

South Parade

Tom Hardwick-Allan
Low Relief and Foil
6 March—19 April 2025

Low Relief and Foil is Tom Hardwick-Allan's second solo exhibition at South Parade. The work is a new series of cast-iron reliefs and an installation of concealed books.

If you ask Tom to explain his work, he presents you with, like, word-play. 'Cause, OK, one example: iron **casting** is a near-obsolete technology of **reproduction**, and the show is full of babies.

And then there's the way he's riffing on multiple meanings of the word '**imprinting**.' Here, one meaning is: **imprinting** is a formal process in iron-**casting** – you **imprint** when you press a carved wood '**pattern**' into petrol-rich sand to leave an impression of the shape of the wood you carved. Another meaning is: **imprinting** is a developmental phenomenon for humans and for other animals, where an infant forms an intense association with the host that cares for it, and that host **impresses** upon the innocent infant a set of behavioural patterns which may, perhaps, define its life.

The word-play goes on. '**Relief**'...'**cast**'... etc. It's more than word-play. The word-play is just a way in. When Tom points to it, it's like he's signposting for you to follow the multi-meaning words as a trail of **footprints** in his wake. To help you navigate his exhibition, he has prepared an actual map of links: a hand-drawn mind map. The terrain charted by Tom's mind map is a vortex of coincidences and unlikely connections, resonances and resemblances between materials and images and processes and experiences across time and space, axes of similitude between things which do not share worlds and on the surface appear to be unrelated. The mind map maps a world tethered to itself by associational links. Tracking these links is at the heart of Tom's practice.

Tom has made an installation in the gallery to accompany the **cast-iron reliefs**. The installation is called *Secrets of the Fruitfly*, and it consists of all of the books from Tom's bedroom wrapped in glassine paper and handled with oil and graphite (the same graphite he used to treat the iron) stacked on the floor and the windowsills, resting on sheets of **foil**. The sheets of **foil** are discarded crisp, sweet and cigarette packets. '**Foil**' is another thing that starts, here, as word-play.

In the context of hunting, an animal's '**foil**' is the trail of marks and **impressions** (including **footprints**) it leaves in its environment. It's what gives the prey away to the predator – it's how the predator finds the prey. The predator tracks the prey by following the trail of association. All that has been touched, marked, and changed by the animal becomes, in a way, part of the animal – it's part of how the prey appears to the predator. Following this logic, then, it's like, to say that two things are *like* one another is not just to suggest they might be related each other, but instead to kind of to say that they have *impacted* each other – resemblance is evidence of contact, involvement, interconnectedness – somewhere along the line, however distant two things might be in their separate orbits of existence, they must have made some kind of contact. They must have made contact, and they must have **impressed** something of themselves upon one another, **imprinting** new **patterns** upon old **patterns**, however subtly.

The wrapping makes the books illegible as books. You can't open them to read them, you can't even fully decipher the titles; you can only perceive the extent of what is withheld. When language is functioning, it leads you away from the **characters** that **spell** the words and towards the parts of experience that it is their power to call upon. The books are wrapped up; you cannot read them; all that is left of the alphabet are the spheres which resemble scraps of punctuation scattered to form the bare minimum condition of human life, one X chromosome and one Y – DNA, the primal **pattern**, the subtle original from which all human copies are made – whose **imprint presses** us ever on beyond ourselves – but they could also be damaged wings.

Many years ago, Tom's grandpa Richard saved a 200-year-old iron **printing press** from a skip. In its day it was used to print broadsheet newspapers. It has a crest in the shape of a bird with outstretched wings. A **printing press** is another obsolete technology of **reproduction**; a newspaper is an obsolete technology for **dissemination** (of information). And then here's another link: the process of **casting** iron

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kind of resembles the process of keeping a foetus alive outside of its mother's body – both involve extremely careful regulation of oxygen, fuel and heat. And in Tom's iron **casts** there are foetuses who appear both premature and ancient, floating in an arrested state, apparently parentless.

