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# CHASING THE TRACK

BY

TONY NICHOLAS

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN IMAGING ARTS

Rochester Institute of Technology

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To Shannon

Thank you for your patience and many sacrifices during the creation of this work. Also to

Anthony and Isabella, may this work be a sign of what is possible.

Finally, to the memory of my mother and father, thank you for giving me what I  
needed.

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Most of all, I must recognize the generous encouragement and support of my family without whom, this work would not have been possible.

# **CHASING THE TRACK**

By

**Tony Nicholas**

B.F.A. Studio Art, Youngstown State University, 1996

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the search for a creative process that satisfies my urge to combine photography with imagery and objects from personal and mass media sources, revealing the artist's hand in the work. This work also explores the use of a subject as a means to finding a working process and its importance in that discovery.

Auto racing motivated me to study photography, thus the use of automobile culture, with an emphasis on the subculture of auto racing is a key element in this work. Juxtaposing unrelated materials and imagery was a new experience. As I worked, the evolving imagery revealed new meaning which in turn led to new combinations of imagery and material. Auto racing was both the personal connection which allowed me to work and the connection to the discovery of my working process. In the same way the work challenges the audience to embrace a new aesthetic experience not usually associated with contemporary car culture.

The key to this body of work is "process." It is a process which offers no solutions or judgments. Its importance is in the commitment to the act of creating, embracing the journey rather than focusing on the destination. Driving the track.

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION TO MOTORSPORTS**

My thesis work addresses two areas; first, a search for a creative process that fulfills my interest in combining a passion for photography with creating art that reveals the artists' hand. Second, though no less important, choosing a subject that motivates one to reach beyond perceived creative limits to aid in the discovery of that process. In this work there is a given theme but the subject's importance is partially as a medium in the discovery of a working process. In order for the work to be authentic, I had to use a subject that was an integral part of my being. Auto racing inspired me to study art, therefore, it is fitting that cars and their vast culture be the subject I used to find the creative process which would satisfy my artistic concerns.

Car culture, briefly defined, is a set of beliefs, attitudes, symbols, behavior and institutions which have evolved around the manufacture and use of automobiles. (Sanford 1981, 533) Specialized subcultures include those around sports cars, vintage cars, hot rods, customized cars, and numerous others. My thesis builds upon my involvement within the subculture of auto racing.

How do I describe the culture of auto racing? It is much like the art of photography as described by Edward Steichen, "both ridiculously easy and almost impossibly difficult." Racing is a sporting event, an entertainment event, a shopping experience, and a weekend festival. But the real attraction is that there is nothing quite like it. Race fans never say they are going to see a race. Rather, they say the same thing the participating teams say "We're going racing." (Huler 1999, 171) They are not merely watching the sport, from the infield to the grandstands and outside among the souvenir trailers, they are part of the scene, and they know it. (Huler 1999, 171)

Perhaps it is as simple as it looks, guys risking death trying to go faster than each other. Racing is pretty simple: loud noise, fast moving objects, and bright colors. A baby is attracted to those things. Is racing the simplest, most attractive sensation available to the common person? In today's "virtual reality" culture where almost anything can be simulated, there seems to be a search for an authentic experience that stimulates the mind and body, racing does just that. "Racing may just be the sport of

the digital revolution, “into a computer monitor world in a plastic case with a matte black finish comes a race car, made of sheet metal, steel, and rubber, a big hunk of actual matter that’s heavy, loud, smelly, and real. Racing has innards, has physical presence. It sweats, it pants, it chews its food.”(Huler 1999, 243) It is a living entity.

To paraphrase one of my favorite descriptions of the sport, a remark from race driver, writer, commentator, and artist, Sam Posey’s autobiography *THE MUDGE POND EXPRESS* “Racing is a gratuitous activity: art for art’s sake. There are few things of such limited usefulness as a race car. Some people consider racing to be down right immoral because it entails what seems like a meaningless risk of death. Others judge less harshly but nevertheless regard it as a frivolous waste of time and money. I was in love with racing, in love with it the way you fall in love with a girl you’ve never met.”

There is a kind of primacy, of simplicity to racing, it has human stories much like other sports: can the young gun beat the wily veteran, can the young woman beat all the boys, can last years champion sustain the winning effort, can the young phenom beat the reigning champion, the perpetual underdog rise to claim dominance. Unlike those other sports, the fan is not rooting for a bunch of free agents who will leave town next month. Race fans choose drivers because they represent something to them, because they believe in them. (Huler 1999, 241) The attraction is not solely in winning, it is the personality of the driver, of the team, that gets people to support and follow the sport. The bond between a fan and “their driver” is but one aspect that fills the stands every weekend.

At race tracks, no matter how big or how small the town that surrounds them, when the cars line up for the start of a race and the pace car pulls off the track into the infield, the moment of anxious excitement is still there. The race begins, as the cars approach the first corner you hold your breath and feel the excited tension until every car makes it through, then you search for “your driver” has he passed anyone, is he being passed? After the cars make several laps around the track you realize you,

along with the rest of the crowd, are all on your feet trying to will your favorite driver to the lead. Once you want to witness people driving fast, it turns out, that you just want to see them driving cars fast.(Huler 1999, 253) You listen to the roar of the engines, while sitting beside a man who's brought his son, not more than five, to the race track. They walk up the ramp to the sparsely filled stands, and the boys eyes widen and he rushes the fence. "Oooh," he says. "Race cars."(Huler 1999, 253)

Where does the connection to motor racing begin? I interviewed a number of people and read several others on, Why racing? Why cars? The quality of their retelling was amazing to me. It is fascinating how the memory of a car, a race or a track could trigger such finely detailed memories. I found that the stories were similar in many aspects. To communicate this collective experience I will tell you the story of my introduction to the culture of auto racing.

In 1970 my family and I moved into a new suburban development in Carmel, Indiana, a town just north of Indianapolis. For me, moving to Indiana from Ohio and learning of *the race* was like learning about a new world. During the month of May our neighborhood was transformed, not only did people exhibit their American patriotism as Memorial Day approached, they also decorated their yards and homes with black and white checkered flags and toy race cars. It was like Christmas for the race: *THE INDIANAPOLIS 500*. The month of May in Indiana is a series of events, parties, and parades. In the weeks leading up to the race there are trips to see the drivers and teams practice, and then attempt to qualify for a chance to race in this historic race, at this most revered of places.

