

A world of
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his own.

Till Nowak
Los Angeles,
California

Filmmaker, concept artist





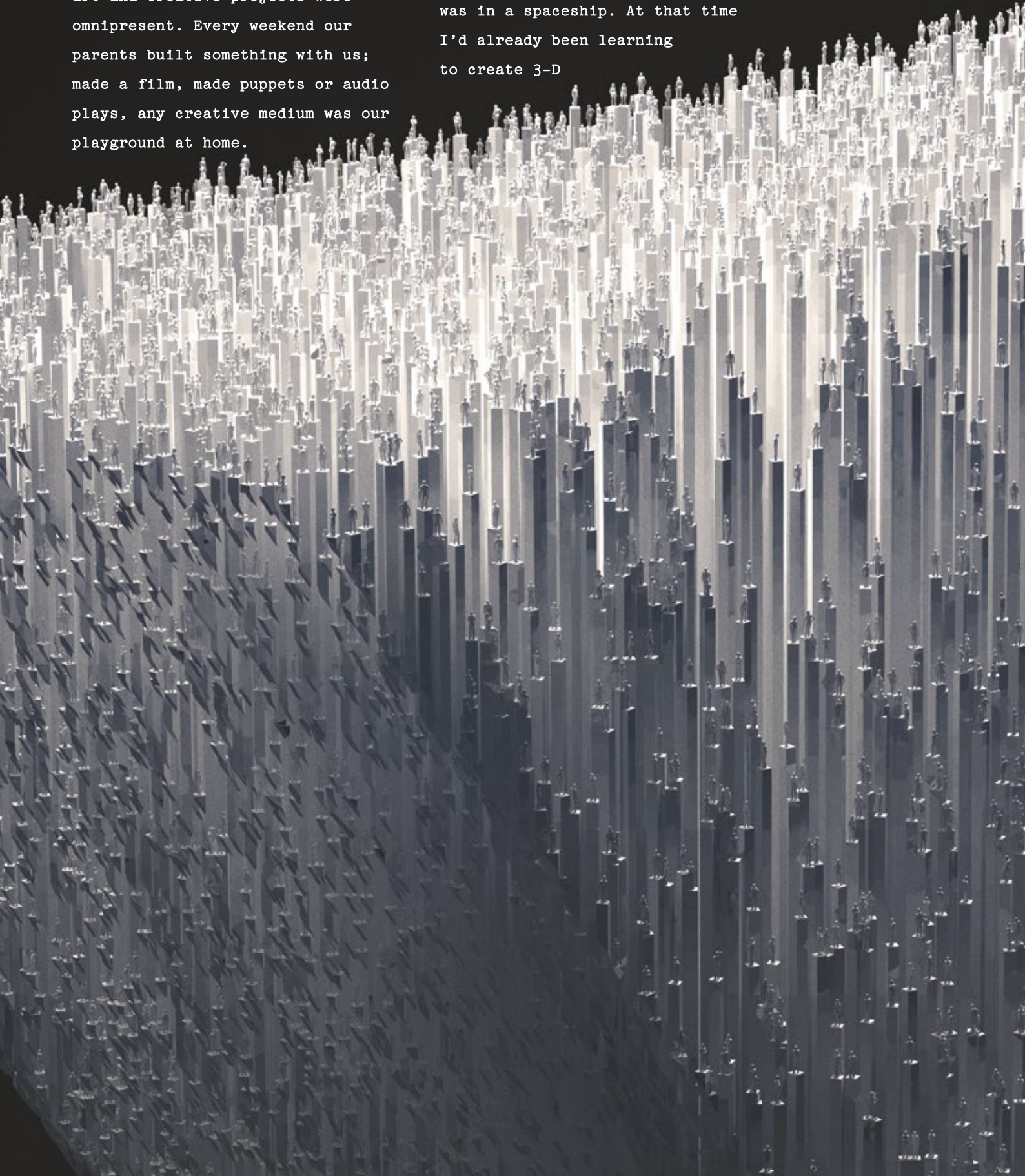
Been Magazine has thus far dealt largely with reality so I thought I'd introduce you to Till Nowak, an exceptional filmmaker and concept artist that specializes in exactly the opposite of reality.

