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Rearranging Abstraction in Frederick Hammersley's Cut-Ups

A new exhibition at the [L.A. Louver](#) remembers the work of [Frederick Hammersley](#), an artist whose influential work has gone largely unrecognized. A longtime West Coast painter, Hammersley created art that was ahead of its time; going against the curve of gestural, lyrical, and painterly Abstract Expressionism, he embraced a cool, formalist, but exciting hard-edge style of painting. His use of color and form was revolutionary, and his interest in experimentation was unique. In "[Frederick Hammersley: Organics and Cut-Ups, 1963 – 1965](#)," a number of works are shown that elucidate his many references and influences.



Frederick Hammersley, *Bertha*, 1965, L.A. Louver

In his "Cut-Ups," Hammersley used a technique similar to that of the artist and writer duo William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin. Hammersley's work evolved from collage and developed into a process of cutting a finished painting into square pieces and rearranging them to form a new composition. Half of the known "Cut-Ups" are included in this exhibition. In *Bertha* (1965), an oil painting on chip board, Hammersley has cut a purple, lime green, sky blue, and apricot-colored composition into 20 uniformly sized squares and rearranged them to form a new composition. His organic forms become sharpened by the imposition of square edges and the resulting compositions are jumbled like unsolved puzzles. In *Bernice* (1965), the composition, while significantly recomposed, ends up being nonetheless classically pleasing, similar to a vertical landscape or a genre scene.

In works from Hammersley's "Organics" series, such as *Lesson one* (1965), with its vortex-like composition, or *Earth bound* (1963), the artist experiments with rounded, rolling forms and rich, naturalistic colors. In *Family affair* (1964), Hammersley uses



Frederick Hammersley, *Bernice*, 1965, L.A. Louver

mineral blue and yellow, soil-like browns, and deep mauve, sometimes switching from one color to another as forms overlap and intersect. Along with other artists in Los Angeles and other parts of California, Hammersley helped to remake American abstraction, and aided in a reappraisal of California, from a provincial outpost to an art world capital.

—Stephen Dillon

“Frederick Hammersley: Organics and Cut Ups” is on view at L.A. Louver through October 18, 2014.