The first time I saw the track I was 7 years old. As my dad and I drove down 16<sup>th</sup> Street toward the track, the first thing I noticed was an immense parade of people marching down both sides of the street, at least a mile from the track! Then up ahead, just coming into view were the towering grandstands with flags waving from the top



and the sunlight glinting off the steel framework that seemed to be hanging over the street. Without panning my head around I couldn't take it all in.

Once we got inside it was as if the outside world ceased to exist. As I approached my seat I looked behind and upward around me at the huge grandstands stretching off in either direction as far as I could see. This place seemed to have an atmosphere apart from the rest of the world. Once in my seat I had my first glimpse of the track itself, a black ribbon of road looking smooth as glass and stretching off into the distance.

Located in turn one, (*Fig. 1*) two rows back from the edge of the track, my seat afforded a breathtaking view. Straight in front of me was a view down pit lane where all the cars and crews were busy working. Looking a bit to the left gave me the now classic view down the front straight, looking past the giant black scoring tower stretching into the sky like some sacred totem, all the way down the seemingly endless front straight. (*Fig. 2*) To my right, the view was looking down the "short chute" between turns one and two able to see the cars move through turn two and disappear as they headed down the backstretch.

Perhaps most emotional for me was the first time I heard a car. One began to move towards me as it exited the pit lane and rolled out onto the track, slowly building up speed, the throaty rumble of the engine seemed to thump against my chest and echo off the grandstands behind me, filling the air with the smell of burning fuel. I had plenty of toy cars and seen races on TV, but seeing, feeling, and hearing this manifestation of speed, this machine built purely to go fast, was more than thrilling. The feeling gave me my first known experience with adrenaline; I could feel the blood pumping through me as my heart beat accelerated with excitement. The car rolled by me with only a few feet of blacktop, a three foot high wall and some fencing separating us, I was overwhelmed. The colors, the wings, the polished metal, the smooth growl of the engine, the smell of the fuel, and the widest blackest tires I'd ever seen, with white letters that played tricks on my eyes, were mesmerizing. Then there was a man, tucked down inside this machine with only a helmet and gloved

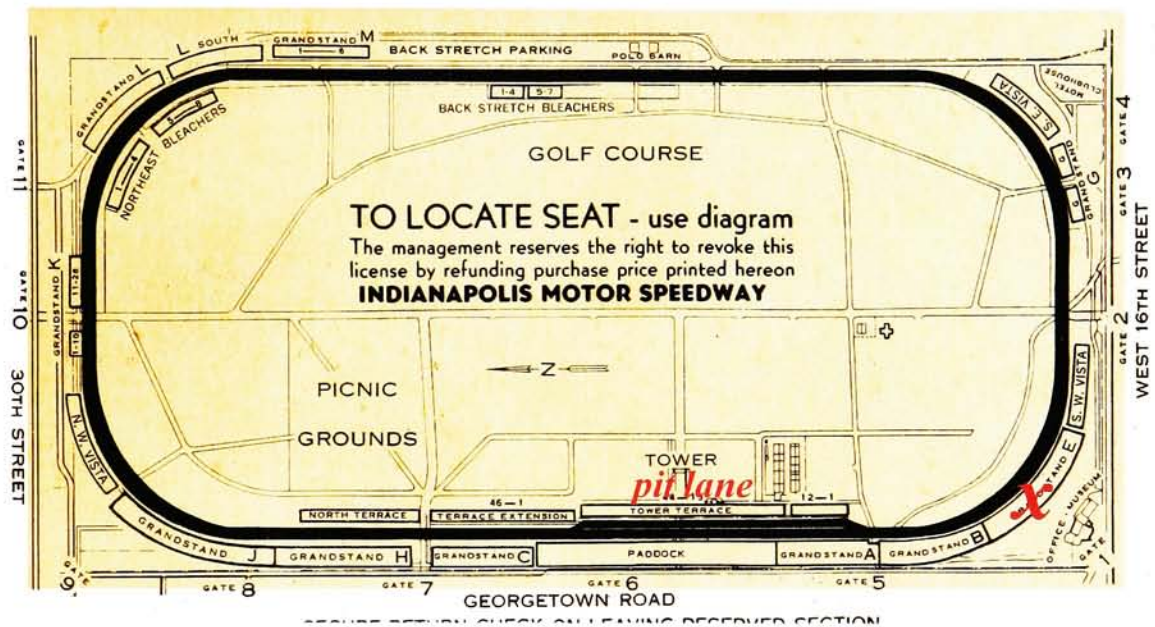
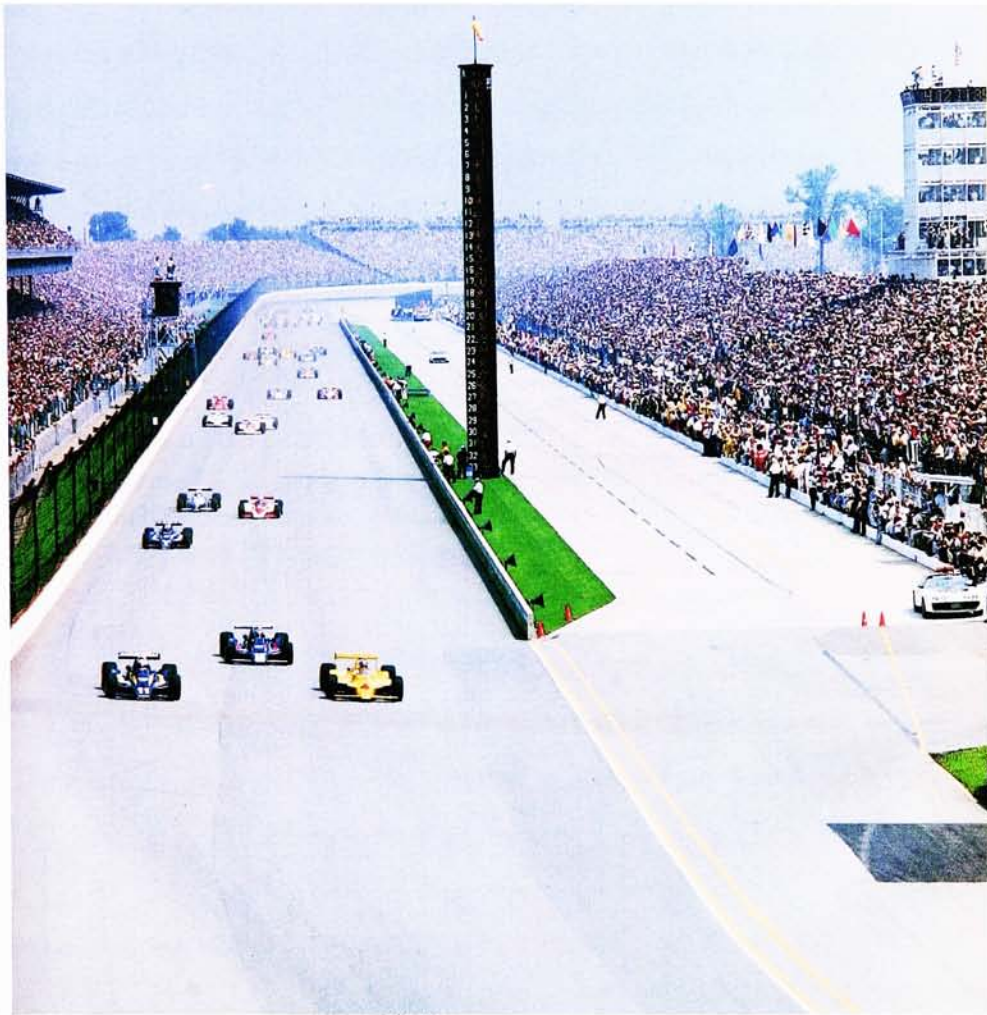


