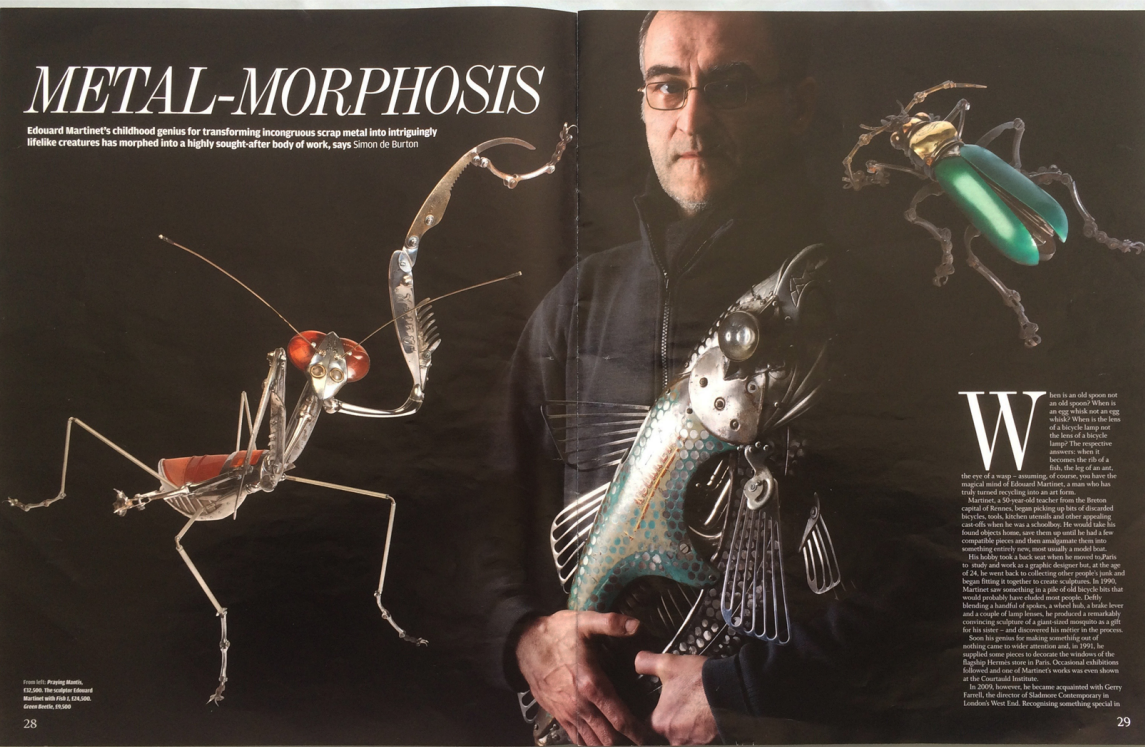


METAL-MORPHOSIS

Edouard Martinet's childhood genius for transforming incongruous scrap metal into intriguingly lifelike creatures has morphed into a highly sought-after body of work, says Simon de Burton



From left: Praying Mantis, £12,500; The sculptor Edouard Martinet with his £12,500 Toad; £12,500

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When is an old spoon not an old spoon? When is an egg whisk not an egg whisk? When is the lens of a bicycle lamp not the lens of a bicycle lamp? The respective answers, when it comes to the work of a fish, the leg of an ant, the eye of a sheep, a mountain of cheese, you know the magical mind of Edouard Martinet, a man who has truly turned recycling into an art form.

Marinet, a 50-year-old teacher from the Breton capital of Rennes, began picking up bits of discarded bicycles, tools, kitchen utensils and other appealing cast-offs when he was a schoolboy. He would either find objects homes, save them up until he had a few competing pieces and then amalgamate them into something pretty new, most usually a model boat.

His hobby took a back seat when he moved to Paris to study and work as a graphic designer but, at the age of 28, he went back to collecting every spare part and began fitting it together to create sculptures. In 1993, Marinet saw something in a pile of old bicycle tools that would probably have ended some people's lives. Heating a handful of spikes, a wheel hub, a brake lever and a couple of lamp lenses, he produced a remarkably convincing sculpture of a glass-eyed dragonfly as a gift for his sister – and discovered his mother in the process.