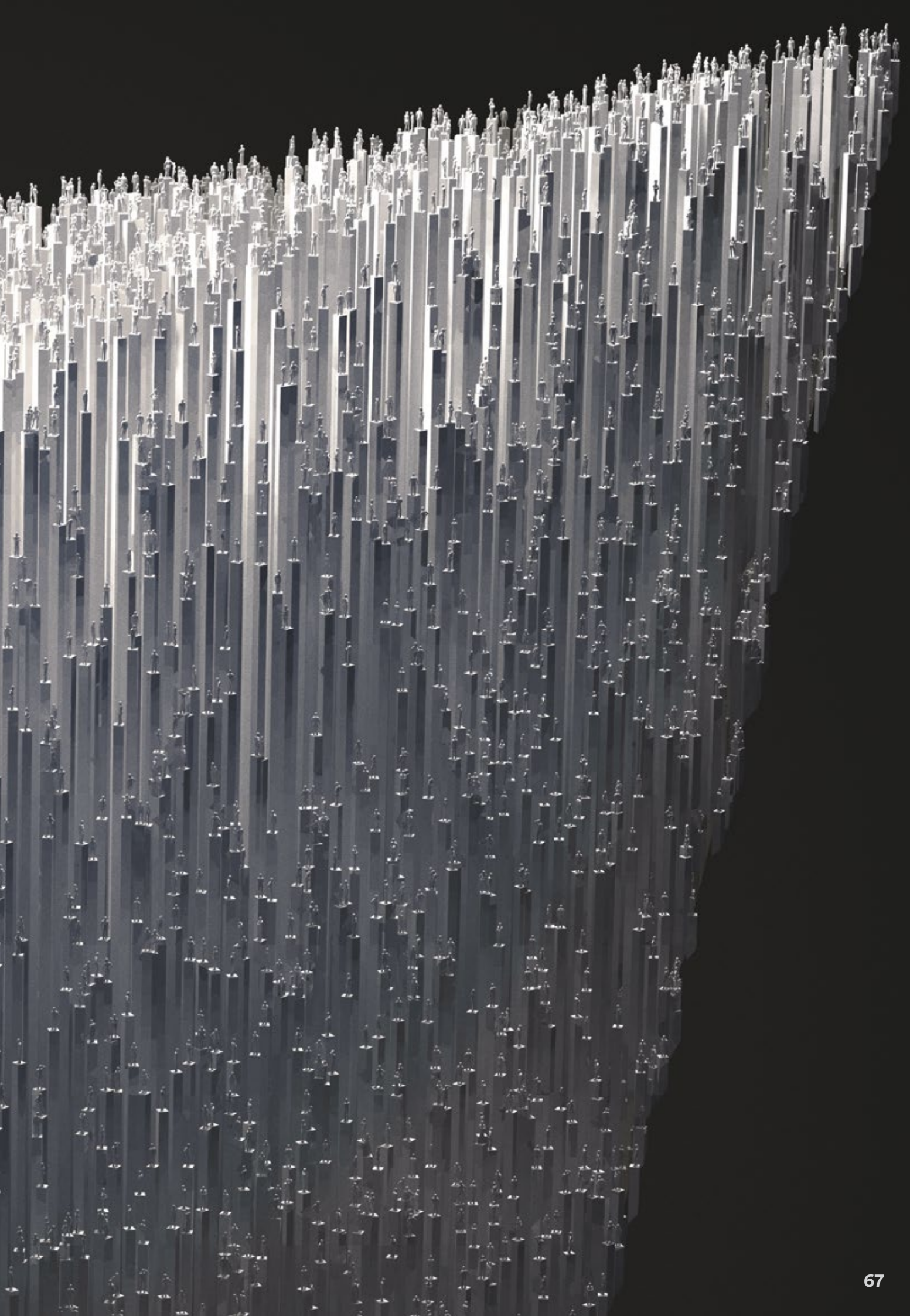
Clips from some of Till Nowak's surreal short films have been viewed by hundreds of millions of people, going viral all over the world, and developing a life of their own. He's worked as a concept artist on Hollywood blockbusters including *Guardians Of The Galaxy 2* (Marvel Studios, 2017), *Black Panther* (Marvel Studios, 2018) and *The Lion King* (Disney, 2019) and received numerous awards for his work at film festivals all over the world. Reality, in his short film projects, is the illusion. He constantly challenges the limits of what computer graphics can do not just technically, but how it can alter reality and change our perceptions in incredible and unexpected ways.

