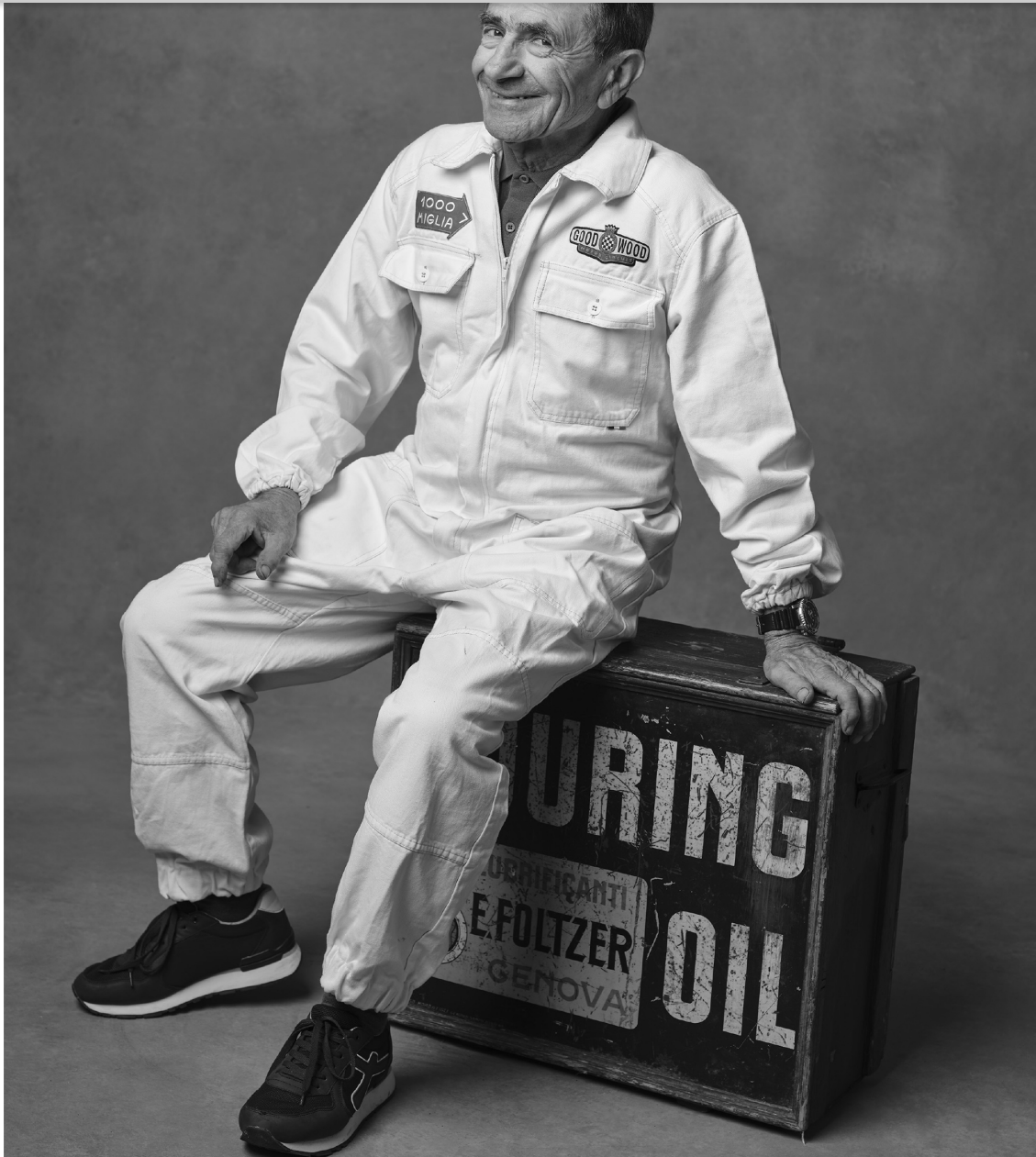


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The Master Mechanics of the Mille Miglia

On Saturday, the final car crossed the finish line of Italy's Mille Miglia, a historic showcase for the world's most elegant automobiles. Whereas many photographers focus on the race car drivers and the beautiful and sometimes perilous route, E.A. KAHANE decided to highlight the mechanics who keep the vintage cars roadworthy, portraying their faces and their work with a Caravaggesque intensity. Here, E.A. KAHANE talks with Aperture about her exhibition *Heart of the Race*, now on view at MO.CA—Centro per le Nuove Culture, through June 29, and the Museo Mille Miglia, through October 31, both in Brescia, Italy.



