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## **CARL RAMSEY AND VIVA HOFFMANN SHOW BRAND NEW WORK AT THE ART WALK**

by Brianna Radford

Bert Green Fine Art Gallery Presents Viva Hoffman and Carl Ramsey

Bound simply by their realistic painting styles, the two artists showing Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at the Bert Green Fine Art Gallery provide two very different stories. Carl Ramsey, who has shown at this gallery before, fills his solo show with images of downtown Los Angeles life. Viva Hoffmann, most recognized for her days with Warhol, takes an exciting step away from her well-known landscapes to reveal a new body of stunning icons.

Ramsey's previous work at the Bert Green Fine Art Gallery received such positive feedback that he was asked to create a new body of work for a solo show. The pieces shown this Thursday continue in the same vein of his previous paintings. "Carl lived in the neighborhood for many years and painted the neighborhood", said Green.

Along with the painted Los Angeles life, Ramsey will show a series of 14 8x10 paintings entitled "Women of Skid Row". While his other paintings are intriguing, these images are captivating. They will be arranged together all on one wall as only a small part of the show, but take time in front of them to appreciate what they offer. In essence they are, "giving these women an opportunity to provide a certain amount of dignity for themselves that they might otherwise be denied," Green explains.

Sharing the Gallery with Ramsey is Viva Hoffmann with her landscapes and delectable icons. When Green first saw Viva's work in Palm Springs she had mostly Californian landscapes and only one icon painting.

"It was not the landscapes I was interested in, it was the icon paintings. However, the landscapes are very good. There's no reason not to have some continuity between what some of her previous collectors expect of her and what she's doing now," says Green. Viva's new icons provide a visual meal. Each piece could be looked at for any great length, the viewer unpacking one symbol after another.

The sheer size of the paintings creates in the viewer a sense of awe that traditionally surrounds holy icons. The heavy-handed imagery is handled beautifully, sometimes playfully. The self-portrait nature of the paintings doesn't ring so personal to Viva that the viewer becomes excluded from the piece. In all honesty, it is those personal musings from a very public life that breathe vibrancy into the images. Green muses that they are "A reconciliation between the amazing things she's done in her life and where she is right now."

So Thursday night, have a bite with friends, gallery hop galore, but also set aside some time to take a really good look at what Bert Green Fine Art Gallery has put up for you to drink in!

Bert Green Fine Art 102 W 5th Street

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## Viva, Viva!

Viva Hoffmann. A Thousand Islands Painter

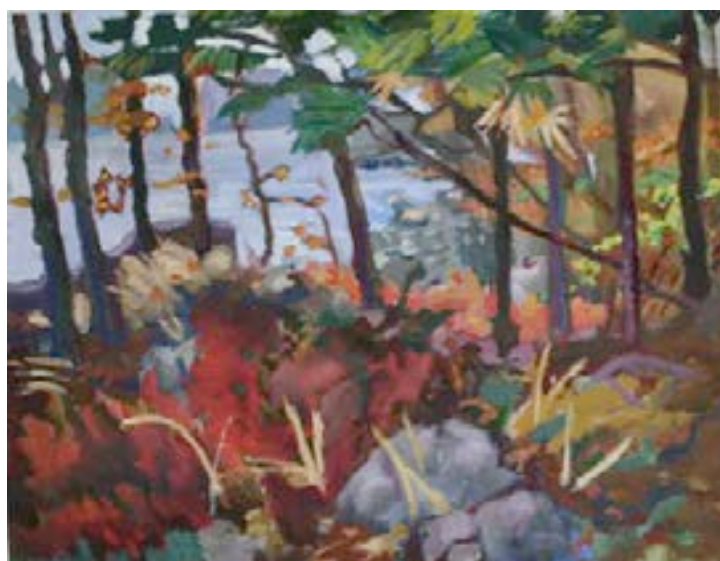
by **Paul Malo**

A special thank you to Judy Wellman, Paul Malo's dear wife and special partner in life. Judy found this article that Paul wrote shortly before he died in July. We are fortunate to have this piece as a reminder of Paul's appreciation for those who love the Thousand Islands. (S.W. Smith editor)

Collectors of Viva Hoffmann's work are a rarified group these days, when her work is rarely shown or seen—although she continues to paint. I had no idea that one of the area's fine builders, Steve Taylor, was a connoisseur of painting, but was visiting his office on business, when I turned around and practically was bowled over: on a wall hung a huge canvas, gripping in its intensity and vigor. "What is this?" I asked incredulously, learning to my surprise that it was a river landscape by Viva Hoffmann. I learned that many of her paintings have been collected in the area and with Steve's and Viva's help we were able to locate several fine examples.