Growing up in Mainz, Germany, Till set up his first company before he even graduating high school.

“I grew up in a family where art and creative projects were omnipresent. Every weekend our parents built something with us; made a film, made puppets or audio plays, any creative medium was our playground at home.

By the time I went to high school, I was obsessed with creating music, my room was equipped with so many synthesizers and knobs and buttons and blinking lights, I felt like I was in a spaceship. At that time I'd already been learning to create 3-D





graphics on my computer, and in breaks when I worked with a band at a recording studio, I would practice my 3-D modeling. A fellow musician who also worked at Germany's largest TV station in Mainz saw my work and asked if I could do some 3-D work for the TV station. That's how myself and friend Tobias Hofer became among the first to bring 3-D into mainstream television. It was a wild adventure. CGI was still rather new then (late 90s), I was going to school and in the breaks managing the jobs and working through the nights and weekends to deliver the work, living a total double life. For our first job we were paid about 30,000 Marks, which was an absolute fortune, it was more money than we'd ever seen before. With that, we bought a couple of computers and started our studio, Framebox.

I finished school, continued the business, and went into studying media design, to learn more about the field. During that time I realized that growing our work into a production company would mean more management and less art so I decided not to develop a growing company but instead focus on projects where I could be the artist. That aligned with my huge love for film. It's where I wanted to play and gave me flexibility and freedom."



