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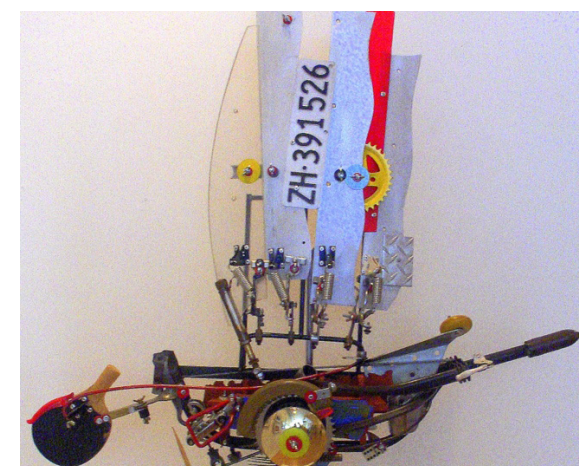
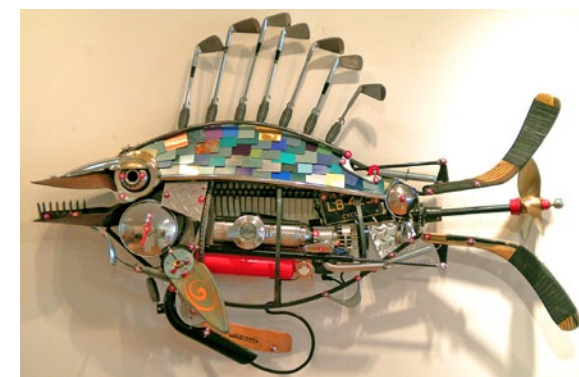
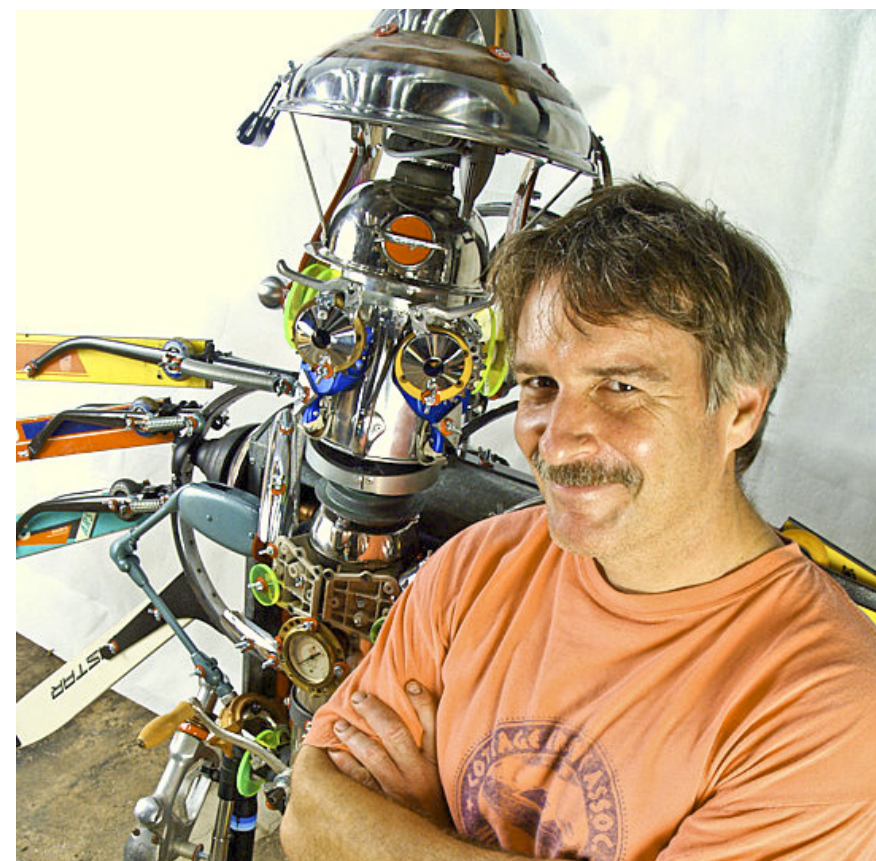
SUMMER DAYS AT THE
DRIVE-IN

PLUS: MEET JASON BAKER

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BELIEVE IT OR NOT, HE'S AT RIPLEY'S MEET JOHN SCHWARZ

BY SHANNON E. BREWER

There are many creative minds behind the unique art brought to life in LAKES Country, but none with a story like that of John Schwarz, a Chelsea, Mich. sculptor whose name is on the moon and whose sculptures are featured in Ripley's Believe It or Not museums around the world.


Walking into one of his shows—some of which take place at his wife Patti's business, River Gallery Fine Art in downtown Chelsea—you'll find yourself surrounded by fantastical creatures. For his "Mechanical Natures" show in 2007, Schwarz created 25 sculptures from recycled materials, which he manipulated into, among other things, a ten-foot long dragon with flapping wings and a moose with skis for antlers. Schwarz and his sculptures were featured in the art magazine *Sculptural Pursuit* in 2008 and caught the eye of the Ripley's Believe It or Not CEO, who bought five of Schwarz's largest sculptures for his museums.

Not bad for an EMU (Eastern Michigan University) ceramics major. Schwarz also has an MFA from the University of Michigan. A ceramics teacher at Detroit Country Day School for the last 25 years, he had been working with ceramics for several decades. When deciding how to fill up the 2007

show, the idea struck Schwarz that he should combine his two passions, kept separate until then. "I just married the two things I loved most, art and mechanics," he says.

Schwarz's father was an engineer working for the U.S. space program in the 1960s—that's how Schwarz's name ended up on a plaque on the moon. He passed on his love of all things mechanical to his son, who was equally fascinated with go karts, motorcycles, and boats as he was with dinosaurs and sea creatures. Years later, "Mechanical Natures" was born.

Now Schwarz creates sculptures of fish, moose and helicopters out of found materials like rubber, old gears, skis, "basically everything except plastic," he says. He is inspired by the mysteriousness of the ocean and the inner workings of motors. "For me it's about bringing these kind of creatures to life and setting them down right in front of [people]," he says.

Schwarz continues to show his work in fairs and galleries around the country as well as creating commissioned pieces for hospitals and universities, and of course, within the wild world of Ripley's Believe It or Not. He continues to explore the creatures that fascinate him, including getting up close and personal with the fish that populate our waters right here in LAKES Country. 

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