Figure 1.  
map on back of ticket from 1974  
My seats for first three races (1973-74-75) were located in  
grandstand "E" located in turn one, indicated by red X.



*Figure 2*  
*Classic view from turn one looking down front straight, pit lane is on right.*  
*Indianapolis Motor Speedway*



hands visible, seeming a part of the machine itself. The car moved by, rolled off into turn two and out of sight down the back straight, accelerating as the sound of the engine tapered off to silence.

I waited and watched the far end of the front straight where the exit of turn four came into sight, as the car popped into view obviously moving much faster than when it left there was no sound just this brightly colored car with black tires and a helmeted figure nestled down in the cockpit coming right at me, heat waves blurred the air around the car, but still no sound. Though still several hundred yards away, as the car came closer, I began to hear the low whistling of the engine and the rush of air as it approached, the speed at which it closed on me became overwhelming and then it was past me diving into the first corner faster than seemingly possible, yet staying in the blackest part of the road, down low on the inside of the corner. The sound that one car makes at such speed is otherworldly.

What would 33 cars be like! That's what stayed with me, the sensory overload; the sights, the sound, the smell of the fuel and the rubber of the tires, the feeling of the cars rushing by you, and the wind that they create. There was also the fear that things could go wrong - the danger involved was evident.

My second trip to the "500" introduced me to the frightening side of racing. At the start of the 1973 race as the cars came down the front straight two cars touched wheels and started a multi-car accident which sent flames and debris flying into the stands, and thousands of pieces bouncing wildly across the track. Not one hundred feet from my seat, one car came sliding to a stop upside down and on fire with the front of the car torn away and the driver's legs hanging out the front. It is a vision that is as clear in my mind today as it was when it happened. (*Fig. 3*) The driver of that car was Salt Walther. He survived, less a few fingers and lived to race again. That same year there was a fatal accident involving a driver named Swede Savage. I knew of him before the race because my dad was a fan of his.





*figure 3.*

*Associated Press photo of crash during 1973 Indianapolis 500,  
wreckage of Salt Walther.*

Witnessing those events gave me a whole new understanding of the sport of auto racing. Artist Gerald Laing perceived the world of auto racing as the modern day successor to medieval and renaissance heraldry. Knowing that one could be killed makes racing seem more important, noble, and more real than everyday life. It is no different for the fan, the driver, or the car manufacturer, that first emotional experience with a speeding car can trigger the growth of a passion that evolves into a life long obsession.

As a teenager I collected car magazines and then would wallpaper my room with pictures of race cars, drivers, with *anything* that had to do with racing. This idea of collecting imagery has evolved into the basis for my work today. The idea of collecting and photography are visual manifestations of the creative desire. (Hirsch 2001) Photography, for me is another form of collecting, similar to my collecting objects and imagery, my photographs are a collection of information or material to be used to create work of an autobiographical nature.

The urge to make my own images to stick on my walls led me to purchase my first camera after my high school graduation. The following weekend while most of my friends were out doing what eighteen year olds do, I was at my usual Saturday night hang out, Sharon Speedway, in Hartford, Ohio armed with my camera and a pocket full of film. Most of the first shots were pretty bad, but they were mine and the adrenaline rush was overwhelming. Leaning over the guardrail panning my camera as a blurred pack of screaming race cars and chunks of flying dirt went past, was a completely new form of sensory overload, and a truly emotional experience.

There are those who see photography as an art created from a distance, as an outsider looking in. Unlike other photographic work I've done the sensation of photographing racing, photographing a subject that I can physically feel, smell, hear and know is dangerous, puts new meaning to "being close to the action." As a photographer at a

race I am part of the scene much like a fan, team member or driver. Perhaps it is just the proximity to the track and the moving cars that raises the adrenaline level. But possibly, photographing racing is as close as I can get to the physical sensation of actually racing.

Both the photographer and the driver pre-visualize the events to come, laying out a plan of attack. First, I put on my gear and prepare my equipment so that everything is where I can reach it without hesitation. Then once the race begins it becomes a play of offensive and defensive moves to get to the right locations, while always remaining ready to react to anything unexpected that may happen. I work to stay with my plan and adapt to unplanned circumstances. A driver deals with other competitors, track conditions, the weather, and car handling situations. The photographer deals with other photographers, location selection, obstacles in your line of sight, lighting situations, the weather, and being prepared to protect yourself and get out of harms way in case of an accident. There are moments of excitement and moments where I know I was lucky to get the shot or to get out of the way. There were moments when I knew a shot or location in relation to certain camera settings would make for some interesting images. Many facets of photographing racing and actually driving a race car can be related except for one, the physical sensation of moving fast.

