



Roger Herman's *Yellow Van Gogh*, 2007 (left), an oversize wood-block print, and his smaller oil on canvas *Untitled (Skull & Bone)*, 2010.

When Roger Herman was an art student, his teacher Gerd van Dülmen offered him a backhanded compliment: “You have absolutely no imagination, which makes you a good painter. It makes you struggle more.” A native of Saarbrücken, Germany, Herman studied law before attending art school in the early '70s in Karlsruhe, where Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz were teaching. “It was a milieu of this kind of intense painting,” he recalls, a reaction against the conceptual art being produced in Düsseldorf.

Herman moved to Los Angeles in 1977, and by 1986 he was making monumental paintings of mountains, nudes, and buildings, as well as wood-block prints. Around that time, he was offered a position in the art department of UCLA, where he continues to teach and explore a broad range of styles. “It is about painting, not about subject matter. I don’t have a narrative,” Herman says of his work. “The subject is always painting, which is why there is a repetition always—like Morandi. I’m trying to go somewhere I’m not comfortable.”

Herman, 63, paces his vast Frederick Fisher-designed studio in the Solano Canyon section of L.A., where he lives with his third wife, photographer Eika Aoshima, three Jack Russells, and a spaniel. His most recent still-life paintings are taller than he is. He made them, he explains, in reaction to the smaller pieces he showed this past January at Jancar Gallery in L.A. and George Lawson Gallery in San Francisco. At Jancar, he also included a massive painting of a mountain covered in slashes of blue, gray, green, and yellow. Priced at \$35,000, it was the most expensive painting in the show.

“I don’t work from figuration or abstraction,” says Herman. “I’m a formalist but I don’t want to make an over-estheticized painting. I’m trying to go against my own control-freakness.” So he paints each picture “really fast.”

From 1998 to 2008, he ran a Chinatown gallery for young artists called Black Dragon Society. Then, last January, at ACME gallery, he organized “Los Angeles Museum of Ceramic Art,” a show of wildly unconventional ceramics made by artists. He included his own lopsided pieces, painted with nudes in erotic poses. “It opened up my painting in a way,” Herman acknowledges. “With ceramics, I try and make them so fast that perfection is not possible,” he says. “For some reason, something special happens when it is off balance but still somewhat in control. You can’t do that consciously.” —*Hunter Drohojowska-Philp*



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