

Muscle Cars stamps to feature Newbury Park artist Tom Fritz's work

By Rachel McGrath

Wednesday, February 20, 2013

Pictures by an artist from Newbury Park will be featured on a series of postage stamps released Friday.

The Postal Service commissioned Tom Fritz to create five stamps for their Muscle Cars (Forever) stamp series.

The stamps, which will be unveiled Friday as part of Daytona 500 events, celebrate five automobiles: the 1966 Pontiac GTO, the 1967 Shelby GT-500, the 1969 Dodge Charger Daytona, the 1970 Plymouth Hemi 'Cuda and the 1970 Chevelle SS.

The artwork will become part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

"I'm honored, and it's a little bit out of this world," Fritz said as he sat in the basement studio of his Newbury Park home. "I was pleased with the outcome, and it's something I'm proud of. I'm in pretty small company now, and to have the work in the museum — that's incredible, too."

Born and raised in the San Fernando Valley, for many years Fritz, 55, earned a living creating art and illustrations for defense firms and pursuing his passion for painting old automobiles on the side.

"Ever since I was a kid I've been involved with old machines, cars, bikes. If you look at my paintings, beyond the subject that is the car, there is a landscape or some sort of a composition that supports the subject," he said.

In 2003, Fritz, who is married with two children, decided to focus full time on his passion for drawing and painting images reflecting the relationship between man and machine.

He found his first market in Michigan and the automotive industry, which commissioned work from him, and he was invited to join the Automotive Fine Arts Society. It grew from there, he said.

He exhibits his work at selected shows across the country and works on commission. His customers include Harley-Davidson Motor Co., the corporate offices of the AAA, General Motors, the Ford Motor Co. and auto enthusiasts worldwide.

Through the automotive arts society, he met Art Fitzpatrick who, with Van Kaufman,

created landmark ads for Pontiac in the 1950s and '60s.

“The muscle cars are part of the ‘America On The Move’ stamp series, and Art Fitzpatrick did the first portion of that series that was called ‘ ’50s Fins and Chrome’ and another series of ‘ ’50s Sporty Cars,’ ” Fritz said.

“We were all at the AFAS meeting at Pebble Beach, and Art’s getting along in his years, and he just didn’t feel he had it in him to do another series. So the art director from the post office asked, ‘Well, if you don’t want to do it, can you find another artist out there that can do it and would want to do it?’ Art looked around the room and said, ‘I pick Tom Fritz,’ and I said, ‘OK.’ ”

The biggest challenge was the fact that his oil paintings would be shrunk to an image about 1 inch big.

“When you’re looking at something that small, details don’t really matter,” Fritz said. “What grabs your eye is the colors and the composition, and so that’s what I strove for.”

“There’s an emotive quality to the muscle cars. They look like nothing else out there. People describe the look as menacing. They look angry, and when you start them up you can feel the engine pulsing, and it has a real visceral quality to it,” Fritz said.

“That quality has to come out in your painting, and I did it through my color choices, colors from the edge of the palette, more saturated and stronger, and in the composition, with a lot of angles, straight lines, that indicate speed.”

Fritz created the art in early 2008 and says he has no idea why it’s taken five years for the stamps to be released. He was bound by a nondisclosure agreement and found out in September that the stamps would be issued this month.

Fritz will be the guest of honor at the stamps’ launch at Daytona Beach, Fla.

For more information about each stamp, visit <https://www.facebook.com/TomFritzArt>.



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