

Lari Pittman

at Barbara Gladstone

Of the 11 smoothly frantic paintings in Lari Pittman's latest ensemble, only one was visible from the gallery's vacant first room. Framed by the passage to the second space, *Untitled #6 (View from the Kitchen)* hung on the far wall. Initially puzzling, the eccentric arrangement underscored one of the unfolding themes of the show: the psychological freight borne by the presumed functions of architectural spaces. Somewhat perversely, that painting's vertiginous aerial view and racing perspective were atypical of the works in the show, most of which subscribe to the spatial conventions of still life and interior genres associated with domesticity. These stabilize and contain Pittman's familiar mad rush of motifs, culled from popular illustration, midcentury suburban decor and hobby-craft magazines, among other sources. As usual, the iconography is so dense that it is hard to sort out, yet these relatively enveloping spaces are a far cry from the linoleum-flat pastiche of symbols, both public and private, that brought Pittman to wide notice in the late 1980s.

Many of the works shown are 8½ by 7 feet or the reverse; all are dated 2005 and employ fastidiously applied cel vinyl, acrylic and alkyd on canvas over panel. Each concerns a different room of an archetypal house. *Untitled #8 (The Dining Room)* focuses on a centerpiece, an arrangement of blue-and-white canisters embellished with spiky cactus handles and guarded by a lethal-looking scimitar. Curling strokes suggesting Arabic calligraphy play across the surface. Whether these allusions to Islamic culture—which is born of the desert, where the home can be literally an oasis—have more or less significance for the artist than the crafty tchotchkes swirling around them is anyone's guess.

The facile brushwork of china- and tile painting and a tacky "dry-brush" treatment familiar from middlebrow ceramics of the 1950s grace *Untitled #5 (The Kitchen)*. The painting crawls with scuttling organisms and shadowy sprites; a dangling fruit basket and a cookie jar communicate mysteriously via a pale, flavescent catheter; grayish strips of "distressed" molding rocket around the place like a Valerie Jaudon painting that has been given a good shake. *Untitled*

#3 (*In the Garden*) features a variant on Pinocchio, the little liar who has appeared in Pittman's paintings over the years, here fashioned of leafy vegetal matter and worriedly eyeing nearby tiki torches and other Polynesian kitsch. Throughout the show, expanses of cloyingly agreeable decorator colors act as foils for jolts of jumpy, saturated hues.

Still under attack by Western culture at large, gay men at this late date might have a special feeling for that corner of the world they can control, their domiciles. The critical dialogue around Pittman routinely has to do with his identity as a gay man making pictorial hay of the language of ornament and decoration, but this new work seems grounded in (ironically) solid, reliably Cubist, ruggedly planar space. A curator with a bit of moxie might team Pittman with ornament overlord Frank Stella, Chicago-based nostalgist Tony Fitzpatrick and fake-jewel maven John Torreano, and watch the sparks fly.

—Stephen Maine



Lari Pittman: *Untitled #8 (The Dining Room)*, 2005, cel vinyl, acrylic, alkyd on gessoed canvas over panel, 86 by 102 inches; at Gladstone.