The babies in the **cast-iron** reliefs are so young you almost can't fully confirm exactly what creature they are. It's like, for a little while longer, while their specifying traits form and make them undeniably the animal that they are, they still retain the capacity to become something different than their parents. And there's maybe a small amount of investment of hope in that idea. But then there's also sadness, because if a baby bird is made to live as a lamb, both sheep and birds will suffer in the end. I don't think that Tom's really on that flex though – I think it's more like: is it possible that we can be altered and marked and **imprinted** upon repeatedly, throughout our lives? Does the human life cycle have to be as predictable as, like, psychoanalytically, it might seem like it's meant to be? Doesn't the **impressionability** of infant innocence return to us sometimes in adult experience? Is the originating **imprint** made on our deepest selves in utero and then in childhood really the *only* blueprint for what we might become? I feel like Tom, who learned **print-making** as an adolescent, hopes very much that that is not the only truth. There has to be something that happens in the life cycle of a living being that is not just repetition. It's like, surely it's not that determined? Just look at the mind-map, and notice how *it* isn't linear at all, and yet it still resembles a family tree.

You start with a baby and then there's an adult and another adult and then there's a baby again, and all these cycles of innocence and experience turn over and over, and heirs resemble ancestors, and old **patterns** of behaviour play out in new worlds with new technologies that serve the same purpose as their grandparents. In *Low Relief and Foil*, the relative permanence of iron is offset by the impermanence of degraded paper and actual trash, and the life cycle of a human, dwarfed by that of iron, orbits the smaller circling life cycles of hares, and birds, and fruitflies. Turning and turning and being turned like cogs interlocked inside a machine that makes things, like predators closing in on prey, like the hidden mechanism of a clock. The fruitfly cannot live unless it dies. When Tom first started attempting to **cast** the iron reliefs, he was acquiring the iron by melting down **brake** discs from cars. Around the same time, his dad Toby and his grandma Barbara were hit by a car that failed to **brake**, and hurt them, and made it hard to live. But they are still living. When you meet Tom's dad you think Tom looks just like his dad, but then you meet his mum Katherine and you think, damn, he looks just like her, and his sister Ella. All marked by older, shared, vanishingly subtle **imprints**, ancient and fine, as well as by each other. The iron spheres that form the chromosomes on the wall are themselves copies of each other, each is **pressed** into the sand to renew its own **impression**, into which more iron is poured, continuously turning through a cycle of **reproduction**, clarifying and degrading its own likeness. Some wheels cannot be stopped from turning. Experience **impresses** the world upon us, and we take on new likenesses, we change and are changed, we shape and are shaped, we acquire defences and we harden where we've been hurt. As people age, to see in them the baby they once were, you really have to study their face. The technical term for the original object **cast** in iron **casting** is '**pattern**.' The rotary sanding discs that Tom uses to carve the wooden patterns for the **iron-cast** reliefs destroy and tunnel into the virgin sheet of wood until an image is revealed by negation; they have the power to make the whole thing disappear, and it's a power Tom has in his art but not in his life to pull the **brakes** (flick off a power switch) on this particular wheel, to capture something stained yet still innocent – while it's still capable of change – for whom it might not be too late – to salvage it from a hostile womb of history and incubate it out of time, by **casting** it in iron. But the iron could be melted down – at any time, with the right technology, anybody might melt the **cast-iron** reliefs down to liquid ore, release it back to its primordial form, where innocence coexists with experience, and things are not fixed, only to **cast** it once again – as a **character**, as a **spell** – and the molten iron will be heated and **cast**, and then cooled again by water with a hiss, a sigh of **relief**.

Text by George Lynch

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Tom Hardwick-Allan (b. 1996, Derbyshire, UK) lives and works in London, UK. He graduated with a BA from the Slade School of Fine Art in London (2019). Hardwick-Allan scratches away at an array of surfaces, treating image making as a digestive process, by which continual revision is a means of staying in dialogue with the work; tracing a range of links between falconry, printmaking, digestion and augury.

Recent solo exhibitions include *NADA, South Parade* (New York, 2023) and *Scrying the Slice, South Parade* (London, 2022). Recent selected group exhibitions include *White Trash, The White Ermine* (Düsseldorf, 2024), *TIMESCAPES, Shtager&Shch* (London, 2023), *Halbe Sachen with Stanislava Kovalcikova, Galerie Khoshbakht* (Cologne, 2023) and *Elif Saydem | Tom Hardwick-Allan, Lady Helen* (Berlin, 2022) and *Breathless: London Art Now* (curated by Norman Rosenthal), *Ca'Pesaro* (Venice, 2019).

