Jeff Koons Turns BMW into Art

By Jonathan Welsh
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Artist Jeff Koons today showed his design concept for the next BMW Art Car. The car maker has been working with artists on one-off paint designs for its cars ever since Alexander Calder signed off on the first one in 1975.

Calder's bright signature paint scheme on a BMW 3.0 CSL racing car helped raise the profile of BMW, which had just set up its North American headquarters in the U.S. and was still an obscure brand here. The company showed the Calder car off on the racetrack, where its unique colors helped establish BMW's high-performance image.

That first car also started a tradition. A year after Calder, New York artist Frank Stella applied a familiar grid style pattern to a BMW. Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and others followed. Many of the cars, both racing and production models, became emblems of pop art's evolution.

Typically the artist creates a sketch or model of the design and BMW actually paints the car. Warhol's case is unique because he painted his car, a sleek M1 racer, in a studio using brushes. Koon's project, an M3 GT2 race car, which is to be completed in June, will be the 17th in the Art Car series. Like Calder's, Warhol's and many others, BMW says Koons' art car will compete in the annual 24-hour endurance race at Le Mans, France.

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