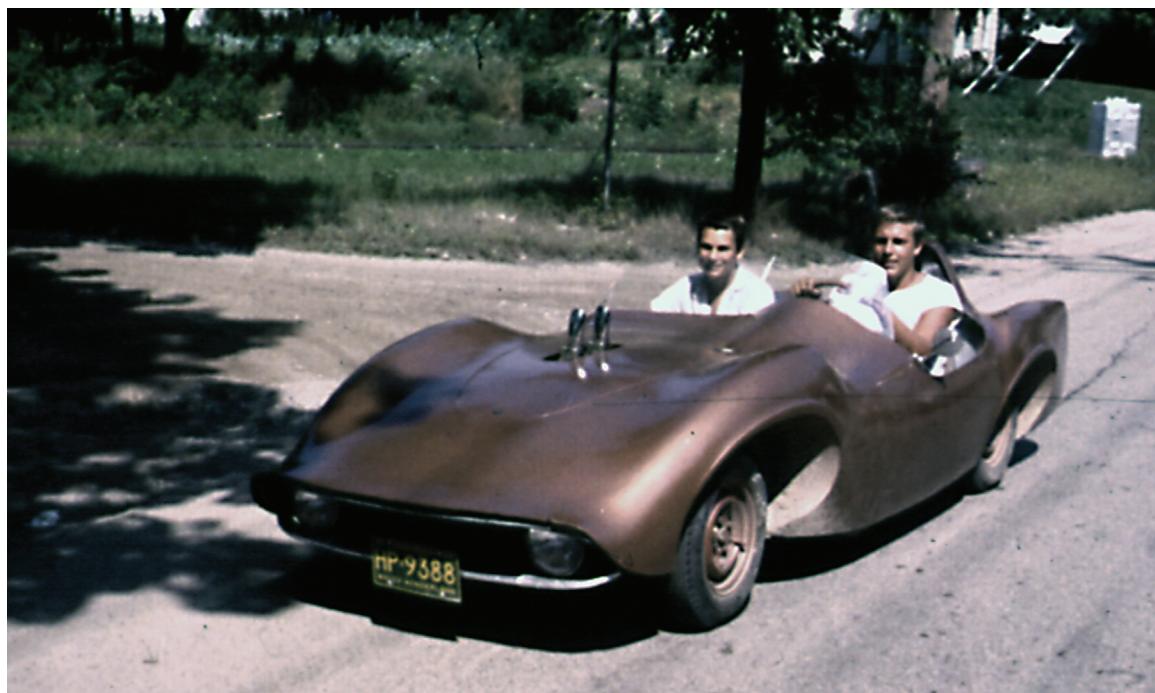


Do the Impossible

What was the Art School experience? How did I change because of it? Did I change? Do (did) I change or just co-exist? Art School was the "Genius Loci" where everything came together making a creative environment. Tom McClure and Jon Rush in the Sculpture department first floor, Emil Weddige and Frank Cassara in the printmaking fifth floor. Then there was Professor Aarre Lahti whose ideas were the catalyst for invention on the fourth floor (I still communicate with Pop's students). I just checked on the web site and there are no records of many of my teachers.

When I left high school he had car. Now that may not be very helpful in college – especially when he was within walking distance, four miles to Traver Road near the junction of Broadway and Plymouth Roads above a former gravel quarry, filled with falling water and ponds, on the north side of town.

Now why do I mention this, is because there was this strange automobile, a Crosley Hotshot, built from the frame with his older brother Aleksis. It was not a car; it was a lifeline to pull oneself out of the town and drive into the University of Michigan Art School. Yes, I had a skinny wheel 10-speed bike, a scooter, shoes, boots, a motorcycle and use of a Plymouth station wagon. But a hand made "Spider" was a different animal.



Ahde left, Aleksis Right, "Spider" 1959

I know it had an effect on the incoming first year experience. Toys are or were the definition of the freshman. Even though I was an okay student, I didn't let any learning in, I took what I had and wrapped it around everyone, whether they liked it or not. 1965 was not a year where

the graduate record exams were used for admission; it was just an experiment that year. So there I was attending School with Finnish cross-country leather ski boots and messing up all my art history classes. My death was LOGIC! Could there have been a worse student? No! I was just good at adlibbing responses! Given that the car was a tour-de-force of engineering, welding, plaster mockup, fiberglass body (unusual design too), it gave me a head start in all the mechanical skills needed at the Art School. The best was that it attracted people and especially girls. It was a two seater, where the driver or passenger had to climb over the side and into the car. No doors, no windshield, no wipers, no permanent lights, no padding on the Eames fiberglass office chairs. Not a bucket seat with leather. Just two slippery plastics with a hole cut in low to drain out the rainwater. You guessed it, no top either. Just a tonneau cover (tarp) with a zipper in the center so one side could remain snapped secure while driving in the rain. Only one mirror clipped on the driver's side. No ignition key, just a toggle switch for on or off. No heater. Well, I should add that I later put in a gasoline heater so my brother and I could drive in the subzero Ann Arbor winter weather. That too was irregular, it had to be turned on and off independently from the motor, leaving a horrible possibility of running out of gas when least expecting to. Now it sounds like Aleksis didn't do a thing, far from it. It was his design, and we alternated it on date nights. The hottest babe got the ride. One day I came back and he mentioned (he too was in the art school) that he was dating "Faith", "Hope", and "Charity" that weekend, these were the girls' names, not a lesson in morals.



