

Gleason, Mat, "George Herms", ARTSCENECAL, March 2005.

GEORGE HERMS

March 5 - May 14, 2005 at [Santa Monica Museum of Art](#), Santa Monica
March 10 - May 7, 2005 at [Tobey C. Moss Gallery](#), West Hollywood

by Mat Gleason

George Herms is on the verge of being trendy. This is perhaps the seventh time in his six-decade career that he has rebounded from near-obscurity and landed in the limelight. With a survey show at the Santa Monica Museum coinciding with a solo show of vintage work at the Tobey C. Moss Gallery, it is going to be hard to avoid American assemblage's Beat Generation master.



"92 Ore," wood/metal/
paper, 26 x 20 x 11 1/2".



"Venus Rose," 2002,
assemblage, 15 x 13 x 12".



"The Bead Game," 1999,
assemblage, 34 1/2" diameter x 5".

Herms had his first solo show a few months after Jackson Pollock died. His latest commercial gallery exhibition is entitled "From George Herms with LOVE." For most of his career, Herms has stamped the four letters of LOVE in the four corners of each artwork. Since most of his work is as far from having the geometric consistency of corners, finding the letters is a bit of a curiosity seeker's foray in itself. While Love is an integral ingredient for such a shamanistic presence as Herms, the focus on memory and reconfiguration are components central to his art.

An art of inclusion, of paradigm shifts that include bleeding boundaries between high practice and tinkering, walks a high wire if it aspires to greatness; its worth hinges on discipline. Herms succeeds over the years with a sparseness of composition. Like a lean jazz quartet, Herms sets the mood as much with what is there as with what is not. In an era where assemblage artists fixate on the cute essentials of thrift store finds, Herms abstracts the detritus of society into an improvisational solo encouraging the things to become something else within his sculptures and collages.

Across town, curatorial icon Walter Hopps waves his magic wand over forty Herms assemblages and dubs the assembly "George Herms: Hot Set." The Santa Monica Museum will not be offering any of the forty major works for sale; perhaps forcing serious patrons to make two trips to the Moss Gallery after seeing the works Hopps



designates for inclusion in the canon of contemporary master-status.

"The Zodiac Behind Glass (Gemini Box)," 1965, assemblage, 25 x 24 x 8"

The fascinating thing about Herms is his ability to live on the fringes of art world legend while still being the purest beatnik soul--his rent parties are almost regularly scheduled art world gatherings, while his casual conversations can suddenly take on the aura of a papal audience to an aspiring artist or art world denizen. I've met more living legends within five feet of Herms than through all of the other art world personalities combined. Yet to witness the same guy dumpster diving in downtown L.A. would instinctively conjure pity in the viewer; until one realizes that the detritus he chooses will likely be on museum walls, and that he probably has his recent appointment at the Getty Research Institute crumpled up in an envelope in his back pocket--if it hasn't fallen out into the dumpster or been tacked onto one of the dozens of collages on which he is inevitably working.

It is no coincidental twist that Southern California's quirkiest art master would be venerated at our most hallowed mid-century master gallery along with our funkier hip museum space. It is Herms' karmic inevitability to reconfigure each situation into a new ironic method designed to deliver Love and Beauty from one Beat generation to the next.