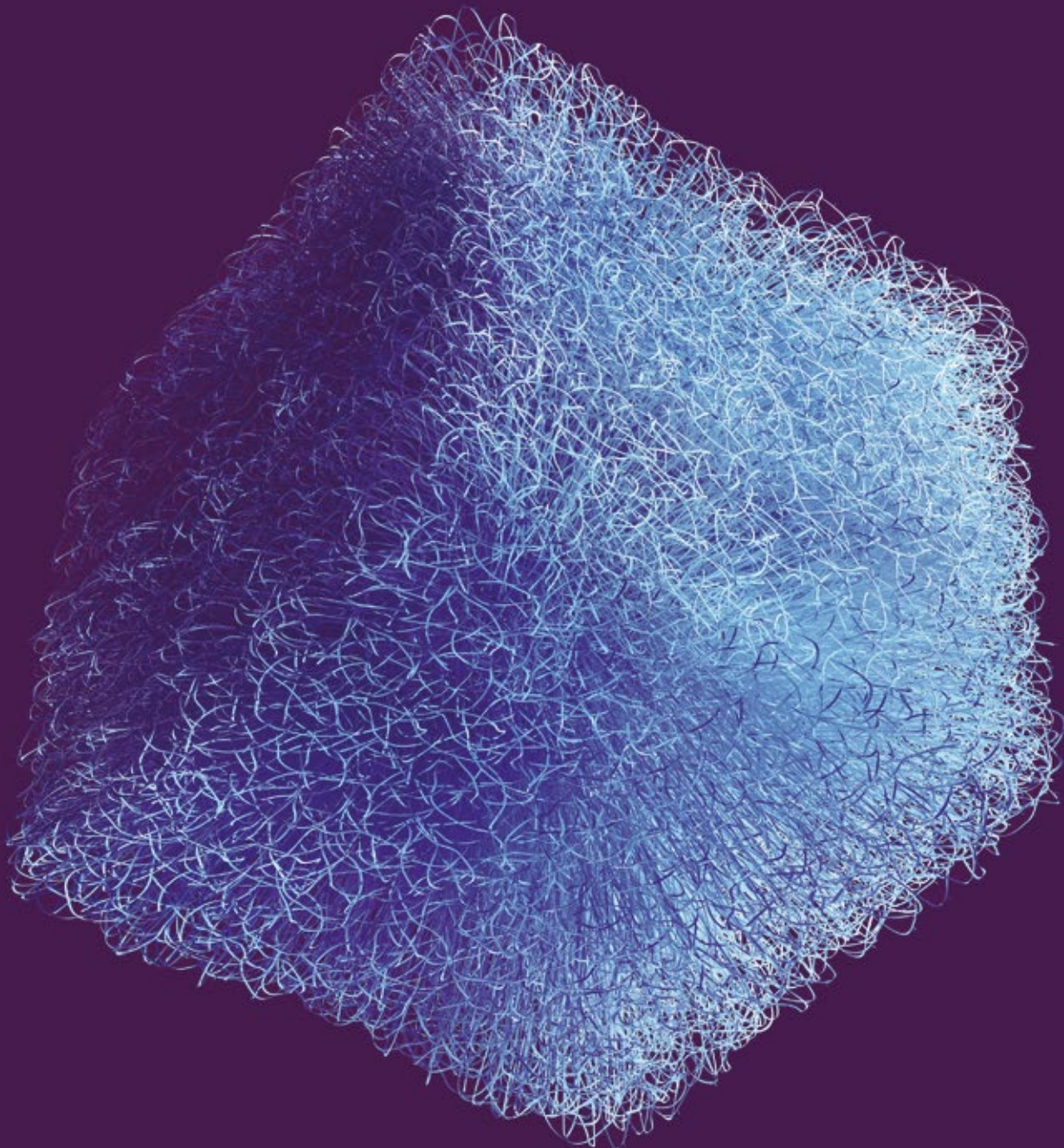


Despite continuous developments in technology and 3-D software, Till made a conscious decision to stick with art over business.

“Some artists are always on the hunt for the newest tools, and I have been the opposite, sticking with a very basic suite of software because having used it for so long, it’s like muscle memory for me, I don’t have to think about my moves, it’s like a direct link from my brain to the computer, it comes so fast. When you look at a professional table tennis player, you can hardly see the ball. And that kind of proficiency is what you get when you use only the same toolset for over 20 years and that’s where I draw my artistic expression from; the freedom that you get when you can use your tools as fluently as your native language.

I don’t aim for a specific look, but people tell me that I have a signature style and that’s confirmation for me that I’ve managed to make it not about the technology.

In my early years I did a lot of exploration to make things photorealistic, during a time when people were quite excited about photorealistic CGI. But once I’d achieved that, it wasn’t interesting any more so I learned early on that it’s all about the concept and not the technology.



I'm happy and I've reached my goal when the emotional impact is there or the composition or rhythm is there, regardless of technical finesse or realism."

