

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Christopher Knight, "Lari Pittman's really, really big paintings", Los Angeles Times, November 8, 2013

I dropped in at Regen Projects in Hollywood to see my friend Lari Pittman's new show, just installed and opening to the public on Saturday. The exhibition is very large – a whopping 92 paintings on canvas, panel and mostly paper – but the three mammoth works that anchor the main room dwarf everything.

Titled as various "Flying Carpets," each one is a boggling 10 feet high and 30 feet wide.

No doubt there are many reasons for the daunting scale, which fits the work's overall theme of epic trauma – and equally epic possibility -- during what the artist has dubbed today's "Late Western Imperium." The spelling alone, with its Old World allusion to ancient Rome, reeks of life lived under crushing conditions of supreme power.

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What struck me about the size, though, was something specific – and polemical.

Much has been written about the proliferation of ever-larger art galleries around the globe ([Regen Projects](#) included), trailing the exponentially expanding international art market. To fill those multiplying giant spaces, many artists now employ vast teams of fabricators and assistants, turning the once rather solitary production of art into a full-fledged industry.

Pittman, on the other hand, runs a mom and pop shop. He made these huge paintings by himself. No fabricators laid out the backgrounds, no studio assistants filled in details at the artist's direction; instructions weren't sent to China explaining to others what to make and ship back. And this is not a contemporary production method in the old atelier manner employed by Rubens or Delacroix, who worked for the state – or by Jeff Koons, to cite a current, corporate-style example.

Nothing morally grand is being proposed about these paintings being handmade by one artist, nor any effort to denigrate other, Koons-style options. For art, whatever works is whatever works.

ART: Can you guess the high price?

Instead, Pittman's inescapable polemic points straight to what this art is: painting.

Unlike sculpture, installation, film, video or even printmaking, painting may be the medium most resistant to the big-team approach. Yes, Andy Warhol employed photographic silkscreens to launch a 1960s mass-production painting factory, but to do it he also launched the now-ubiquitous artistic strategy of making paintings by not really

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painting. In a lecture Wednesday night to a full auditorium at the UCLA Hammer Museum, Pittman simply said, “De-skilling doesn't really work with paintings.”

The extraordinarily skillful work, large and small, in his new show is pretty convincing proof. Within the rectangle of a painting, whether on paper a few inches square or wood panels the size of a ballroom wall, an artist can exert the absolute power – the Late Western Impaerium -- of individual imagination.

We may be living through a grim social period, which these paintings emphatically acknowledge. But it is also a time not without hope.