Soon his genius for making something out of nothing came to wider attention and, in 1999, he supplied some pieces to decorate the windows of the Bachelier factory near to Paris. Occasional exhibitions followed and one of Martinet's works was even shown at the Courtauld Institute.

In 2009, however, he became acquainted with Gerry Farrell, the director of Sladmore Contemporary in London's West End. Recognising something special in

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the sculptures, Farrell offered Martinet a show and now his marvels of reconstituted metalwork regularly wing their way to the homes of the rich and famous.

"There are plenty of people using found objects to create art, but there is something about Edouard's work that instantly appealed to me," explains Farrell. "It is so remarkably realistic and so beautifully thought-out – it's endlessly intriguing to gaze at the individual parts and try to work out how they started life."

Of eight Martinet creations that Farrell exhibited on the Sladmore stand at last summer's Masterpiece London fair, six sold rapidly, including two large-scale pieces: a 50cm-long grasshopper priced at £24,500 (pictured below) and a praying mantis at £32,500 (pictured on previous pages), measuring 104cm high. Notable patrons to date include the producer of the *Die Hard* and *Matrix* movies, Joel Silver, and the venture capitalist Tom Perkins, who bought a dragonfly with gossamer wings made from fencing wire to display in his vast San Francisco penthouse.

Now based back in Rennes, where he lives with wife, Sylvie, Martinet continues to scour junkyards, flea markets, rubbish skips and even the gutters for objects to reincarnate as, perhaps, a wasp's thorax or a ladybird's wing. He has, you may have noted, a particular fascination for insects, something that was instilled in him at the age of 10 by an enthusiastic primary-school



The creatures often take a considerable amount of time to gestate and can sit for months, even years, while their component parts patiently wait to be brought together as something new



From top: Longicorn Beetle, £10,500; Grasshopper, £24,500; Toad, £12,500; Falcon, £16,500. All by Edouard Martinet

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teacher. But alongside the various bugs and beetles (Longicorn Beetle, £10,500, pictured above; Green Beetle, £9,500, pictured on previous page), there are also birds (Falcon, £16,500, pictured bottom left), fish (Fish II, £24,500, pictured on opening pages) and amphibians (Toad, £12,500, pictured bottom far left).

Marinet's creatures often take a considerable amount of time to gestate, however, and can sit for months, even years, while their component parts patiently wait to be brought together as something entirely new. These days, he works nine hours a week as a teacher of graphic design, leaving the rest of his time free to forage and make sculptures, which he does in a remote workshop on a farm around 10km outside Rennes. Here, drawers and boxes overflow with random salvaged parts that Marinet will routinely work on through the night.

"When I see an object, I don't always see a use for it, but I usually keep it and put it away for later," he says. "Yet sometimes I'll find something and see its potential instantly. Occasionally, an object will even give me an idea to make a particular insect. But it can be a very long process to get all the right parts because they not only need to fit together, they need to accurately represent whatever part of the sculpture it is that they are intended to be. It's not unusual to start something and then have to put it to one side until I find just the right item to finish it. That dragonfly was in production for 15 years."

It took him a while, too, to gather together the incongruous ingredients of a car mascot, some metal cables, a bicycle mudguard, an electric fan, some poultry scissors and a few snail forks – but after leaving them around for a few months, he suddenly realised that what they really wanted to be was a Dublin Bay prawn. And now they are – in a 52cm long sculpture (£24,500).

"I try to keep the parts as original as possible. I don't really like to cut things up or reform shapes – although I might, perhaps, take the handle off a soup ladle and just use the bowl," Marinet concedes.

He is also unusual in eschewing processes such as soldering and welding, preferring to join the parts of his sculptures using nuts, bolts and screws. This lends his creatures the pleasing articulation that achieves his principal aim of making them realistic.

"I want a bird to give the impression that it is about to fly, a grasshopper that it is about to hop and a praying mantis that it is about to lunge," says Marinet. "I want them to have life." ♦

www.edouardmartinet.com. His next exhibition at Sladmore Contemporary, 32 Bruton Place, London W1 (020-7499 0365; www.sladmore.com), opens on November 27.

JAN LAMBERTSON/STY

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