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Making an art theme park for Jack Black's Festival Supreme

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Carolina A. Miranda

An artist-designed carnival will be part of the fun @FestivalSupreme this Saturday



A detail of a marionette piece by L.A. performance artist Barry Morse for "Circus of Death," part of a wild artist-designed theme park organized by Steven Hull. It goes on view as part of this Saturday's comedy series, "Festival Supreme." (Carolina A. Miranda / Los Angeles Times)

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Somewhere on a side street near the Hawthorne Municipal Airport, artist [Steven Hull](#) is furiously at work on an art installation like no other.

On one side of the artist's roomy studio, a pack of wood sculptures show human figures astride a team of horses, one of which shoots bubbles from its rear end. On the other, a large pink head, with hair flopping in its face, sticks out its tongue. There are puppets, trains and seats for a merry-go-round painted in vibrating op-art patterns. All along the walls, ink sketches of monsters, clowns and freak-show figures crowd the walls.

Hull, an artist known for fantastical installations crafted from brightly painted wood and found objects, is preparing a carnival attraction that goes on view this Saturday as part of actor Jack Black's comedy show, "[Festival Supreme](#)," at the Shrine Auditorium. The show will feature eight hours of comedy by the likes of Fred Armisen, Margaret Cho, Cheech and Chong, Janeane Garofalo and many others. There will also be DJs, bands and other performances, including a show by Black's own comedy rock band, Tenacious D.

But the pièce de résistance — at least in my art-addled mind — will be the sideshow: the artist-designed theme park, "[Circus of Death](#)," spearheaded by Hull.

"We started with the idea of doing a train ride," says Hull, a painter and sculptor represented by [Rosamund Felsen Gallery](#) in Santa Monica. "And it kind of went from there."

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A preliminary sketch shows how Hull envisioned his artist theme park, with a windmill, an iceberg and a bouncy house in the shape of a church. (Carolina A. Miranda / Los Angeles Times)

Certainly, "Circus of Death" is now way more than a simple train ride. In fact, it contains two small trains running along three hundred feet of track. The trains will loop through an iceberg, a windmill stuffed with monsters and a castle. Along the perimeter, there will be other attractions, all crafted by artists whom Hull knows.

This includes a bouncy house — in the form of a church — by L.A. painter and sculptor [Jim Shaw](#). Artist [Marnie Weber](#) has contributed an array of ghoulish monster costumes that will be inhabited by students from Otis College of Art and Design. [Allison Schulnik](#) has pitched in with some surreal, mind-bendy videos, and performance artist Barry Morse will be dolled up as his tutu-wearing character, Cindy, who also comes in puppet form.

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Steven Hull has been prepping a wild interactive artist-designed theme park for Jack Black's comedy fest, "Festival Supreme." It will contains acts and installations created by a bevy of L.A. artists, including Hull himself.

In addition, there will be marionette shows by the [Bob Baker Marionette Theater](#) and musical performances by Shaw's and Weber's bands. (With the late Mike Kelley, Shaw was a founding member of the punk noise band [Destroy All Monsters](#).)

Pulled together on a tight schedule (in just two and a half months), Hull marvels that somehow the project is almost finished. But he says that this unusual theme-park installation was an opportunity he simply couldn't turn down. Approached by comedian Black, who has supported a number of his artistic endeavors in the past, Hull says "Circus of Death" offered him an opportunity to work on a large scale for a broad public.

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"Nobody gives you a \$150,000 and says, 'Make your art,'" he explains. "Plus, Jack absolutely trusts what I'm going to do. It's really incredible."

The fact that the installation will only live for an afternoon is something that he is totally fine with.

"I did [Glow](#) in Santa Monica last year and it's so crazy to make something like that and have it only last for a day," he says. "But I don't mind it. Plus, I really like making works that aren't for the art world."

Which makes me think: It wouldn't be such a bad idea to repurpose this wild piece somewhere in the confines of some cavernous gallery space. The Museum of Contemporary Art has all of that empty square footage at its Little Tokyo location. Might not be a bad idea to invite the circus in ...

["Circus of Death"](#) will be on view this Saturday from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. as part of [Festival Supreme](#) at the Shrine Auditorium, 649 W. Jefferson Blvd., University Park, Los Angeles, [shrineauditorium.com](#) and [festivalsupreme.com](#). Tickets start at \$99.