

# ONE

COBHAM

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## High flyer

Claire Westwood tells us about her life and career and reveals what happens on War Day...

# For art's sake

By day, Matt Retzlaff works as a Production Supervisor at Mission Systems, Orchard Park, but in his spare time, he turns his hand to creating stunning artworks from found objects



When Matt Retzlaff joined Cobham in 2006, he would never have imagined himself as an award-winning artist.

Today, his monumental scrap-metal sculpture *Seven Bird Bison* holds the accolade of Best in Show from the Lewiston Art Festival, which has been held annually in Lewiston, New York for the past 52 years.

'I've only been doing art for about four years,' he says. 'But I've always been interested in it and now it's starting to take off. My mom was a keen watercolourist and potter, and she spins, dyes and weaves wool from the sheep she keeps - she's very artistic and a big influence on me. And my father is good with his hands too, so I get it from both sides.'

## Family matters

Art might run in Matt's blood, but it was the birth of his own son that unlocked his creativity.

'I don't know what happened, but it was like a switch flicked in my brain,' he says. 'I think maybe I needed the stress relief.'

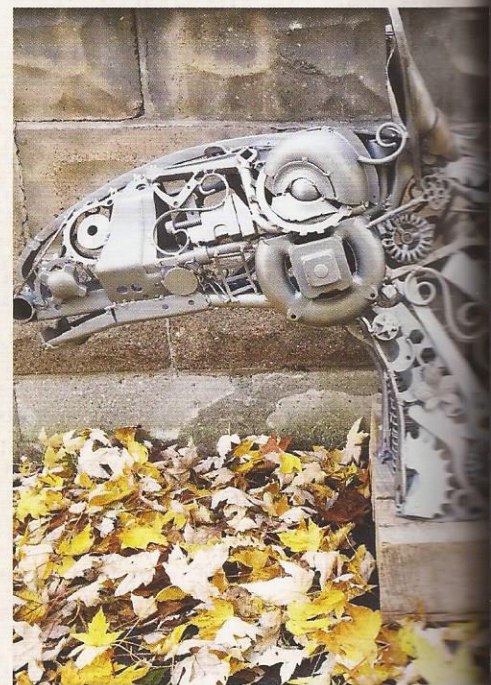
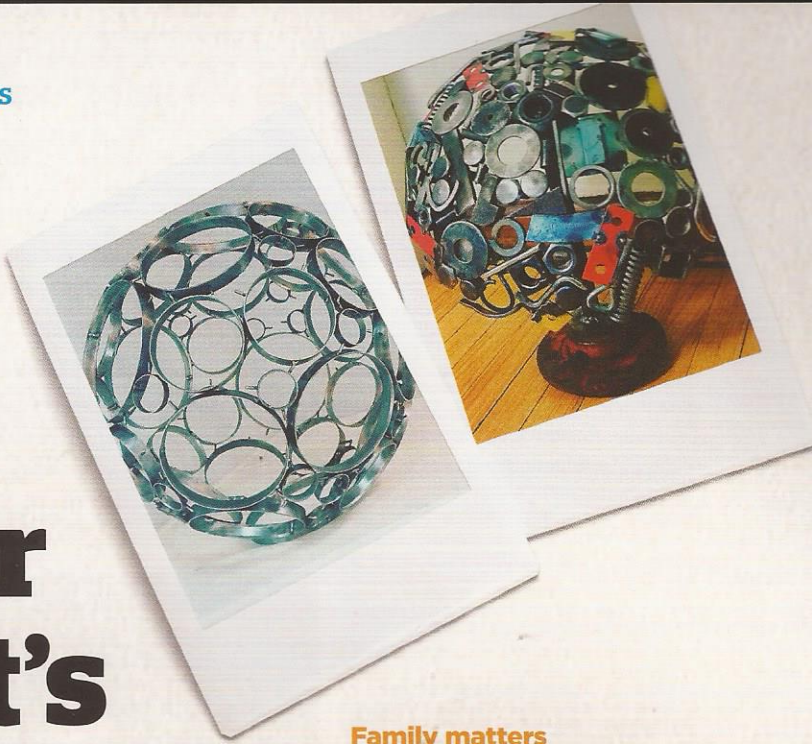
In addition to the stressful job of parenting, Matt's career at Cobham has its share of responsibility, too. Matt's role includes supervising production lines on which actuators that steer missiles are made, as well as ensuring that parts arrive on time, and that production schedules and quality control procedures are followed. This is all in a day's work for the part-time artist.

But Matt's inspiration is drawn from nature rather than technology.

'I want to create things that are beautiful and tranquil,' he says. 'I'm inspired by strong, dramatic animals like horses and bison. I grew up riding horses and I love how they are strong, yet gentle and peaceful too. Native American art is another influence, although I'm not trying to duplicate anything specific, just to do what appeals to the eye.'

As its name implies, *Seven Bird Bison* has a secret: concealed around the magnificent head of the buffalo are seven delicate birds.

'I'm influenced by the sculptor John Lopez, who conceals lots of intricate details in his work,' says Matt. 'I thought it would be cool to hide birds in the bison. It brings the work to a whole new level - I love seeing how it blows people's minds when they notice it.'





**Waste not, want not**

If nature provides rich inspiration for Matt's work, it's also central to the ethos he follows in its creation.

'I use 95% reclaimed, free metal,' he says. 'People donate it to me or I'll pull over and stop my car if I notice something that's been thrown away. If you're gardening and you snap a shovel in half, you'd throw it away - but I can turn it into something cool. I work with nuts and bolts, pots, pans, cutlery and old tools. There's so much waste in the world; if you can turn it into something beautiful, you're doing a good thing.'

Matt's commitment to using reclaimed materials can make his task more challenging, especially at certain times of the year.

'If people aren't clearing out their garages, I start to run low on supplies,' he says. 'But having only a handful of material to work with forces me to be more creative and think outside the box.'

Matt's current projects are a 3ft-tall owl, made partly from old alarm clocks, and a model of a human spinal cord made from medical forceps.

'In my day-to-day life, I have to be very precise,' he says. 'It's very calming to go into my garage on weekends and get creative. I look forward to doing it and make sure I make time for it.'

**You can follow Matt and see more of his work on Instagram @mattretzlaffart. ■**

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