

REGEN PROJECTS

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Regen Projects

"FLYING CARPET With a Waning Moon Over a Violent Nation" is an epic-scale painting by Lari Pittman.

ART REVIEW

Operatic, violent visions

BY LEAH OLLMAN

Too much of a good thing can be wonderful, Mae West famously quipped. She might have been standing in front of a Lari Pittman painting.

The three epically scaled works anchoring Pittman's show at Regen Projects forsake "or" to exuberantly embrace "and." They — and to a slightly lesser extent its other paintings on canvas and paper — are high-energy operatic productions.

Even the titles tend to be prolonged and dramatic. The three 9-by-30-foot extravaganzas are named: "Flying Carpet With a Waning Moon Over a Violent Nation"; "Flying Carpet With Petri Dishes for a Disturbed Nation"; and "Flying Carpet With Magic Mirrors for a Distorted Nation."

Pittman spikes his paintings with emblems of our violent, disturbed and distorted nation, but shuns the literal and linear. He shows us five views of the moon as it slims down to a crescent through the scope of a rifle. The tondos are interspersed

with several large nooses, the ropes resembling standard-issue neckties striped in silver, red, blue and orange. Handguns figure in the painting with the petri dishes, whose contents, through context alone, hint of biological warfare.

Like the Afghan weavers who have integrated images of helicopters and tanks into rugs since the Soviet invasion of their country, the L.A. stalwart sets his markers of threat into an overall ornamental structure in which ebullient pattern and vibrant color prevail. The pictorial converges with the graphic; instruments of hostility mesh with pure design. The schematic, flat and snappy consort with passages of assertive atmosphere and depth.

Pittman's hatchings and striations are mannered and pervasive, investing the surface of the work with a relentless, restless energy. These are history paintings of a sort, minus the reportage. What remains is the mood of being alive in the present moment — a hyperstimulated, mixed bag of sorrow and sensuality,

Lari Pittman: 'From a Late Western Impaerium'

Where: Regen Projects,
6750 Santa Monica Blvd.,
Los Angeles

When: Through Dec. 21.
Closed Sunday and
Monday.

Contact: (310) 276-5424,
www.regenprojects.com

wreckage and revelry, damage and delight.

Pittman frames the action in another pair of paintings — "Needlepoint Sampler With Patches (#s 1 and 2) Depicting Daily Life of a Late Western Impaerium" — inside needlework hoops.

The lens-like circle can barely hold fast its contents: broken, bruised and punctured bodies, overlaid by feeble rows of X's, vainly canceling out what lies beneath. Needlepoint samplers were once performances of a sort for young marriageable women; Pittman borrows the form to stage his own

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bravura performance in paint.

The density of his work can overwhelm — both the reprieve-free surfaces, packed edge-to-edge, and the density of historical reference. Overt connections here range from Egyptian mummy portraits to Leger's *Ballet Mécanique*, the paintings of Hermenegildo Bustos and Puccini's "Tosca."

There are countless others, more subtle. Pittman also peppers his work with references to the mechanics and varieties of vision: microscopic, reflected, focused and aimed; spectatorship of a cultural order and that of a militaristic bent (surveillance). Visuality itself is celebrated and honored, a flying carpet ride eliciting at once delight and fear.

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