



Bernard Corman's *Caddy Corner* took 18 months to complete. See more at [www.bernardcorman.com](http://www.bernardcorman.com).

JEFF GROSS

# FIN ART OR FINE ART?

Sculptor Bernardo casts American iron in a new way

BY PATRICK C. PATERNIE

■ BERNARD CORMAN, A.K.A. Bernardo, is one sculptor whose work—a captivating collection of outrageously contorted and twisted automobiles—tends toward *Ronin* rather than *Rodin*.

His two-and-a-half-ton full-scale bronze sculpture of a 1959 Cadillac features a whimsical 90-degree bend in the middle that prompted Corman to dub it *Caddy Corner*. Much smaller in format but bolder in concept is the front half of a 1955 Buick melded to the lower half of a corpulent naked female, aptly titled *Big Ass Buick*. Another '50s Cadillac is the subject of *Double Vision*, which depicts twin front ends stitched together at the fenders and a giant eyeball residing on the roof.

Not surprisingly, Corman, who says he picked up “the sculpting habit” from his dad, credits Ed “Big Daddy” Roth as an early influence. He cites wacky cartoonist Tex Avery as another early instigator of his surreal sense of humor. Other promi-

nent sources of inspiration are the works of René Magritte and Salvador Dali.

“It’s really a cliché now to say Roth influenced you, but in my case it’s true,” Corman explains. “I was 10 years old in 1968 and did clay models of his drawings of cars with the giant engine bursting through the hood and a big arm coming out of the window to shift gears.”

Corman drifted away from car models as he pursued a traditional sculpting career path by attending the School of the Art Institute in Chicago and serving a number of apprenticeships to learn and hone his skills in casting metal. He also worked at the noted Johnson Atelier in Mercerville, N.J.

Then one day, a friend stopped by his studio with *American Dream Cars*, a book about the history of concept cars.

“I didn’t know about the styling studios and Harley Earl.

I thought, ‘My God, these are like sculptures,’” he recalls.

Corman calls Earl’s Sabre jet-influenced LeSabre his all-time favorite.

“It was so

intense for that period of time in this country,” he says.

Corman saw the exaggerated styling of '50s cars as the perfect foundation for amusing juxtaposition. His “carp collection” includes the faces of Studebakers, Buicks and other cars from that era attached to colorful guppylike fish bodies.

He credits a “cosmic sense of humor” for the force behind his ironic portrayals

but admits surprise at the response of the Kuwaiti businessman who owned the original tabletop version of *Caddy Corner* when Corman suggested a larger version.

“He said, ‘How about life-size?’ and then requested that he be able to sit in it,” says Corman.

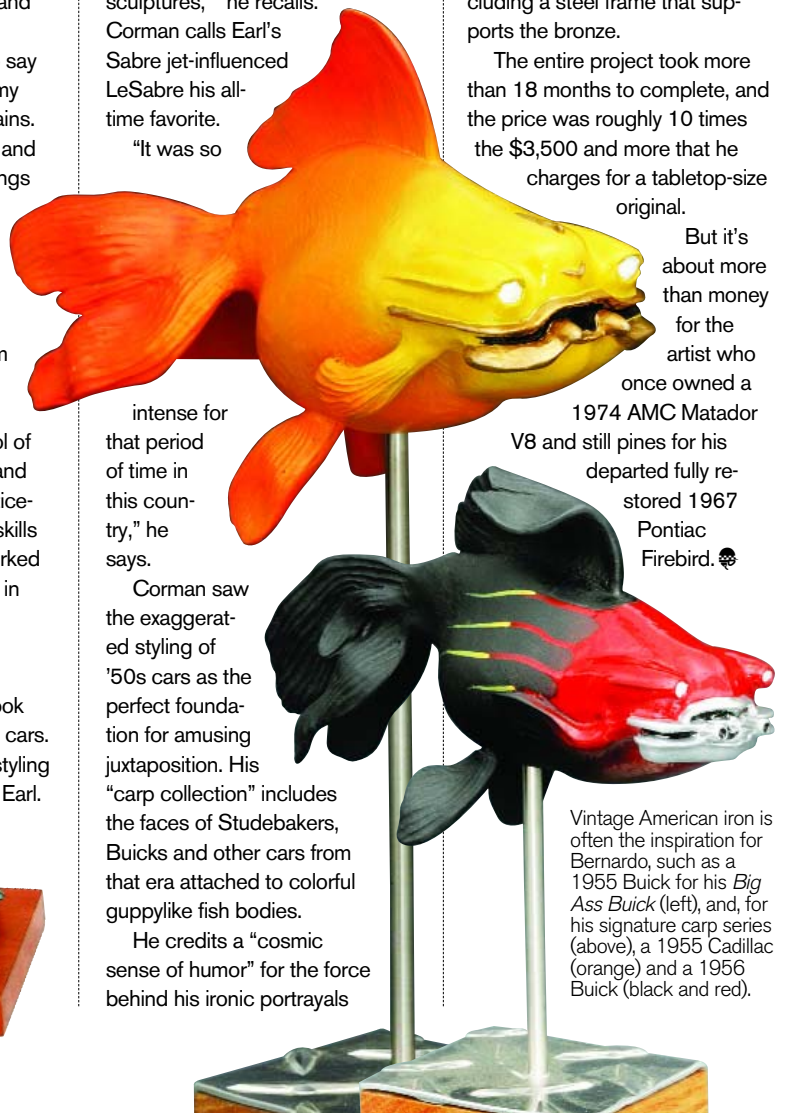
Fortunately, Corman had a foundry that could handle such a large project. His biggest hurdle was raising the level of detail. So he constructed a pantograph machine to measure and scale up the original sculpture. He then could carve Styrofoam pieces from which to sand-mold-cast the fenders, hood and trunk. He purchased actual Cadillac parts, such as the grille, headlights, bumpers and taillights, and used them to make lost-wax castings for the added details. Then everything was welded together, including a steel frame that supports the bronze.

The entire project took more than 18 months to complete, and the price was roughly 10 times the \$3,500 and more that he charges for a tabletop-size original.

But it’s about more than money for the artist who

once owned a 1974 AMC Matador

V8 and still pines for his departed 1967 Pontiac Firebird. 🚗



Vintage American iron is often the inspiration for Bernardo, such as a 1955 Buick for his *Big Ass Buick* (left), and, for his signature carp series (above), a 1955 Cadillac (orange) and a 1956 Buick (black and red).



VERA-ICON (3)