Three words have wound through my journey: emotion, passion, and obsession. These three terms define what is contained within the world of auto racing and clarify how my interest in auto racing grew. EMOTION: a strong subjective response, that initial exposure to racing, noise, speed, fear, excitement. PASSION: a deep overwhelming feeling of emotion, the feeling inside that something gives me and motivates me to pursue that experience again and again. OBSESSION: preoccupation with a fixed idea, how the pursuit of said experience grows into a life encompassing endeavor that enriches my life experience.



Emotion, passion and obsession are also terms that explain my art, how it has become an integral part of my life and how my life became an integral part of the work. This approach to creating demonstrates “That nothing is beneath paying attention to realizing that all experiences are viable for inclusion in the work . . . incorporating various materials both photographic and objects of many origins . . . lead by the impulse to embrace all aspects of one’s environment.” (Mattison 2003, 68)

Arriving at or developing a working process which allows for the addition of many previously unrelated objects to unrelated imagery emphasizes their use to locate the works in place and time and to connect them to varied experiences. (Mattison 2003, 68) Artists often capture and rebuild the world as evidence of existence. Choosing to return to the subject that initially sparked my interest in photography allowed me to explore the possibilities of my creative process knowing that my obsession with the subject would foster my desire to go beyond any self-imposed artistic limits.

Thus I was freed to develop a way to merge the fine art sensibility with the documentary nature of racing photography by incorporating imagery and objects from everyday life illustrating that an artist’s life and work are inextricable.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**TOTAL ACCESS**

With my introduction to the culture of motorsports stated previously, the next development was in how to create a body of motorsports photography to use as part of the raw material for the final work. Let me begin by relating how my motorsport photography came into existence. The initial problem was physical access to events. I would go to races and try to photograph from general public locations ranging from the grandstands to under billboards, through fencing, anywhere that I might gain a better vantage point. For the most part all of those images ended up unusable and in a box somewhere. Through all the many races I had been to previously the people I envied the most next to the drivers were the photographers. When I initially started to study photography it was the racing photographers whom I wanted to work with. I loved everything about their jobs albeit I hadn't a clue of what their job entailed. I just knew that they had access and could get close to all the action; so much so that photographers have become as much a part of the motorsport scene as any other part of the culture. If not for them we would miss so much of a beautifully colorful and fast moving sport. I needed to work next to the professionals and observe how they approached their work and learn from them.

After inquiring to people in the press and promoters of events I learned the only way to get press credentials was to work for an agency that provided images to press outlets. I couldn't get friends in the press to allow me to photograph on behalf of their newspapers, even without paying me if they used any of my images, I just wanted to be able to photograph. Thus the birth of "Down Force Motorsport Imaging" I created my own agency consisting of a staff of one.

At the time, my day job was in a professional photo printing lab, where I could print virtually whatever I wanted. I began making promotional material and business letter heads and started faxing requests off to race promoters and tracks for photo credentials. To my sheer joy the first race I gained true media credentials for was for a race that I had been going to since its inception in the 1980's, "The Cleveland Grand Prix" in Cleveland Ohio at Burke Lakefront Airport. Believe me when I tell you on the day I picked up my credentials and went out to the garage area I was glad I

had sunglasses on because the tears were filling up my eyes. I was so excited and happy to be where I was that I couldn't stop the emotions that were coming over me.

My intent was never to sell my images; in fact I never sold a single image to any news outlet. Once I gathered several successful images from races (Cleveland, Mid-Ohio, USGP@Indy) I printed hundreds of five by seven promo-cards with my logo and contact information on them and as I would walk from place to place at any given race I would hand out these cards to kids or anyone who would take one. I have never forgotten how good it felt to get a "cool" picture of a race car as a kid and this was my way of providing that little piece of excitement for free to some young kid who came to the races. Seeing their face light up when you handed them a photo that he could have was just one of the advantages of being able to be there photographing.

Once I got over the sheer excitement of having total access I began to study how car racing was photographed. The professionals find a location and wait for the action to come to them, in hopes that things will happen in front of their lens. As I worked next to them I began to see that my images look similar to everything I saw in magazines; cars on the track, cars and people in the pits, blurry speed shots, super close-ups. Formally, they were documentary photographs illustrating the picturesque of the sport. I knew I wanted to do more with these images, to bring more of my own creative energy to the work.

One goal was to show the many ways to illustrate the sport, how the artist sees it compared to the professional motorsport photographer and the amateur or fan. Another objective was to put motorsport photography into a fine art context and bring it to a different level of attention. One of the issues I have always had with motorsport publications is that there is no room for experimentation, to let the creative instincts of those involved really express themselves. I grew tired of the repetitive nature of many "photo issues" of racing magazines. It seemed to be a repetitive exhibition of the same types of imagery year after year. My frustration with the search for my own process to create with racing photography led me to search out other art work to help

inspire my process. I found that today there are few outlets that promote artwork that involves racing. This lack of a creative source brought me to write to the editors of some of my favorite magazines and see them publish my interests in creating an outlet for such a type of creative work (RACER, April, 2001). This is what motivated me to push the creative envelope of my own work, perhaps relating one possibility of how to use motorsport photography other than as a document.



**CHAPTER 3**  
**DISCOVERY OF PROCESS**

I have always believed that the single image could not have enough of my personal imprint upon it to satisfy my creative goals. Thus, from the earliest work I created during my time at RIT my thought process included images in a group or series. As John Berger states in his book *ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING*, “If photographs quote from appearances and if expressiveness is achieved through what is termed the long quotation, then the possibility suggests itself of composing with numerous quotations, of communicating not with single photographs but with groups or sequences.” The challenge is in how to construct these groups or sequences in order to communicate the experiences of life in a narrative form.

That earliest graduate work was also telling of my desire to work with my hands. My first project was a documentary of the hands of working class people. (*Fig. 4*) The following step was to take images of working class people, use a slide projector to project other images onto them, re-photograph the resulting composite to produce a final print. (*Fig. 5*)

Subsequent images incorporated more layering and hand work. For these I collaged portraits of mine with mass media imagery, images personal to me and/or family photos, then re-photographed those constructions. (*Fig. 6*) I knew similar imagery was being created digitally, but electronic media did not satisfying my creative interests or have the physical vitality contained in hand made work that I desired.

