

Meet Slamdance 2017â??s Festival Artist

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

This year we welcome Houston native and MFA student at Claremont University, Tommy C Burns to the already impressive list of artists who have contributed to Slamdance including **Shepard Fairey**, **Kii Arens**, **David Flores** and **Rosie Lea**.

Slamdance spoke with Tommy about his background, inspirations, and his creation of the 2017 Slamdance Film Festival key art, titled **The Charmer.**
Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background? Where are you from?

Originally Iâ??m from Texas, born in Houston. I graduated from high school in Midland-Odessa and I have a huge family in San Antonio. I moved to LA when I was 18 and California has always been kind of influential to me from an artistic perspective. When I was growing up, I admired a lot of graffiti coming out of LA. A lot of the youth skateboarding scene which is heavy with images for decks and tee shirts and stuff like that. Of course, the movies. Thatâ??s so powerful, and all the album covers that I would see growing up. I mean, I do know my art history a little bit, but I would say that as far as what is contemporary art to me, that is more influential to me then the modern art scene.



LAâ??s definitely a good place to find that kind of, subversive stuff. And thatâ??s really â??Slamdanceâ?• tooâ?¦graffiti and album artwork and stuff like that. When did you start getting into art?

Some of my first memories are making art I guess. My grandmother was an artist, rest in peace. She just died actually this last year. I didnâ??t really have a lot of contact with her because she lived very far away and I didnâ??t really have as much communication on that side of the family, but it was always a memorable experience. I just think Iâ??ve formed a lot of my best friendships around artistic sensibilities. I guess we kind of search each other out.

Yeah, you have a bond.

Yeah, especially in a city like Midland-Odessa where I graduated from high school, itâ??s not a very artist-friendly environment. I think itâ??s kind of changing a little bit more, but itâ??s definitely not something that was encouraged

Right. Did you find your crew of artists there? Did you have a community?

I did. We never expected to be able to do what weâ??re doing now. Itâ??s real inspiring because I have a friend who owns a gallery, I have another friend who is a pretty well known tattoo artist in the area. Out here too, in California, Iâ??ve gotten a chance to be introduced to so many different artists and meet a lot of my heroes growing up. Not just that, but I think I was really heavily influenced by a lot of chicano art and muralists. Even though I donâ??t think thatâ??s necessarily what I do, I know that subliminally all those things kind of come into my conscious.

That was my next question. How does your cultural background influence your work? I do feel as well that even if itâ??s something you donâ??t actively think about, itâ??s inside you.

Definitely. And thankfully, through some of my trips painting in different cities, Iâ??ve gotten to see just how thereâ??s a common aesthetic throughout the whole southwest for that kind of movement. Itâ??s meaningful to get to see those kind of common bonds of images. I think that all of those kinds of images are changing literally the way people look at themselves. Having a place like a film festival is the same thing. People get a chance to explore some of those kind of topics, and having the opportunity to paint and do something different, itâ??s been really helpful for me and my artistic development.

Something that weâ??ve come to learn at Slamdance is that itâ??s super hard for filmmakers to get a start, because itâ??s very competitive and it tends to be that you need a lot of money to do anything. Iâ??m wondering with art and your experience, what are some roadblocks that youâ??ve faced?

Itâ??s actually kind of ironic, because to tell you the truth I did some film school and I really love film and have tried to do film myself. Iâ??ve always wanted to branch into film because it seemed more stable. I was thinking, if I get this technical skill of being an editor or cameraman, itâ??s gonna be more job security. Little did I know..

â?¦thereâ??s millions of people thinking the same thing

Yeah! Going back into art I felt like it was a chance for me to distinguish myself from others by doing something that was a little more personal. Itâ??s easier to see the artistâ??sâ?? hand. My thing is basically to try and make things, no matter what, without needing permission or approval. It does suck to feel like you have to wait for a budget or a permit. Thatâ??s really my main thing with film. I shot so much without any paperwork and no permits. Itâ??s like I have a form-o-phobia. Anyways, I guess thatâ??s what I would say. People should just try and make things until hopefully people will see theyâ??re passionate for what they do, and they can meet the right person who can help their ideas live in the real world, you know? Not just in their head.

So youâ??re currently a student at Claremont. How long have you been studying there?

