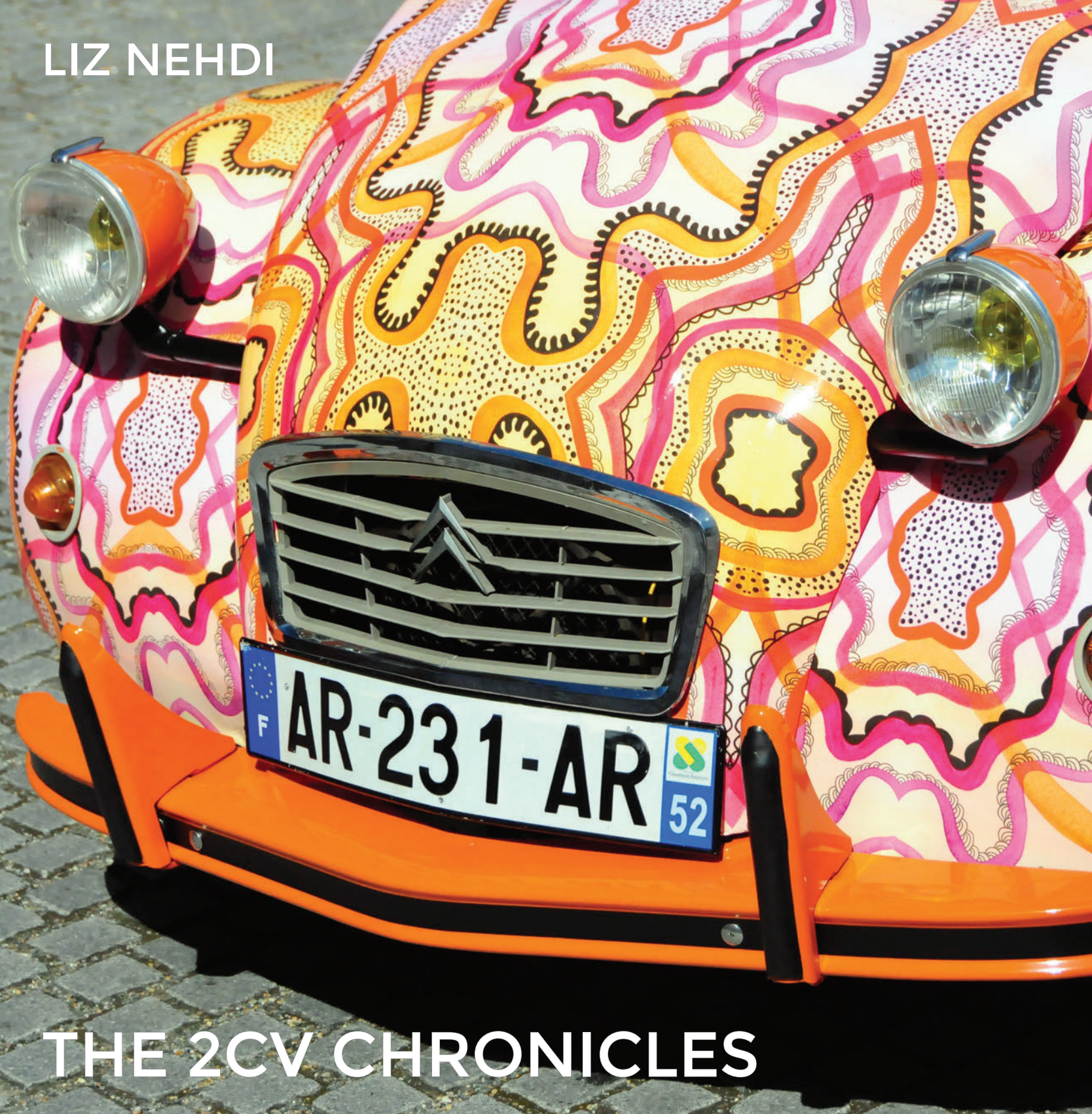


LIZ NEHDI



THE 2CV CHRONICLES

This isn't a car...
it's a way of life.

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Liz Nehdi is an American artist and textile designer based in London. She specialises in digital surface pattern designs based on her original paintings. These pattern designs can be applied to virtually any surface - fabric, canvas, Formica, wallpaper, or the exterior of a car, to name a few. Her work is available to view at liznehdi.com

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THE 2CV CHRONICLES

TRANSFORMING AND RETHINKING A CITROËN 2CV TO UNCOVER AND CREATE MEANING

I seek to create cherished, enduring objects that imbue life with joy and serve as more than mere props – and in doing so encourage slower, more meaningful consumption.