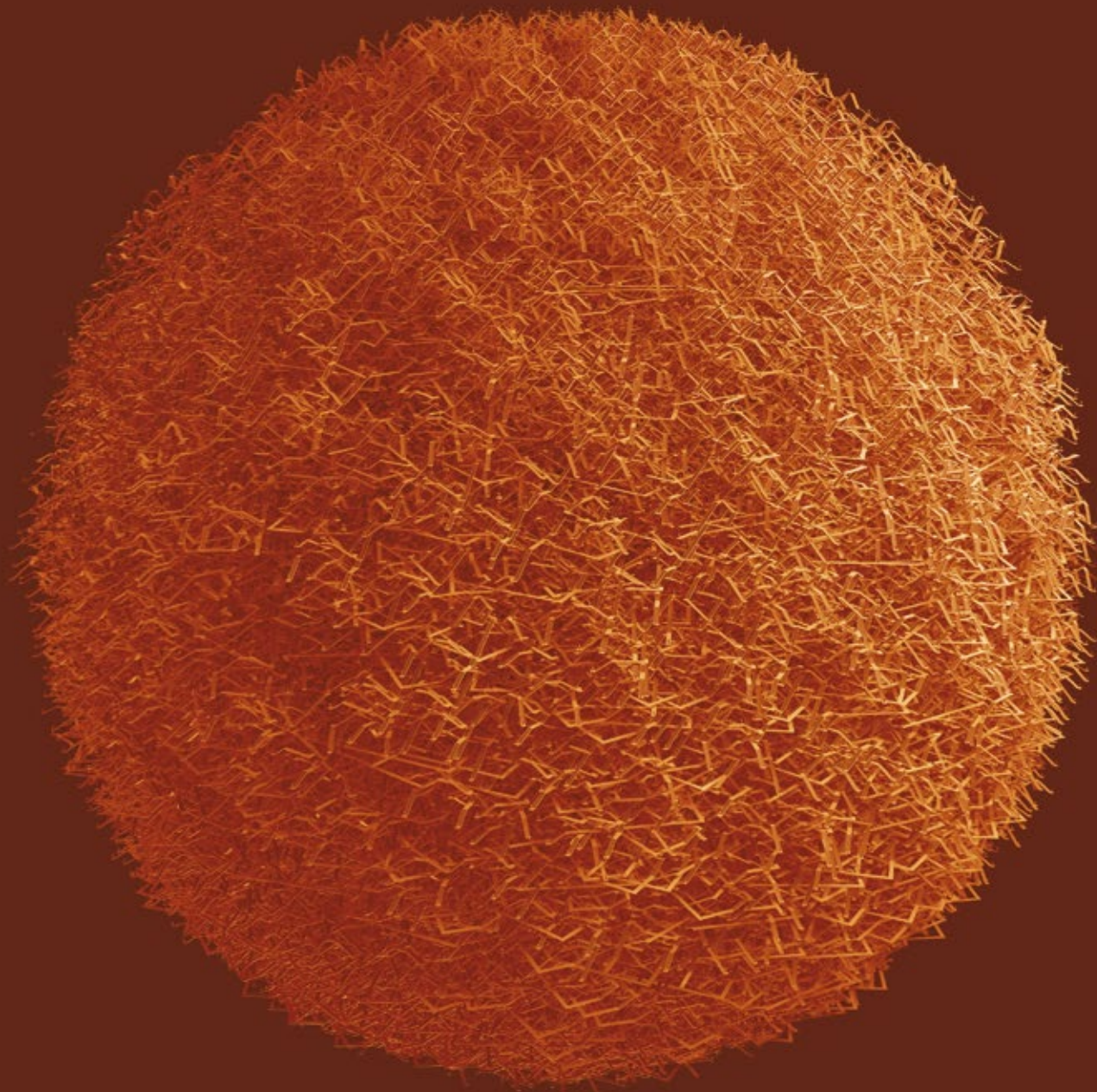
One of the most impactful parts of his work is how he constantly delivers the unexpected with surreal, mind-bending, gravity and logic defying sequences.

"The 'unexpected' is one of the core elements in my

short film work. It is so gratifying to create something that was previously only in my mind – not just imagining it, but becoming a spectator of my own work. If that experience feels like I imagined it, it's very satisfying."