My approach to imagery begins with the object itself. To me, the image just sits there begging to be altered or changed. With each modification the image takes on a new form becoming a new expression of the possibilities latent in its original form. I equate this to a car in its standard form which begs, similar to the photograph, to be

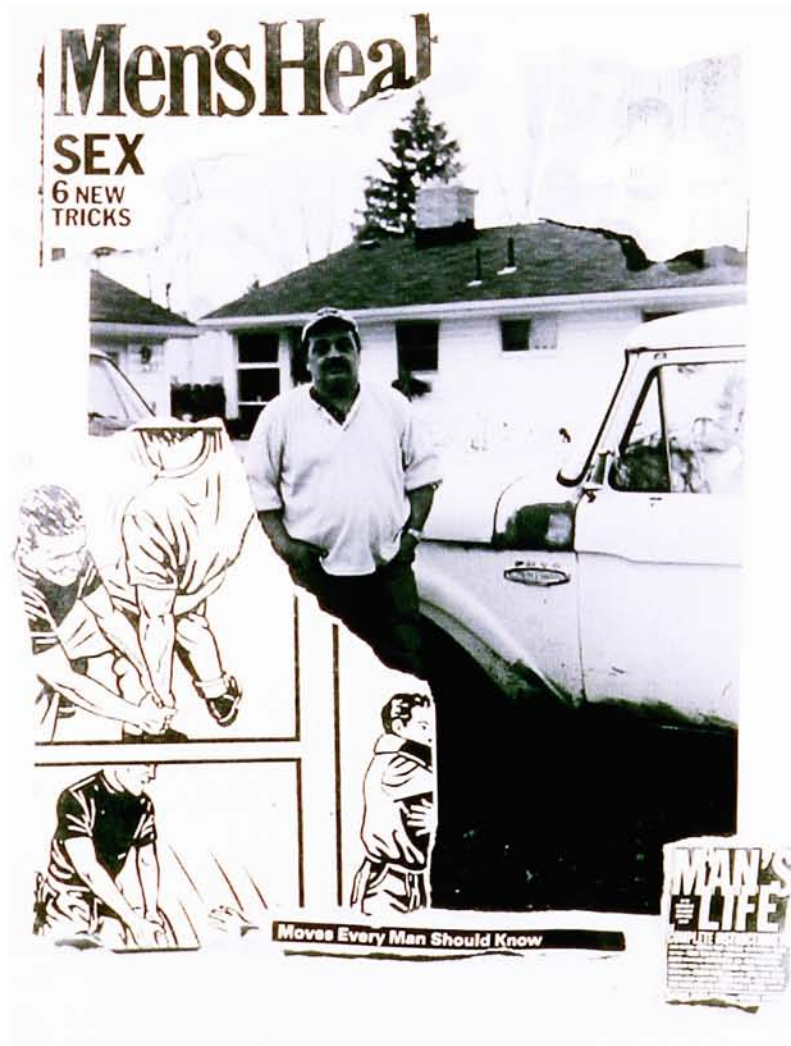


*Figure 4*  
*Tony Nicholas. Hands at Work. 1998*  
*Color Photograph*



*Figure 5*

*Tony Nicholas. Brother Tom, Monochromatic print,  
projection of springs on to portrait of man. 1999*



*Figure 6*  
*Tony Nicholas. Untitled. 2000*  
*Photo collage*



altered or personalized, or pushed to a form of pure function-the race car. Wanting my work to derive from a personal nature, altering images or pushing straight photography towards another form is one element that connects this work to my need to create.

The photograph is the catalyst which starts a longer process of creating. For me, the act of photographing is not executed by looking for meaning or intent in an individual image. Intentions can change in an instant as new meanings come into view during my examination of my prints, and as I am making constructions. The intent in photographing is to collect traces of time that, when put together with other unrelated imagery and objects offer multiple meanings dependant on the viewer.

Simultaneous to photographing, is the collection of artifacts from the sites and material from various sources, both personal and from the mass media. As I shoot the work may have a chosen theme, but the process of photographing and gathering material is a collection of raw material to be analyzed later. Objects tangential to the experience come from many areas ranging from intensely personal imagery from the family album to seemingly random detritus of ticket stubs, parking passes and media guides gathered at a specific, subject related event. Artifacts that relate to issues of everyday existence are culled from my everyday life. "This multiplicity is the result of bringing into the zone of art all kinds of objects and images that were originated outside the painting by different people for different purposes other than the artist's use" (Alloway 1976, 5) This method of working combines chance with clearly defined themes, ideas, and interests. The work integrates the widest range of materials and experiences becoming a model for inclusion. Art should open itself as completely as possible to the surrounding environment. (Mattison 2003, 57) If art is to say something of life at this period of time then the objects and imagery from this time should be part of the material to define and describe this time. This process of working is lead by the desire to embrace all aspects of my environment.

My work is a form of cultural construction. The collage elements may be used to locate the works in place and time and to connect them to varied experiences. (Mattison 2003, 68) By placing the assorted elements together on canvas the work becomes a more significant portrayal of my life's experiences. A photograph is one means of communication involving the nature of lived experience. By choosing what to photograph and incorporate into a work the final assemblage becomes a construction of a social situation, the life of the photographer and a way of explaining the world I live in.

The process involved with rearranging available information so that it is removed from established patterns of thought "... brings about arrangements and juxtapositions of information that might not have otherwise occurred." (Mattison 2003, 32) It is often better to do something and then afterwards to understand what one has done. (Mattison 2003, 32) In working in this way I include objects and imagery that function as a connection to what I was experiencing on a personal level during the conception and execution of each piece. The photograph describes, it also has its limitations. A photograph may only show what something looked like under certain conditions. The incorporation of other materials leads to a more coherent description of experience.

The choice of images and objects was also based on their origin. I purposely include imagery from high and low culture suggesting that the random appearance and non-hierarchical quality of the work are a reflection of our image saturated culture. A blend of the complex, intricate and multifarious, a take on the world in which we are continuously faced with multiple choices and alternatives rather than clear answers. (Mattison 2003, 29) Our culture is one immersed in images with little time to recognize their meaning. The idea of mixing past and present moments, high and low culture brings into the work the idea that art is similar to an inventory of human traces. (Alloway 1976, 8) The various parts of each work and the choices of material are parts of human existence, traces of a record of being here. By creating this work my intent

is to capture experiences giving the viewer time to apply their own meaning through the examination of each piece.

Another aspect of my work comments on the vernacular glance of our culture. We look at the world through eyes that move from image to image or object to object. The world is a supermarket, where there is no recognition of beautiful or ugly, or a hierarchy of importance only an interest in immediate need or want. Through image, color, texture and dimension I hope to slow the quick gaze, and make the audience consider meaning.

