

Frank Russell



P O R T F O L I O

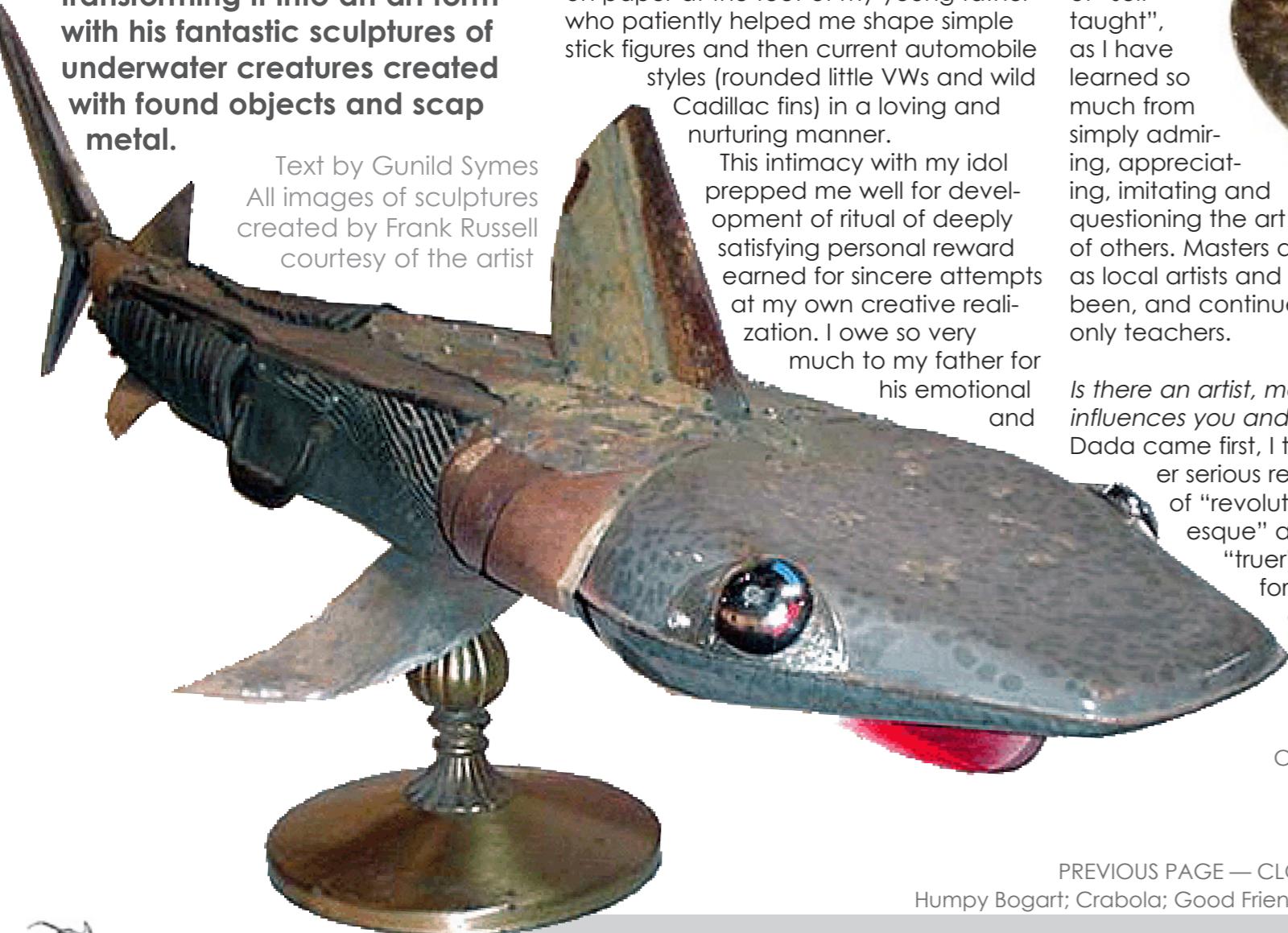




These days anything we can do to help the environment and recycle is a good idea.

American artist Frank Russell of North Carolina takes recycling to another level, transforming it into an art form with his fantastic sculptures of underwater creatures created with found objects and scrap metal.