Pine Island & Muskrat © Viva Hoffmann



Swiftwater Point © Viva Hoffmann

Although we have had many fine painters on the river, my instant reaction: "Here is the best

painter the region has ever seen, doing landscapes of our favored place, and no one is aware that this is happening." I resolved then and there to correct this unfortunate situation, thinking initially of a show, but we have few galleries large enough (or perhaps sufficiently sophisticated) for this purpose. Viva represents the New York School of Abstract Expressionists, a movement that waned when supplanted by (ironically) Andy Warhol and his school of pop art, although Viva was a member of the Warhol "factory."



Snake Island (#2) © Viva Hoffmann

I suppose I was primed to be receptive, since I had worked with painters at Syracuse University, had collected abstract expressionist paintings myself and was familiar with abstract expressionism—familiar and sympathetic. We painting buffs had long discussions about painting trends, and intense discussions of Harold Rosenberg's and Clement Greenberg's nuanced critical essays about the New York scene. Viva was not really part of that scene at the time; she had not yet been taken in by Andy Warhol. And recognition on the New York scene required patronage of some dealer or other prominent figure of the hour. Perhaps the painter closest to Viva and her work was Helen Frankenthaler, whose dynamic "action paintings" were much discussed in the aspect of gender—was it "feminine" for young women to be wielding such large brushes, slathering paint on such large canvases? At the time, some critics thought that women's paintings should look demure.

Viva certainly is not demure, and had her paintings been more visible back in the 1980s, her star might have risen along with Helen Frankenthaler's.



Flame Tree – Santa Monica © Viva Hoffmann

Since the New York School is now, alas, history, here is a good capsule definition of “abstract expressionism”:

A painting movement in which artists typically applied paint rapidly, and with force to their huge canvases in an effort to show feelings and emotions, painting gesturally, non-geometrically, sometimes applying paint with large brushes, sometimes dripping or even throwing it onto canvas. Their work is characterized by a strong dependence on what appears to be accident and chance, but which is actually highly planned. Some Abstract Expressionist artists were concerned with adopting a peaceful and mystical approach to a purely abstract image. Usually there was no effort to represent subject matter. Not all work was abstract, nor was all work expressive, but it was generally believed that the spontaneity of the artists' approach to their work would draw from and release the creativity of their unconscious minds. The expressive method of painting was often considered as important as the painting itself. <http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/a/abstractexpr.html>

Indeed, this sort of painting is “expressive” or it is nothing. The intent is to ‘freeze” a moment on canvas—and certainly this is “impressionist” in intent. Put another way, the concern is less to portray some subject but more to portray the process of painting itself. Painterly improvisation recalls jazz. Decisions must be split-second—going back and reworking would flaw the spontaneous honesty of the expression.



Two Willows © Viva Hoffmann

Here is another good, short definition of "action painting":

In Action Painting the canvas is the arena in which the artist acts. The action of painting becomes a moment in the biography of the artist -- the canvas becomes the index (record) of the event.



Water Lilies © Viva Hoffmann

This may sound esoteric, but is really no more so than thinking of recording a session of jazz improvisation, which is the record of an event. Much of the value inheres less in the form of the product as a musical number than that in the intensity and vigor of the process—whether it rises to the level of attaining its singular “groove.”

Viva usually finds her groove—and it may not be too cute to call the work “groovy.” It is improvisational, and jazzy.



Goose Island © Viva Hoffmann

"Goose Island" a painting from late last summer: Look at that water! It's musical, and "painterly." It's been said that there are two kinds of painters, the draftsman-like and the painterly. The late Hans Junga was draftsman-like (as is Michael Ringer) whereas Viva is a "broad brush" painter who attacks the canvas directly. No blocking out the composition with a pencil drawing for her. No reworking. Make the mark and let it stand. Live with it—let the next mark relate to it—this is improvisational painting.

Viva is essentially an impressionist painter, working in the landscape tradition of Monet. Similarly she paints in plein aire (open air, outdoors, not in the studio from sketches or photographs); she is inspired not merely by the visual scene, but by the whole environmental quality—breeze, smell, the total river ambiance, which she tries to capture.



Poppies © Viva Hoffmann

The “action painting” approach assures a liveliness to the image, which really records “action”. The picture is not a rendering of something, like a typical Ringer canvas—where the intent seems more to record a scene with realism. Rather, Viva’s paintings seem alive, pulsating with her jazzy brush strokes. They are not mere pictures of attractive subjects—they are live music.