

CALENDAR

ART PICK OF THE WEEK

POEM MAKERS

Back in the late 1950s, the last time art got people all hot under the collar because of its supposedly salacious content, there wasn't any NEA for the bluestockings to beat on. They just called out the vice squad and closed down the show. That's what happened to Wallace Berman's one-person exhibit at Ferus. The irony was, it wasn't even Berman's work that got his ass busted; it was a drawing of a nude by a woman named Cameron, reproduced in Berman's limited-edition, unbound grab bag of a literary-art magazine called *Semina*. *Semina*, which appeared several more times before Berman packed it in and gave his full attention to his assemblages and pioneering Verifax (proto-Xerox) collages, brimmed with such provocative material, whether drawn, photographed or written — that is, whether photo-reproduced or set in linotype. Berman didn't sell this ad hoc Beat-era publication in bookstores; he sent the sheafs of pictures and poems to his friends. It was Mail-Art — and Artists' Books — *avant la lettre*, and it was, at least often,

wonderful stuff. A look back at *Semina* now, with its contributions by everybody from Michael McClure to Charles Bukowski, William Burroughs to David Meltzer, John Altoon to Walter Hopps, isn't simply a stroll down memory lane with a bunch of early counter-culturalists; it's a bouquet of little gems, the contributions of the now-obscure names glittering as brightly as those of the now-famous. To celebrate its publication of a facsimile version of the nine *Seminas*, L.A. Louver has not only put the facsimile on exhibit, but surrounded it with an exhibit of Berman's work, as well as that of friends and collaborators George Herms and Jess (Collins) — all wonderful, powerful, magical manipulators of the found object and image. A further treat is the additional display of non-*Semina* postcards, photos and ephemera documenting Berman's all-too-brief artistic life, borrowed by the gallery from the Archives of American Art. At L.A. Louver, 55 N. Venice Blvd. and 77 Market St., Venice; thru July 11. Michael McClure and David Meltzer will read, and films by Berman, Stan Brakhage and Larry Jordan will be screened, at Beyond Baroque, 681 Venice Blvd., Venice; Fri., June 26, 8:30 p.m.; \$6; \$3 members, students & seniors. (310) 822-3006. See also Poem.



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—Peter Frank