Text by Gunild Symes
All images of sculptures created by Frank Russell courtesy of the artist



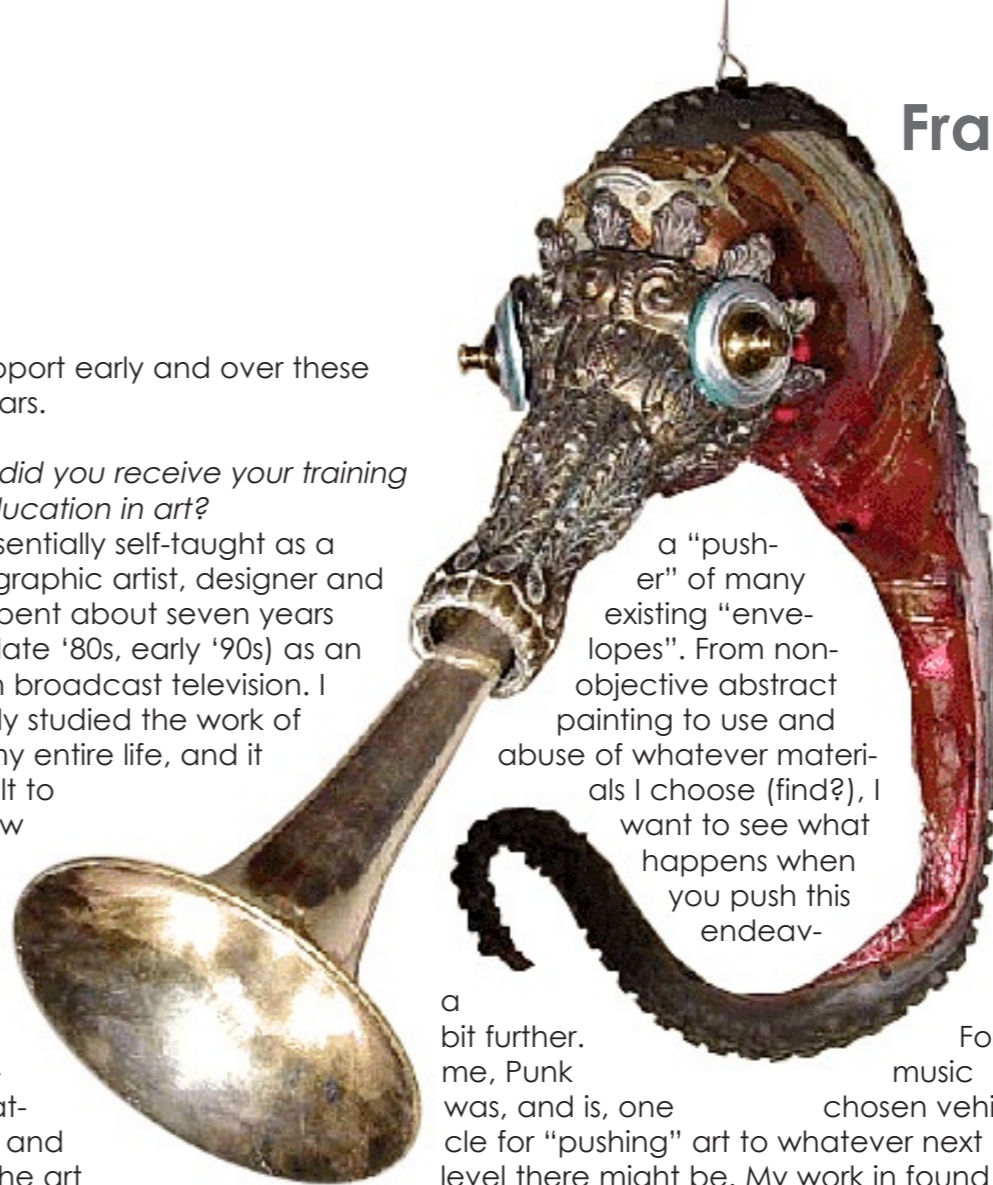
What made you go into art?
Some of my earliest childhood memories are of drawing with pencil and crayon on paper at the feet of my young father who patiently helped me shape simple stick figures and then current automobile styles (rounded little VWs and wild Cadillac fins) in a loving and nurturing manner.

This intimacy with my idol prepped me well for development of ritual of deeply satisfying personal reward earned for sincere attempts at my own creative realization. I owe so very much to my father for his emotional and

spiritual support early and over these many years.