There may appear an inherent contradiction between today's careless consumption patterns and the notion that products should be more meaningful. However, building on the assertion that waste is the result of a missing bond between object and user, I aim to show that thoughtful design can increase an object's emotional significance and thus reconfigure the object-user relationship to reduce waste.

My work explores how the combination of artistic and handcrafted techniques, memory evocation and new technology can induce lasting bonds between user and object in this post-modern world. This project represents the culmination of my experimentation with the notion of loading objects with emotional value to reduce waste and bring more satisfaction into people's lives.

The Citroën 2CV, entitled *Orangina II* – a relic of an enchanted time in France – is my medium for uncovering, creating and subverting layers of meaning through pattern design. Building on my own experience with the car and the emotional significance of the 2CV for others, I hope to demonstrate the endless possibilities for pattern design to transform and enrich the objects of our lives.

THE STORY, PART 1:

HOW A CITROËN 2CV BECAME MY MUSE

My crush on this curvaceous specimen began a few years ago, when I moved to France with my then fiancé Karim, and she soon became the most cherished and absurd aspect of our time there. “Orangina,” as we affectionately christened her, was given to us by my now-husband’s uncle Lionel and his parents.

The specs: she’s a 1974 Citroën 2CV (“Deux Chevaux”, or “Deudeuche”) with a two-cylinder engine, churning out a massive 28 horsepower. Yes, that’s right – she’s basically a lawn mower engine and four wheels under an orange umbrella.



It’s also worth noting that she’s a convertible. A cabrio is a must-have in north-central France, and this model doesn’t disappoint. Her vinyl roof rolls back like a sardine can, allowing us to enjoy the rarefied French air blowing through our hair.

While we’re on the topic of wind, you might notice that she also features flap-up windows – just enough space to stick our arms out to receive the many high-fives offered as we drove through the village. Interestingly, older French observers unanimously made the exact same proclamation in talking to us about the Deux Chevaux: “Succès garanti!” (guaranteed success!). Indeed, when driving this we’re confident in our ability to make friends and influence people. And also carry large loads of French baguettes.

We’ve gotten a few questions about the name “Orangina.” Orangina is of course a delicious orange-flavored French soda, and we chose the name upon learning the colour of the car. But since acquiring it we’ve come to realize that we feel like we’re driving around in a soda can – another great reason for the moniker.

Hilarious and treasured, yes, but she’s far from perfect. Her fuel gauge is ‘broken and there has been at least one instance of running out of gas during a trip. Her engine has been replaced or repaired countless times. Driving her on the highway is a turbulent experience, as other drivers pass us on both sides, shaking the car violently. Yet these imperfections add to her appeal and significance for me.

So, what does this 2CV have to do with art and design? *This quirky little car has become my muse, and my medium, embodying the joy of our time spent in France.*



ABOUT THE 2CV

CECI N'EST PAS UN VOITURE...C'EST UN ART DE VIVRE

The Citroën 2CV, or Deux Chevaux (two horses), with its 'snub nose, pert mouth and jaunty, wide-eyed expression full of character and personality,' is one of the most iconic French cars, experiencing an enormously successful production run of nearly seven million vehicles for 42 years between 1948 and 1990.

In 1935 Citroën began research for a French People's – or Peasant's – Car, which would become the 2CV. Although 1 in 10 Americans owned a car, only 1 in 150 French citizens had an automobile. A large part of the French population were farmers, and motoring was limited to the rich. Citroën intended to change this. They undertook an extensive market survey, interviewing more than 10,000 people on their motoring needs. They found that there was a resounding need for an affordable automobile, not only from French farmers, but also working class artisans, tradesmen and shopkeepers.

With this research in hand, Pierre-Jules Boulanger, who oversaw the design of the future 2CV, set to work. The car was designed with the farmer in mind: it was meant to be affordable, lightweight, easy to repair and maintain, reliable and able to handle off-road terrain. And yet this design brief was approached in an idiosyncratic way. Boulanger assembled a multi-disciplinary team of 'intellectuals and academics, artists and craftsmen, scientists, technicians, and even an astronomer, to tackle engineering and design.

