

Good Times



Elsa Braunstein

Injuns at Al's

Howling Indians on the warpath rampage through the streets of downtown Los Angeles. The Indian princess Pocahontas intervenes as a brave is about to scalp the paleface Captain John Smith. This romantic American saga is the theme of a mural by German artist Roger Herman. It is splattered in blood red and black all over the bamboo-covered walls of downtown's art bar, Al's. Filling the entire corner of the seedy green room, the huge figures seem ready to stampede right up to the bar, crushing the drinkers, pool players, and the lineup for Space Invaders.

The sloppy monumental style and outlandishly heroic subject are characteristic of Herman's painting. The artist often presents traditional mythic imagery in his signature expressionist technique.

So why would a nice Jewish proprietor like Al permit a wild German artist to express himself all over his bar?

"He begged me for three weeks to paint the ceiling. 'Please, Al, he said, 'Let me paint the ceiling.' I held off as long as I could but finally agreed. The next day, I walked in and he'd painted the walls. I got furious. I said, 'Roger! You've been begging me for weeks to paint the ceiling. Why did you paint

the walls?' He answered, 'It dripped in my eyes. And I love bamboo.'"

Indeed, Herman did try the ceiling. A small portrait of the inspired mad-

man, Vincent Van Gogh, looks down on the bar, as guardian of the sprits ... as well as the artists.

Art is not the only excuse to go to

Al's: music on the weekends, poetry readings on Sunday nights.

— Hunter Drohojowska
Al's Bar, 305 S. Hewitt, downtown.