



A visit with emeritus AFAS member

Stanley Wanlass

by Victor Q King

I recently had the rare opportunity to meet and visit with Stanley Wanlass at his home/studio in the beautiful mountains and ski country of Utah, just ten minutes from Alta and Snowbird ski resorts. As the massive wrought-iron gate opened and I drove down a long winding lane past the "Clos de la Foret" vineyard and 16th century stone well-head to the entrance of his magnificent "Chateau Foret", I was transported to an earlier date and time. Having been a lover and collector of automotive art (and especially "Wanlass" art) most of my adult life, it was exciting to see numerous outside "Wanlass" sculptures appearing enigmatically half-hidden within the forest drive. I parked on the cobblestone entrance and passed additional exterior paintings and sculptures to a medieval entry. Upon entering, I was overwhelmed by the many 15th through 18th century antiques and exceptionally large Renaissance paintings gracing the walls.

Saturday, April 13th 1985

Dear John

I want you to know how much I ~~sppe~~ appreciate seeing
the original of that ^{FINE} ~~facinate~~ Walter Appleton Clark. I
continue ~~to~~ believe had he lived and retained his in-
terest in cars and racing, the rest of us automof, ~~we~~ artists
would look like amateurs. That is, Excepting Wanlass.



Cordially.

WALTER

Priscilla's had fun
Hope you can read
this

An impressively beautiful curvilinear staircase led us towards his private gallery. The massive beams were all interrupted at the juncture of each post with corbels sculpted in the likeness of some of Wanlass' heroes; Shakespeare, Montaigne, Dante, Voltaire, Goethe, etc.. We walked along the cobble tiled hallway which overlooked the entry far below, stopping at a highly carved Renaissance armoire. Mr. Wanlass opened the lock with an ancient key leading me through the closet to a hidden door that opened into his mysteriously concealed gallery. The wonderful vaulted ceilings gave perfect ambience to present Mr. Wanlass' works.

Although hidden, the gallery had a magnificent view not only of the mountains, but of the valley below.

In addition to his sculptures and paintings, the gallery was adorned with antique racing trophies, early photos of racing cars, old automotive tins, porcelain signs and a myriad of automobilia. At the far darkened corner, among

the collectibles, I spotted a letter given to him by his friend John Zolomij. The letter was written by one of Wanlass' heroes, Peter Helck. I always considered Helck 'the father of automotive art' and read the letter with relish. The letter was concerning an exhibit at the Detroit Historical Museum where Helck, Wanlass and the Holland Museum had shown together in 1984. The poster advertising the exhibit depicted an old painting by Helck's hero/teacher Walter Appleton Clark, named "Meeting of the Monsters". The letter thanked Zolomij for using this painting and was also a tribute to Wanlass, comparing him to Clark. Wanlass considers it his most prized tribute.

We sat amid his many sculptures and paintings and talked about his works and philosophy. I was amazed at the scope and enormity of his creations, which looked to me like ten lifetimes of labor. I knew that Wanlass had created a large body of work but had no idea that he was so prolific. And, this represented only a portion of his lifetime of creating. He also has many heroic historical monuments that are spread throughout the land.

While living on the Oregon coast Wanlass sculpted a very large monument, ("Surf II") for the U.S.A Bicentennial (1976) that is placed at The Marina in Everett, Washington. In 1982 Wanlass sculpted a heroic monument ("Arrival") celebrating Lewis & Clark's sojourn to the Pacific. It is located at the Lewis & Clark National Memorial at Ft. Clatsop on the north Oregon coast. This was the first of many Lewis & Clark monuments Wanlass sculpted for the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial including "End of the Trail" at the turn-around on the beach at Seaside, Oregon (1990), "Mark of Triumph", Lewis & Clark monument in downtown Long Beach, Washington (1990) and "Clark's Tree" erected on the sands of the Pacific Ocean, north of Cape Disappointment on the Long Beach Peninsula, Washington. This monument is a twenty-five foot bronze tree that marks the furthest northwest point traveled by Lewis & Clark's Corps of Discovery.