The process of developing the 2CV was a long and bumpy one, including an interruption by the Second World War. It finally launched at the 1948 Paris Salon Motor Show to mixed reviews from the

press, but an overwhelmingly positive response from the French people. What some of the press didn't understand was that the 2CV wasn't meant to be a status symbol; it was intended to fill a pressing need from the masses. Thousands of orders were taken on the first day of the motor show and more than 1.4 million people came to view it in total.



But due to France's post-war economic crisis, Citroën was unable to match production to demand. Waiting lists grew and for the first few years of production, cars went only to the most deserving cases, such as country doctors, vets and small farmers. The principled Boulanger determined that the rich and powerful would not be able to jump the queue; this was a small proletarian revolution that would cement the 2CV's position as the car of the people. Over the next fifteen years the 2CV remained popular with this audience and became sought-after throughout much of Europe and even further afield.

Citroën even launched a variety of extension models and began offering colour choices other than gray.

In the 1960s the image of the Deux Chevaux – and its driver – shifted from agricultural to a classless group of people who were young – or young at heart. During this time the 2CV became the inexpensive car of choice for professionals, students and teachers. In the minds of many in the French post-war generation – including Orangina's owners, Karim's parents and uncle – the 2CV remains a symbol of their youth and the era of upheaval of French society during the late 1960s.

Sales of the 2CV declined in the 1970s and 1980s, and production of the Deux Chevaux ceased in 1990. By that time the automotive industry was drastically different from what it was at the time of the 2CV's conception, and the Deux Chevaux's essentially handmade production process had become uneconomical.

However, the 2CV has retained great popularity among contemporary restoration enthusiasts, which can be seen as the continued relevance of the handmade in modern life. The 2CV remains a symbol for generations of owners, embodying nostalgia, the perfect housed within the imperfect, and joy. This sentiment was best summarized by Geoff Wulff, a Deux Chevaux owner I met at a rally for the 2CV Club of Great Britain:

The 2CV represents stripped down motoring, with a bit of flair. And no matter where I drive the Deux Chevaux, it always raises a smile from those around me. The 2CV is a bit of light in a bland world.



THE STORY, PART 2:

RETRIEVAL & REBIRTH

After months of research on the collective meaning of the 2CV, and contemplation of its meaning in my life, I was ready to begin work on transforming my own model. But first, I needed to get Orangina in working order and bring her over to London from Lionel's chateau in Champagne, where she had been in residence (and recuperation) since our departure from France.

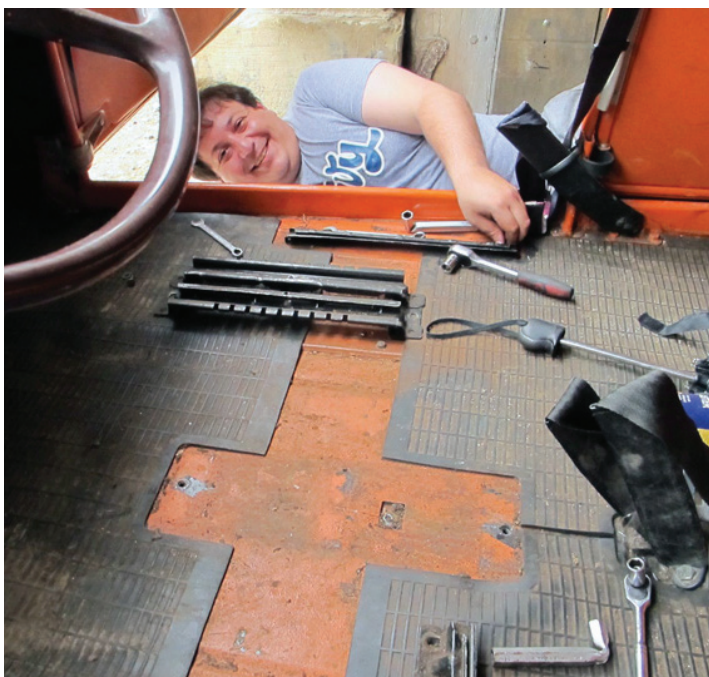


Testing the engine, minus the seat



First things first - let's get her in working order

Fortunately, I had some help on this project. Beyond Lionel and Karim, my brother-in-law, Selim, came over from the states for his holiday and agreed to join us on the trip to France to get Orangina in working order. The trip to France was comfortable and fun – a few beers, sandwiches and great conversation together on the Eurostar. From Paris we took another train to Chaumont, the closest stop to Germainvilliers, home of Lionel's chateau and vintage car collection.