My work questions the relationship of the personal and the public. I equate my process of creating to writing a journal of my existence; it may be seen as art, as part of my life or perhaps the art of life. Dan Eldon's method for creating journals inspired me to include all aspects of life's experiences in order to reflect a personal perspective on life. His work is similar to that of an archeological discovery, a record of things that happened in the past, "... reflecting [my] own peculiar perspective on life [illustrated through] . . . colorful relics of a multifaceted civilization. (Eldon 1997, 5) The idea to work in this fashion is also influenced by my study of Robert Rauschenberg whose work "blurs the boundary between the rarified realm of art and the more prosaic realm of the everyday." (Molesworth, *Baltimore Museum of Art*) The work of Eldon along with that of Rauschenberg helped to underscore my belief in the idea that the work of an artist should include the entirety of life experience. When it does, it is a far more powerful connection to the world I inhabit and a bond to those who follow.

An aesthetic of heterogeneity must be flexible enough to allow for all kinds of imported objects and images as well as a formality that is loose rather than tight. (Alloway 1976, 5) In order to integrate multiple elements my process is an approach that is free and open to allow for the assimilation of materials and imagery into a system of order. Photography has the ability to put structure and a sense of understanding on



the world. By using multiple images and objects from other aspects of life, both personal and public, I can communicate a more comprehensive view of the experience of living.

I depend on an approach that utilizes the intuitive, responding to things that happen during the creation of each work without pondering what works and what may not work. The benefits of working in this manner is in the multiple interpretations and meanings that come from focusing only on creating within the process, the work benefits by what it reveals. The selection of material for each work is not entirely pre-planned, in most cases it is a single image or object that begins the entire process of building a piece. The accumulation of material and the position of imagery upon the canvas is deliberate, creating a random order. My working procedure may begin with a single image but decisions about the addition of other images or materials are discovered during the process of creating. The addition of various images and objects develops from the work allowing me to see the many images and objects in my collection differently. In some instances images or objects were initially placed in the work as a design element functioning as a way to keep the creative process moving forward, perhaps added only as color, line or texture. These elements created and therefore expressed some form of tension or communication discovered afterwards.

Relating the process to auto racing, the application of paint reflects the nature of racing. Although things are planned and there is organization of where things should be and how it should develop, the unexpected, unplanned incidents and unforeseen happenings dictate the final outcome. Each work, just as a race, is the product of deliberate choices, but success depends upon instant incorporation of the spontaneous and accidental.

The use of paint with photography and various materials provides a greater sense of discovery. My interest is in the capabilities of paint to participate in the illusion of reality played along side the reality of the photograph or object. The tension between the real and the illusion is played upon. "This approach to creating insinuates that life

is a blend of first hand encounters and a wide range of experiences made possible through photography.”(Coke 1964, 352) My method for application of paint and mediums for texture allows me opportunities to discover varying ways to build depth and layers of images or meaning by burying images or blending them into the body of the piece. This lets images and objects vie for attention creating a sense of time in the work. Frequently, image and object overlap becoming difficult to separate from their surroundings thus melding into parts of an integrated environment. This method of working is a play of intuitiveness and careful planning of exactly how to locate the images and objects in space on the canvas. As parts of a whole, each piece has its initial place but the receptiveness to the unexpected gives way to further discovery and creative fulfillment.

A photograph implies a world which continues beyond the edge of the print, whereas in a painting the image ends at the edge of the canvas. My combination of photographs and paint calls into question this edge. The process is my race, there is control but in the application of paint the exploitation of chance effects presents ways to go beyond a given or perceived edge. A race driver searches out the edge of control, the limits of himself and his car in order to go as fast as possible. Once the fine line between control and an accident is found he knows how hard he must push himself and the car to find success. For me, discovering this working process was similar to a driver finding that edge. As the imagery evolved, the edge was pushed beyond the frame of a photograph and beyond the use of a single canvas. In the beginning one image was not enough, and then images alone were not enough, including objects and imagery from other sources was one answer to finding that edge of creative success. As a driver constantly searches for more speed, I moved, in some cases beyond a single canvas to find fulfillment.

This working process is central to the meaning of the work. The work is process, a method of recording the experience of life. I want to present variety and alternatives not to make judgments or propose solutions. My concern was to make work that

relates to the many aspects and details that make up a life. I worked with a mindset that was open to new experiences and tried not to impose solutions. I worked without concern for making a statement or comment on the issues of the world and concentrated on my process, enjoying the work for the sake of doing. Letting the meaning develop after the work is completed. The process may be planned out but the act of creation is spontaneous. It becomes a play on the thing itself and an intuitive expression of my personal outlook on the relationship of creativity and life.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**HISTORY AND INSPIRATION**



At the turn of the century the invention of the automobile was one part of a vast scientific and technological revolution that gave us the airplane, the wireless telegraph, the electric light, moving pictures, and major theories in physics, psychology and mathematics. One contemporaneous observer noted in 1913 that “the world has changed less since the time of Christ than it has in the last thirty years.” (Silk 1984, 35) With the onset of such a massive sense of change, artists searched for ways to manifest this modern metamorphosis. The automobile became one symbol of this change. One of the themes addressing the dawning of the new age was a poster by H. Ballery Desfontaines, an ad for the automobiles of Richard Brasier from 1904. (*Figure 7*) Similar to the classical theme of Aurora, goddess of the dawn leading the way for Apollo’s sun-carrying chariot, now with the car as symbol of the dawning of a new age, a modern-day chariot of Apollo bringing technological power, energy, and light to the new world. (Silk 1980, 601)

The impact of the automobile reconfigured how we viewed our world from a classical sense into a modern vision by altering the environment and changing how we see it. Examining art work that utilized the automobile and its affect on American culture relates to the effect that auto racing has had on my life. My passion for motorsports has altered my life and led me in new and interesting directions. The image of the goddess Aurora leading the speeding auto into a new modern world equates to my passion for art being lead by auto racing into a new realm.

