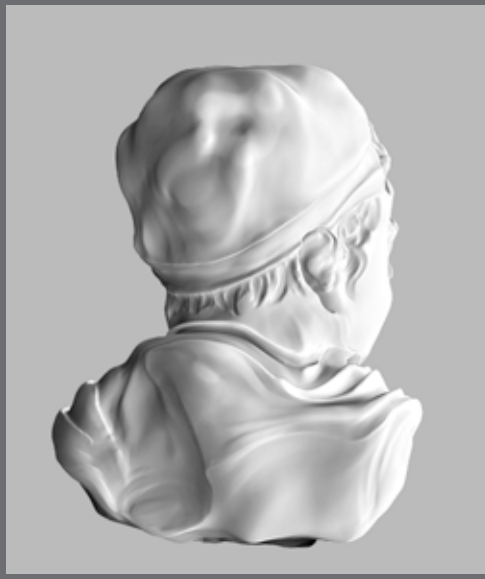## Chevrolet, the man

Louis Chevrolet was born in La Chaux de Fonds in 1878. He emigrated to the USA in 1900, made his career as a racing driver and co-founded the Chevrolet car brand. He was obsessed with the idea of pushing the motor car to its limits; working as a designer, a mechanic and as a driver to make cars go faster and yet faster. He was the quintessentially driven man and Chevrolet remains a household name.

Chevrolet, the dream

An adventurous man who thrived on risk, Louis Chevrolet lived the American dream. His endless quest for speed and performance pushed him beyond the familiar horizons of Europe to the unknown of a frontier world.

When La Chaux de Fonds was rebuilt after 1794, the town planning was innovative and new. In order to turn individual workshops into a "town-factory", they rejected the assumption that a town needs to grow organically and instead used a grid system to maximize the use of sunlight. It is apt therefore that the town should raise a tribute to Louis Chevrolet. Both the town and the man exemplified innovation and efficiency.

Chevrolet, the bust

The traditional way to pay tribute to a man is to create a bust of him. A bust is supposed to represent not only the features but also the spirit of the person. The challenge here is to give this tradition a contemporary relevance. As a sculptor, I see my job as one of finding new perceptions of existing realities. I am trying to enhance an aspect of reality. I need to be able to look inside my subject and turn it inside out in order to present a hitherto hidden face.

Let us take this concretely. What happens if I take a traditional bust, mold it in rubber and then turn the mold inside out as you might do to a sock or a glove? It is the same face, the same head, with the same features but reversed. The nose becomes a cavern, the forehead a cliff face . The face becomes a sort of abstract landscape. Of course I have some influence on this process of abstraction and I am looking for the point at which the sculpture takes on a life of its own whilst remaining formally connected to the original bust. The face is simultaneously present and absent. In my view, such a bust is a legitimate evocation of Chevrolet because his features become free to take on an infinite number of new forms thus escaping the fossilization process that takes place with the creation of a traditional bust.

In the last few years, my work has concentrated upon reinterpreting traditional forms, in particular, the bust. In one of the methods I do exactly as I describe above. I turn a classical bust inside out to create a new bust: an abstraction of the original. It is the same surface with different topography. Using this technique on a series of classical busts (borrowed from the Art & History Museum, Geneva), I made a series in ceramics call *Hcabneznog* (my name in reverse).

Chevrolet, the sculpture

As the starting point for the present project, I made a 3D computer generated form using pictures of Louis Chevrolet as the input. I took this CAD form and created its virtual negative. This first transformation is still too close to the original. It is too easy to read the static features of Louis Chevrolet.

But, as the sculpture will be in place for many years, I want to create a much more complex visual experience so that people will see something different each time they pass.

So, in order to introduce the complexity I need, I printed the positive bust of Chevrolet with a 3D printer, made a rubber mold of it and then reversed the mold to create an abstract sculpture. The use of real material provides tensions that do not exist in the virtual world. The next stage of the project would be to make a 3D scan of this abstract sculpture and scale it up to monumental proportions.

The sculpture needs to be monumental in order to work in synergy with the dimensions of the park and the surrounding buildings. In addition, by magnification, it looses its human scale and takes a further step towards abstraction. In order to move from portrait to landscape, the sculpture needs to go far beyond human scale. This could only be achieved with a work of at least 5 meters in height.

For the reasons I have outlined, is important to me that the sculpture contains movement. The park is already in constant movement, clouds, trees, passers by, etc. So I can capture this movement on the surface of the sculpture by using a highly reflective material such as polished stainless steel. Mirror polished stainless steel is hardly visible itself, it reflects the world around it, producing a visual singularity.

Aside from its reflective qualities, stainless steel can be used like a skin that can be deformed; its streamlined form reminding us of the Chevrolet cars of the 1940's.

On a practical note, stainless steel is the ideal material for external use. It does not rust, it withstands extremes of weather and temperature, needs little upkeep and is hard to damage.

Chevrolet on a pedestal

In order to give the sculpture its proper place it must be lifted from the ground on a low pedestal. This pedestal needs to be stone-like, dark and matt to provide a contrast with the mirror like surface of the sculpture. Black polished concrete fits the bill.
The shape of the pedestal is also a classical form, but inverted.

Chevrolet in the park

The City of La Chaux de Fonds is built on a grid system. The site of the sculpture, the Park de l'Ouest, is the only green area within the grid and has a symmetrical design. La Chaux de Fonds is listed by UNESCO and I therefore think the original structure of the park should be respected. In addition, the townspeople and their children use the park to relax and enjoy the outdoors and so it should remain green with its purpose unchanged.

To facilitate the installation of the sculpture, a handful of old trees will need to be felled in order to give a better feeling of space and provide a more harmonious rapport between the sculpture and the remaining trees and surrounding parkland. In addition, some minor landscaping will be necessary, turning of benches etc. Finally, I will install lighting to illuminate the sculpture and improve visibility in the park at night.

Chevrolet, the bottom line

The power of this sculpture rests on the existence of three paradoxes.
Firstly, the sculpture is an abstraction and a "re-figuration" of Chevrolet's features.
Secondly, the multifaceted nature of the surface gives the static sculpture a dynamic sense.
Thirdly, despite its monumental size, the highly reflective quality of its surface, means that the sculpture can sometimes almost disappear from view.

Louis Chevrolet by Christian Gonzenbach

The sculpture will be realized in stainless steel sheets, welded together and mirror polished.
The dimensions of the sculpture are: height 500 cm, width 400 cm, depth 300 cm.
The pedestal is made out of reinforced concrete; all faces are covered with 15 cm thick moulded polished black concrete.
The pedestal dimensions are: height 100 cm, width 380 cm, depth 280 cm.
The pedestal lies on a underground concrete base covered with grass.

500 cm

100 cm

400 cm