

William A. Hall: Car Drawings, 2008-2017

September 10 – October 22, 2017

California car culture and bucolic psychedelic landscapes meet in William A. Hall's remarkable drawings. Living as a homeless person in Los Angeles for 18 years and using old Cadillacs, a Buick and most recently a Dodge for his art studios, Hall would sit in the driver's seat drawing sometimes for 12 hours at a stretch every day. He would prop his sketchpad against the steering wheel and work from imagination with colored pencils and crayons, creating alternate realities containing retro-futuristic vehicles gliding through gnarly Middle-earth-like environments.

Curiously, there are no figures behind the wheels of Hall's outrageous machines, thus inviting the viewer to take a vicarious spin through his world of rocky roads embedded with serpentine tree roots and vines, threatened by impending precipices and occasionally washed by the majestic blue waves of the Pacific Ocean. Despite their eccentric appearance, the cars themselves are rugged, all-terrain vehicles designed to be driven by an adventurous day-tripper through a phantasmagorical frontier. They often have protective curvilinear piping and sturdy guard rails surrounding their long, narrow bodies, while fenders, hoods, windows, doors, grills and wheels seem composed of wildly disparate elements inventively inspired by vintage Detroit assembly-line models or diesel railroad bullet trains. Ranging in styles from clunky 1930s deco to 1950s space age rocket and hot rod dragster motifs, the artist's designs would easily have been the envy of late California custom car king George Barris.

Born in Los Angeles in 1943, Hall's paternal grandfather T. Victor Hall (1979-1965) was a commercial artist in New York. Hall himself, while self-taught, took basic art classes in elementary school and always wanted to be an artist. He lived with his mother until she passed away in 1997, and then became homeless. "In kindergarten, I made a Baltimore Oriole out of aluminum foil," he recalled in an interview with Hyperallergic. "My first love was sculpture. When I got put out on the street, I couldn't make sculpture anymore. In the streets, you have a whole different mindset."

Hall creates several series of drawings in which many separate 11 x 8.5 inch sheets of paper combine to create a single scene. In some of his compositions, the convoluted landscapes framing Hall's vehicles come to the fore and take center stage. Sometimes they are composed entirely of rocky outcroppings punctuated by deep crevices, craggy stairways and narrow plateaus carved into a mountainside. Other times the focus may be a mysterious architectural structure supported by a network of massive trees. Still other times, Hall's signature rocks and foliage may provide the foundation for an intricate series of interconnected waterfalls, pools and lagoons.

This exhibition, William A. Hall's first in a gallery, is in collaboration with Henry Boxer Gallery (UK). Boxer debuted the work in his booth at the Outsider Art Fair 2017 in New York.