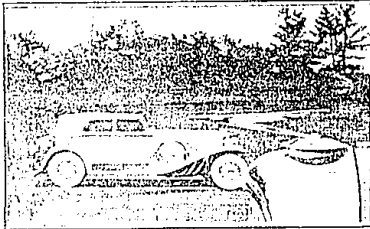




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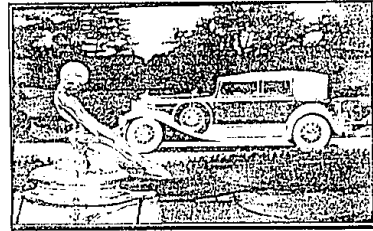
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Gray Counts of Clarkston painted his rendition of a 1932 Duesenberg Sedan.



Bill and Denise Michalak of Troy turned their hobby into a business. Their Rochester gallery includes this airbrush collage of a Renault Formula 1.



Gray Counts created this painting of a 1932 Packard Sedan.

Automania

Designer charged up about new car gallery

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

BILL MICHALAK has been reeved up about cars ever since he visited his first Automania show at the Waldorf Astoria in New York.

"I was only three or four years old and I went car crazy," the Troy resident said. "I said to myself, when I grow up, I'm going to design cars for General Motors."

Jean Dixon couldn't have made a better prediction if she tried.

After graduating from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y., Michalak landed a job with General Motors design division. But, 20 years of sketching didn't satisfy his craving.

So, he gathered all of the car memorabilia he had collected for 35 years and opened a gallery devoted to — you guessed it — the automobile. His wife, Denise, runs Gallery Automania, which has been in business since September at 304 East Street in Rochester.

THE FIRST of its kind in Michigan, the gallery is one of less than a half-dozen in the United States devoting exclusively in automotive art and collectibles.

"It's an extension of my hobby," Michalak said. "I thought I would combine my interest in cars and art work."

At first glance, the gallery looks like a mini-shrine for auto-worshippers. In fact, it's a place only a car buff could love.

There's something for every age, taste and pocketbook. For the young collector, a model Mercedes (\$9.95, part of the Brumm series from Italy) is ideal. But, even middle-aged men or women who want to be on the right track would consider the model 1932 Packard (\$129, Mini Marque series from England) a rare find.

An original poster of the 1952 Grand Prix de France will put admirers in the driver's seat. (Unless you're an avid collector, you might think you're being taken for a ride when you see the price — \$410.)

Michalak's collection of original art is impressive. Ken Hill's graphic

depiction of Gilles Villeneuve's final lap shows the Canadian racer before his crash.

Robert J. Scheek's rendition of a 1938 Cadillac Fleetwood V-8 (moussinet) portrays the vehicle in its elegant splendor. The artist is a retired GM employee from Mount Clemens.

Then, there are the expensive works by the big four — no, not Chrysler, GM, Ford and AMC. David Lord, Dennis Brown, Ken Eberts and Jack Juratovic — all members of the prestigious Automotive Fine Arts Society.

Alongside the serious art are playful ceramic pieces by Belinda Durrie of Rochester — a 1949 Buick, 1957 Chrysler and 1956 Chevy.

If knick-knacks are your thing, then you might be drawn to salt and pepper shakers in the shape of cars; brass coasters with the BMW emblem or 24-karat, gold-plated alloy Christmas tree ornaments.

An original advertisement for the 1924 Ford four-door Sedan sells for only \$3. Postcards and cards also are in the affordable price range.

Michalak's print collection ranges from inexpensive European magazines to high-priced color photo books of Ferraris (\$75).

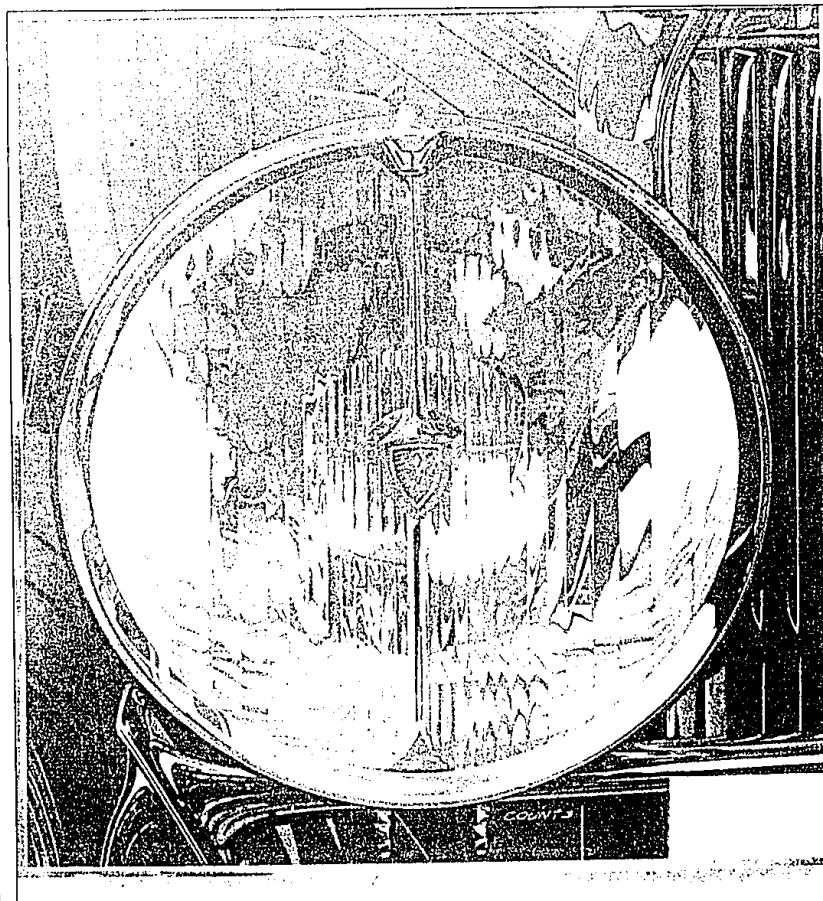
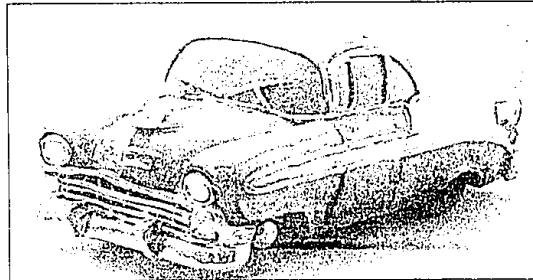
"Books and models are my best sellers," the owner noted.

BUT, ONCE things get rolling, Michalak hopes more Motor City customers will ride out to his shop.

One customer, Lee Kollins of Orchard Lake, stopped by to check out the gallery. As chairman of the board of the Detroit Public Library's National Automotive History Collection, Kollins wanted to track down such historical artifacts as a sketch by the late Harley Earl. (He was head of the design studio at GM for years.)

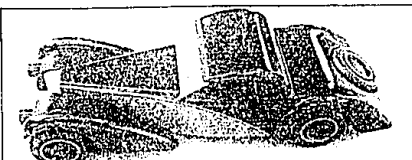
He didn't find what he was looking for. "My interest is in the early period of auto companies. And, he specializes in contemporary artists."

Michalak realizes he can't please all of the car lovers all the time. But, for now, he's riding high on his new project.



Photos by CAMILLE MCCOY

A 1932 Hispano-Suiza headlight — painted by Gray Counts — grabs the spotlight at Gallery Automania, the only showcase of its kind in Michigan for automotive art and collectibles.



A wooden replica of an Atlantic coupe from France.