

GM to UC by way of Hollywood

By Jerry Stein
Post staff reporter

The well-designed automobile for Brigid O'Kane, curator of the "Transportation Design" show now up at Manifest Gallery, is fine art to her.

"To me vehicles are moving sculpture," said O'Kane, who has an undergraduate degree in industrial design focusing on transportation from Detroit's College for Creative Studies and a master's in fine art in drawing from the University of Cincinnati.

"They are expressive, beautiful — and fun to drive," she said.

O'Kane, an associate professor of design at UC, teaches transportation design.

Prior to coming to Cincinnati five years ago to teach, she designed cars for General Motors in Detroit, where she grew up. In designing automobiles, O'Kane has found a perfect fusion for her interest in autos and educational background.

"The mix of combining your artistic perspective with creating a three-dimensional product that has an incredible impact on society is very rewarding," she said.

O'Kane traces her interest in transportation design to her strong interest in sports cars. She said designers like her "are motivated by that passion."

Before the degree in industrial design, O'Kane earned a degree in graphic design. While visiting the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, "I came across this wall of sketches — floor to ceiling, wall-to-wall of

A woman did it. It was like an epiphany. And I'm like, I have to do this. I have to do this."

— Brigid O'Kane

these beautiful, artistic expressions of vehicles.

"They were cars. They were going 200 miles per hour on the page. And they were signed 'Julie.' A woman did it. It was like an epiphany. And I'm like, 'I have to do this. I have to do this.'"

She went home and excitedly told her father what she had seen at CCS.

"He was looking at me like I was nuts," O'Kane said. "And my dad goes, 'Brigid, that's what we do at work.'"

"My dad worked at General Motors for 37 years as an engineer in the design center and he never took me in.

"The next day, he took me into the studio he worked at. It was a truck studio. There were trucks all over the wall. The designers were at their desks sketching away. The energy, the excitement, the atmosphere was captivating."

After completing her industrial design degree at CCS, O'Kane went to work for GM for 10 years.

"I worked on the Oldsmobile Intrigue," O'Kane said. "My design for the (Pontiac) Aztek was chosen to go into production.

What actually came out was a little bit different.

"The design changed as it evolved. It's part of the process.

"I was out in California when I saw the first billboard. And, then, I saw one moving on the road. Aztek is a different animal. It was a thrill."

Despite her success, O'Kane decided to leave GM.

"I wanted to be creatively expressed as Brigid O'Kane. At the time, I didn't know what that was. I knew there was something else out there."

Without definite plans, O'Kane moved to California.

"I started working in the film industry doing production design. I realized I was creating someone else's vision once again."

While in California, O'Kane began to teach a course at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

"I realized I loved teaching," she said.

The former dean of UC's College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning, Jay Chatterjee, recruited O'Kane to come to Cincinnati.

"There are many things that are happening at UC that make it different from other schools that have transportation design," O'Kane said. "They look at portfolios; we admit students on their academic performance.

"Our students are very smart. They are more likely to go out into industry and be leaders."

Art: 4-wheel dreams start on paper

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illustrate the ongoing process of tail to define form and mass. sign is a rendering of the entire
an automobile's design. Another sports car rendering exterior of the car.