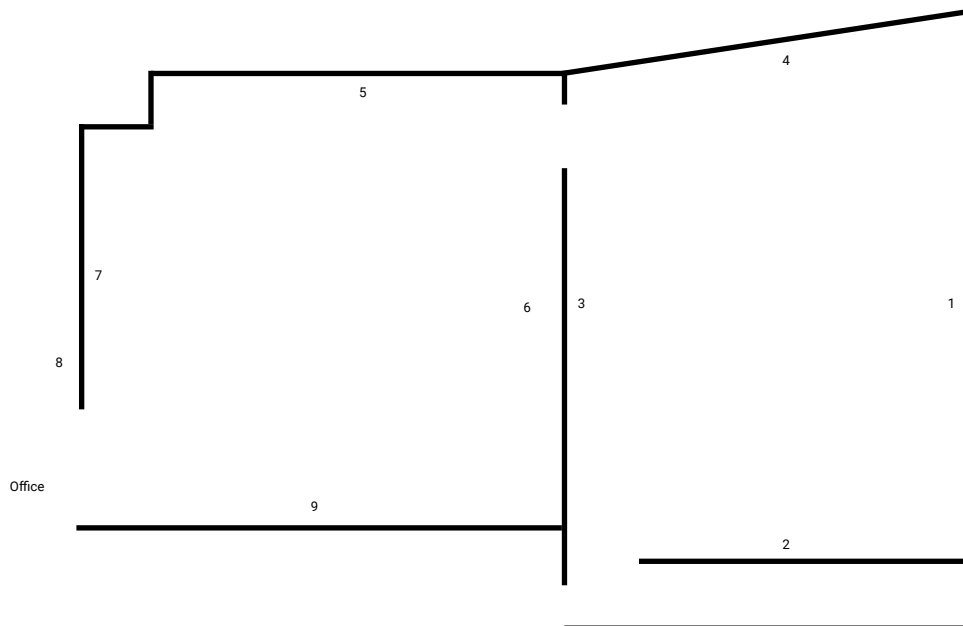
As a musician, Hardwick-Allan is a member of the bands *Gentle Stranger* and *Shovel Dance Collective*. Recent performances have taken place at *CCA* (Glasgow, 2024), *Kunstverein St Gallen* with Agnes Scherer (St Gallen, 2024), *Roskilde Festival* (Roskilde, 2024), *Re-Wire Festival* (The Hague, 2024), *Cafe OTO* (London, 2024), *Pudel Club* (Hamburg, 2024). Selected albums include *The Shovel Dance* (Shovel Dance Collective, 2024), *Inner Winter* (Gentle Stranger, 2023), *Upon Return* (Gentle Stranger, 2022) and *Love and Unlearn* (Gentle Stranger, 2020).

Recent artist books/publications include *After the Numbers, Before the Numbness, South Parade* (London, 2023), *Catching the First Mute Sliced in the Morning, South Parade, (NADA, New York 2022)*, *Studio Log, South Parade* (London, 2022) and *Vogel, Weinspach* (Cologne, 2021).

Performance

Tuesday 1 April (7–9pm)

Join us for a performance night featuring Tom Hardwick-Allan and friends



1. & 9. *Secrets of the Fruitfly, 2025. Books, glassine, oil, graphite, foil, Dimensions variable*
2. *X, 2025. Cast iron, graphite, 163 (H) x 106 (W) x 3.5 (D) cm*
3. *U < O, 2025. Cast iron, graphite, 12.5 (H) x 50 (W) x 3.5 (D) cm*
4. *Lamb < City, 2025. Cast iron, graphite, 178 (H) x 173 (W) x 4 (D) cm*
5. *Hare < Stairs, 2025. Cast iron, graphite, 131 (H) x 50 (W) x 4 (D) cm*
6. *Fetus < Falcon, 2025. Cast iron, graphite, 110 (H) x 160 (W) x 3.5 (D) cm*
7. *Y, 2025. Cast iron, graphite, 163 (H) x 67 (W) x 3.5 (D) cm*
8. *Low Relief and Foil, 2025. Print on glassine, 50 (H) x 75 (W) cm*