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INSIDE INFORMART

Allan Berman
(cover artist)
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Annual
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Issue

AFTERMARKET RETAIL PRICE INDEX

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RETAIL PRICE

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Lillies of Love
18" x 20"
available as print

Artwork courtesy of Allan Berman
Penn Valley, CA

Allan Berman

A Long Path To The Big Splash

by Pam Dean-Cable

In some people's view, still life artist Allan Berman is an overnight success. It was just two years ago he began following his long-held dream of being a full-time artist, and, during that very first year, began gathering awards, such as the Pastel Society of America's much sought-after Signature Status.

You hear a lot in the pop-psych circles these days about self-actualization. The lucky or the destined are those few whose path is so focused, so compelling, that few twists and turns deter their vision. Such was not the case with Berman whose "overnight success" as an artist began in a California salvage yard nearly 40 years ago.

Family duty seemed the right and honorable path for young Berman back in 1964. At age 22 he turned his back on his dreams of fame and fortune in music or art to work beside his grandfather, father, and brother in the scrap metal business. Besides, he reasoned, it might take years singing in bars to get ahead and, anyway, people in



the '50s and '60s thought artists were lazy bums. Neither was appealing. So began his career in business.

Berman, however, a type-A personality by his own admission, had energy to burn and he found an outlet through art. On a fateful day in 1972 during an annual visit to a gallery to frame a painting he'd done for his mother for Christmas, his life took a fateful turn.

"The gallery owner thought I should meet an artist he knew: an Italian, classically-trained artist, a modern master of oil painting, Roberto Lupetti," Berman says. "As it turned out, he lived only a mile from me and was teaching classes to a handful of artists each Saturday." The group was so accomplished that Berman felt honored to be invited to join.

He came to regard Lupetti as a second father. "He was a big, burly guy who liked to hunt and fish. He totally blew away my stereotypical perception of artists. Not only was he my mentor, but I really think he saved my life mentally. He advised me to develop my work in pastels so they resembled oils."

Dividing his time between the salvage yard and painting, Berman managed to put together his first professional art exhibition in 1976, and from then to 1980 he was the resident still-life artist of the New Masters Gallery of Carmel, CA.

He then opened his own gallery and publishing company. It wasn't long before he caught the interest of the entertainment industry through a series of celebrity portraits. In 1984 he designed the cover for the *Elvis Presley International Forum Magazine* and was commissioned to do a portrait of Sylvester Stallone for Orion Pictures Corporation. The successful Stallone painting resulted in an invitation to the Academy Awards that year.

In an interview with a news reporter, Berman tells of this Hollywood adventure. "We drove up to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion -- our little old car stuck in the middle of this big procession of limousines. My wife said, 'I'm not getting out!' But I told her, 'Nobody knows who we are. Just smile and wave.' So we smiled and waved all the way into the building, with people screaming and applauding. It was incredible." (*The Sierra Star*, Nov 24, 1999)

All the while Berman continued working at the salvage yard. His father retired in 1982 and his responsibilities grew when the company became one of the first to get into computer asset recovery. They hit the big time. But with financial success and the trappings and symbols of "the good life," also came long hours. Painting became a memory.

The stress of maintaining a multi-million dollar busi-



Mixed Blessings



Memories in Blue
(available as a giclée)



*For The Love of
Mica
13" x 21"*

do what I really want to do... until I'm 80?"

Then came 1997, a year of painful personal loss, when three of the most important people in his life died. He realized it was essential that he reassess his priorities. His brother died of melanoma and then his father (his best friend), and his mentor Roberto Lupetti were gone. Berman agonized over the losses and all the opportunities he had passed over. Lupetti had wanted his student to accompany him to Italy to paint and share his love of the Sistine Chapel in which he had done restoration work when he was young. "I was too busy accumulating wealth, sending the kids to college, buying fancy cars," he says with sadness. "I would say, 'Yes, Roberto, next year, next year.'"

During the course of saying his final good-byes, Berman promised both his father and Lupetti that he would follow his dream and become a full-time artist. "My father finally realized that this is what I really loved, and that I had been unhappy all these years. I guess he didn't see it at the time because he needed me in the business."

