

A Mix Tape From the Future

"Prelude to an Apocalypse" melds untraditional playfulness and unease

By: [Michael Reid Busk](#)



Here's a free line to use at your next cocktail party: for the past century and a half, Western art shifted from realism to abstraction, corresponding to a similar shift in cultural values from religious absolutism to secular relativism. Or: Many paintings don't try to look like real stuff anymore.

In the past half-century, paintings have also increasingly become crucibles for different styles and even materials—Rauschenberg's combines, Jasper Johns' painted-over collages. The Aristotelian ideal of the unity of the artistic work, dominant through Monet, Picasso, even Pollack, began to crumble. Or: A painting is no longer one thing.

Certainly that's true of the works in Pedersen Projects' new show, "Prelude to an Apocalypse." The Pomona gallery's show features the work of four Southern California artists—Lisa Adams, Amir H. Fallah, Wendell Gladstone and Greg Rose—none of whom employ only the brush and canvas.

At first glance, Adams' two paintings are the most traditional—in *A Morass of Contradictions*, flowers grow from a dead stump as a chimney smolders in the background. However, Adams paints the flowers' stems with the flat surrealism of Magritte, cleanly drafted but—impossibly—swarming through the air like snakes or Medusa's head, while the stump itself is painted more roughly, flecked with brushstrokes of an unlikely blue, and the chimney is merely one of a series of background rectangles. But the painting's most daring touch is the flowers themselves, each a bright puff of spray-painted yellow, suggesting worn tennis balls, haloes, the corona of a firefly.

Fallah's two paintings are perhaps the least obviously traditional, manic collages that evoke both *Diá de los Muertos* and forgotten drawers of the nightstands of teenage boys. Against backdrops reminiscent of Dalí's deserts, busy shrines balance on spindly legs like Dalí's elephants. One of the two paintings ironically lionizes Arnold Schwarzenegger in his incarnations as governor, Terminator, and bodybuilding god, while the other juxtaposes photos of Roman busts with clips from contemporary magazines.

As natural in subject as Fallah's works are artificial, Greg Rose's landscapes are, in fact, composed with at least as much manual arrangement. To add a sense of depth in his bright bushes and trees, Rose spent countless hours taping off the canvas and painting one color after another, building a low relief with cartoonishly sharp lines dividing each color from its neighbor.

But the show's tour de force is Gladstone's lone painting, *Sanguine*, the most ambitious and expertly composed of the exhibit's seven paintings. A bodiless ogre's head is lassoed inside and out with candy cane rope, which also wraps around a bevy of all-white sailor/harlequins—created in relief via heavy taping—who vomit and spill from wine bottles what appear to be Dippin' Dots that gather to form the levitating, pointillistic body of the passed out drunk sailors are sitting on, who's pouring the green contents of his own green bottle onto the green grass. The drunk, sailors and ogre's head differ radically in style, and it's Gladstone's ambition as much as his talent that's thrilling.

Taken together, the works featured in the show are more preludes than apocalypses, and if they do gesture toward any apocalypse, it is the end of the painting that coheres as one indivisible whole. But that terminus isn't chaos—in the hands of artists as capable as those featured here, the painting becomes the best sort of hodgepodge—a buffet, a mix tape sent to us from the future.

"Prelude to an Apocalypse: Prelude in an Era of Diminished Expectations" at PEDERSON projects, 396 S. Thomas St., Pomona; www.pedersonprojects.com.

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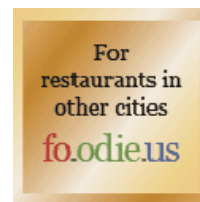
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