

Artist reflects on using ‘disco as a metaphor’

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Council on Culture & Arts

“Look up.”

Artist and Florida State University adjunct art instructor Tom Hall recalls these words spoken by his high school teacher as he and his classmates bus-

tled down a busy street. The sentiment represents his process as a maker, doer and sculptor of narrative.

“Look at the world and think about everything around you,” says Hall. “We should all have aims and ambition, but the ‘now’ is the important part otherwise you will always be hungry for what

is next and miss the ‘now’ completely.”

Hall continually looks at the present world around him from every perspective imaginable. His pieces range in dramatic scale — from singular objects to multi-room installations that have been exhibited nationally and internationally. Each carries Hall’s flair for story bal-

anced with a touch of rebellion.

“Plus, if you’re always looking up, you might bump into someone,” Hall remarks cheekily. “It is important to do the right thing, but who knows what might happen if you don’t.”

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Hall's exhibition at 621 Gallery "The Sometimes Observed life of A Disco Gimp," encapsulates this play between perspective, personal histories and a spiraling visual thought process. The installation opened on Jan. 3 and will run through Jan. 31.

In this exhibition, Hall turns an eye inward to investigate personal tensions between parental responsibilities and fears. Each room highlights the difficulties of becoming an adoptive father by exploring a new persona, "Disco Gimp Dad," who represents a mixture of "masked figures" that men play throughout fatherhood.

"Sometimes a father figure who is both a superhero and a subservient jester discovers bits about himself," writes Hall in his description of the installation. "Is he on a quest? Or is he being tested by something from the outside? Much of the reflections in the work is manifested in the form of mirrors and is due to the dual role of any father, that of likewise being a son."

Hall grew up the son of a farmer in the English countryside, surrounded by expansive lands and animals that he cared for and were his pets. His father was always outside hard at work but would often purchase model airplane kits for him to make. His mother also encouraged his impulses to craft with his hands by making homemade playdough.

Hall's room was a museum to these objects and tinkering. Odd-shaped machines were suspended by strings, swiftly painted and sometimes only half-completed. Hall says he wasn't a fastidious child, but instead delighted in the act of creation as a way of making sense of his surroundings.

"It's my out, it's how I communicate with the world," says Hall. "There's a practical side to my work as a maker and doer. I think through the act of making."

Hall graduated from the Wimbledon School of art with a degree in sculpture and completed his master's degree at the Royal College of Art. While he doesn't think of himself as a "sculptor" in the traditional sense, his creative process always begins with an event. It soon develops into a bubbling geyser of ideas and questions that spans six months of development and creation.

When Hall first emigrated to the U.S., his work focused on the historical significance of moving westward. His materials take on lives of their own as a glimmering gold leaf car or missile covered with mirrored pieces transforms into a character within a larger story. Hall often uses references to disco as a "method of disappointment," as they reappear throughout his body of work.

"It is the saddest thing in the world when you turn off the music and you just have a rotating ball there," says Hall. "So, I use disco as a metaphor to express worry and disappointment."



Tom Hall's "Hay Dad, Why Dad, Not My Dad," 2019, Megaphones, Glass Mirror. TOM HALL

His "Becoming Invisible," consisted of a hand cut glass mirrored carpet that obscured Hall's figure as he was filmed by his adopted son. The project stemmed from old photographic images of birth mothers covered in cloth as they held their children who were up for adoption. Many of his chosen narratives reflect a certain empathy and sentimentality, which Hall believes to always operate at the core of his works.

"To be empathetic, you have to be sentimental," states Hall. "I search for empathy in everyone. Even the most seemingly mundane person has an incredible history."

As visitors enter the first room in "The Sometimes Observed life of A Disco Gimp," they are met with a twelve foot high "Portrait Of My Young Son," comprised of 12,000 hooks. This drawing recreates the first image Hall and his wife saw of their eldest, adopted son.

Hall remembers he and his wife placing their hands on the sleeping child's chest to feel his heartbeat, echoed in the casts of hands that hold 25 pound bags of jasmine rice in "Product of Thailand." Rope ladders hint at escape narratives, and the final room with its white porch pillar questions identity while an amplified speaker collides with it.

The most impactful room for Hall has been "Hay Dad, Why Dad, Not My Dad," which is comprised of three megaphones and encourages children to scream cathartically at him. Hall recalls on opening night three young men whose quiet declarations cemented his reasons for creating this project, which expresses both difficult times and family bonds.

"That is why you make the work," says Hall. "I am not the one who is important. It's not about my story. It comes down to who is standing in front of it that makes the time worth spending."

If you go

What: The Sometimes Observed life of A Disco Gimp

When: 1-5 p.m., Friday-Sunday through January 31

Where: 621 Gallery, 621 Industrial Drive

Cost: Free, contributions welcome

Contact: For more information, visit <https://www.621.org>.



Florida State University adjunct art instructor Tom Hall TOM HALL



Left: Tom Hall's "Portrait Of A Disco Gimp," 2019, Digital Film; and right, "Portrait Of My Young Son," 2019, Handmade Wire Hooks. TOM HALL

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

Glenn Miller Orchestra

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