

**Born**

1952, Los Angeles, CA

Education

B.F.A. and M.F.A., California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA

Lives and Works

Los Angeles, CA

Biography

Influenced by commercial advertising, decorative traditions, and Latin American folk art, Lari Pittman's meticulously layered paintings transform pattern and signage into luxurious scenes fraught with complexity, difference, and desire. Pittman's hallucinatory works reference many aesthetic styles, from Victorian silhouettes to social **realist** murals to Mexican **retablos**. Pittman uses **anthropomorphic** depictions of furniture, weapons, and animals loaded with **symbolism** to convey larger themes of romantic love, violence, and mortality. His paintings and drawings are a personal rebellion against rigid, puritanical dichotomies. They demonstrate the complimentary nature of beauty and suffering, pain and pleasure, and direct the viewer's attention to bittersweet experiences and the value of sentimentality in art. Despite subject matter that changes from series to series, Pittman's paintings often include complex narratives and opulent imagery that reflect the rich heterogeneity of American society, the artist's Colombian heritage, and the distorting effects of hyper-capitalism on everyday life.

Media and Materials

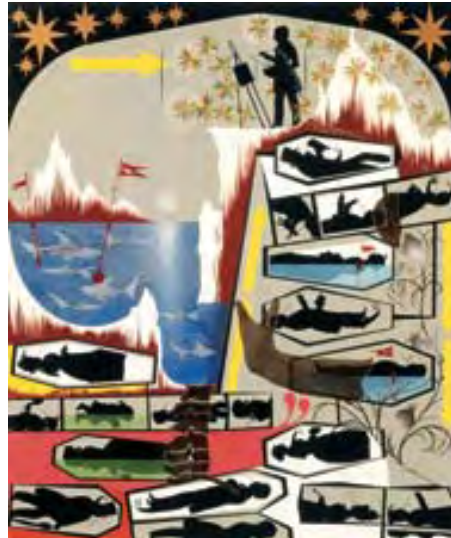
painting

Key Words and Ideas

aesthetic, allegory, metaphor, social commentary, symbolism, visual literacy

DISCUSSION**Before Viewing**

■ Discuss what it means to be alternative or mainstream. Cite examples from contemporary culture as well as social and cultural movements of the past 100 years that have challenged or changed mainstream beliefs, practices, or styles. What role have artists played in these transformations? What is the role of **social commentary** and **critique** in art? What works of art include **social commentary**? Discuss what these works comment on and how they communicate ideas visually. Which are the most effective and why?



This Landscape, beloved and despised, continues regardless, 1989. Acrylic and enamel on mahogany panel, 72 x 60 inches. Private collection. Photo by Douglas M. Parker Studio, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.

After Viewing

- Pittman says that Latino culture is characterized by “bittersweetness,” that “being simultaneously happy and sad is not a problem. Nor is it fundamentally contradictory.” In what ways is this duality apparent in Pittman’s work?
- How do we read visual images? Pittman compares certain visual elements in his paintings to nouns and verbs. Select one of Pittman’s paintings and identify visual verbs, nouns, and adjectives in order to create a reading of the work.
- Pittman says, “as chaotic as American culture is . . . I thrive on that.” What does he mean? How is this sentiment reflected in his work?

ACTIVITIES

- Create a visual or written work that explores the concept of duality, bittersweetness, or simultaneity in American culture.
- Study one of Pittman’s paintings and list the references to advertising, **popular culture**, and historic art traditions you find in the work, noting why each may have been used. Collect photos or drawings of signs and **symbols** from around your community and incorporate them into a portrait of your local environment.



Untitled #8 (The Dining Room), 2005. Cell vinyl, acrylic, and alkyd on gessoed canvas over panel, 86 x 102 inches. Photo by Douglas M. Parker Studio, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.



Untitled #32 (A Decorated Chronology of Insistence and Resignation), 1994. Acrylic, enamel, and glitter on panel, 84 x 60 inches. Private collection. Photo by Douglas M. Parker Studio, courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.