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Hawk Moth; Falling Giraffe; Falling
Ostrich, Shawn Smith.

ART REPUBLIK EXPLORES THE
PIXELATED WORLD OF SHAWN SMITH.
BY TYEN FONG

Digital Love

Seeing the world in a pixelated form would not have been possible before the emergence of technology. With pixilation, the depictions of real objects become reduced to a rudimentary form, losing finer details and nuances.

American artist Shawn Smith explores this intersection between technology and reality in his body of work consisting of pixelated wood sculptures. Each sculpture is composed of small pieces of wood that Smith sculpts together. On a two-dimensional level, each work resembles a collage made up of colourful mosaic tiles. Smith treats each small piece as an individual component of his overall composition, meticulously placing each piece to form one complete image.

More specifically, Smith's work investigates the relationship between the natural world and the digital word; for example, the way in which we could potentially experience natural elements through computers and television screens. The main subjects for most of his sculptures are animals.

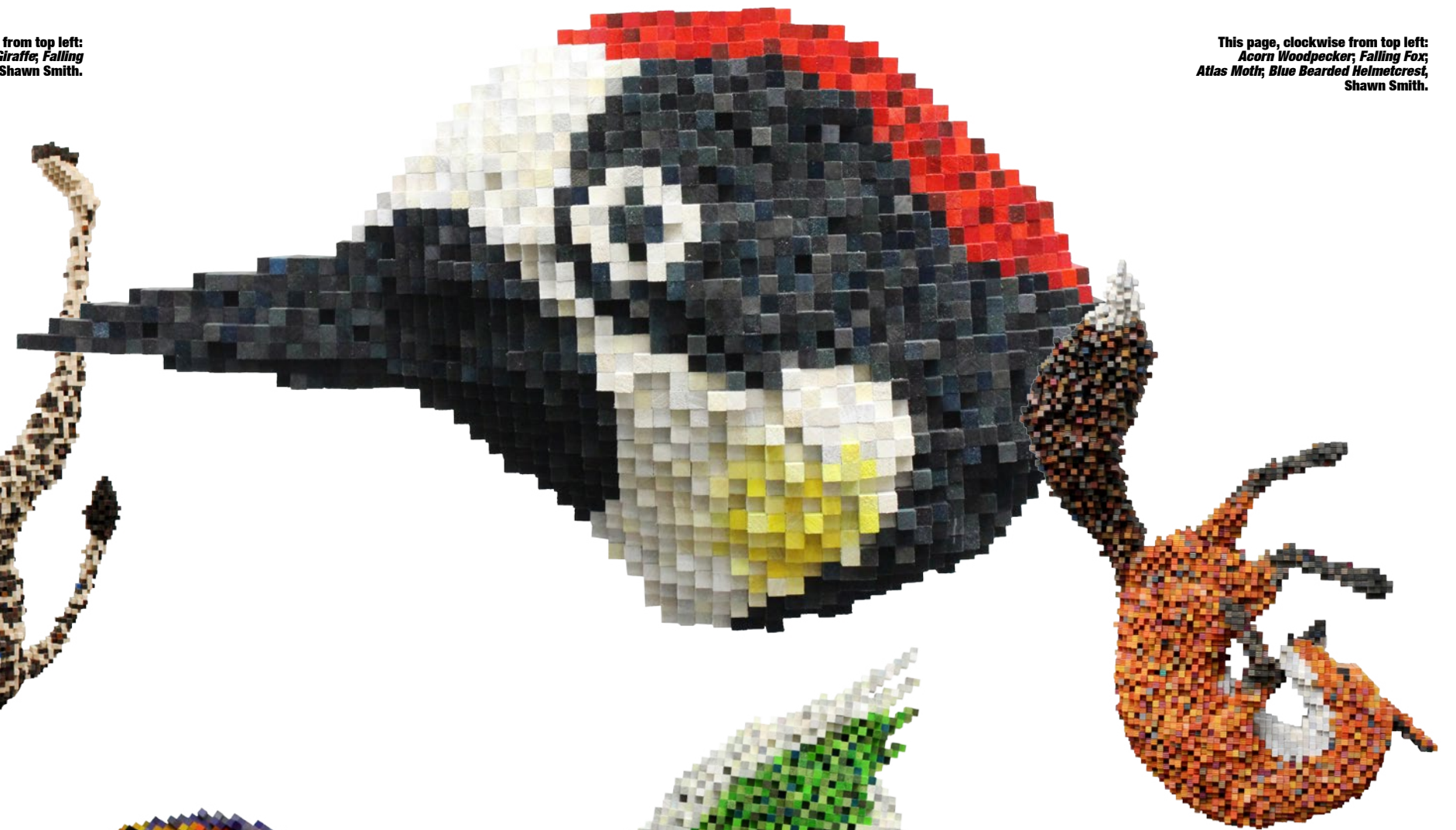


Using his pixilation style, he crafts impressive sculptures of eagles, giraffes, antelopes and other creatures. In addition to animals, he also takes inspiration from other organic forms like plants and body parts.

He calls these pieces "re-things" because of the process in which he creates these sculptures. His starting point is a digital image he sees online. Online images present a detachment from reality given its lack of physicality. In Smith's artistic process, he reverse engineers these online images back into their physical form.

As for his building process, the artist starts with a full sheet of material like plywood or medium-density fibreboard (MDF) and cuts it into strips of varying lengths. Using dyes mixed from ink and acrylic paint, he then hand paints each strip of wood individually. The culmination of wooden strips of varying lengths and colours give the sculptures more depth and dimension, which he plays with before assembling all the pieces together to create the final product. Similar to the way in which each cell plays a vital role in the identity of an organism, Smith's interest lies in the role each pixel plays in the identity of the object.

"I grew up in a large city only experiencing the




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Acorn Woodpecker; Falling Fox;
Atlas Moth; Blue Bearded Helmetcrest,
Shawn Smith.



natural world through computers and television screens. With my work, I create three-dimensional sculptural representations of two-dimensional images of nature I find online. I build my objects pixel by pixel with hand-cut, hand-dyed strips of wood in an overtly laborious process in direct contrast to the slipperiness and speed of the digital world," explains Smith.

Born in 1972, the Texas-born artist attended Arts Magnet High School and Brookhaven College before graduating from Washington University in St Louis, MO with a BFA in Printmaking in 1995. He received his MFA in Sculpture from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco in 2005 and has received artist-in-residencies from the Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, CA and the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris, France. His works have been exhibited in solo and group galleries throughout the United States.

In his transposition of digital to a three-dimensional pixelated form, Smith distils, distorts and deletes details. Each sculpture represents an evolutionary collision between nature and the digital world, combining mathematical rigor with the beauty of nature. 

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