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Christine Cummings and her award winning clay menagerie

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Nik Burns

Sculptor *by Angie Boyer*

Nestled away in the beautiful Shropshire countryside is the workspace of sculptor Nik Burns, a tranquil and inspirational setting, where he is surrounded by nature. "The combination of nature with machine is central to my practice and offers a common theme throughout my work," Nik tells me, and it is inside his workshop that the machinery becomes the main focus.

"I have amassed a collection of old machinery and tools," he continues. "I love older machinery due to its high quality; it often has an aesthetic that inspires

my practice. There are boxes of bits of copper and brass, broken machine parts and oddities, things I have collected obscure every available space."

There's a mood board wall of inspirational images in his workshop too, "I draw from that during the making process, in the early stages I refer to the images a lot making measurements and working out proportion and what goes where, as I get more into the project I refer to them less and less as my imagination takes over."

The end result of that making process is unique, sometimes quirky sculptures, bringing together Nik's fascination for, and love of machinery and nature.

"Ever since I was a small child I have loved to make things, my mother was a market trader and I would sit under her stall assembling things from bits of card or wooden boxes. At school I excelled in art

and design technology going on to study art, graphic design and photography at A level. I took a break from education to pursue a career in photography from 2002 until 2010. "I felt the need for a change of direction and I enrolled at Hereford College of Art on the applied arts course as a full time mature student. The three years were a real chance to push myself and find my identity, I started the course believing I would be a ceramicist, as I was very interested in working with clay. I quickly discovered the metal workshops and never really left. I finished the three years achieving a first class honours degree."

In 2013, just one week after his degree show, Nik exhibited his work at New Designers in London.

He returned the following year with his work in the One Year On gallery, which directly led to his sculptures being featured in 'Making Sculpture from Scrap Metal', a book by Peter Parkinson, whom he met at the show.

"I discovered my current style of work in the last six months of Art College," Nik recalls. "Our final two projects really opened the doors to what made me tick and the result was a series of articulated insects with a giant one metre steel hornet as my centre piece." It was Nik's hornet sculpture that, in 2014, won him the Designer Craftsmen Prize from the Society of Designer Craftsmen.

"After discovering that creatures were my thing, I continued to develop the theme looking firstly at insects, then animal forms. I moved on to sea creatures completely by chance after discovering a lump of wood that vaguely resembled an angler fish, I made some alterations with metal and was really pleased with the result. The sea forms have really taken over from all other pieces and are constantly being developed."

Nik explains that he often uses reclaimed items in his work, "I use them as starting points and it can add an element of familiarity for the viewer and often creates a conversation. I frequent flea markets, auctions, car boot sales and browse the Internet to find unusual items. It could be an old car part that is now a fish's fin or an old garden sprayer that is now a bezel for a light fitting. On occasion I will



Hornet



Seahorse



Pearl eyed crab



Juvenile turtle

drastically alter the reclaimed item and blend it with a section I have created; in these cases their use is not so apparent."

Nik is passionate about early science fiction, the work of Jules Verne and HG Wells have been a constant influence to him and these, along with some of his more unusual finds in antique shops, provide much of the inspiration for his work. Nik's pieces range from the very small to the remarkably huge which sometimes need a forklift to move them!

"I enjoy the challenges those larger pieces create and it often pushes me to try new processes and

techniques," says Nik, who predominantly works to commission.

"I have created hair pieces, brooches, lamps, gates, shop signage and even door clasps for a vintage Porsche. I am currently working on a Deaths Head Moth for a customer and I have a commission for a 7' high abstract human figure to tackle in the coming months."

"Is there anything we've not talked about that you'd like us to mention?" I ask Nik, and I am a little surprised by his answer, it's not quite what I'd anticipated.

"To help support myself and my young family during the time I was at college, as well as when I started my new business, I taught modern jive dancing two nights a week. This meant I could keep my days free to push on with my craft."

Well, he's certainly versatile that man! You can see more of Nik's work online, although you may need to visit one of the shows he'll be exhibiting at for a chance to get a glimpse of that jive dancing!

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Nik plans to attend a number of events this year, including:
 5-8 May RHS Malvern Spring Festival www.rhs.org.uk
 1-3 July The Big Arts Show, Shrewsbury www.thebigartshow.co.uk
 11-20 August Designer Crafts at the Mall, London www.societyofdesignercraftsmen.org.uk
 12 - 13 August Shrewsbury Flower Show <http://shrewsburyflowershow.org.uk>
 10 - 11 September The Big Arts Show, Milford, Surrey www.thebigartshow.co.uk
 24 - 25 September RHS Malvern Autumn Show www.rhs.org.uk

He also regularly has work on show at:
 Silk Top Hat Gallery, Ludlow
 British Ironwork Centre, Oswestry
 Jinney Ring Craft Centre, Bromsgrove



Leatherhead the Cuttlefish