



The Washington Post



An installation view of Tom Holmes's exhibit "Go Back to Party City" (Vivian Marie Doering Photography)



A number of works in the Tom Holmes exhibit at Von Ammon Co. lean against folding chrome chairs (Vivian Marie Doering Photography)

Mark Jenkins | 08 April 2022

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Tom Holmes

Flowers are traditionally found at funerals and gravesites, but these days some memorial sites are marked with stuffed animals and funny-faced Mylar balloons. Such pop culture artifacts are among the inspirations for Tom Holmes's "Go Back to Party City," a show of paintings at Von Ammon Co. Updating the classical memento mori, a reminder of mortality, the Tennessee artist depicts toys, ornaments and Halloween decorations. Many of these items are available at the party-supply retailer invoked in the show's title.

The subjects are often absurdist, but the style is predominantly realistic, with occasional expressionist flourishes. Several pictures, notably a nighttime scene of a beaming jack-o'-lantern and its reflection in a window, are tightly focused, dramatically lighted and composed. Others are more random. The show includes a self-portrait in which the full-bearded artist is positioned below a depiction of a cartoonish skull mask. The disconnection is, as intended, jarring.

A few of the paintings hang on the wall, but most lean against folding chrome chairs (which reflect the daubed images) or balance on plastic jugs. The effect is to make the show seem more impromptu, closer to how the paintings look when propped up in the artist's studio. The jugs also underscore that plastic is a motif in Holmes's work, which features several detailed renderings of large sheets of shiny colored material. These are a different sort of memento mori: Plastic is cheap and perishable, yet at the molecular level nearly indestructible. In some form, a Mylar balloon will outlive anyone who buys, or simply looks at, one.

Tom Holmes' *Go Back to Party City* runs through 24 April 2022