

## ART REVIEW

# Taking on the computer age

BY DAVID PAGEL



Frederick Hammersley, *Scallop Potatoes*, 1969 computer drawing / print on paper, 11 x 14 3/4 in. (27.9 x 37.5)

Upstairs at L.A. Louver “Frederick Hammersley: The Computer Drawings, 1969” takes visitors back to a moment when the great American painter was not yet a great American painter.

In fact, Hammersley (1919-2009) was stumped. He had just moved from Los Angeles to Albuquerque for a teaching job and, as he says in the valuable little catalog that accompanies the awesome little exhibition, “This happened to coincide with a time in which I had painted myself out, so I welcomed this new experience [of taking a computer class].”

Over the course of a year Hammersley made a series of 72 computer-printed images and a good number of offshoots and oddballs. The format forced him to be extremely efficient. It gave him plenty to mull over, in terms of shading and structure, variation and sameness, deliberation and discovery.

And it led, quickly, to some of the best paintings he would make, bold black-and-white compositions that twist, often deliciously, a viewer’s desire for visual symmetry and conceptual coherence into a geometric pretzel that’s hard to get your mind around without a smile breaking out on your face. One of these, “Back and white #2” (1971), is displayed alongside 51 page-size drawings.

Hammersley’s drawings show an inventive mind having a blast as it turns simple grids of letters, numerals and punctuation marks into eccentric compositions that are a pleasure to look at – as fresh with insight and surprising delight as the moment they were made.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through Feb. 23. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.lalouver.com](http://www.lalouver.com)

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