



DANNY HELLER

# Tiki Modern

Growing up in Los Angeles, Danny Heller was surrounded by midcentury modern architecture and classic cars. When he became an artist, he decided it was important to preserve and document these houses and buildings. Each new exhibition Heller does focuses on a particular aspect within midcentury design. His show *Tiki Modern* at George Billis Gallery in Los Angeles hones in on the Polynesian inspired architecture that developed primarily in the 1950s and '60s.

“Right after World War II you had the GI’s coming back, and a lot of times they had spent their time in the Southeast and they brought that aesthetic—the Hawaiian and Polynesian—with them,” Heller elaborates. “There was a bit of a yearning to escape...You go to the local tiki bar or hotel and it feels like you’ve been transported. It’s a nice anecdote to the times when things were getting a bit more tumultuous.”







- 1  
*Tiki Ti Evening*, oil on canvas, 14 x 20"
- 2  
*Royal Hawaiian with Pontiac*, oil on canvas, 20 x 30"
- 3  
*Trader Mort's*, oil on canvas, 20 x 28"
- 4  
*Caliente Evening*, oil on canvas, 28 x 38"



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Often the architecture done in this style was commercial rather than residential, so for the show Heller will focus on hotels and bars that feature this aesthetic. "The interesting thing with midcentury architecture is it is distilled down to simple shapes," he says. "There are long, rectangular midcentury homes, and with a lot of the tiki and Polynesian inspired architecture, I see it distilled down to the triangular A-frame. It is this simple, but dramatic structure that grabs your attention right away."

In *Caliente Evening*, Heller depicts a hotel in Palm Springs, California, that evokes the exoticism that captivated so many to the style. "There are a couple of classic cars that help dress the scene and the lighting itself really evokes this wonderful mood," he says.

Another painting in the show, *Trader Mort's*, strays away from the A-frame to another roof style that was prominent in the South Seas. "This is in San Diego, right at the entrance of this little peninsula called Shelter Island. It was created in the '50s and the idea was all of these hotels on this peninsula had to be in the Polynesian aesthetic," Heller explains. "This little liquor store—I don't know if



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it was created at the beginning or when it kind of got going—but they decided to embrace that tiki vibe."

*Tiki Modern* will be on view through June 22. ●

**George Billis Gallery**

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