Italian Futurism was the first major art movement to utilize the car as a central image. The futurist movement held the automobile as a paradigmatic innovation, grounded in their belief that the auto best exemplified the “beauty of speed” and their concept of dynamism. The artists’ of the movement recognized the power that the automobile contained to alter the environment and man’s perception of it, centering much of their attention on the sensations of driving fast and capturing the sense of multiple experiences while traveling in a car. The works of the futurists aid my process of photographing and using paint in capturing movement and distortion. The depiction of simultaneity, that several things are happening at once proved central to the



Figure 7  
*H. Ballery Desfontaines. Automobiles Richard-Brasier,  
1904. Color lithograph 34 3/4 X 56 3/4"*



development of my work. I relate the futurist idea of multiple sensations experienced through a speeding car to the physical sensations that I enjoy when photographing racing.

The technique of collage or utilizing several images together in any manner was first exposed to me through the researching of the Dada movement. The use of collage was a favored medium by Dadaists incorporating imagery from newspapers and magazines. Francis Picabia, a dada artist and car enthusiast who owned almost one hundred cars in his lifetime introduced imagery of car parts into his work while in America in 1915. Intrigued by American auto trade journals and advertising Picabia's work was derived from the stimulation from those areas. The Dada use of imagery from mass media sparked my interest in merging images from advertising and media outlets into a fine art context. Also inspired by the Dada integration of imagery and objects from the world of industry and machines I wanted to use imagery and objects from outside the art world, material from everyday life in my work.

The nature of the new contemporary experience that the automobile provided early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not be properly communicated through traditional methods of art which led artists to adopt a new form of visual expression. Cubism played an important role in the effort to develop a style appropriate to the modern world. Their visual tools of fragmentation dematerialization of form, use of transparency and overlapping also revealed to me ways of utilizing the various objects and imagery that I wanted to work with. I wanted my work to exhibit many things going on at once utilizing the idea of simultaneity that was also borrowed from the cubists by the futurists. Cubism developed through a need to explain a new and evolving world. My process moved forward through the research of how art develops a visual language in order to explain the world. Our world today is a constant barrage of rapidly moving images and symbols and my work tries to slow the glance and give the audience time to apply meaning to what they see.

A more recent movement that provided invaluable assistance to the development of my process is Pop Art. Utilizing the techniques and subject matter from the mass media the resultant art movement, although begun by English artists, reached its fullest expression in the United States. American Pop explored the emotional and psychological effects of the automobile and mass culture and reflected the artist's views on the fragmentation of images, the disorientation and confusion of the modern environment. My work contains similar imagery and material inspired by its use in pop art but does not originate from the idea of explaining the affects of such imagery on our culture, it is more closely related to a writing journal from someone who has lived and grown up within the culture that pop art began to critique.

The work of photojournalist, Dan Eldon, has influenced my work immensely. Eldon's personal journals have in part been published by his family. Contained in these personal collections are images and objects from every aspect of his life, both personal and public. He created thousands of pages "... reflecting his own peculiar perspective on life ... layered like an archeological dig, the pages are bizarre and colorful relics ... intensely personal though inhabited by many different people." (Eldon 1997, 5) Each image and piece found a place in an integrated whole using motifs he saw around him. His method of using all experiences for inclusion in the work is another central aspect to my working process. Upon seeing Eldon's journals I knew then that I wanted my work to incorporate everything that I came in contact with. Seeing the many pieces and things that he would save and add to his journals illustrated his personality and communicated a more comprehensive image of who Dan Eldon was. Making work that is personal and expressive of who the artist is peaked my interest in developing a process relative to that method of inclusion.

Robert Rauschenberg has been the most influential artist on the development of my work. As an undergraduate seeing his work for the first time expressed visually what kind of work I wanted to make from a formal standpoint. The idea of using unrelated images and various objects along with paint made a connection with me. Thru the study of his work I learned that every aspect of his process interested me. His interest



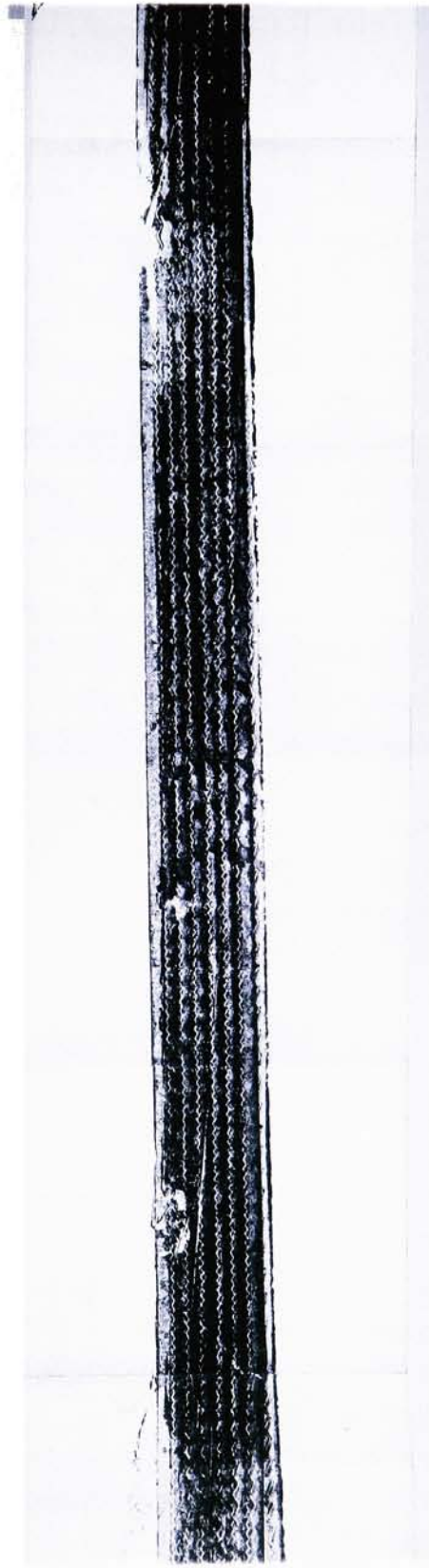
is in the perceptual and psychological medley of modern life. In one of his early works *Automobile Tire Print* (Fig. 8) the length and variety of the work shows his interest in mobility, movement and change. These concepts became central aspects of Rauschenberg's work and "... his idea of the literal span of an art work as revealing the ongoing and unfolding process of life." (Mattison 2003, 57)

Rauschenberg's physical environment played an important role in his art which was influenced by the working class neighborhoods where he lived in New York City. I was influenced by his interest and use of material from his everyday existence. The connection to using images and objects from all of life has been a part of my work since I began studying photography, yet at that early stage I was unaware of its influence. Perhaps it is a reflection of my upbringing as a young teenager in the working class area of Youngstown, Ohio once dominated by the steel industry and now a collection of empty cavernous mills. My neighborhood was near the old mills but dominated by strip malls and consumer culture. As I studied photography at YSU not five miles from the "steel valley" One of my favorite shooting spots was among the closed mills where I began to collect objects lying around and would take them home and photograph them. As my photography developed into different areas I would still go to locations of old industry and collect objects for some unknown purpose.

