



South Florida Outings: “Going Places: The Stylish Design of Travel” at the Norton Museum of Art

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

A retro installation of zooming model planes. Sleek aluminum bullet shaped trains. Conceptual sketches of dream automobiles with fins and bubble tops. Vintage posters and a fun selection of classic film clips. Fasten your seat belts for the new show, “Going Places,” at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, FL.

This exhibition, on view through January 10, 2016, swiftly captures the arc of innovation and futuristic thrill of getting from one place to another, as seen by those in a golden age of design. More than 200 objects fill the space, curated by Matthew Bird from the enormous collection of part-time Palm Beach residents, Norton trustee Jean S. and her husband Frederic A. Sharf.

Bird, a professor of industrial design at the Rhode Island School of Design, zoomed in on the Sharfs’ collection, looking for images and objects that tell a story not only about transportation but about how America saw itself while getting around this wide open country through the decades.

Sharf has long been fascinated by the accelerated pace of life in the middle of the 20th century, as exemplified by changes in designs for planes, trains, and automobiles and subsequent promotions for consumers. As a collector, Sharf started out buying architectural drawings, presentations to woo clients for planned buildings that were often never built. The illustrations got him interested in automotive drawings.

“The architects would draw cars beside the buildings,” he said. “I started to wonder about those cars.”



On view at “Going Places: Transportation Designs from the Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf Collection,” June 25, 2015 to January 3, 2016, at the Norton Museum of Art.

The dream cars in these and other drawings of the time were futuristic and extremely detailed, drawn into settings of desert roadways or rain slicked city streets or parked outside tree shaded

suburban dream houses. Long and low, with sharp fins, dual exhaust pipes and swooping bodies, these autos were dreams on paper. But many of the drawings made in Detroit design shops were destroyed and never archived in any way due to security concerns about rival auto makers stealing ideas.

Saving those that remain, along with drawings for full production cars and early advertising, became the self-appointed task of Mr. Sharf, who has almost singlehandedly established car design drawings as a subject worthy of the attention of art museums and scholars.

He has since collected hundreds of sketches, paintings and scale models created in the studios of General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and other top American auto makers that dreamed up ideas for cars of the future. Often rendered in pastels, charcoal or Prismacolor colored pencils, they encompass not only travel history but an alternative history of things never made.



Artwork by Carl Renner. On view at "Going Places: Transportation Designs from the Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf Collection," June 25, 2015 to January 3, 2016, at the Norton Museum of Art.



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One of the most significant artists in the show is Carl Renner, whose large scale paintings on black backgrounds embody a certain kind of 1950s cool.

One of Renner's largest paintings displayed here hung for years in the cafeteria at GM, according to Bird. In 1945, after leaving Walt Disney's design studio, where he worked as a cartoon animator, Renner took his portfolio filled with automotive designs and went to General Motors Styling, landing a job as a junior designer in the Orientation Studio.

From 1950 to 1955, the artist took an active role in the entire design process of the 1952 through 1957 Chevrolet models. Other Renner design contributions include the Corvette side cove, "ducktail" rear end, the streamlined roof line, deluxe steering wheel, grilles, recessed hoods, the "notch belt" fender line, parking lights, bumper guards and side trim.

Renner passed away in 2001, but his gorgeous, sleek designs live on like scenes from a Hitchcock film.

BASIC FACTS: “Going Places: Transportation Designs from the Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf Collection,” June 25, 2015 to January 3, 2016, at the Norton Museum of Art, 1451 S. Olive Avenue, West Palm Beach, FL 33401. www.norton.org.

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