

HYPERALLERGIC

An Artist's Fantastical Drawings of Cars, Made While Living in One

For 18 years, William A. Hall lived in his car, a pale yellow 1972 Dodge Dart, and spent the same amount of time reimagining it.

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William Hall, "Untitled" (2015), crayon pencil, 11 x 17 in each panel (all images courtesy Henry Boxer Gallery, London)

The colored pencils William A. Hall so frequently uses have an unusual richness to them, at once bright and soft. In his drawing "Untitled (Car in Landscape)," a scene of an intricate car and landscape looks half-real, half-fantasy: A tree-like structure bends to form a bridge; the car is bright pink and seems to contain a fourth dimension — curved arms protect its shell and wheels, and a domed top protects its Go-Kart-style seating. Tough impact, if it were possible in this mirage of a world, wouldn't affect it.

Hall's drawings are as meticulous as they are sweeping and expansive, their settings difficult to place in either the past or future. Hall was born in 1943 in Los Angeles and, though self-taught, has made art since he was a child. While it'd be incorrect to say cars are his sole focus — for example, his *Pumpkin Castle* series, which showcases the interior and exterior of a candy-colored, stained-glass futurist cottage surrounded by a moat, evokes the sublime — they might be his favorite subjects.



William Hall, "Untitled" (2015), pencil crayon, 11 x 17 in

For 18 years, Hall lived in his car, a pale yellow 1972 Dodge Dart, and spent the same amount of time reimagining it: drawing vehicles with protective features, placing them in remarkable settings. When Hall's mother passed away in 1997, keeping up on house payments became difficult, and he found himself on the street. He worked in his car for up to 12 hours a day, traversing just a few neighborhoods. After his niece's death in a traffic accident, he began designing safety features for cars, usually in the form of jutting layers on their exteriors to minimize shock.

Drawing came easily to Hall, as he'd always made art. "In kindergarten, I made a Baltimore Oriole out of aluminum foil," he told 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.”



William Hall, “Untitled” (2010), pencil crayon, 9 x 12 in

Hall’s striking story is chronicled in a new book, *The Visionary Art of William A. Hall*, published by the Henry Boxer Gallery and featuring essays by Colin Rhodes, a professor of outsider art at Sydney University. Hall’s narrative is one of odd luck and coincidence, but *The Visionary Art* does what a tale this unique ought to — let the protagonist’s work speak for itself. Rhodes’s foreword is barely seven pages, the rest of the book offering closer glimpses at Hall’s drawings.

Perhaps the most classic signifier of Los Angeles in the American imagination is the automobile, once considered a solution (unreliable, overfilled streetcars!) to the very problem it’s created (congestion, crowding — not to mention pollution). Hall’s drawings of cars are majestic and intricate, singular and strange, and, upon close examination, almost seem like they’d be mechanically sound. As Rhodes explains in his forward, “They are definitely not of the present, but they are in some ways emblematic of historical technologies put to futuristic purpose.”



William Hall (photo by Angie Page)

It was by happenstance that, a year ago, Hall met Stephen Holman, an LA-based artist and animator who'd eventually become a kind of agent, and who also edited *The Visionary Art*. Their meeting was pivotal — in less than a year, Hall would find representation at the Henry Boxer Gallery and have his work become part of the permanent collections at The American Folk Art Museum in New York and the abcd gallery in Paris.

As Holman tells it, he was at The Hive in downtown LA, where he is a resident artist, when a family greeted him. “They’d just moved from Wisconsin and said, ‘We found this gentleman living in his car on our block and took him in. His car was full of art — we think he can sell some of it, maybe get back on his feet.’” Holman checked out the work and, deeply impressed, arranged meetings with local galleries to showcase the drawings. He connected Hall with Henry Boxer, who

became his liaison for both the Henry Boxer Gallery, which specializes in folk and outsider art, and the Folk Art Museum — Boxer’s own connections to the institution are responsible for Hall’s placement in the permanent collection. “His work does fall into the outsider art category, though that can be nebulous. I thought it would be better to speak to someone who understood that world,” Holman told Hyperallergic.



William Hall, “Untitled/Purple Castle Exterior” (2013), colored pencil on paper, 11 x 14 in per panel

The book is separated into four sections: “Cars, Inventions,” “Notes & Novel,” and “Landscapes.” Hall’s notes contain details of his day — the temperature, snippets of conversation — and reveal a mind that’s

part-gyroscope, always spinning. His inventions recall the scientific drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, all pulleys, protuberances, and worlds that connect through Rube Goldberg meanderings — a ladder here, a chute there. The cars and their landscapes, both of which contain wild curves and multitudinous layers, are at once foreign and recognizable, dangerous and inviolable.

Most stunning are Hall's panel works: multi-part drawings created, one at a time, while scrunched against the dashboard of his car — first one sheet, then another, and so on. It wasn't until Holman met Hall that he was able to see his pieces laid out and connected. He'd drawn them intuitively, sometimes up to 20 panels. "I kept developing how to do it in a car, behind a steering wheel," said Hall. "It seemed to be like a drawing board. There was nothing else to do. It developed into that over the years; I didn't realize I had as much work as I did."

What's interesting about Hall is his work falls into a few narratives (outsider art, figurative art), but not quite. As Rhodes told Hyperallergic, "His work is highly original, and he is not part of any school or particular tendency ... Nevertheless, the work sits in certain identifiable artistic contexts. This is narrative art, aesthetically powerful." Adds Holman, "It's like creating a myth. It's a fairy story, something that comes directly from his interactions with his own imagination and the universe. His parallel universes are a reaction to this one." When I asked Hall about his own take on the experience of sharing his inner world with the rest of us, he said it felt exciting. "If you have a vision, you should share it if you think it's valid," he said. "I always thought my life was valid."