



COURTESY OF STUDIO SHOP GALLERY. PHOTO BY STEPHANIE MARTIN.

Petersen in his studio signing his latest piece, September 2025.

Roland Petersen has long stood as a defining voice in Northern California art. Associated with the Bay Area Figurative Movement—a group that reshaped postwar American painting by reintroducing the human figure into a field dominated by abstraction—Petersen developed a distinct visual language that balances structure and spontaneity, observation and imagination. Yet his work ultimately transcends any single movement, driven by a restless curiosity that has guided his practice across decades.

Roland Petersen at 100 traces this remarkable trajectory, beginning with his early abstractions of the 1950s. These formative works reveal an artist deeply engaged with the formal concerns of mid-century modernism—color relationships, spatial tension, and compositional rhythm—while already hinting at the lyrical sensibility that would define his mature work. The exhibition then unfolds through Petersen's pivotal engagement with figuration, including his celebrated Picnic series, in which groups of figures gather in sunlit landscapes rendered with vibrant color and dynamic structure.

"Petersen's work has always been about more than what is seen," notes Studio Shop Gallery. *"It's about how color, form, and light interact to create an emotional experience. Even at 100, he continues to approach painting as a space for discovery."*

One of the most compelling aspects of the retrospective is its reflection of Petersen's ability to evolve while remaining deeply committed to his core ideas. The Picnic series, initiated in 1959, continues through the present day as a central thread in his practice, revisited and reimagined across decades. In the 1970s, Petersen briefly turned to his Satellite series, exploring new formal and conceptual territory before returning to the figurative rhythms that define his work. Together, these bodies of work reveal an artist continually refining and expanding his visual language.

The exhibition culminates with Petersen's most recent painting, completed in 2026. That a new work anchors a centennial retrospective speaks not only to longevity but also to an enduring commitment to the act of creation. This is not simply a retrospective—it is a living testament to a life in continuous dialogue with painting.

Born in 1926 in Endelave, Denmark, Petersen immigrated to San Francisco as a young child. He later studied at the University of California, Berkeley, earning both his BA and MFA, where he was influenced by artists including Chiura Obata and the ideas of Hans Hofmann. Following his graduate studies, Petersen was awarded a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, which enabled him to spend the summer of 1950 studying directly with Hofmann at his school in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Later that year, he traveled to Europe, where he spent six months in Paris working at Stanley William Hayter's renowned Atelier 17, an experimental workshop for graphic arts. There, Petersen immersed himself in intaglio printmaking and worked alongside leading figures of modern art, including Joan Miró. He later went on to become a longtime professor at the University of California, Davis, where he played a central role in shaping one of the most dynamic art departments in the country. His career reflects both his European origins and his deep roots in the Bay Area, resulting in a body of work that bridges modernist traditions with a distinctly personal vision. His paintings have been widely exhibited and are held in major private and public collections.



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