

CHARLOTTE JACKSON FINE ART, INC.

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For immediate release:

“A work of art is successful if it changes the viewer.”

***RON COOPER: Racers and Combos* Opens July 4 at Charlotte Jackson Fine Art**

(Santa Fe, NM) Charlotte Jackson Fine Art is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new work, *Ron Cooper: Racers and Combos*, on view July 2nd - 30th, with a reception for the artist on **Friday, July 4th** from 5 - 7 PM. The gallery is located in the **Railyard Arts District** at **554 South Guadalupe Street**.

Imagine a valley running east to west. Surrounded by mountains and hills, roughly three miles across and ten long. Tracked by the sun, a hollow bowl filled with space and light. Small enough to be at a comfortable human scale. See a landmark, point to it, turn your feet there, and walk. Some evenings the sun, setting over the Pacific Ocean nearby, fills the valley with colored particles of golden light. This is the Ojai Valley, in California, where Ron Cooper grew up – cradled in a sort of crucible of light and space.

Now turn to Cooper’s latest iteration of his *Vertical Bars* series, the *Combos*. Made of long, thin boxes of Plexiglas, from certain angles, they appear to float. On their outward facing surfaces, color, texture and shimmer hover over the wall, while the boxes themselves are filled with light, so that the pieces are lit from within.

The world shapes us. Cooper’s childhood in the Ojai Valley shaped him profoundly, influencing not only his passions and perspectives, but the attitudes he brings to his working life every day. Part of this influence is of course the fascination with light and space, so beautifully transmuted into the *Combos* with their juxtaposed Plexiglas boxes that allow the pieces to become containers, or perhaps more aptly, valleys, of light, illuminating the sometimes diffuse and sometimes particulate pigments which he has painstakingly layered with lacquer on the front surface.

A spark of light from a lamp or a change in the angle of sun might set off a cascade of shifting hues. What was one thing becomes another. Moment to moment. Day to day. Different, fluid, transforming. There is room here for both choice and chance. Over decades Cooper has honed his skills with the contemporary materials he utilizes, experimenting with new sources of pigments (early on he even worked with pigments derived from pearlescent fish scales) as well as ways to change and disrupt his surfaces. However, just as there is an inherent element of the unknown to the way these pieces react to light under different conditions, Cooper’s process involves elements of intuition and improvisation, a dance between skill and chance, structure and the unexpected.

However, it is not just Cooper’s artistic output that has been influenced by these early origins. In the gallery along with the *Combos* are two of his favorite retrofitted racers. For Cooper, becoming an artist wasn’t a

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forgone conclusion, as a young man he was drawing hotrods, sure he would become the greatest car builder in the world.

But again, there was a transformation. Just out of high school, a yearlong trip with his best friend to Europe via New York brought him into contact with great museums and great art. Steeped in this wealth of art history, Cooper decided to pursue art, eventually receiving a scholarship to the famed Chouinard Art Institute. During his time at school and then working in studios in and around Los Angeles in the 60's, Cooper was part of the loose collective of artists in the Light and Space Movement.

His love of cars never went away, as Cooper says he always had, "great, special cars." But then about ten years ago Cooper built his first car, combining a '29 Model A chassis with a '31 A and a hopped-up touring engine. Since then, he has continued to build racing cars, as well as to race them himself, combining bits and pieces of classics as well as custom made parts. Here again is an example of the attitude toward creation he learned early – a confidence to pursue whatever physical or technical skills are necessary to complete a project.

Ron Cooper's life has been filled with moments of artistic transformation. From his early experiences to his pursuit of art, his explorations of light and love of cars to his years long evangelism of artisanal mezcal. (Another fascinating tale of discovery and transformation ... he calls mezcal "liquid art" for how the special liquor changes something "in the back of your head".)

As Cooper says, "A work of art is successful if it changes the viewer." The world shapes us, even as we shape the world. Ron Cooper rides this dynamic line, creating works that may just shape us, as well.

- *Michaela Kahn, Ph.D.*