Where did you receive your training and education in art?
I am essentially self-taught as a painter, graphic artist, designer and sculptor. I spent about seven years (back in the late '80s, early '90s) as an art director in broadcast television. I have sincerely studied the work of others over my entire life, and it is a bit difficult to passively allow the "handle" of "self-taught", as I have learned so much from simply admiring, appreciating, imitating and questioning the art of others. Masters as well as local artists and crafts people have been, and continue to be, my best and only teachers.

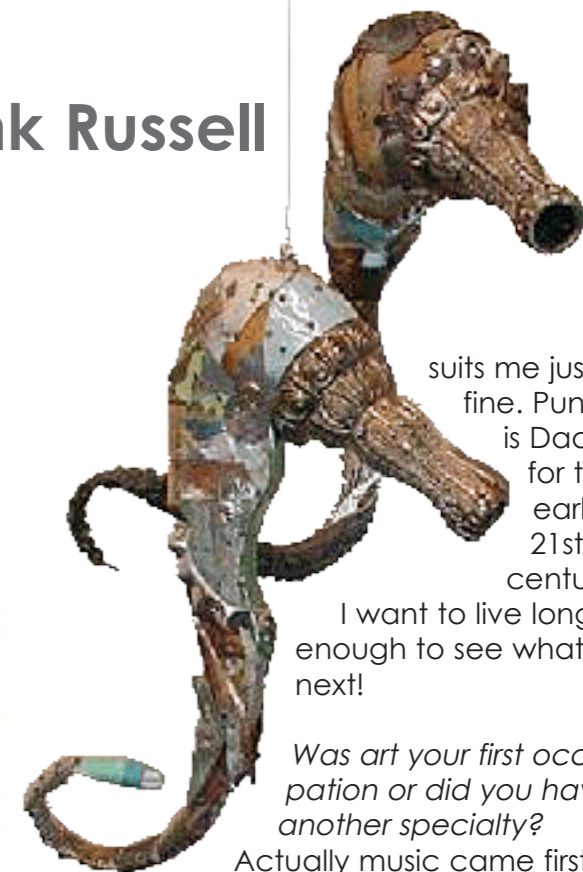
Is there an artist, movement or idea that influences you and your work?
Dada came first, I think, as an initial rather serious realization of the idea of "revolutionary" art. "Outsider-esque" art seems somehow a "truer" creative endeavor for me, and I have typically been known as



a "pusher" of many existing "envelopes". From non-objective abstract painting to use and abuse of whatever materials I choose (find?), I want to see what happens when you push this endeavor

a bit further. For me, Punk was, and is, one chosen vehicle for "pushing" art to whatever next level there might be. My work in found objects has been described as a bit "punk" and "post apocalyptic" and that

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suits me just fine. Punk is Dada for the early 21st century.

I want to live long enough to see what's next!

Was art your first occupation or did you have another specialty?

Actually music came first in my development as an expressive artist. I played in bands (to little or no avail) for several years before I decided to make visual art. It seemed less demanding physically, and I could stay "off the road" and perhaps find more peripheral life outside of art: a wife, a home, etc.

A few years later, I ended up as freelance art director, graphic designer in broadcast television for several years

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Chopper; Piranha Donna; Horatio Hornbower; Wild Seahorses; Swordfish

PREVIOUS PAGE — CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Humpy Bogart; Crabola; Good Friends in School; Turtle Recall





LEFT TO RIGHT:
Beneath the Ray of Hope; Crab; Eel
Mannered; Pocket Lobster

before taking the plunge into full time studio art about 17 years ago.

Why did you choose the medium you use? Where do you find your materials? If necessity is the mother of invention, then poverty may be the father. It can be expensive to make fine art. I know of more than one good artist who must keep a "straight job" in order to afford sometimes expensive materials to work on "unsecured" artworks. Without commissioned budget or materials, significant

or larger projects must typically come from working artists' pockets. Hence, a search is on for less expensive raw materials throughout the life of poor working artists. Rock 'n Roll doesn't need an expensive guitar, right?

Most of the furniture in my home was built of recovered, recycled materials on hand at the time they were needed. When my sons were small, they carved their names and whittled quite mercilessly on their old wooden double bunk beds. I used this material to build a rather

handsome seven-foot cabinet for our living room from these "pre-loved" scraps of wood that actually held significant intrinsic value to us. This cabinet means much more now. It tells a story of youth, family history and love.