I have the world's best brother-in-law

From this point on, the stay became decidedly un-holiday like for the boys. Lionel, an avid lover of cars, has 40 years' experience with such restorations (starting with his first car, a 2CV). I was lucky to have him leading the restoration efforts, in which an impressive amount of work was completed over several days.

Leading up to our appointment for the 'Controle Technique,' which would determine whether or not Orangina would be allowed on the road for another 2 years, they rewired the electrical components throughout the car, installed a new engine, revamped the brakes, and rebuilt the architecture of the seats, as the old ones were rotting away. Lionel's "gentle giant" of a dog, Raymond the boxer, supervised all of our activities.



Raymond checks out our progress



The details count - rebuilding the seats from the inside out



Driving and dancing with Raymond



While the boys toiled over our 2CV, I prepared meals and set up a spot to paint outside with an idyllic view of the chateau and Lionel's gorgeous vintage Jaguars in the background. I don't know if a more inspirational backdrop could be found.



The good life



The tools of the trade

Drawing from the sunlight, fields and flowers around me, I tested colour combinations and experimented with countless pattern repeat units, evoking memories of important experiences from our magical time in France: the undulating hills of Provence, the brilliant orange-red of poppies in bloom, the bubbly refreshment of Orangina soft drink and the delicious blush of rosé wine. The colours, forms and marks of *Orangina II*'s final pattern designs have a referent in these cherished memories and experiences.

After days of work, the big moment had arrived. We left Germainvilliers in Orangina, driving 45 minutes through fields and villages to the local technician for the 'Controle Technique,' the government-mandated inspection of a vehicle's roadworthiness. A surly mechanic, grumbling of his preferences for Porsches over 2CVs, tested the lights, suspension, emissions, brakes and tires. Finally, with a simple summary statement – "pas terrible" – he gave us the stamp of approval, and we were off.



Orangina gets a lift at the Controle Technique



Leaving Germainvilliers

Topping out around 50 km / hour, the 2CV isn't known for its amazing speed, and we expected the journey back to London to be a gruelling 15+ hours, but Lionel generously agreed to rent a trailer to haul us for the French leg of the journey. Even stopping every hour or so to make sure the 2CV was still secured, we shaved several hours off the trip to Calais, where we unloaded the 2CV and boarded the train headed under the Channel to Dover.





Orangina coming off the trailer in Calais





Taking advantage of Orangina's many openings on the train to the UK

At this point, it became a bit of a clown car situation, as both the Nehdi boys are quite broad shouldered and the 2CV is a, well, petite vehicle. My husband – all 6 feet, 6 inches of him – moved the drivers seat as far back as he could to drive, while Selim, in the front passenger seat, had to basically hug himself for the entire journey as to avoid being in the way of the clutch. Being only 5 feet, 1 inch, I volunteered to take the back seat, which isn't known for its extensive legroom.



The train ride itself was only about 40 minutes, and then we were off for the final leg of the journey to London. Avoiding the jostle of the motorway, we charted a path through the Kentish countryside, giving us an opportunity to once again enjoy the benefits of Orangina's amazing sardine roll-back top. 5 hours and a few wrong turns later, we were back in London.



THE STORY, PART 3: TRANSFORMATION

Once back in London, it was time for me to seek the assistance of experts. After weeks of research and following up on recommendations from classmates, friends and tutors, I had found some great partners to collaborate with.

For the seats, I enlisted the help of Robb Rankin, who had endless anecdotes of his varied experiences, including a variety of celebrity commissions and collaborations with other artists.

I had designed a custom graphic black and white fabric that would be trimmed in hot pink along the edges. 3 of the seats had been rebuilt from the inside out while we were in France, and the fourth was intact but had countless rips and stains fortunately, Robb seemed unphased by the condition of the seats – although the patterns made him dizzy – and assured us that the seats were in good hands.



After dropping off the seats to Robb, we delivered the car itself to Nic Bessent and his team at Sign Cube for the task of covering the exterior in a vinyl wrap printed with my pattern repeat. A departure from their usual work wrapping taxis and vans, they were enthusiastic collaborators.



The artwork that served as the basis for Orangina's exterior pattern

Although I had done a lot of work on the painting that would be the basis of the exterior pattern, being a bit of a perfectionist, back in London I continued to work and rework the pattern. My design process is a mix of analog and digital: I'm a painter and print maker by training, and I always start by putting paint to the page. I work in an iterative way, creating dozens of pieces at a time, working back into each one time and again.

