

Outings



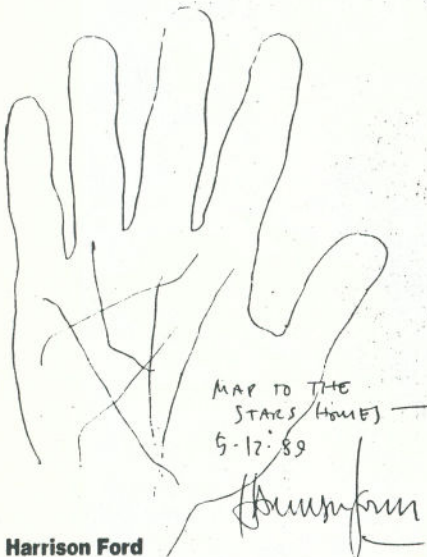
Sydney Pollack



Bill Murray



Ben Cross



Harrison Ford



Terrence McNally



Jack Lemmon

Where some celebrities draw the line Back Alley's doodle auction attracts fans and collectors

By Lauren Lipton
Herald Examiner staff writer

It was a little drawing of the White House on a piece of plain bond paper. It was dated "8-8-88" and carried the inscription, "not a bad place to live."

Not a bad investment, either, thought one doodle collector, who, at the Back Alley Theater's annual doodle auction a few weeks before last year's presidential election, took a gamble on a sketch by still-hopeful Michael Dukakis. The buyer spent \$2,200 on the drawing, but the rest, as they say, is history.

Not everybody who goes to the Back Alley's doodle auctions is a gambler. One bidder might be a serious fan, out to get a little "piece" of a favorite celebrity.

Another bidder might be an investor — like the lucky and smart purchaser of a doodle by George Bush in 1986, back when he was still

"that other guy in the White House." Other bidders might be looking for the insight some of the doodles provide, such as a drawing by Arnold Palmer, featuring a golf ball coming out to eat him.

Most everybody who attends the auctions is also anticipating a fun afternoon — which they will definitely get, says auction coordinator Allan Miller. "It will be a delightful event," Miller says of the fifth annual auction, which takes place Sunday at 3 p.m. at the John Anderson home, 12940 Addison St., Sherman Oaks.

The auction features minimasterpieces by luminaries in every field, including Anne Tyler, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Pearl Bailey, Mel Torme, Perry Como, Jodie Foster, Mel Gibson and Wilt Chamberlain.

Miller, an actor who has been co-producing director of the non-profit Back Alley for the past 10 years, has turned into something of a big-game hunter with celebrity scribbles as his prey. Miller will approach anyone

for a doodle at any time, including during his own auditions. He recalls, for instance, asking motion picture director Mike Nichols for a doodle during a reading.

Nichols "turned his copy of the script over and drew a picture of his cat on the back," Miller recalls. "I didn't get the part, but I did get the doodle."

Miller also uses contacts — the Lakers' masseuse, his in-laws, a friend who writes for Rolling Stone — to secure doodles. "Every time I have friends starring in a film," he adds, "I ask them who else is in the film. Then I try to get doodles from those people too." Most celebs are glad to donate a drawing either on the spot or within a few days, Miller says.

Because it is so unique, the doodle auction has evolved from a small-scale curiosity to the theater's major fund-raiser. Auction profits jumped from \$9,000 the first year to \$39,000 in 1988. This year Miller anticipates

increased profits, due, in part, to the large number of big-name doodles.

"We have a beautiful piece by (sports artist) Leroy Neiman that could be worth \$1,000 or more," he says. "We also have one by (Voyager co-pilot) Jeana Yeager, who is a modern-day Amelia Earhart. And Oscar Peterson, who is an all-time jazz great, did a doodle for us I'd give my eyeteeth for."

Miller says doodles generally sell for between \$25 and \$1,500. The most ever paid for a pen-and-ink? After Dukakis' White House, the second-priciest sketch was by John Huston. It sold for \$2,000 at 1987's auction, which was held, coincidentally, just after the director's death.

Tickets for the doodle auction are \$50 and can be purchased at the Back Alley Theater at (818) 780-2240, or at the door. The afternoon includes food, drinks and musical entertainment, as well as a chance to take home a little piece of history. One never knows, after all, who will live in the White House in 1993.