As a painter of abstract canvas for over 30 years, I have always experimented with atypical materials, textures, shapes... I have worked with asphalt and tar... I began to attach (to the surface), assorted pieces and shapes of textured materials, including fabric, organic

materials, and eventually small sheets of flat metal. I made a series of paintings on recycled tin roofing and sheet copper. As I began to "work" the metal to advance surfacing and to build texture, the metal itself became more and more important in the process. This, combined with the work I was already doing with paper collage images of piranha and sharks, eventually led to experiments with small fish made of metal shapes.

Actual objects (horseshoes, handguns, dental appliances, handlebars,

etc) came next. Interlocking shapes provided even more entertainment, and the rest, as they say, is art history.

One aspect of my work that provides a certain charm is the recognizable aspect of many or most of my materials. I make it a point to use parts and pieces of easily identified objects (musical instruments, household items, bowling pins, cooking utensils, garden implements, farm tools, coffee pots, etc) that the viewer need not be art savvy to appreciate.

It brings an "A-HA!" or a smile to almost



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Tuna; Hammerhead; Sir Lampsalot; Dancing Queen Fish; Looper; Peter Pan Fish

Frank Russell

caring heart. This formula will work magic with almost everything, even broken relationships or bad credit!

What is your creative process?

As my audience grows, I find that more and more, I need my experience as an art director to effectively support my work as the creative. Commissioned works typically come with the “baggage” of current fashion, preexisting ideas, spatial requirements, budgets, input from “players”, buyers or designers, etc—so my creative process requires active “people skills”, listening skills—too many meetings and countless hours just on the phone. Only then can I get actual freedom to create something original or fresh, new and (oh, by the way...) suitable.

I need to spend lots and lots of time simply in the close company of raw materials—all stretched out across the floor or the yard, not in neat piles. In fact, I need to regularly stumble over objects I’ve never worked with before in order to find the next piece that will take me on the next journey.

Solitude is imperative at certain stages. Music is always present in my work. Trance music, dub dance music, kick-ass rock and roll, environmental space

music, outsider music, (loud) vintage surf guitar, global ethnic music as a bed of seamless ambience that flows through my studios like the river of junk that flows beneath my feet.

What is your artistic mission?

I own my gallery here in the city, and it is purposely a gallery that is about mutual respect, creative growth and personalized artist-to-artist support and development. It is not about profit or making a fortune in the art world.

I offer studios to local artists who are working hard to grow creatively as well as professionally. I try to give back a little of so much that has been given me by my community, or tribe, here and at large. We love to see developing artists gather confidence and skills and begin to take their rightful places as honored, respected or revered members of society, community leaders and career artists.

Historically, working artists have allowed themselves to be relegated to sub-status as “social underlings” somehow. We have a tendency to become playthings for the rich as well as prime targets for every other fundraiser in town...