After I have a set of artwork that I'm happy with, I import them into Photoshop to create pattern repeats and touch up as needed, playing with scale to ensure that the pattern right for the surface that I'm applying it to.

Landing on the right colour palette after examining my experiments with watercolour, acrylic and gouache paints, I refined the repetitive and meditative black dots and curved pen lines to frame the colours, an approach honed over several months of design investigation.

As every artist and designer has experienced, I endured countless frustrations in getting the work just right, but finally everything just “clicked” – I knew I had my design for Orangina. After a very positive response to the design via an experimental crowdsourcing effort on Facebook, I was ready to get the wrap printed. But before it could be applied, Orangina needed to be deconstructed and cleaned.

**Liz Nehdi**
August 9

I need your help! Do you prefer this layout – #1 or...



Like · Comment · Unfollow Post · Promote · Share

Claire Gamain, Hope Hempstone, Liza Jordan and 8 others like this.

**Selim M. Nehdi** I like the symmetry here
August 9 at 3:09pm · Like · 1

**Erin Freedman** This one.
August 9 at 3:20pm · Like

**Stephanie Bealing** This one. Definitely
August 9 at 3:41pm · Like

**Katie Clough** This one
August 9 at 3:47pm via mobile · Like

**Tenielle Goldlist** This one!
August 9 at 3:54pm via mobile · Like

**Zahra Jaan** This one! No1!
August 9 at 4:02pm via mobile · Like

**Yuliya Uspaskikh** this one
August 9 at 4:08pm · Like

**Niv Liran** #1, defo
August 9 at 4:18pm · Like

**David Douglas** Number 1. And you could make a puzzle out of it too 😊
August 9 at 6:09pm via mobile · Like

**Liz Nehdi** Thanks so much for all of the feedback guys! I decided to go with #1 based on everyone's input. I'll be sure to share photos of the final product as well
August 9 at 7:15pm · Like · 1

**Ellen Perman** #1 pattern naturally flows across the car.xoxox
August 11 at 2:21pm · Like

Write a comment... 

Removing the side panels, bonnet, doors and bumpers revealed a number of remnants of Orangina's history. Beneath the interior door panels we discovered her former life in a shade of bright green somewhere between lime and emerald. An old registration plate traced her heritage to the Calvados department of France. And beneath so many of her fittings, rust - a reminder of her days bathed in the sea air of Normandy.



A remnant of Orangina's Norman provenance



Orangina's hidden former lime flavour

Orangina's interior also needed a lot of love. I spent the better part of a week vacuuming and scrubbing the interior and putting some elbow grease into the rubber and metal details on the exterior.

It was the not-so-sexy part of the project, working through years of accumulated rubbish, dirt, gravel and oil. In the process, I had a lot of time to think about which parts of the 2CV I would replace, polish, embellish or leave as-is, in a gloriously imperfect state.



My new "art" materials



Rust sucks



An important aspect of this project is the 2CV's history – both my own experience and the collective meaning – so I've chosen to replace as few parts as possible and focus the renovation efforts on my custom designs. Orangina's colourful history is evident in her nicks, dents and irregularities, and my intention is not to hide these imperfections, but rather to showcase them as an integral part of the piece. For example, this meant preserving the existing bumpers, despite the fact that the front bumper was slightly askew from an incident 3 years ago



Orangina's "crooked smile"

in which Karim's father had forgotten the parking brake, sending Orangina rolling gently down a hill into one the old stone walls surrounding Lionel's chateau. The bumpers were repainted, first to silver and then ultimately to an orange that would recall Orangina's "true colours" after she was wrapped in my patterns. I also opted not replace Orangina's "crooked smile" grille, or to hammer out a few small dents that had come about during the various efforts to lift, reposition or otherwise cajole Orangina during our recent restoration visit to Germainvilliers.



Finally, it was time to begin work on the exterior. After getting the digital artwork down to a manageable size (the original file was many gigabytes), we used Sign Cube's industrial-sized printer to create sheet after multi-meter vinyl sheet of my pattern at a grand scale, three to four times the size of the original artwork.



Working closely with Bruce, Sign Cube's master wrapper, I lined up the large vinyl prints of my design to the different parts of the car to figure out the exact placement of the pattern. Section by section, Bruce applied the vinyl, and after a few long days, the exterior transformation was complete. With the installation of the newly recovered seats, *Orangina II* was born.

