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ar Adam Cvijanovic and David Humphrey: Defrosted: A Life of Walt Disney

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By **Jonathan T.D. Neil**

Space Mountain was the first rollercoaster I ever rode. Unfortunately, at the time I was not yet old enough to take delight in my own terror. I'm sure the ride would seem completely pedestrian today – a kind of pseudo- or starter-coaster, which is what it's meant to be – but there was something about the darkness and disorientation which made me desperate to get back out into the light, preferably into Mickey's fuzzy embrace (though this thought now fills me with an equivalent kind of dread).

With *Defrosted: A Life of Walt Disney*, Adam Cvijanovic and David Humphrey have pulled off a brilliant show, one that goes a long way towards peeling back that thin scrim that papers over such childhood traumas and goes by the anodyne name of 'imagination'. The set pieces of the show – and they are quite literally 'set pieces' – are Cvijanovic's epic mural paintings, which offer a synoptic view of Disney's 'life': there is 'Doc' Sherwood's house in Marceline, Missouri, which the not-yet-ten-year-old Walt was 'commissioned' to draw, his first commercial outing; there is the polo accident, which killed an MGM contract actor named Gordon Westcott, with Disneyland under construction nearby; and there is Space Mountain, out on an expanse of weed-ravaged tarmac, looking like a relic of the 1950s futurism that saw it built.

All of this is revealed for the kind of fabrication that it is. The house is a set layered with scenes of Main Street and the railroad that so fascinated Disney his entire life. The scene of the polo accident, cartoonishly rendered and set within a large ink 'splat', unfolds in some fanciful forest setting seemingly straight out of *Snow White*. Humphrey's paintings add punctuation by depicting, in wildly divergent styles (sometimes within the same frame), some of the more bizarre scenes from Disney's life: here he is riding a pig, there he is, with pants down, waiting for his father to pick the switch that will deliver his whipping. And in the middle of the room stands a wood lattice that mimics the scaffold of Disneyland's Magic Mountain, which is seen under construction in Cvijanovic's mural. On this the pair have gathered pieces by their friends and other gallery artists (Leon Benn, Will Cotton, Inka Essenhigh, David Herbert, Arturo Herrera, Greg Hopkins, Adam Hurwitz, Eva and Franco Mattes AKA 0100101110101101.org, Joyce Pensato, Francesco Simeti, John Wesley and Paula Wilson) that treat – by turns roughly and parodically – different Disney-esque themes.

One wishes more artists (and curators, especially curators) would follow Cvijanovic and Humphrey's lead in taking certain singular ideas – biography, celebrity, entertainment, trauma – and developing them so richly and ambitiously. *Defrosted* is generous in this way; it's refreshingly undidactic, and it doesn't wallow in its own esoteric knowledge, daring you to try to make sense of the proceedings and snickering when you inevitably come up short. I also won't hesitate to say that Cvijanovic and Humphrey's show is one of the best demonstrations of the capacity of painting to figure the imagination – or better yet, vision (one tragic man's in particular) – rather than simply putting it to use.