E.A. KAHANE, Giuseppe “Pino” Pesce, 2024
© the artist

Aperture: Could you tell us a little bit about the Mille Miglia?

E.A. KAHANE: The Mille Miglia was originally an endurance race that went from Brescia to Rome and back again—*mille miglia* means a thousand miles. The race started in 1927, and was the place to show that you had the fastest car, whether it was a Maserati, a Ferrari, or otherwise. For years, people would line up along the streets in all the towns the race went through and cheer these cars on. In 1957, there was a tragic crash that led to the race being canceled, but it was resurrected in 1977 as a time trial. Now, it’s still a thousand miles—a little more than a thousand, actually—and it still starts in Brescia. It’s a bucket-list item for car enthusiasts around the world.

How did you get involved in the race?

take a car and join the race. So we all went. To rally in these cars throughout Italy and have people cheering you throughout is extraordinary. I was in the chase car, so I would get there before them, and I would photograph the spectators and the cars coming in. I photographed the whole race. I took probably a thousand images. When I got back to the US, somebody in Newport said, “Oh, why don’t you make a show of this?” So I had an outdoor exhibition, *Front Row Seat*, at the Museo Mille Miglia in 2022, which then traveled to Newport [Rhode Island].



Outside the Museo Mille Miglia, Brescia, 2025

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During the 2022 race, I became friends with Maria Bussolati, the director of the Museo Mille Miglia, and she invited me to drive with her in 2023. We drove a 1935 Fiat Balilla as an all-women team of cultural ambassadors of Italy. After five days, it occurred to me that the true stars of the Mille Miglia were the mechanics. Not a single vintage car in the race can make the journey without some kind of intervention from a mechanic along the way. The cars break down all the time. Sometimes mechanics take a car apart completely and rebuild it.

Last year, with the support of the 1000 Miglia SRL, I made portraits of eighty mechanics. This is the first time that these workers' stories have been told. My team and I arranged formal portrait sittings before the race and also set up makeshift roadside studios. During the Mille Miglia, I photographed using a handheld camera, no flash—just the mechanics' lights. My inspiration was Irving Penn's *Small Trades* series from the early 1950s, where he photographed bakers, butchers, chimney sweeps, and other workers against simple gray backdrops.

Tell us about the exhibitions you've curated at MO.CA and the Museo Mille Miglia.

It was important to show the work in Brescia's city center, and to have an outdoor public installation using the building's seventeen windows. The Mille Miglia isn't only about race car drivers and car enthusiasts—it's about all of Brescia. I wanted to engage the community and to put the mechanics up front: They keep this historic race and these vintage vehicles alive. I also wanted to tell stories through vignettes. For example, there was an astonishing repair of a Bugatti. Its chassis broke, and they're in the countryside in the middle of nowhere. They found a piece of scrap metal on the ground near a farmhouse, and they brought in a welder and—on the side of the road using a generator—welded the chassis back together. It was unreal.

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Inside MO.CA—Centro per le Nuove Culture, Brescia, 2025

How many mechanics are there in the race?

Last year, I photographed eighty—not only Italian, but also Japanese, Dutch, American, Swiss, and German. There were two women last year, and I made sure to include them. In the final gallery at the Museo Mille Miglia, all eighty portraits are on view. There’s an audio component, so you hear their voices, too. They’re telling their stories, often for the first time. And in the middle gallery there, I recreated an auto shop.

Who stood out to you the most while making these images?

Giuseppe Pesce, a master mechanic who passed away right before the exhibition. There’s a beautiful interview in the catalog with him. He started out as a ten-year-old kid working on the Topolino, the Ardea, the Balilla—all cars that are now considered vintage. He noted that during the race, if another team is missing a part, he’d give it to them, no problem. “At the end of the day, there’s nothing to win,” he said. “The real prize is the pride of having completed the Mille Miglia.”

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