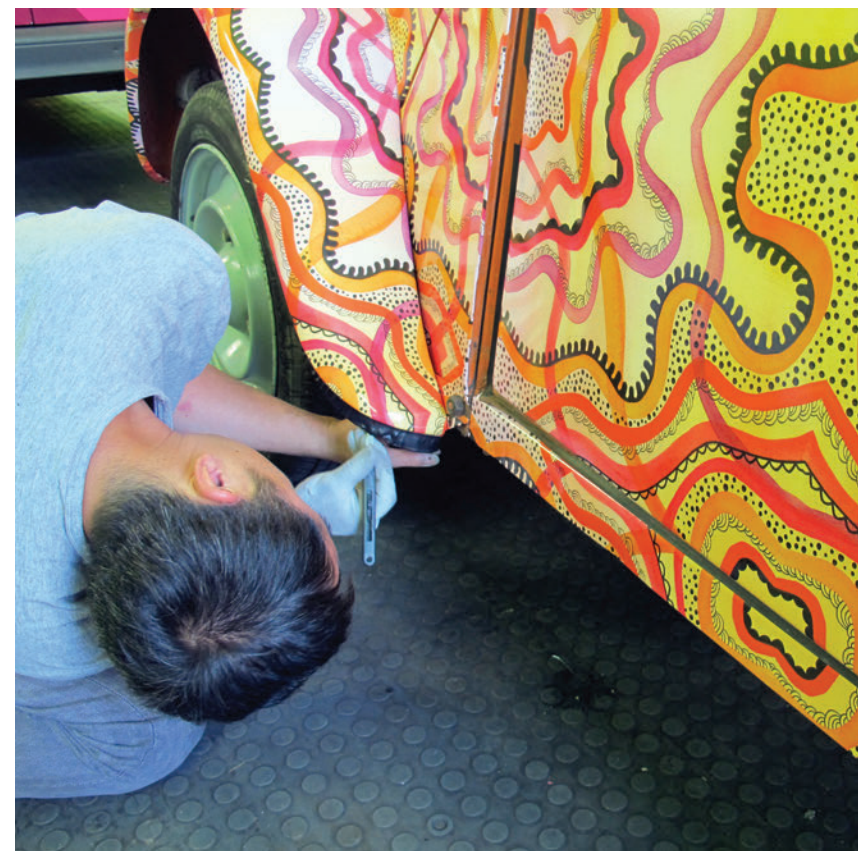


The printing begins at Sign Cube





Bruce works his magic





THE STORY, PART 4: FINISHING TOUCHES

With the biggest tasks of the transformation out of the way, it was time to create the smaller touches that would complete the project.

For the interior panels and trim, I developed an orange and pink textile based on a watercolour painting I had made in France. Although these colours would pop in any other context, they are neutralised by the 'statement' patterns inside and out, achieving a visual effect of hyperstimulative subjugation.

With tangled meters of cord, ribbon, decorative gauze and piping in the various colours of my palette, I created accents for the steering wheel, seat belts and trim edging. Hours of braiding meter after meter of cord were followed by careful application of the colourful ropes to various nooks and crannies throughout the interior, some hidden unless viewed from just the right angle.







Orangina II in my temporary "studio," an underground garage in Chelsea, and parked outside our flat

Much of this work was conducted in a makeshift studio in an underground parking garage near our flat. It being Chelsea, *Orangina II* was in good automotive company: the adjacent spaces housed Rolls-Royces, Ferraris, Bentleys and Aston Martins. Despite these beautiful and glamorous neighbours, one of the garage's parking attendants cheerfully recounted that *Orangina II* drew the most head turns during his shift.

Once just about everything was in place, it was time to take *Orangina II* to her exhibition space on the Parade Ground at the Chelsea College of Art & Design for our postgraduate show.



Orangina II takes her place on the Parade Ground at the Chelsea College of Art & Design for the CCW Postgraduate Exhibition









THE STORY, PART 5:

THE FUTURE

My hope is that after this transformation *Orangina II* will be the basis for a new set of cherished experiences. For me, it has been an enriching and inspiring process, and has opened up new areas of exploration in vehicles, “cult” objects and the juxtaposition of aesthetic and utilitarian design.

I plan to continue developing my practice while working on a bespoke commission basis. I intend to explore transposing my wild designs onto a variety of surfaces and into a multitude of environments, from hospitality to retail, fashion and theatre. I love testing the boundaries of my experience and hope to have the opportunity to work across a variety of media and industries. I believe pattern design has a highly emotive capacity to transform and heighten any environment or element of everyday life, and I plan to let this principle guide my practice going forward.

