

View of "Stephen G. Rhodes," 2007.



accordion, and a piano fragment from Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975)—added to the overall sense of delirium.

Rhodes's videos recall—and double—the form of Michael Snow's synchronized and looping two-projector film installation *Two Sides to Every Story*, 1974, in order to present two pistol duels that owe much to Kubrick's film. As with Snow's work, viewers must encounter the work on both sides of the two screens while essentially taking the place of the duels' participants. One exchange features a man and a woman in a wooded setting; the other, two middle-aged men (played by Rhodes's father and uncle) on a pier, with the artist serving as a "referee" in both. The characters are outfitted in loose interpretations of "period" costume and wield pop guns; willful anachronism runs throughout the videos, particularly when waterskiers pulled by a speedboat cruise by the pier and wave. Because the videos are looped, both skirmishes are ambiguous in outcome, time breaking down without clear ending or beginning: In this sense, it's not such a stretch to see *Dualism 2* and 3 as allegorical, given our nation's present morass in the Middle East, with two separate wars persisting more than four years after a declaration of "mission accomplished"—especially given the artist's recurring interest in the follies of historical reenactment.

Adding to the allegorical tone were two vaguely anthropomorphic piles of bricks, *Ruined 1* and *Ruined 2* (both 2007), constructed from surfboard foam, latex, and bloodred paint, which were symmetrically aligned with the video installation. Top-heavy and seemingly on the verge of collapse, the ruinous piles were variously embedded with clothbound books, clumps of hair, Mardi Gras beads, pieces of peach-colored latex, a fake hand, a full-size C-3PO head, and several stuffed birds accompanied by white splatters of simulated birdshit. Inspired by ruins found in the artist's native state of Louisiana, the rather cartoonish sculptures blended the personal and the allegorical—ruins, according to Walter Benjamin, are an emblem of allegory—as did several of the aggregated photographs in which family snapshots (including one of the artist's mother in a Minnie Mouse costume, middle finger extended toward the camera) mingled with images of a devastated post-Katrina New Orleans. Each of these was spray-painted with an ominous, ghostly X, recalling the symbols with which rescue workers tagged abandoned homes following the hurricane.

Less affecting, and somewhat overwhelmed by the show's general cacophony, were *Vacant Portraits 14-16* and *17-19* (both 2007)—dueling triptychs of vertical canvases in archly gilded frames, each panel depicting an amorphous, glowing green "figure," with each accompanied by a collaged image of a pistol. More successful was a tantalizing series of mixed-media palimpsests (interspersed with the triptychs) titled *Post-Dualistic Bresson Notes...* (all 2007), with each work piling quotes from Robert Bresson atop others from Maurice Blanchot

(the latter upside down and on the verso side of the paper), alongside personal fragments—each taking the form of an envelope, representing the formal invitation to a duel. "Ruined Dualisms" relentlessly exhausted its structural format, but not before unearthing charged allegorical and autobiographical matter from a personal archaeology more than worthy of continued excavation.

—Michael Ned Holte

Lari Pittman REGEN PROJECTS

From across the room, it looked as though two perfect sunny-side-up eggs were stuck to the face of a painting in Lari Pittman's recent exhibition. Closer inspection revealed them to be painted on, in something between a flat, graphic style (the differing shapes of the two egg whites made by flipping the same stencil over) and an attempt at spatial illusionism, with a waft of shading hinting at the contour of each yolk. This stylistic and spatial play—continuing in the way the eggs assert the surface and artifice of the underlying painting, which depicts in illusionistic depth a hyperstylized and surreal realm—is typical of the work in this show. And, as if fried on the canvas, the eggs seem to indicate the temperature of the depicted hothouse world, in which giant overripe fruit strains its vine to the breaking point while morphing into the buttocks of disembodied legs squishing their dandy shoes into adjacent squash.

This is one example of the interweaving of style, tenor, and form that defines the ten untitled paintings here. Executed in acrylic, vinyl, and lacquer on canvas stretched over wood panels, these works further the play of transparency and fluid brushwork present in other of Pittman's recent works, but take both to a higher level, resulting in compositions in which components seem to glisten, sweat, or dissolve. The images may be divided into two groups, one prickly in both image and mood, populated by cacti and bristling with high-keyed decorative motifs, the other overripe, packed, and burgeoning. Several of the paintings present manic, fractured, and reshuffled landscapes or garden scenes peppered with human accoutrements. In one, kneepad-clad phantoms that manage to be simultaneously sexed-up and sexually ambiguous sport amputated limbs in the apparent aftermath of perverse violence. Meanwhile, seemingly abstract and decorative calligraphic passages begin to read as signifiers of organic life.

Such almost indigestible pileups of the luscious, the irritating, the terrible, and the strange have turned up before in Pittman's work, but never with this degree of intensity. In this respect, they call to mind Max Beckmann's paintings of menacing man-beasts and amputees, bound together in a claustrophobic space. The kinship with Beckmann ultimately is as much a matter of attitude as that of formal devices or imagery. Even in the exhibition's seventeen more playful, less congested works on paper, there is no doubt that Pittman has turned to a darker place, and is sounding it with as shrill a voice as he has ever mustered. Curiously, it is Pittman's use of framing and cropping—he incorporates actual painted borders into some compositions—to create scenes in which everything seems to hedge, corral, squeeze, and fracture everything else that most effectively raises the pulse of these paintings.

Though compositional complexity has long been a hallmark of Pittman's practice, here the implications of pushing that complexity to such dizzying heights became fully apparent.

—Christopher Miles



Lari Pittman, *Untitled*, 2007, acrylic, cel vinyl, spray lacquer on gessoed canvas mounted on wood panel, 52 x 40".