



WILLIAM MEYER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

On Monday, Sal Erato attaches the last pieces to a sculpture he created of race driver Michael Andretti's car at Genesis Creative Group in Elm Grove, where Erato works. Andretti is giving the artwork as a gift to car owner and actor Paul Newman. Erato is finishing a few more of the pieces for Andretti to give to comedian Tim Allen and members of Andretti's race crew.

Art in the fast lane

Sculptor creates pieces for racer Michael Andretti, celebrities

By Paul Gores

of the Journal Sentinel staff

Elm Grove – Artist Sal Erato says he's never driven a race car, but he has seen enough races to be able to capture some of the thrill of zooming around a track at 200 mph.

In turn, Erato's artistic interpretation of that experience has captured the eye of race car driver Michael Andretti.

As a result, actors Paul Newman and Tim Allen can expect to find some of Erato's work under their Christmas trees this year.

Andretti has commissioned Erato, 31, to create four similar relief sculpture wall-hangings for racing enthusiasts Newman, Allen and two other friends.

The three dimensional pieces of art – crafted with wood, plastic and paint – focus on Andretti at the wheel of an Indy 500 style race car. The blurry, airbrushed background creates the image of high speed.

Erato, 31, said he created one of the wall hangings and sent it to the agency that offers

Andretti's line of souvenir products. He already had sold the agency a limited edition print of his painting of legendary race car driver Mario Andretti, Michael's father.

"I sent one (a sculptured wall-hanging) out to them earlier this year just to see what their reaction would be, and they ended up buying it and they gave it to Michael Andretti as a gift", Erato said Monday. "But he liked it so much that he ordered four more that will be given away as Christmas gifts".

Sculpture Focuses on Driver

Erato said each wall-hanging takes about 30-40 hours to make. He designs, carves, paints and decorates them by referring to photos he has taken of the car and driver.

"It's really kind of focusing on the driver and a little bit less on the car", he said of the Andretti sculpture.

Erato creates the artwork as part of his business, Performance Art, which he describes as "Automotive fine art". Erato, a Waukesha resident, also is an artist and

designer with the Genesis Creative Group, which he co-owns in Elm Grove.

"I do racing car artwork in any spare time I get," he said.

Erato says he has been an auto racing fan for years, "but I've never actually been in a car or anything like that."

"My family, in fact, are big racing fans," he said.

He said he met Michael Andretti two years ago at State Fair Park in West Allis.

"My very first contact with them was when I had done a painting, an airbrushed painting of Michael Andretti's car in 1994," Erato said. "I went up to Michael Andretti before the Miller 200 and asked if I could do a print of them and if he would sign them."

Andretti turned the project over to the family's souvenir agency, Andretti Signature Line. That contact with the agency opened the door for the Christmas project and other work for Erato, who has also designed the cover of this year's Miller 200 program.