



INEZ STORER AND ANDREW ROMANOFF

Allow Nothing to Worry You

March 31 - May 13, 2023

Opening Reception: **March 31, 6 - 9pm**

Here is a California story for you.

In 1974, Andrew Romanoff and Inez Storer met and eventually married, blending six children into their new family life in Inverness, California. They lived in a rambling red-shingled home at the end of a tiny street that over its 110 years, had been a tourist hotel and a brothel. Inez Storer's backstory is a private one, while Romanoff's was very public, played out in all the history books, biographies and films.

Romanoff was the grandnephew of Czar Nicholas II, the last Emperor of Russia. Had the Bolshevik Revolution not intervened, Andrew was in line to become Tsar of Russia. Instead, his family members were murdered and buried in unmarked graves in St. Petersburg, and the Romanoff dynasty ended. Andrew's childhood was spent in exile on the grounds of Windsor Castle in London, having been given refuge by the British royal family. He was raised in proximity to his cousins in the British royal family and groomed to be a suitor for Princess Margaret. In 1940, when he was 16, his mother was killed when a Nazi bomb exploded near her family's home. He joined the British Royal Navy and served during World War II until 1946.

After serving in the British Navy, he arrived in the United States with \$800 to his name, with his royal wealth purportedly locked up in assorted British financial institutions. He eventually moved to Northern California and worked as a carpenter, arborist, jewelry maker, and even as the owner of a headshop. But, artmaking was always an important part of his life. Despite having no formal art education – or perhaps because of it – Romanoff developed a naive folk art style truly of his own that lacked any pretense. He created hundreds of works on his most cherished medium, Shrinky Dinks. The material is most commonly associated with children. It is a plastic that is drawn upon, then heated in the oven and shrinks. Romanoff delighted in the process and used it to document his daily life, both real and imagined, in an unfiltered and revealing way for decades. You can't make this up.

When artist Inez Storer and Andrew Romanoff got together, she took on the formidable role of caring for a blended family of six children, four of hers and two of his. The demands of motherhood and the rampant sexism of the 70s and 80s kept many women from pursuing careers. "These were very challenging times for female artists, it was white male-dominated art market. The way to overcome self-doubt is to continue on." Rather than keep her from working as an artist, the challenges of motherhood had the inadvertent effect of inspiring the "magical realist" collage method that has occupied her ever since. "I was juggling the

demands of motherhood, so collage was perfectly suited for the many frequent interruptions that beset a mother of young children. I could pick something off my studio table and glue it to a surface and a narrative could be develop [using] the closest materials at hand.”

In addition to Storer’s work as an artist, she has used her agency to assist others. Storer taught at the San Francisco Art Institute, Sonoma State University, San Francisco State University, and the College of Marin. Storer worked at SFAI alongside Jay De Feo, Carlos Villa, Bill Berkson and Joan Brown among others. While on the faculty at Sonoma State, she organized the gallery’s inaugural show, *Northern California Artists*. Featuring work by major artists like Richard Diebenkorn, Joan Brown, Peter Voulkos, and William T. Wiley, it set the bar for the new gallery. In addition to her teaching work, she directed Lester Gallery in West Marin, which exhibited Carlos Villa, Richard Shaw, David Best, J.B. Blunk, John Roloff, Cornelia Schulz, and Irene Pijoan.

We are proud to be presenting a major survey exhibition of both Inez Storer and Andrew Romanoff’s artwork. Andrew Romanoff passed away in November, 2021 at the age of 98. The couple’s relationship lasted 47 years. Storer, 89, continues to work in her Pt. Reyes studio. This exhibition presents work of both artists made over the last 25 years, including Storer’s new work. Her paintings are included in the permanent collections of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Oakland Museum of California, San Jose Museum of Art, and the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University. Romanoff’s work was exhibited all over the world. In 2006, Gallery 16 published the book *The Boy Who Would Be Tsar* which told the story of Romanoff’s childhood illustrated by the artist, now in its second printing. We have also published a small monograph of Inez Storer’s work, *Allow Nothing To Worry You*.