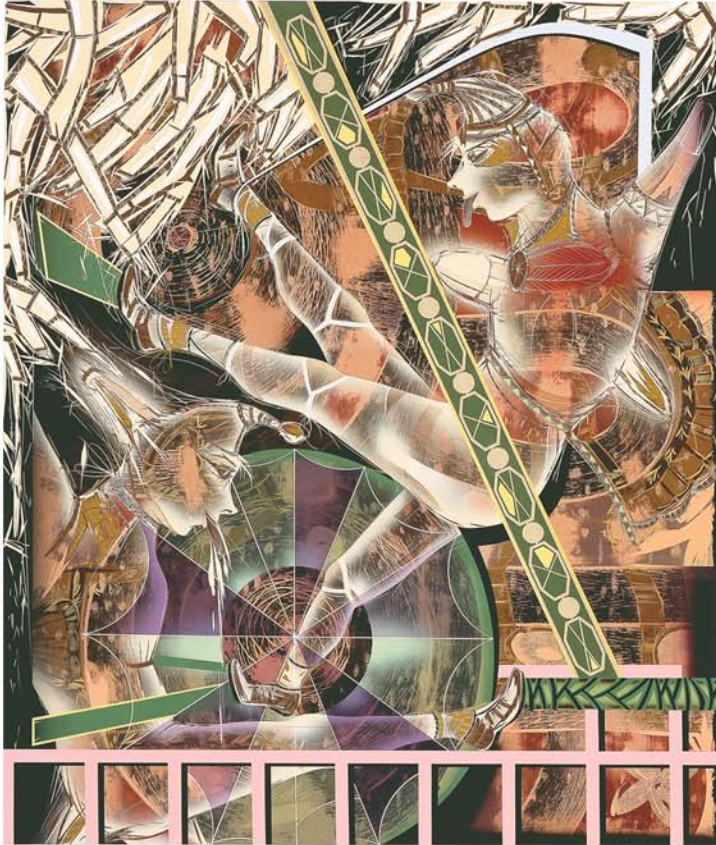


# REGEN PROJECTS

Pagel, David, "Lari Pittman's fantastic dreams," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 2007, p. E 18, ill.

## Los Angeles Times



*Regen Projects*  
**'UNTITLED' 2007:** At Regen Projects, seven large dreamscapes and 23 smaller works by Pop artist Lari Pittman are on display.

## Lari Pittman's fantastic dreams

By DAVID PAGEL  
*Spectral to The Times*

Lari Pittman's new paintings leap off the deep end. They take viewers into a subterranean, silent, slow-motion realm in which odd shapes, semi-recognizable objects and inescapable conundrums swim in and out of focus. It's a dream world that's neither frightening, like a nightmare, nor soothing, like a reverie, but flat-out strange. The sense of murky menace is both timely and out of step with just about everything else.

During the last 20 years, Pittman has established himself as L.A.'s preeminent Pop painter, churning out — like a one-man factory — dazzling panels jam-packed with flash, amped up with manic palettes and crisscrossed with cacophonous narratives. Think of his earlier works as rebuses pumped up on designer drugs and buffed out for display in exquisite boutiques, each more lavish, extravagant and operatic than the last.

In contrast, Pittman's seven huge panels (each measuring more than 8 feet by 7 feet) and 23 small drawings at Regen Projects abandon the brashness of Pop for the hokeyness of Folk. Their palettes are darker, creating shadowy nooks and crannies where scary scenarios unfold and embarrassing sentiments are hidden.



Flat graphics have been replaced with atmospheric depth. Translucent objects open onto worlds within worlds. Other passages recall woodblock prints, their rough-and-tumble surfaces seemingly cut by quick slashes of Pittman's brush.

The byzantine story lines — once Pittman's trademark — have been simplified. Not much happens in his dreamscapes. Many evoke the aftermath of traumas — loaded moments right after the damage has been done but before one knows what to make of it. Others suggest post-apocalyptic laboratories, cramped quarters in which odd concoctions are cooked up to remedy inconceivable maladies.

Not as many recognizable things are present. And it is hard to say if the larger-than-life-size fruits are tomatoes or pumpkins. Pittman's monstrous pixies might be marionettes or circus acrobats who have fallen into a toxic world that is equal parts Cirque du Soleil and Abu Ghraib. These paintings dwarf viewers, making us feel as if we have stumbled into situations bigger than us.

More abstract elements appear. Many resemble ghostly organic forms, such as bone fragments and bodily organs. Patterns frequently break down, disintegrating before they provide

structure or familiarity.

And the written messages that once spun Pittman's stories in many directions have become an unintelligible babble, a mixed-up mélange of letters and syllables, in Cyrillic and English and gibberish, that makes easy reading impossible. If a story co-written by the Brothers Grimm and Fyodor Dostoevsky were illustrated by Charles Demuth, it might resemble these melancholic paintings.

In a sense, Pittman has turned his back on the age of instantaneous communication and gone underground, making haunted pictures of a netherworld. But he is no backwoods mystic. Simplicity is nowhere to be found in his ruminative paintings. Neither is the angry bitterness that often accompanies reactionary rejections of modern life.

His brand of "nouveau folk" includes cheeky urbanity and cosmopolitan sophistication. A testament to individualism at a time dominated by streamlined lifestyles, prefab culture and pre-digested ideas, Pittman's dissent-fueled art is attuned to nuance but unwilling to fiddle while Rome burns.

**Regen Projects II**, 633 N. Almont Drive, (310) 276-6424, through Oct. 20. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.regenprojects.com](http://www.regenprojects.com).