Berman sold the business to his employees and "retired" with Janie, his wife of 20 years, in Penn Valley, CA, on Lake Wildwood in the foothills near Silicon Valley. "We are so fortunate," he says. "I guess you would call the style of our home a sophisticated mountain home. We have one acre on the lake. My studio is a dream." Measuring 15' x 20' there is a fireplace and kitchen. The studio looks out over the 350-acre man-made lake surrounded by trees and fed by streams.

For the past two years Berman has found bliss as the pastel artist who became an overnight success. He's won first place or major awards with nearly all the paintings he's entered in competition, locally and nationally. Although his heart belongs to still life, he also paints wildlife and portraiture.

Sitting in his studio, he can now reflect on defining moments, clues from his childhood, that

*Midnight Lace
15" x 20"*



ness, however, caused Berman once again to seek release through his creative side. He became a celebrity impersonator, doing gigs on the side as an outlet. At sock hops and charity fundraisers, he felt energized as Elvis, Neil Diamond, Buddy Holly, or Ricky Nelson. Karaoke enabled the use of backtrack tapes and Berman soon found he was in demand. "I won second place in a star search competition," he says, "and I performed for President Clinton's 50th birthday party."

While singing provided an outlet that enabled Berman to continue running the family business, he began to notice he wasn't feeling well. "Actually, I felt like I was dying. I asked myself, 'How long am I going to wait to

point to the path of his heart. There was the day his parents took him to the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco. At ten years old he had already spent five years drawing with a set of coloring pencils, and when his young eyes fell upon a painting titled "After the Hunt," he was mesmerized. The painter was American still-life artist William Harnett, from the early 1900s. "I couldn't believe someone could do that on a flat surface. The objects seemed to jump off the page. I remember very clearly thinking, "That's what I want to do!" And as art director for his high school paper, Berman remembers the many hours he spent in restaurants drawing on placemats or napkins, connected to his authentic self.

Now, as he paints, he draws from these memories and from the gift of inspiration given to him by Lupetti. "I paint a lot of antiques," Berman says. "I love painting the reflections in silver. It's awe-inspiring. You're actually doing two paintings in one. The silver, then the reflections. Antiques have been here for hundreds of years. By painting them you can preserve them for the next 1000 years. It's hard to explain why I'm drawn to still life, but it's calming to me." No surprise, Berman's hobby is collecting antiques.

With his initial training in oils and no formal study in pastel, nonetheless, Berman has fallen in love with pastels. "Back when I was running the family business and then coming home at night to paint, oils just took so much time." He enjoys trying to make this "chalk stuff," in the end, look like an oil painting, look real. He fills the pores of the paper with many layers of pigment, attempting to develop a three-dimensional look that is true to life.

An award winning piece, "I Never Promised You A Rose Garden," was inspired by Berman's love of wildlife and flowers. Always endeavoring to combine realistic portrayal with the techniques of the classical masters, he spent many hours developing the texture of the fur of the raccoon, as well as the softness and vibrancy of the rose petals. These, along with the solid mass of the brick and mortar, show mastery in bringing varying textures to life.

Of his work Berman says, "I strive for perfection, frequently to the point of emotional struggle. Since my paintings contain complex *objets d'art*, I become impatient as I wait for a painting to develop while I blend objects, textures, colors, and surfaces together. As my painting matures, my struggle with perfection gives way to feelings of gratification. My emotions then shift to how the work will be accepted. These feelings usually subside once I see the reaction of the public."

Wanting to touch people's lives, Berman hopes to help them experience the beauty of art. "I hope that the artistic spirit instilled in me by my mentor Roberto Lupetti will always show," he says. He recalls that Lupetti told him he had a natural style with the pastels. "In my work, you can't see a lot of strokes, or you can't figure out what I did or how I got there. I can't either. But watching me paint is like watching grass grow," he admits with candor. A Berman painting takes weeks to accomplish.

This year he wants to do a large, important piece -- perhaps a musical instrument theme with Beethoven in the background. One thing's for certain: Allan Berman is not ready to retire from *this* business. No, he has given himself permission to follow his bliss, and follow it he will. Δ