Why did you choose fish and marine life

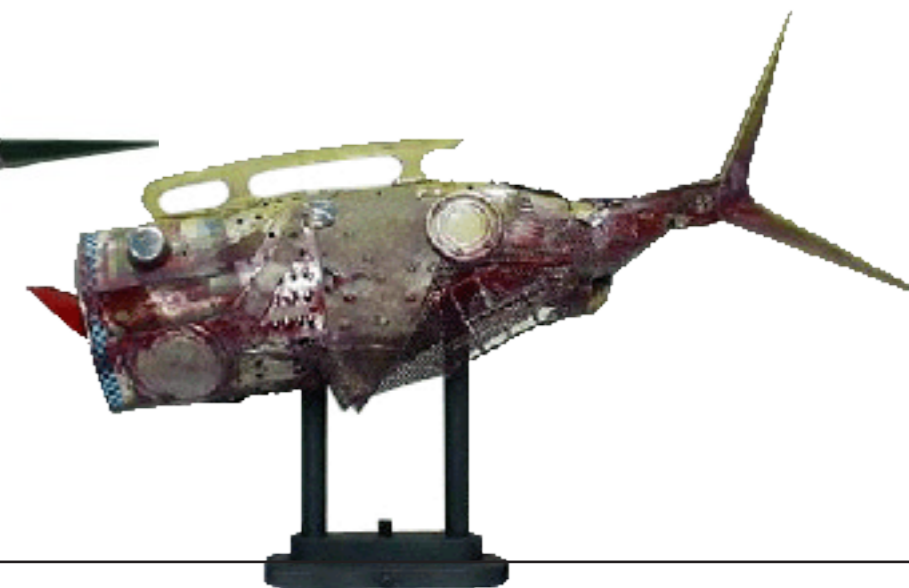
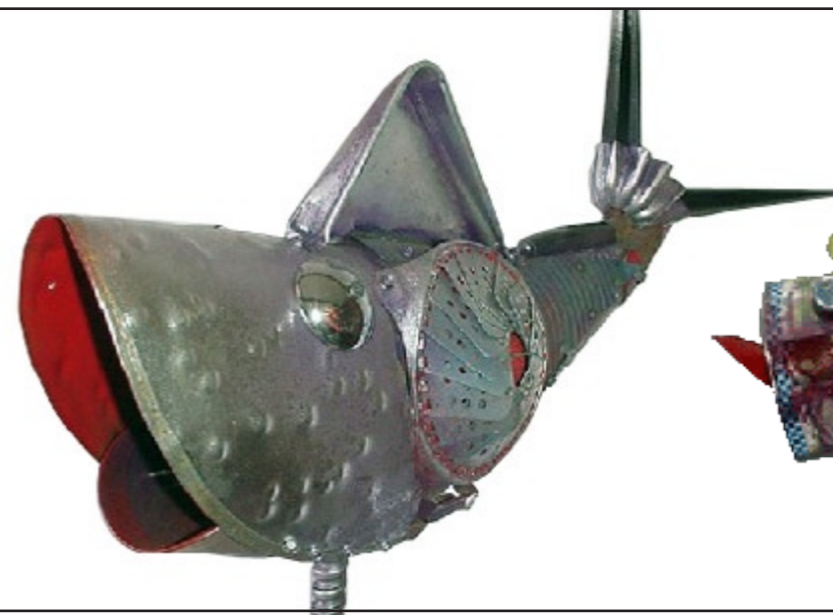
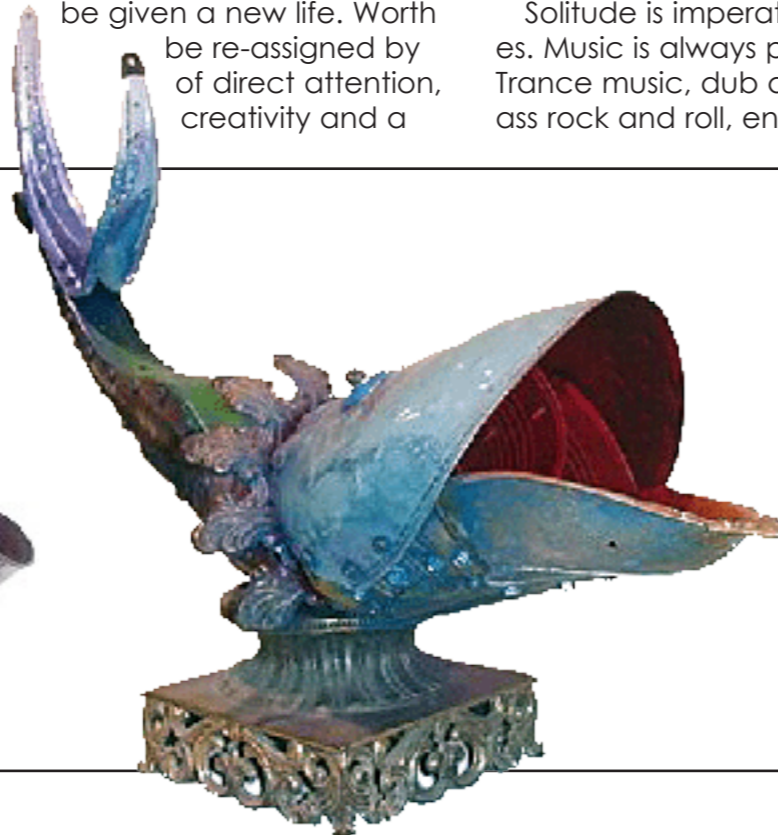


captions this page...

anyone who sees a catfish whose head is or was a frying pan, or a penguin made from an obvious streetlight... it makes my sculptures that much more accessible and much more, fun!