Clark had carved his name and date in a pine tree on the beach. The tree apparently washed away sometime in the mid-eighteen hundreds. Wanlass was able to GPS an old survey and place the bronze tree on the original site. This monument was sculpted and cast in Utah, trucked to the headwaters of the Columbia River at Lewiston/Clarkston on the Snake River. At Clarkston the tree was lifted by one of the largest cranes in the northwest onto a barge to look like the prow of a ship for its trip down the Snake to the Columbia and on to the Pacific Ocean, following the footsteps of Lewis & Clark to its final and permanent site on the Pacific shore of the Long Beach Peninsula. "Clark's Tree" had a royal send-off ceremony with many speeches, marching bands and the release of numerous white doves by the local Indian chief (to carry peace to all corners of the earth).

Once on its way, "Clark's Tree" made celebratory stops each night at cities along the Snake/Columbia Rivers, finally arriving at the Pacific coast three weeks later for a huge celebration and unveiling ceremony in 2003. Wanlass confided in me that he also carved a hidden mysterious message (as he does in many of his creations) in Latin asking a centuries old question concerning mankind. So far, no one has been able to find this elusive riddle. The Seattle Times has written numerous articles concerning this enigma.







Wanlass has created other heroic monuments including the Muhlenburg Monument ("Man of Vision"), 1991, tastefully mounted on a large marble plinth under the bell-tower/Christopher Wren dome in the Administration Bldg. Muhlenburg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, The Rockwell Monument ("The Protector"), 2002, in the

sculpture courtyard at the Hutchings Museum in Lehi, Utah and the still ongoing "Seafarers Memorial" that is planned to be placed off Point Adams in the Pacific Ocean (mouth of the Columbia River) dedicated to those who have died at sea. He also has plans for a large bronze racing car monument for the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah.

Wanlass says that he still has 250 years of work planned so he must work quickly. We left the gallery and descended a secret tiny logarithmic spiral staircase through the library turret where Wanlass' five-thousand rare book collection is housed. A significant amount of the research for his sculptures and paintings are housed here.

His rare books range from the dawn of the automobile to Newton's Principia. We continued down the turret staircase to his office, his studio, and through a large ancient Gothic double door to the great room where his one-of-a-kind (all original and unrestored) 1927 Bugatti boat-tailed torpedo speedster sits next to his monumental walk-in stone fireplace, where it has resided for the last twenty-five years.

Leaving the great room, I was directed along a cobblestone hallway to one of his studios. This studio has many large Elizabethan cabinets, tables, and easels with a variety of paintings in progress. There are early medical anatomical drawing/paintings on the walls and sculpture stands holding numerous wax and clay sculptures in different stages of completion, some in the final stages of patina.

Some of his finest sculptures are 'kinetic' in nature. He has built four '32 Fords; the first one in the mid-fifties. One is Ardun powered with a SCoT blower. Another has a Cadillac turbo motor.....He is presently working on a severely chopped '36 Ford Roadster. He designed and patented a laid back '32 roadster windshield (Wanlass Windshield) which is manufactured under the names Rodworks and Rebel Rods.

His love and knowledge of hot rods and hot rod sculpture led to his involvement with Bob Larivee's "Hot Rod Heritage" at the S.E.M.A. shows in Las Vegas starting in the mid-80's. His latest hot rod sculptures "S'Deuced" and "Flat Out" are near five feet long. "S'Deuced" was featured at the 75th anniversary of the '32 Ford at the N.H.R.A. Museum in L.A. and more recently The Grand National Roadster Show in L.A. with its full-sized clone built by Jim Busby for Richard Munz.





Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time to see all of his garages but did see (and sit in) his magnificent 1929 Alfa Romeo 1750 supercharged Zagato Spyder, and his Ferrari Testarossa that he uses on the annual Utah Fast Pass, a charitable rally that attracts fifty or so super-cars from all around the world. The race covers a thousand miles through the red-rock country of Utah, every August. Mr. Wanlass annually donates the painting image for the poster to the charity. His latest painting "A Distant Mirror" will serve as the 6th annual poster for the 2011 rally in August.

When he isn't busy sculpting or painting, Mr. Wanlass is actively involved in architectural design and consultation. He is currently designing turrets and walk-in fireplaces for a 150 foot light house on the tip of the Long Beach Peninsula in Washington state.

Wanlass admits that his wife Joy does most of the work and he merely signs it and takes the bows.

In order to catch my plane, I had to leave much too soon. There just wasn't enough time to see and experience all I wanted to. But, I left a much richer person with renewed appreciation for Stanley Wanlass and his contribution to the world of art.

www.stanleywanlass.com



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