

A Profoundly Personal Vision

An Extraordinary Artist

By Thomas Albright

An extraordinary artist named Irving Marcus is making his first San Francisco appearance in a one-man show at the Wenger Gallery, 85 Montgomery street.

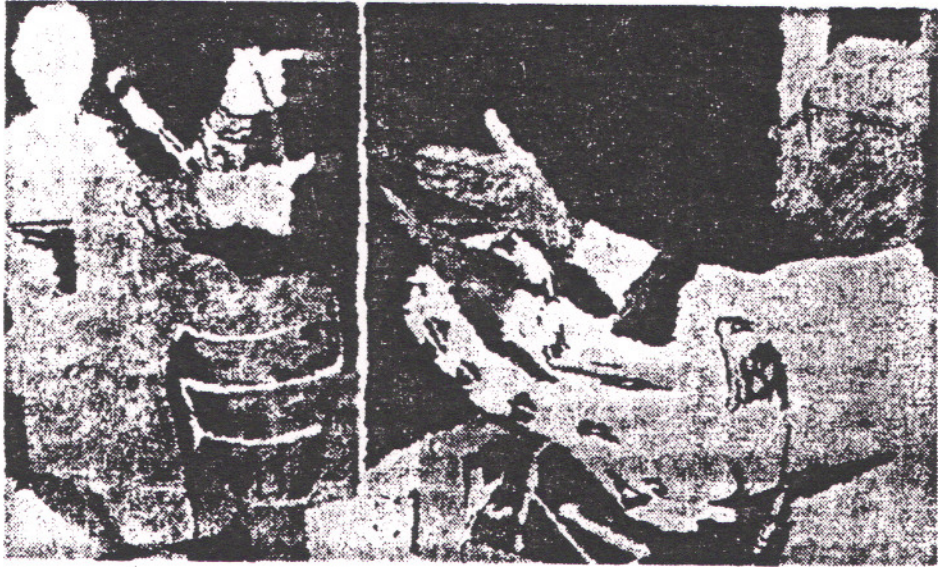
He does the kind of paintings that flash like an unexpected bolt of lightning in the generally placid atmosphere of contemporary art. Since this phenomenon occurs only once or twice a year, you owe it to yourself to go and see it.

Marcus lives and works in Sacramento, and Leslie Wenger says that he has been responsible for much of the far-out teaching talent that has gravitated to the art department at Sacramento State University in recent years. However that may be, he also "belongs" to that vigorous non-group of myth-makers who are now injecting so much vitality into the Bay Region art scene.

FEELINGS

This means that the "content" of his art is not art itself, or the recent history of art, but images and feelings that project a profoundly personal, interior vision of Marcus' own. Artists who involve themselves with exploring this personal universe don't have to worry about novelty of style or technique, for uniqueness will take care of itself.

The themes of Marcus' paintings are the ritual diversions of contemporary middle-class life — auctions, cat shows, donkey basketball and The News, or at least tragedies and disasters of various kinds that take on the aloof, once-removed quality that "reality" assumes when viewed over a television tube.



Irving Marcus's 'Call for Bids'

'RECEPTION'

In contrast to New Realism, however, the "reception" in Marcus' paintings is always deliberately distorted and faulty. His images are reduced to broad, raggedy areas of color that loom close-up against grounds that seem to tilt diagonally into space, in a manner that often curiously resembles the compositions of Degas.

These color areas are sometimes filled with relatively flat, intense yellows or oranges through which appear porous, sponge-like holes or islands of vivid blues or greens which set everything aquiver in an op shimmer. Sometimes, they are filled with agitated flurries of crayon-like hatchings and scrawls in color mixtures of great resonance and richness.

DIMENSION

In any case, Marcus' intense colors and nervous brushwork make his images seem to decompose into the liquid abstractions of a color

television set on the blink. In doing so, however, they also assume an inner dimension of magic and ritual. The woman with her cat in a painting called 'Cats' Convene' takes on the presence of a high priestess engaged in some hermetic religious exercise; 'Dying Mountain Lion' becomes an animal sacrifice, and 'Donkey Basketball' a bizarre pagan festivity.

The towering masterpiece of this show, however, is a big painting that Marcus calls "Slain Guerrillas." Its background is a line of shadowy, ghost-like figures that are barely distinguishable as uniformed soldiers or cops: in the foreground is a writhing, dark reddish mass which is the very essence of gore and blood. In this painting, an image which has become all too familiar on the television tube is transformed into a horrifying barbaric rite, which, of course, it really is.