

Rolls-Royce Art Cars

By David Neely

An art car is a car that has been transformed into a painting or a sculpture as an act of personal artistic expression. Bold artwork often invites controversy and that is almost certain to be the case when the art car canvas is a Rolls-Royce.



The late John Lennon's Phantom V.

John Lennon's Phantom V is a Rolls-Royce art car that readily comes to mind. The 1965 Phantom V, chassis, 5VD73, a Mulliner Park Ward limousine, was delivered in June 1965.

Originally painted in Valentine Black, Lennon had artist Steve Weaver paint it in the style of Romany caravans with flowers, zodiac signs and scrollwork to match the 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' album artwork. It was unveiled with the album's release on 1 June 1967. The colour scheme, usually described as psychedelic, drew this reaction at the time from Giles Taylor, design director for Rolls-Royce, "It's like putting graffiti on Buckingham Palace. You're getting close to the nerve of British elegance, British politeness and good British manners."



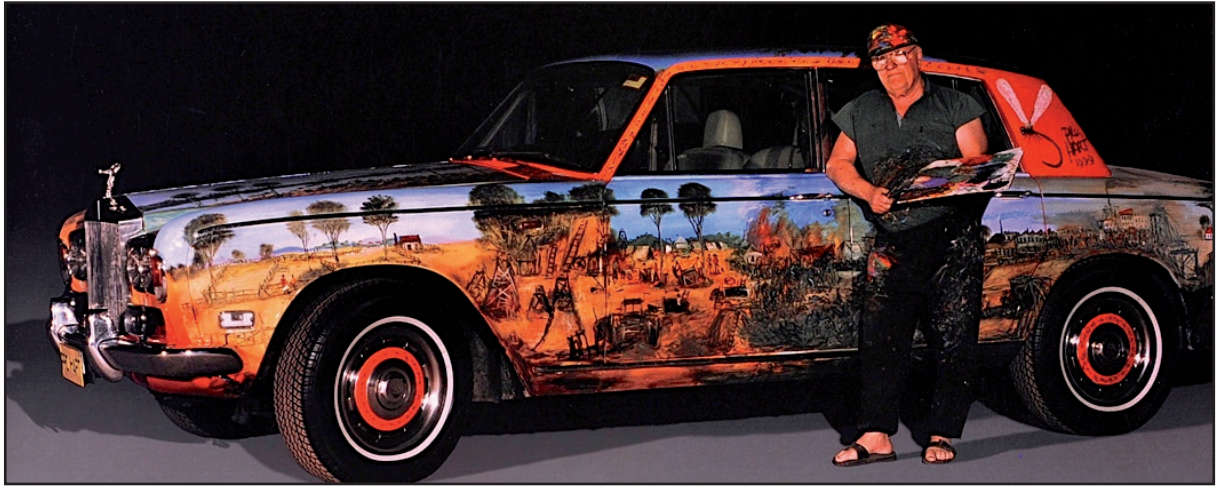
Lennon commissioned the artwork on his Rolls-Royce, however, two Australian artists, Pro Hart and Reko Rennie, have created art cars using their own Rolls-Royces.

Pro Hart painted his 1974 Silver Shadow, SRH19604, with Australian historical scenes in 1999, at the time of the republican debate in Australia, to show his support for the status quo with Queen Elizabeth as Head of State. Hart told Derham Groves, senior lecturer, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne about the artistic inspiration for his Rolls-Royce art car,

The late Pro Hart's Silver Shadow.

"I painted the history of Australia on a Rolls-Royce. It done a lot of good because a lot of people looked at it and they seen the landing of Cook and Captain Phillip and the history of Australia, and all this Australian history all over it made people conscious of Australia and ... you know, make them realise that the Republic wasn't a good idea. So it worked good because we had it driven around Canberra so everyone could see it. I tell you what, it got a lot of votes against the Republic. It done so much good I decided to keep it. ... It had a lot of effect. We took it up to Surfers Paradise ... and had it on show at Marina Mirage and it attracted a lot of attention, you know, it made people conscious of Australia. And a lot of the younger generation today they don't know much about Australia, so on the petrol-filler-flap on the "Roller" ... I painted Ned Kelly on there because a lot of kids think Ned Kelly was a blooming rock singer, they wouldn't have the foggiest idea about Australian history. So it just taught people about Australia, and made them conscious about Australia, you know, instead of all the Communist garbage about the Republic."

This image was used for a poster with Pro Hart's message, "God Bless Australia. My tribute to a great country and the year 2000. Best wishes Pro Hart M.B.E."



Reko Rennie's Corniche at the National Gallery of Australia.

It made me think of my grandmother, Julia, and how she was also enslaved on pastoral stations and missions due to former government policies.

I decided I would buy a Rolls-Royce in similar vintage myself. The marque of the vehicle is a symbol of wealth, privilege and royalty. I have hand-painted the Rolls, with a geometric camouflage, referencing the traditional diamond shape of the Kamilaroi and using a contemporary pattern of camouflage to promote visibility of identity. The video work is about a road trip, where I return to Kamilaroi land and make an emotional journey back to Country for my grandmother and myself, in a reclaimed (Reko Rennie) Rolls-Royce.

Referencing my own urban upbringing, I take the car on Kamilaroi earth and thrash the Rolls-Royce on Country, creating donuts on the land, also in reference to traditional Kamilaroi sand engravings.

Then I return to my other home."

An advantage of an art car is that it can be mobile. The late Pro Hart used his Silver Shadow to tour Canberra and the Gold Coast to promote his pro-monarchy views. Reko Rennie used his Corniche to drive to the country of the Kamilaroi people in northern NSW. There he paid tribute to his grandmother, who helped raise him in Melbourne, and was taken from her own family at the age of 8.

Two Australian artists, two personal artistic interpretations, two Rolls-Royce art cars.

Reko Rennie painted his 1973 Corniche with the iconography of his Kamilaroi heritage. Rennie is an artist who explores his Aboriginal identity through his art and provokes discussion surrounding Indigenous culture and identity in contemporary urban environments. One of his works, 'Personal Structures', is currently on show at the 2017 Venice Biennale.

At the National Gallery of Australia Rennie spoke of the inspiration of his Rolls-Royce art car, "I've heard and seen stories of some Australian pastoralists back in the early 1900s owning old Rolls-Royce or Bentley vehicles, dressing up on a Sunday and then driving to church. During this time, there were many Aboriginal women, men and children enslaved on these properties working for nothing but rations, abused and mistreated.



The Corniche in Kamilaroi country.