Iâ??m getting my Masters in Fine Arts. Thereâ??s not really a way to describe it because we can all do what we want. I really enjoy my professors, Amiko, and David Pagel as well have really helped me a lot. Itâ??s been a great experience. Like I said, I havenâ??t really ever studied art formally. I had a class in high school, one class in college with David Amiko, which is why I chose to go back to school. He really encouraged me and helped me through the application process as far as giving me a lot of good advice on how to follow through.



How do you feel about being the festival artist for Slamdance?
In a way, I feel like it is a complicated relationship that artists have with commerce. Yet at the same time, itâ??s one of the most exciting relationships an artist can have. Thatâ??s what we aspire to, is to be seen and to be heard and be relevant. I feel like a film festival is the ultimate example of that. Youâ??re having all these teams of people trying to come together to express these abstract ideas. As an artist, I do that by myself at a studio. I was talking to somebody about â??art by committee.â?• Itâ??s kind of a painful process in a way. I guess you can almost say itâ??s like group therapy. Itâ??s kind of painful because thereâ??s uncomfortable moments about certain things because people donâ??t agree or see eye to eye on everything, but thereâ??s a lot of growth thatâ??s happening. People have wide and varied interests and belief systems, I think an independent film festival is kind of the epitome of that.

Yeah, and your artwork is representing that this year. Itâ??s pretty awesome.

Yeah itâ??s exciting!

Weâ??re so stoked with how the artwork turned out and feel as though it totally represents us as a festival and what weâ??ve been doing for over 20 years. In your words, what is the message behind this piece and how does it fit in with our festival?

First off, I think it was fun for me to paint. It was to me an image that I want to look at. Itâ??s interesting and could be looked at as somewhat erotic. I look at it like, yeah itâ??s sexy, but everyone has different ideas of what sexy is. I completely understand if not everyone thinks itâ??s sexy. The main form is representing a strong woman, and at the same time, kind of wrestling with those societal pressures of what she should be doing or how she should be acting. With all the stuff thatâ??s happening with the election, I know that a strong woman is still very intimidating for a lot of people. I know that not everybody is going to look at that image and see just a strong woman. I think like I said about sexuality, itâ??s always going to be like a hand grenade, no matter what itâ??s gonna be explosive. But thatâ??s also whatâ??s interesting about those kinds of images to me. I tried to do it tastefully from my perspective or my point of origin.

I really appreciate the opportunity and I think I chose to try to use it to represent the festival because what I admire about filmmakers is that theyâ??re wrestling with their own personal demons or ideas. Like the way sheâ??s holding the snake. Itâ??s unclearâ?? is it friendly? Is it dangerous? Is she playing with it or is she restraining it? Thereâ??s a lot of uncertainty and I think thatâ??s the fun part of film and having other people look at your film and those kinds of interactions. Those kinds of interactions are really precarious.

Hereâ??s a fun one, whatâ??s your favorite movie

Oh man, itâ??s really hard

Itâ??s my least favorite question

For real Iâ??ve seen hundreds of movies. Iâ??m a huge Criterion Collection fan. Iâ??ve seen a lot of them. I love japanese films. Iâ??d say one of my favorite films that is one of the most personal to me is 400 blows. Thatâ??s his first film! Itâ??s incredible, itâ??s insane. Iâ??m a huge Kurosawa fan, thatâ??s probably my favorite director as well as Kubrick. Iâ??m a huge Walter Hill fan and I like a lot of various strange things like Ralph Bakshi. I like Brian de Palmaâ??s films, and the film Black Moon by Louis Malle, that one is a big inspiration to me actually. Itâ??s hard for me to narrow stuff down, and thereâ??s so many incredible filmmakers, itâ??s insane. I mean, how to even keep up with all the new talent because even now itâ??s even more crazy and itâ??s harder to know whoâ??s who because thereâ??s so many more people that are creating!

(Source: http://www.slamdance.org)

Category

1. Slamdance

Tags

1. 2017 Slamdance Film Festival key art
2. Art
3. Competition
4. Conversation
5. creativity
6. Film
7. film festival art
8. inspiration
9. Larry Gleeson
10. marketing
11. Media
12. News
13. platform
14. Programming
15. Slamdance
16. Tommy C Burns

Date Created
December 27, 2016
Author
hollywoodglee