

# CALENDAR

Friday, August 1, 2003

## AROUND THE GALLERIES



L.A. Louver Gallery

**CURVES:** Frederick Hammersley's "Goal Rush" is one of three paintings on exhibit that includes elaborate shaded passages.

## Winding through a landscape of gems

By DAVID PAGEL  
Special to The Times

Born in 1919, Frederick Hammersley is in the twilight of his career. But there's nothing melancholic about his new paintings, four of which cap a gem of an exhibition at L.A. Louver Gallery. They're among his most joyously complicated works.

The judicious little survey features 15 oils on wood, Masonite and linen that Hammersley has made over the last 40 years (since 1968, he has lived in Albuquerque, N.M.). All are modestly scaled or smaller. Most are set in simple wood frames that were designed, carved and stained by the artist.

Not a single straight line is to be found among the sinuous

curves and loopy doodles that make up the crisp contours of Hammersley's abstract shapes. Imagine a jigsaw puzzle whose individual pieces have been painted solid colors. The paintings resemble magnified close-ups of such pieced-together setups, their indescribable shapes interlocking to form lively wholes.

The three largest works date from the early 1960s. Their horizontal format makes them look like landscapes, as does their earthy palette. Painted with palette knives, not brushes, their surfaces have the chiseled solidity of real substances such as dirt, sand and gravel.

Even the sky seems palpable in these taut paintings. Their basic forms recall Arthur Dove's abstract landscapes, in which he compresses nature's vastness into tight spaces.

The next six works are from the 1980s. To make these page-size pieces, Hammersley used a brush, which made for juicier, more fluid surfaces. He also keyed up his colors to include super-saturated eggplant, screaming tangerine and bubble-gum pink. These eye-popping tones contrast dramatically with a rich range of grays, browns and taupes.

The two paintings from the 1990s are the first in which Hammersley adds a multihued section to his otherwise single-color components. In "City Limits," he blends lavender and lemon yellow into the opposite edges of a creamy white blob, suggesting a cross between a rainbow and a dish of Neapolitan ice cream. In "Pleasant Tense," he gets bolder, blending an even hotter yellow into a gray shape as well as a white one. This jazzy abstraction looks as if it's the pint-sized offspring of works by Henri Matisse and Stuart Davis.

The final four paintings, finished over the last two years, show Hammersley to be at the top of his game. With great panache, "Option Open" plays the three primary colors (red, blue and yellow) against their complements (green, orange and purple). To complicate the vi-

brant composition, Hammersley tosses a peck of pink right in the middle.

"Even Steven," "Goal Rush" and "On Time" include even more elaborately shaded passages. This puts more space into the picture, suggesting that Hammersley has folded several light sources into his multi-planed works. But he also juxtaposes relatively large black and white shapes, providing stark contrasts that flatten space.

Less like brightly colored jigsaw puzzles than rainbows tied in knots, Hammersley's idiosyncratic paintings pack loads of satisfying surprises into very small spaces. This is one of the most beautiful shows of the year.

**L.A. Louver Gallery**, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through Aug. 30. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

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