

# Art in the midst of the roar of engines

By Todd Schneider  
staff writer

Looking through the dirt, grease and grime of auto racing they see... art.

Yes, art. For Ken Coles and Jim Bisignano, nothing is quite so poetic — or as much of an artistic challenge — as a Formula 1 racer twisting its way through the curves of Detroit's annual Grand Prix.

Coles, of Garden City, has been reworking photographs of dirt track sprint racers, Indianapolis 500 winners, even hydroplane drivers into paintings for more than 30 years.

"If it moves, I'll paint it," said Coles.

Bisignano, a Birmingham freelance artist, has been painting racing vignettes as part of a varied portfolio since the mid-1960s.

"It happens to like the sport, and I think it lends itself well as subject matter," Bisignano said. "There's a drama there just waiting to be captured."

Bisignano has worked the Grand Prix circuit from Detroit to Monaco. His paintings are done on commission, usually for the race team's sponsor or the driver himself.

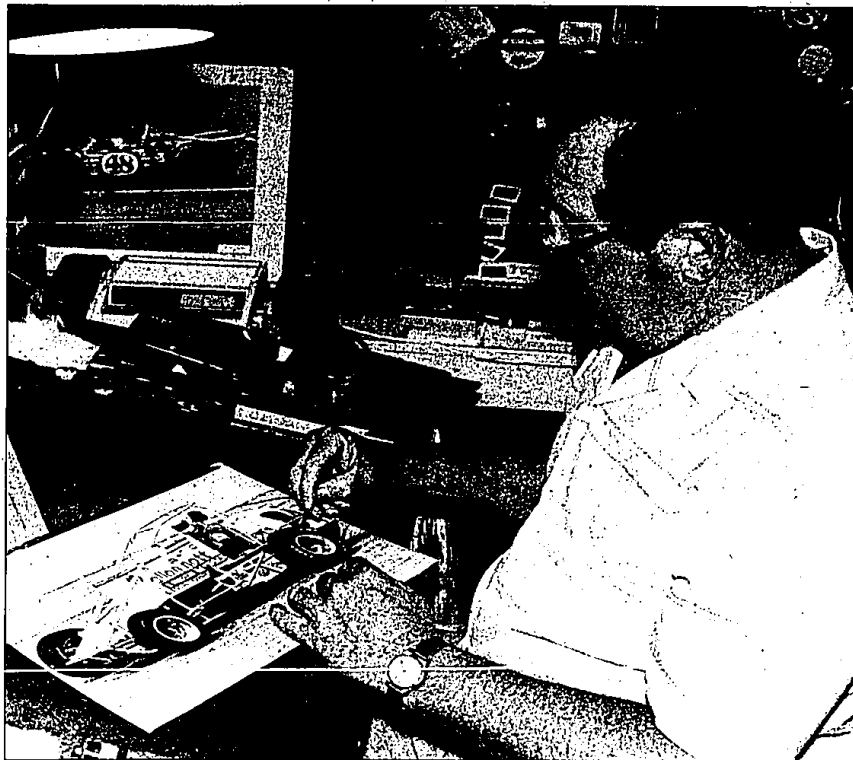
The 49-year-old former General Motors employee will start with a photograph and go from there. But Bisignano doesn't always paint it the way the lens sees it.

HELL OFTEN paint the pictured car and driver with exacting detail and then add to the background using nearby (but unpictured) landmarks or his imagination.

For example, for a painting done at this year's Brazilian Grand Prix, Bisignano "moved" a mountain a quarter mile in order to get it into the background.

"The environment can be just as visually interesting as the car itself," he said. "Painting is a matter of interpretation. It doesn't have to be identical to the photograph."

His love of cars comes from a stint in automotive design at General Motors, Bisignano said. He has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from



Ken Coles begins oil work on a sprint car photograph in his basement workshop.

ART EMANUELE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Notre Dame University.

Coles' work is an offshoot of his friendships with drivers and a never realized desire to race himself (he has poor vision in one eye).

"I had been taking all these black and white photos when I began to hang around the dirt track circuit in the 1950s," Coles said. "I started adding color, though oils, and came up with this kind of old-fashioned, tinted look."

Coles, a retired industrial artist, also will sell his photographs to any of a dozen racing magazines.

The 57-year-old Detroit native has lived through racing's evolution from a "small-town, Saturday night diversion in the cornfield" into a high-tech, corporate sport. And along the way he has made friends with some of the world's top drivers.

HE POINTS to a Christmas card from Mario Andretti and can tell you stories about A.J. Foyt and Al Unser that will make your head spin.

"When you first meet them (drivers), you think 'boy, these guys really have big egos,'"

Coles said. "But then you realize that it's a survival sport and it probably takes a big ego just to come out alive."

Testimony for that theory is provided in the person of the late Ronnie Duman, Coles said.

Coles and Duman, a nationally known sprint car driver from Dearborn, became good friends in the 1960s. Duman was killed during a Milwaukee race in the summer of 1968.

