

Parallel Play

Rory Hamovit

“Parallel play” is a term coined by sociologist Dr. Mildred Parten in the 1920s; it’s one of her six stages of childhood development. It’s the point at which toddlers will play alongside each other, maybe even doing the same activity. Picture two kids standing at a child-size table, each with a piece of construction paper in front of them, and a 64-count box of crayons in the center. They are sharing the box of crayons, aware of each other, but not cooperating or working together. One of the toddlers uses a crayon that the other sees and is impressed by. He reaches to take the crayon, and the first toddler sacrifices it, an initial act of sharing. Theirs is a game of discovery and impression, not fully communicative, nor are they really comprehending their world or their actions.

And here you have a series Rory Hamovit’s images that are parallel playing. The photos work alongside each other, have similar motifs and tones, all exist in the black-and-white world of photography. The images do not communicate with each other, but they are all engaged with some idea of play, and Hamovit uses a lot of crafty and playful techniques to do that. More on that later.

The other name for this show, the or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, would be something like, or How to Reconceptualise Your World Through Crafted Facsimiles Meant to Defamiliarise. This of course references defamiliarisation, a concept from the critic Viktor Shklovsky’s 1917 essay *Art as Technique*. In the essay, Shklovsky talks about rote and cliché imagery, and about how “perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic.” Shklovsky uses the example of “the sensations of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time,” and asks the reader to “[compare] that with [the] feeling [of] performing the action for the ten thousandth time.” Defamiliarisation is about reacquainting yourself with familiar images from unfamiliar perspectives. (He then praises a story by Leo Tolstoy. The story is about two men in a carriage, but it is told from the perspective of the horse who is pulling the carriage.)

Supported by



All these images that you see here started as sketches, ideas Hamovit had in a moment of meditation or even in a dream, things that reflect some sort of unconscious way of reseeing the world. In his studio in Los Angeles, there are approximately 60 drawings taped to one wall. They are sketches of cartoon men, women, children, and anthropomorphised objects in various oddly imagined situations. The drawings are all titled, and they will later become photos. I will not describe the drawings, but I will offer some of the titles to give you an idea of what is up there: Claw with Eggs; Autographed Forehead; Painted Watch; Water Backpack; Cowboy Fight; Naked Knives; Graveyard.

The work in this show started in a similar vein, from similarly drawn-out ideas, pen-and-ink sketches with matter-of-fact titles like Flower Balloon (now called Pollinator) or Strong Arms (now Strong Man) or Shadow Puppet. Obviously, some of the ideas seem impossible to execute in real life. How should he create that massive shadow puppet? Or make an image that is shot from inside a mouth? The sketched ideas are then played with, and the approach of making the image further changes it. Photographs are documents of what is tangibly in front of the photographer, and while there are myriad options for creating digitally manipulated images, Parallel Play is about making things in the real world that can seem otherworldly.

Rory takes his drawn ideas and plays with them in his studio. He uses crafty, cheap, and handmade ways to defamiliarise our perceptions. He uses a lot of the things that sparked imagination in our childhoods. There are rubber bugs in otherwise appetising ice cream, fake teeth pressed into clay to make the camera look as if it is shooting from deep in some throat (Interior Shot), store-bought silk butterflies pinned above a piece of glass covered in dirt (Looking Up). Rory uses techniques like papier-mâché to make a giant keyhole, warping how much we could, or should, see through it. He plays again with the perception of size by having adult men move a dollhouse. He has made—from craft store fabrics and foam and felt—various creatures he's anthropomorphised, blowing life into puppets (In Light and others) and a raggedy dog and a doll made of socks and buttons (Socks). He took nylons and couch stuffing and gave ridiculous Popeye arms to a slender woman in a slip dress (Strong Man), using an old costuming trick to have the viewer reconsider our rote ideas of gender.

And for those mired in photography, you know that the medium is wholly dependent on light and shadows. Hamovit has reimagined the basic elements of the medium by cutting, painting and pasting a large swath of butcher paper to make an unfathomable shadow puppet of a soaring bird (Shadow Puppet), making something so playful and silly you can't help feel impressed upon to try to make your own shadow puppet here in this darkened gallery.

- Philip Anderson

About

Rory Hamovit

Rory Hamovit (b. 1991 Augusta, Maine) is an artist and educator based in Los Angeles. He received his BA in photography from Bard College in 2013 and his MFA in photography from Yale School of Art in 2020. He has exhibited internationally and been featured in many publications including Wallpaper Magazine, British Journal of Photography and PDN. His work deals with concepts of masculinity, queerness and their myriad of interpretations through performance and play. Often utilising humor, he incorporates video, performance and text into his work. Recently he worked at the University of New Mexico.

Image list

13	Rory Hamovit, Welcome, 2023, single chanel video, 4:3		NFS
14	Rory Hamovit, In Light, 2021, selenium toned gelatin silver print		
	Framed 31.25 x 38.75cm	1/1	\$3700
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 22 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
15	Rory Hamovit, Socks, 2021, selenium toned gelatin silver print		
	Framed 31.25 x 38.75cm	1/1	\$3700
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 22 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
16	Rory Hamovit, Fingers, 2021, selenium toned gelatin silver print		
	Framed 31.25 x 38.75cm	1/1	\$3700
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 22 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
17	Rory Hamovit, Strongman, 2021, selenium toned gelatin silver print		
	Framed 31.25 x 38.75cm	1/1	\$3700
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 22 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
18	Rory Hamovit, Projector Series, reproduction of the artist's photographs		NFS
19	Rory Hamovit, Pollinator, 2021, inkjet print on lightbox paper		
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 23 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
20	Rory Hamovit, Shadow Puppet, 2018, inkjet print on lightbox paper		
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 23 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
21	Rory Hamovit, Interior View, 2021, inkjet print on lightbox paper		
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 23 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500
22	Rory Hamovit, Looking Up, 2021, inkjet print on lightbox paper		
	Print only 45.75 x 61cm	1/3	\$2200
	Print only 23 x 30.5 cm	1/3	\$1500