I now live knee-deep in a river of cast-off, discarded, recycled materials that somehow find their way to me. Folks know of my work with “junk” and bring really cool things to me simply because they like the idea of them being “re-born to be wild”, as opposed to drag-

ging these items to the curb or to the city dump. I have calls almost daily from donors. I have “pickers” all across the land that keep my work in mind as they peruse potential materials or treasure. As a piece of seemingly useless junk is re-discovered, reconsidered, re-evaluated (“cared about” or LOVED, if you will) it can be given a new life. Worth can be re-assigned by a bit of direct attention, creativity and a



portfolio

as subject matter?

Living at the coast of North Carolina for several years, an acquired passion for pier and surf fishing, snorkelling in the Florida Keys and my enchantment with large aquariums combine to provide my fascination with marine life and underwater beauty. Many of my clients are avid scuba divers. A few are involved in marine research. Fish are also visually an invitation for design. They are so diverse in appearance, size, color, shape, etc. Such diverse beauty one could spend an eternity simply appreciating the minutia of wildly different designs and details.

I am voluntarily working with The Natural Science Center of Greensboro North Carolina in the US to assist in the design, financing and development of one of the largest aquariums in our state. We have a long way to go. We need boodles of local support and some fairly heavy money. This city's Natural Science Center is one of only a handful of accredited science museums in the country that operate also an accredited zoo. A 20,000+ gallon aquarium will make us a triple winner. It is a dream being realized through the vision and leadership of the good folks at the Center. Observing wild creatures living in and under water provides a centering, soothing and healing power that my soul seriously seeks. God seems somehow more visual and readily apparent underwater.



What are your current works or projects in progress?

- A 16-foot square coral bed featuring several types of coral (a Brain Coral made from Slinkys), a crustacean or two and perhaps even an octopus made entirely of recycled and brightly colored found materials.
- A large four-panel installation for Carolina Pediatric to be entitled "JOURNEYS" that will illustrate the trek of a child from birth through early adulthood using actual objects of childhood development (to 18 years old) along a 6"x 50' metal "path" lined with toys, dolls, games, computer components, bicycle parts, car keys, etc.

turning a bright yellow Hypertech Pro 40 underwater camera case into a life-sized Anglerfish... any takers out there?

For more information, visit the artist's gallery ARTMONGERZ at 610 South Elm Street, Greensboro, North Carolina, tel. 336.389.0398. Images of some of his pieces and a brief history of his found object sculptures of sea creatures can be found at www.theartmaker.com ■



- A school of six 8+ feet long tiger sharks built three dimensionally of found materials to be suspended 30 feet high in a large reception area fronting a new facility of a local law firm. Also, our gallery celebrates four years next month and we are delighted! I am also



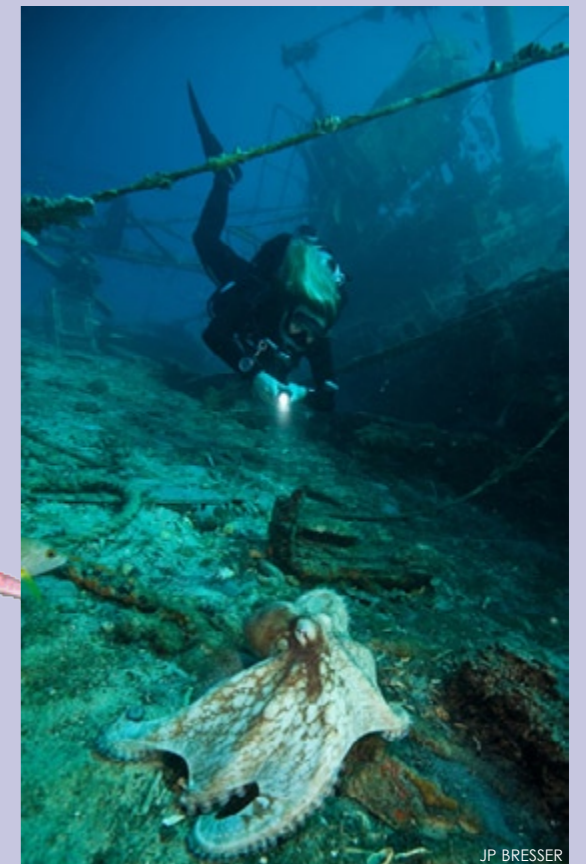
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Grouper; Kisser; Shark; Full Tilt;
Portrait of the artist

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SCOTT JOHNSON



JP BRESSER

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