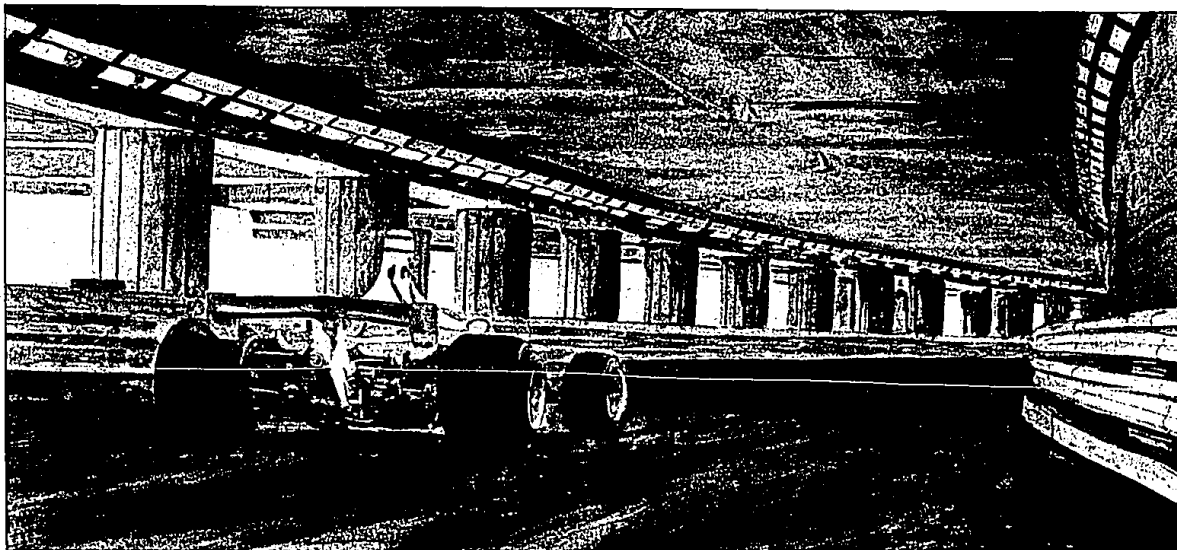
"Since then, I decided I would work with the drivers and respect the drivers but not really get close to the drivers," Coles said.

Both Coles and Bisignano have had close shaves while at the track.

Coles was nearly when the driver of a Porsche lost control and the car flipped over, missing his head by a few feet.

Bisignano said a car ran over his foot once while he was taking photographs at Monaco.

"That was before there were guard rails for us to stand behind," he said.



FILE PHOTO

Jim Bisignano painted this Ferrari going through the tunnel in Monaco six years ago.

## Amelia's quiet contrasts with Biscayne's fast pace

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YOU CAN fish, sun, swim on the beautiful uncombed public beach or around the great fishing dock at Fort Clinch State Park, with side trips into the 30-square block historic district.

The 1735 House is one of several kinds of overnight accommodations available through inn owners Gary and Emily Grable, who run Amelia Island Lodging Systems.

Either way, you'll want to join the crowds that gather around the shrimp boats at sunset, or watch the sun go down from one of the wooden walkways that traverse the marsh at Amelia Island Plantation.

Amelia Island rates went down at Labor Day and go up again in February or March, depending on the property. Amelia Island Plantation rates for two people off season are \$153 a night for a one-bedroom room in the hotel, \$194 for a one-bedroom condominium. If you plan to play golf or tennis, ask for the two-night package plans, which give you unlimited recreation. Call (904) 251-6161.

If you reserve through Amelia Island Lodging Systems, you will find that a one-bedroom condo at Amelia

Surf and Racquet Club is \$65 a night. A bedroom at the 1735 House is \$65 year-round. They also manage a few units at Amelia Island Plantation: \$95 to \$95 for an ocean-front room. Call (904) 251-4148.

For more information, contact the Amelia Island-Fernandina Beach Chamber of Commerce, Center St., Fernandina Beach, Fla., or telephone (904) 251-3348.

IF AMELIA is too low-key for you, consider the slightly faster pace of Key Biscayne. The Indians called it the "island in the path of the rising moon." Explorer John Cabot, who landed on the island in 1497, called it "the Cape at the End of April." I call it a miracle, an island of sand, sea and pine trees 15 minutes' drive from downtown Miami.

This playground, set in a sea as green as any Caribbean water, is roughly divided into four parts, all available down the single main street of the island.

The entrance area, across the Rickenbacker Causeway, is where boaters park in marinas and locals, tourists and Miamians meet at bars and restaurants clustered around the marina. The Miami Seaquarium,

Planet Ocean, Museum of Science and Space Transit Planetarium are some of the major attractions here.

Another attraction, Crandon Park makes a great green patch across the causeway end of the island. Picnic under coconut trees or swim at the 2 1/4-mile long public beach.

The village of Key Biscayne comes next, with a busy area of hotels, restaurants and sand beaches on the Atlantic side.

Finally, there's Bill Baggs Florida State Recreation Area and the light-house that marks the "Cape at the End of April," known around here as Cape Florida.

Tourists come to this park when it is too hot to stay for another sun-burned moment on their hotel beach or around the pool. Families drive in from Miami, children crowding the golden sand of the public beach, families speaking Spanish or playing dominoes at the picnic tables under the Australian pines.

THE SALT bush, seagrape and buttonwood are native here, as they are in most of Florida, but the Australian pines planted late in the 19th century have long ago taken over the park, making fringed green canopies



MICKY JONES

One of the attractions along Amelia Island's Fernandina Beach is meeting the local shrimp boats when they come in from a day of fishing.

over the roads and shaded groves beside the sea.

It is usually cool under the trees, within sight of both the public beach and the Cape Florida Lighthouse.

Low season rates on Key Biscayne are from Labor Day until Dec. 1. There are two hotels and a motel

side by side on the beach. Off season rates are: Silver Sands Motel, \$72, the high-rise Sheraton Royal Biscayne Beach Resort, \$86 to \$125, and the high-rise Sonesta Beach Hotel and Tennis Club, \$140 to \$215.

For more information on Key Biscayne, contact the Key Biscayne Chamber of Commerce, 95 West McIntyre, Key Biscayne, Fla. 33149, or call (904) 361-5307. Or you can contact the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, 4770 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, Fla. 33137, or call (904) 573-4300.