

## Los Angeles Times

# Review Frederick Hammersley at L.A. Louver: There's more than meets the eye

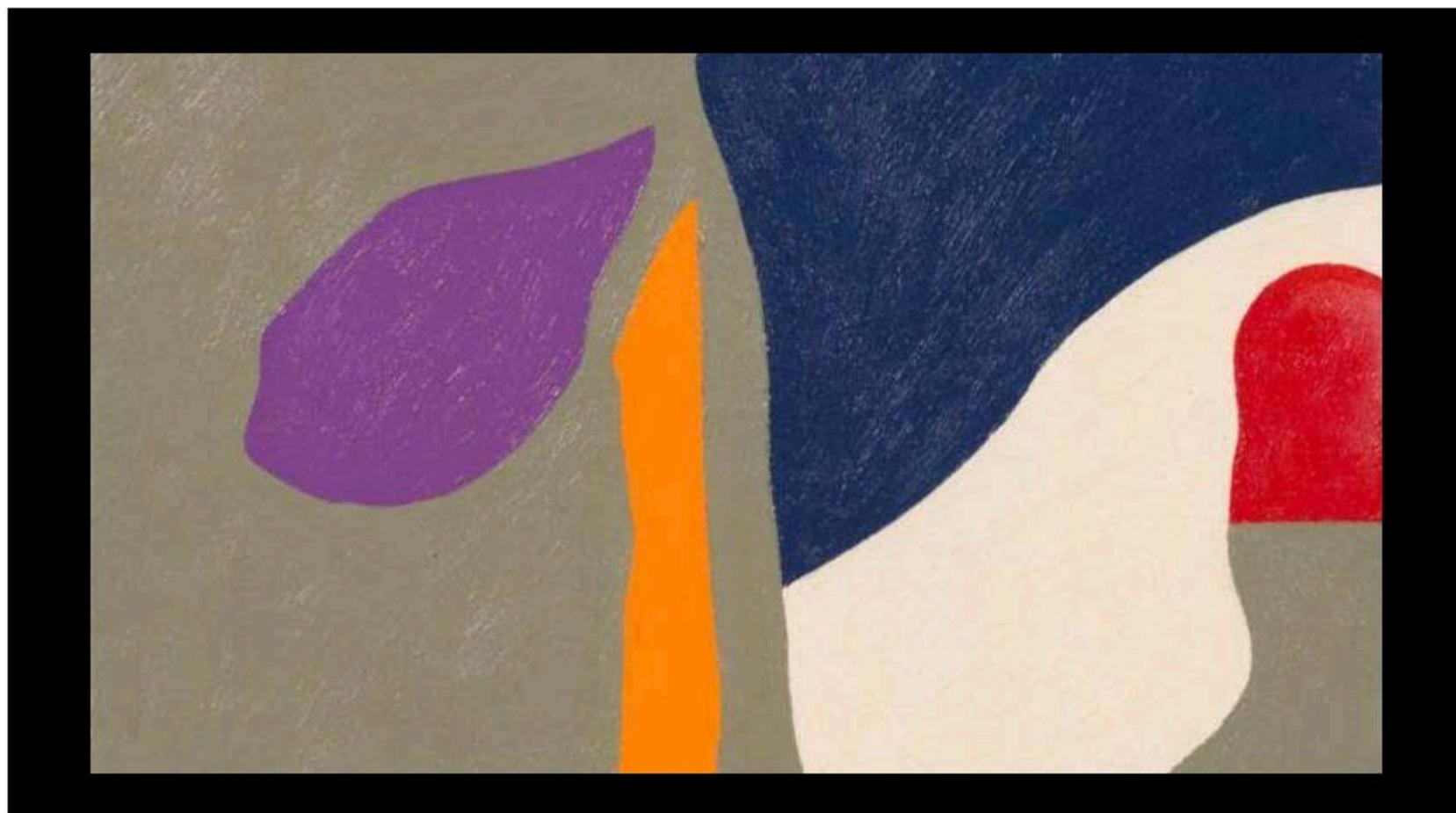
By **David Pagel**

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**I**f you're familiar with the paintings of Frederick Hammersley, you'll be thrilled to see this beautifully installed survey at the Venice gallery L.A. Louver.

And if you're new to the art of Hammersley (1919-2009), then you're in for an even bigger treat.

The installation of 98 works that Hammersley made from 1937 to 1991 provides an eye-opening introduction to the two bodies of work for which he is revered: his organic and geometric abstractions.



Detail from Frederick Hammersley's "Money From Home," 1986. (L.A. Louver)



Frederick Hammersley's "Before + After," 1964, oil on chipboard panel in artist-made frame, 26 inches by 30 inches (L.A. Louver)



Frederick Hammersley's "Dark and Like," 1977, oil on linen, 39 inches by 39 inches (L.A. Louver)

Fantastic examples of each stop you and make you wonder how Hammersley could do so much with so little, transforming snugly abutted blobs and eccentrically interlocked slabs of supersaturated color into odd compositions abuzz with befuddling possibilities.

Paintings such as "Family Tree" (1991), "Money From Home" (1986), "Altered Ego"

(1971) and “Pre Prayed” (1981) make a virtue of illogic while making a case for humility, hard work and the secret pleasures of anonymity. Both meticulous and whimsical, Hammersley’s paintings push past conventional thought patterns to get us to see the world differently.

The show does something similar. Rather than zeroing in on Hammersley’s masterpieces, the exhibition features an abundance of what are usually thought of as minor works: sketches, studies, watercolors, collages, photographs and more.



In Hammersley's hands, such explorations are anything but secondary. They go to the heart of what he does as an artist: to pinpoint, in seemingly incidental details, the silent beauty of the world. The work is magnificently intimate.

In the first gallery, nine tiny lithographs — each measuring 3 inches square, each in its own handmade frame, and all from 1949 or 1950 — combine the dissonance of collage with the harmony of resolved compositions. Hammersley marries disparate elements by finding confluences and building them into spunky patterns.



Frederick Hammersley's "Cut Up," 1964, oil on chipboard panel in artist-made frame, 21.25 inches by x 21.25 inches (L.A. Louver)

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To make “Cut Up” (1964) and “Bernice” (1965) he sawed a modestly scaled painting into equally sized squares and then rearranged them into a new composition. By collapsing two ways of organizing a painting onto a single surface, Hammersley opens up possibilities not even he anticipated.

The freedom to go beneath superficial appearances and to find deeper structures and rhythms shape all of Hammersley’s works, which include 24 drawings made with a dot-matrix printer in 1969-70, a small number of lithographs from the 1980s, three black-and-white photographs from the 1940s, three from the 1970s and all manner of sketchbook studies.

There’s more to everything than immediately meets the eye. the works’ pleasures are all about how we see and know, not what we think we do.

*L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Los Angeles. Through June 24; closed Sundays and Mondays. (310) 822-4955, [www.lalouer.com](http://www.lalouer.com).*



"First Still Life (Ft. Hall, Idaho)," 1937, oil on upson board in artist-made frame, 19.5 inches by 15.5 inches (L.A. Louver)



The full image of Frederick Hammersley's "Money From Home," 1986, oil on rag paper on linen on wood in artist-made frame, 10.75 inches by 13.75 inches (L.A. Louver)