Another key to the development of my work learned after studying Rauschenberg was the joy I would get riding my bicycle down the main road near my neighborhood, route 422 and observe the foreshortened perspective of the telephone poles and wires criss-crossing the road highlighted by the mass of signs from all the businesses along the road, all merged into a mass of shapes, colors and lights topped by the crest of the hill and the sun setting on the horizon. That scene always caught my attention, even today when traveling down a street filled with stores and the bustle of business, my eye goes to the signs and imagery and merges the scene into a flat plane. (Fig. 9)

Through the research of the automobile's incorporation in to the art world, my working process was illuminated and refined as the research progressed. All of the art

*Figure 8*  
*Robert Rauschenberg,*  
*Automobile Tire Print. 1953*  
*monoprint: house paint on 20 sheets*  
*of paper mounted on fabric.*  
*16 1/2 x 264 1/2"*





*Figure 9*  
*Tony Nicholas. 4th of July series (Austintown, OH) 2002*  
*Work in progress*

movements related here and artists' who have integrated the car into their work have influenced and affected my work. While creating hand made work with multiple translations for the viewer is highly interesting to me. Including aspects of the entirety of life's experiences makes personal the work that develops from such a process. Discovering a working process through the study of past art movements and artists connects my work to its inspiration from the past and pushes those ideas into an unknown future in which art initiates a better understanding of where I've been while giving insight into where my work is going.



## **CONCLUSION**

Similar to the automobile becoming an indispensable part of life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so too has my passion for art become a central part of my existence. There are few objects that we see as an extension of ourselves as we do the car. Few such inventions have altered life more since their inception than the car. It has changed our cities, our landscape and the way we see it, and our lifestyles.

Many artists in the past have used images of the car in their work in attempts to put meaning to both the positive and negative impact of the car on our culture. For me, the use of the culture of auto racing as a subject is about using a piece of my life experience as an aid in the discovery of a working process with which I can use all of life's experiences as parts of my imagery.

My family worked with their hands struggling to make ends meet, blue collar workers invisible to the world which benefited from their labor. Watching my parents come home exhausted from their long hours of toil instilled many things in me. Most dominant in my mind now is not wanting to spend the short time I have on earth feeling unfulfilled and unsatisfied with my existence. As my work has become more involved with process incorporating personal experience has become a vital element in its development. Auto racing has been such a positive influence and interest in my life, the challenge was how to integrate my motorsport photography into a fine art context. As I worked on methods of putting racing images into the work, it became clear that the incorporation of pieces of the entirety of life's experiences would place racing in a proper context. Racing imagery was another aspect of a life lived, just part of a record of my being here. The working process began to emphasize the journalistic nature of the work, highlighting it as an anthropological collection of one person's existence. The attraction with creating art through a hand made process perhaps reflects my working class upbringing.

A line from the movie “LeMans” comes as close as possible to relating my need to create to auto racing. In the particular scene a woman asks “. . . what is so important about driving faster than anyone else?” To which the driver replies, “A lot of people go through life doing things badly, racing is important to people who do it well, racing, it’s life, anything that happens before or after is just waiting. . .” The lesson that I get from exploring that quote is a greater understanding of the relationship of having goals and my “living in the moment” approach to life. It has been stated that people who race live “in the moment,” resulting in a life more exciting and full than those who do not race. I have stated previously that I approach my working process as “my race” being that this process is such an integral part of my life, life can be approached metaphorically as a race as well.

Let me clarify that I do not mean the “rat race” where the striving for goals with our eye only on that which is to be gained or only to win. We cannot all win at every attempt. It is the act of running the race that makes life more meaningful and fulfilling. What is important is not only winning; fame or riches though they may deservedly come are not why the race is run. We’re here to accept the challenge of taking part, accepting the risks, failure, and dangers, which adds excitement. It is the many facets of the act of doing, that withholds my interest once a race or project is completed.

In his book DEATH: PHYLOSOPHICAL SOUNDINGS Herbert Fingarette begins his description of the relationship of work and rewards by asking, is my fundamental interest the present activity - the game as a whole (running the race, living life to the fullest) the project on the job, the writing of the book? Or is my interest largely or entirely . . . In some hoped for outcome of the activity - to win, to earn money, to receive the rewards of success? In the latter cases, the activity itself is mere labor, of value only as a means to my goal . . . . The time and effort spent is just that, time surrendered, life expended, without value of its own. The goal may be promising in it’s expectation but the work to get there becomes oppressive unsatisfying labor. Examined objectively living life in this way can only become meaningless drudgery

filled with tension and is so in spite of social status or material comforts achieved.”  
(Fingarette 1996, 71)

Possibly I may never feel the sensations of driving a car to its limit, but it is, the passion with which those who race pursue their goals that I truly admire and use as a model to live my life. Living in the present does not mean discarding concern for future outcomes, just a concern for a certain *kind* of interest. My interest is in the entirety of artistic activity, of which gaining praise, fame or riches are a small part. This is how I see auto racing and also how I attempt to approach my life and work. When traveling at 200 mph all attention must be on driving; I must be completely involved in the work I am making in order to transform my ideas into an image. Reiterating Fingarette the doctrine of *karma* teaches that we should not be attached to the fruits of action. Here the concept of “action” connotes a coherent project, a course of conduct in which I am purposefully engaged. To be unattached to the fruits of action does not mean we should act without interest in the goals and rewards to be achieved. It means to be committed to the present action *as a whole*.

Is that what auto racing gives me, a brief look at how life can be lived if I truly pursued my passion and made that my life’s work, pursuing the knowledge that life is an accumulation of moments to be experienced? In my brief existence I have learned to value these moments and I have attempted to fill my life with varied experiences. Embracing the act of doing, of creating, has brought a sense of fulfillment and joy to life. It is my hope that the visual manifestation of such an outlook is recognized and pondered by an audience interested in the value of life.



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