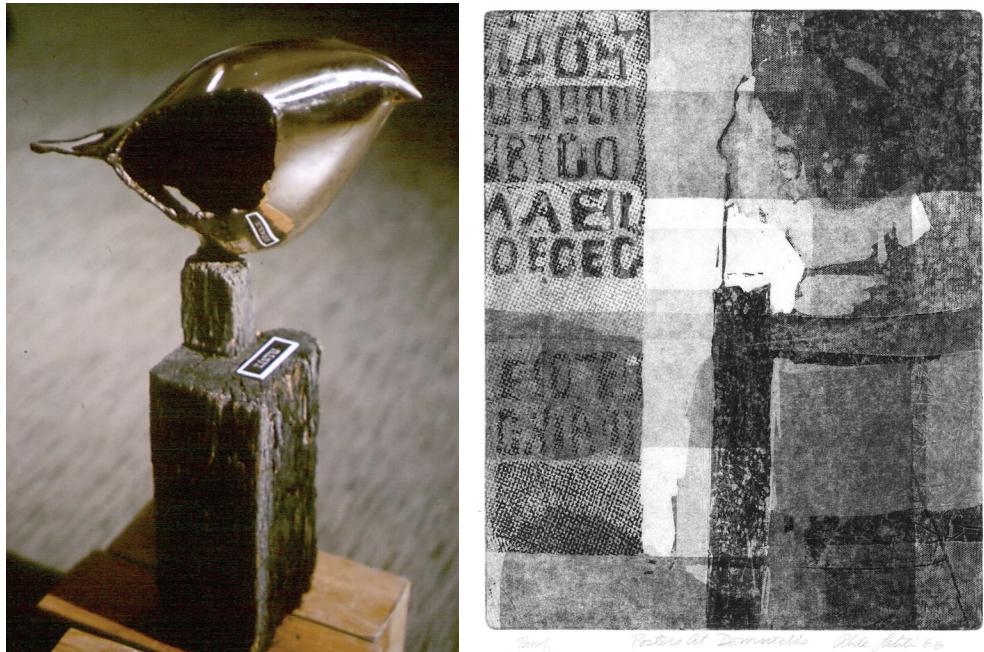
Aleksis left, Ahde Right, "Spider" 1959

What exactly did Art School offer, being a six story walk-up classroom? Girls. Did I mention that? We entered the Art School, Steve Molitoris, Will Reyer, Dennis Raney and myself, but there were 25 entering girls too! Ratios aren't my strength, but you can do the math, with your eyes closed and in the dark! I was a late starter; the first nude girl I saw was the model in life drawing class! Now how can that be? Well, a car takes a long time to build and get right. From the 1959 (when started) on the car construction was the primary energy draw. Art School taught me to survive, had to converse in art historical terms, see every foreign film on the first floor, carry up 50-pound cardboard containers of plaster of Paris to the fifth floor. First floor was sculpture where I dragged whole trees that had been chain sawed and chiseled into new forms.



Embrace Wood Sculpture

Bronze sculpture was most exciting, avoiding zinc shivers after each pour, wetting down our Levis to keep them from bursting into flames next to the red-hot crucible. No mistakes, everyone knew what the results would be, hot bronze dancing.



"Lintu", Bronze Sculpture & "Posters at Dominick's", Etching

Possibly the finest thing was going to Dominick's next door, the place where the teaching efforts of the day were processed! People from all Schools ended up there. My favorite was the tuna sandwich, which is still served and I still order or make here in Ojai as often as I can. The art students did the film festival posters that were hung on the walls. Downstairs there was a coal furnace, where one could sit eat and be toasty, where the environment was the holy grail of mysterious firebox, boiler, and rusty machinery. We never worried about parking; we were already there. Can you imagine a self-enclosed universe of art, food and history? Art supplies were just around the block as were all the books. We were adjacent to the UGLY and Graduate Libraries, where one could get lost in the "stacks". A labyrinth of enormous proportions; with a 7' head clearance; 3 floors for every main floor. Before I left, the stacks were closed to all but staff.

What became of me? Everything, I went on to The Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies (1965-68), started teaching at Cal State San Diego (1969), then to Cal Poly Pomona (1970-72) and eventually was a co-founder of SCI-Arc (Southern California Institute of Architecture, 1973-97). Art School created the power to strike out and do the impossible.

Ahde Lahti 01.06.2017