Till is passionate about living and working in Hollywood, the achievement of his childhood dreams, but sometimes the reality of Hollywood, the





way things often work there, isn't something Till wants to conform to. Pitching concepts in Hollywood often requires presenting in a 'this-film meets-that-film' sort of method, and for Till, that's simply not his way. It's not interesting to him, to reference the known, he rather reaches for the unknown. Despite high levels of interest in his creating or directing features, he remains committed to doing things his way, at his pace. He currently focuses on his

work as a concept artist on some of Hollywood's biggest blockbusters.

"As a concept artist, I design the worlds, which either the visual effects department builds and details or the construction department builds physically as a set. Seeing my concept work getting built on a stage is where my childhood dream comes to fruition. When I walk over the set of a giant spaceship built out of my original concept, I feel like I am where I wanted to be in life."



“Working on Jon Favreau’s remake of *The Lion King* had a huge impact on me, it drew me into the world of virtual reality (VR). Since I was a kid, I’ve known about VR, but was never really convinced by it. On *The Lion King*, The director, myself and the cinematographer simultaneously entered the world I built in VR. We went into my computer, and I could

walk with them through my set, make real time changes to the landscape and see the results as I made them. That way of working blew my mind, I’m totally hooked. It feels like a true revolution, not so much the goggles or the VR but the real time rendering and editing of worlds using game engines.”



His short film *The Centrifuge Brain Project* premiered in 2011, and achieved dozens of awards and accolades from film festivals all over the world. The film gained lots of attention from Hollywood as well, but what happened after its premiere, was astounding. *The Centrifuge Brain Project* was inspired by a ‘documentary’ called

Dark Side Of The Moon, purportedly about the story of Stanley Kubrick faking the 1969 moon landing. What fascinated Till about that work was that the documentary first traps the viewer into believing their story then, while watching, the story is reversed and explains how the audience were fooled. He took that concept a step further.



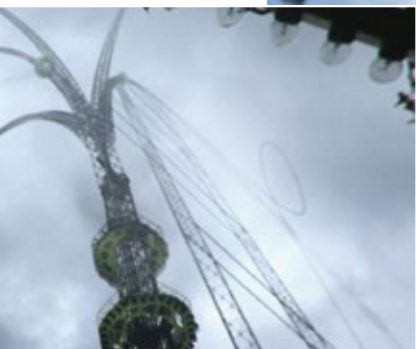


Still from "Dissonance," 2015.



Still frames from the short film "Extraction," 2020.

Still frames from the short film "The Centrifuge Brain Project," 2011, starring Leslie Barany.





Still from an animated sequence for the feature film "Girl on Ice," 2015.



Still from "Jump," 2008.

Still from "Sus," 2011.





Still from the music video "Think Big" for Deichkind, 2015.

"In 2008, I was standing in front of a huge amusement ride and spontaneously took out my camera. I recorded this huge carousel and while doing this I repeatedly panned the camera towards the empty sky above, seeing in my mind's eye the digital extensions that I would fill it with."

"The Centrifuge Brain Project started with a lie and slowly built that lie up to a point where nobody could believe it anymore, revealing itself while you watched. The shocking thing is how many people believed it. Today, nine years after I made it, not a day goes by without some comment being made either via YouTube or social media or email from people who believe it, endlessly discussing whether or not it is real. Truth is much more fragile than I thought. The film has reached millions of people all over the world. Pirated edits, without credit, narration or context have been seen by about half a billion. That viral wave continued all through Hollywood, it seemed like my work arrived on every desk. It was an amazing

response. All short film makers wait for exactly that to happen. But it came at a time when we had our first baby. I had the opportunity to jump on the hype train towards directing my own feature films, but somehow I didn't go the obvious path. It's a lot to do with freedom. I like to know that I have freedom to go wherever I want or do what I want without being locked into a certain path or project for too long."

Till is credited on dozens of Hollywood films. He has more of these in the works in 2020 as well as continuing to explore his own imagination developing short film concepts in the limited time he can find between film work and time with his young family in Los Angeles.