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Lisa Markwell: Never fear, a wartime slogan's here

Observations: New formula for success

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One would imagine that down-and-dirty Formula One car pits and arty private views rarely overlap, but one engineer-turned-artist disagrees.

Alastair Gibson – a former chief mechanic for Honda Formula One cars – spent 10 years in the pit stop before becoming a full-time artist. For Carbon Art, he has created a life-size, 3m-long mako shark from the recovered chassis parts of Jenson Button's 2008 F1 Honda Grand Prix racing car. "I feel the same excitement when I sell a piece as when I'm on the winning team in the Grand Prix," says Gibson. "It's the nerves of bringing a piece into the gallery and wondering if people will like it and if it will sell. Working in the pits, you're waiting for the car to come down, knowing millions of people are watching you and thinking you've got to be the best."

Gibson has previously made a hammerhead shark sculpture for Button's father, John, and a piranha for Rubens Barrichello, using fittings from one of his cars. "Sharks have evolved to be the ultimate feeding machine in the ocean," explains the artist, "while the racing cars have evolved for one purpose – to get to the finishing line first. My work draws together these two worlds."

The sculptures, which can be seen at the Russell Gallery stand at the Chelsea Art Fair until Sunday, are made from carbon-fibre, titanium and permaglass. With his thrift-store ethos, Gibson may just be the only eco-conscious engineer in the notoriously gas-guzzling world of Formula One. "One of the reasons I use recycled Grand Prix cars is that it's very expensive. All the old parts never get recycled, so I give the public a chance to take a look at the pieces that usually end up chucked in a skip."

www.carbonart45.com; www.penman-fairs.com