

Around The Galleries

A joyful geometry at work

David Pagel

Joy is one of those things that you have to experience for yourself. Reading about someone else's just doesn't cut it. And trying to tell people when and where to experience joy is humorously futile: It's simply impossible to persuade people to be joyous.

Fortunately, art goes far beyond persuasion — and way beyond rational explanation — especially when it's as lovely and loaded as Frederick Hammersley's. At L.A. Louver, Hammersley's first solo show in Los Angeles since his death in 2009 at 90, shows the mildly reclusive artist at his best: spreading joy by treating it as a gift — a surprise that comes unexpectedly, unbidden and through no power of one's own.

Such sensible humility is out of step with the me-first assertiveness that defines our times. But it's pure Hammersley. In 1968, he got a job teaching at the University of New Mexico and moved from Los Angeles to Albuquerque. Three years later he resigned. The solitude of the Southwest suited him and he stayed in Albuquerque, transforming his little home into a one-man workshop, with rooms dedicated to sketching, painting, reading, frame-building and record-keeping. For decades he painted in near anonymity.

His oils on canvas, many in hand-carved frames, are homemade and humble, each a smattering of intensely colored shapes curiously snuggled together or set side by side, their geometric perfection complicated — but not contradicted — by the slippery asymmetry of their patterning, which is punchy and funky and animated by participatory rhythms.



Frederick Hammersley
Growing game, #1 1958
oil on canvas
framed: 42 7/8 x 33 in (108.9 x 83.8 cm)



Frederick Hammersley
Betwain, #1 1973
oil on linen
44 x 44 in (111.8 x 111.8 cm)

Right now, the three downstairs galleries that house the 24 paintings and 13 lithographs Hammersley made from 1950 to 1991 just might be the most beautiful rooms in all of Los Angeles. But that is something you have to see for yourself. Hammersley wouldn't have it any other way.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through May 12.
Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouer.com