

Marine Contemporary

001

Christopher Pate
Camp Alpha



Foreword Claressinka Anderson

When I first saw Christopher Pate's paintings and drawings, I was instantly drawn to their poetic expression of history, memory and loss through geographically specific imagery. As a long time lover of cartography and its role in history, his unusual exploration of space and mapping was immediately compelling to me. His work possesses a portal-like quality, often bringing the viewer into a layered, seductive and contradictory world of pop, geography and historical references. Pate is also concerned with the physical structure of painting - a concern that has always operated in tandem with a focus on surface and pictorial qualities within abstraction. His use of vintage tablecloth "screens", are a literal and conceptual grounding in the idea of actual space, particularly American space.

Pate's interest in space and structure has not, however, led him as far as the reductivist explorations of Robert Ryman, where painting and structure operate in constant reference to one another and that purity of purpose is the central point. Pate explains, "I perhaps came closest to that ideal in my Live Birth paintings, in which one stroke of paint was brushed down a stepped totemic three-dimensional surface once a day for nine months, until a stalactite-ridden organism was formed as an outgrowth of the structure beneath." In Pate's works since that time, the surface has been less materially oriented and more focused on qualities of pictorialism, involving the orchestration of color, formal composition, line, atmosphere, light and space.

Pate made a group of six works called "Screens" in 2005. These works were done on burlap stretched over square panels. The painted area floated on the surface within a border of raw burlap. The corners of this area were rounded, suggesting an early television screen. There was content within the 'screen' that varied within this group of six paintings, but the forms were simple

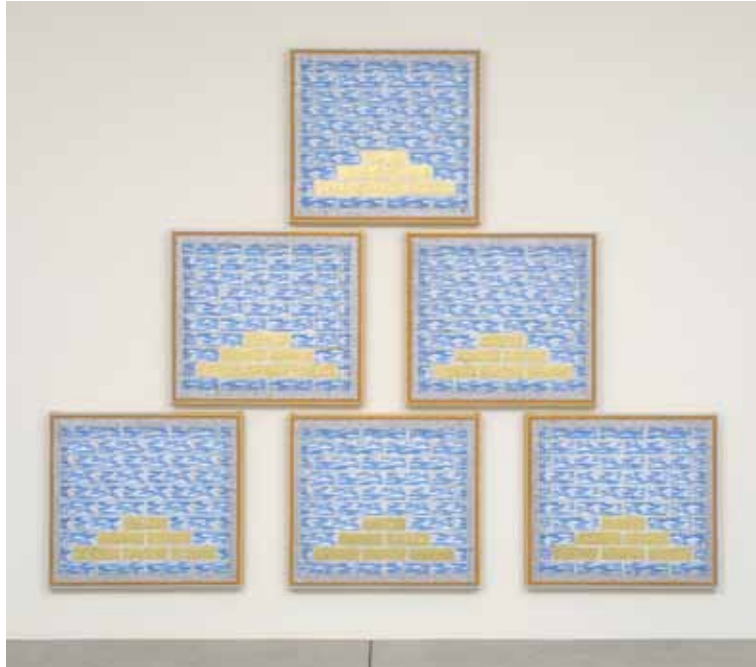
in their sensual curves and glowing interior space. During the making of what was to be the seventh "Screen", an unpredictable moment occurred. Pate explains, "I laid a vintage tourist tablecloth depicting the island of Oahu onto the painting in progress. I can't say exactly what compelled me or where this tablecloth came from, but it had been with me for years and had even been pinned to the wall of the bedroom loft of my studio. Upon seeing this cloth filled with kitsch imagery upon this expanse of stained burlap, something clicked. I immediately glued the tablecloth to the surface and a whole new approach to painting for me was born. My obsession with structuring a painting surface, that had led me to utilize burlap for the "Screens", had now led to a new conceptual layer within the work through the use of this printed tablecloth. The ground of the painting was now grounded in the idea of actual space."

Pate was raised in Idaho (the state with "Famous Potatoes" on their license plate, which might well explain his attraction to burlap), an area remote from the culture centers of America. Growing up, he was deeply embedded in a conservative, flag-waving, God-fearing atmosphere. The artist felt like an alien in Idaho and this implanted in him a fascination with America in all its crazy quilt strangeness. Pate has not been fundamentally attracted to the didactic or polemical, so making paintings that attempt to accurately describe a certain place, or criticize it in some specific way, has generally not been his main objective. Instead, his practice explores the ideas of decoration, geometry, symmetry, color, and articulation of space within an abstract format. The tablecloth imagery is employed in large part as a supple armature to fasten a host of painterly moves and ideas.



Oahu 2005
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
65 x 65 in./165 x 165 cm.

And yet, in addition to creating beautiful, contemplative surfaces, Pate's thoughts on America have continued and gradually embraced more pointed and specific forms. The first work to demonstrate this was the edition of five paintings called "The Americans", involving a silkscreen of a distorted contortion of skulls on a star-spangled, red, white and blue patterned fabric. The six-panel, pyramid stacked work "Bricks," also involved silkscreen and found fabric. In this work, a clean, minimalist stack of panels mimicked the stack of gold bricks within each panel, eliciting ideas of repetition, material accumulation and wealth, art collecting and consumption, all within an elegant formal structure.



Bricks 2008
Silkscreen on found fabric and acrylic
on burlap, six panels 97 1/2 x 122 in.
247.7 x 309.9 cm (overall)
31 5/8 x 35 1/8 in. 80.3 x 89.2 cm (panel)

Pate's more recent explorations into the origins of America led him to investigate the name "America" itself. In "Slither (Vespucci Part Two)," Amerigo Vespucci is pressed up against the jungle he claims to have discovered. It is generally agreed that America was officially named in 1507 after the explorer Amerigo Vespucci, having been published in maps of the time, most famously in the Waldseemuller map "Universalis Cosmographia" that now resides in the Library of Congress. Pate researched Amerigo Vespucci and found him to be a controversial figure who many feel did not deserve the honor of having his name attached to the New World.



Slither (Vespucci Part Two) 2010
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap (two panels)
84 x 84 in./213 x 213 cm (overall)

For the painting “Slither (Vespucci Part Two),” there are two large panels that form a perfect seven foot square. A Vespucci face off, the painting depicts the explorer pressed up against the South American jungle. The jungle is depicted through the use of two types of patterned fabric, adding a kitsch factor, a sense of repetition and an overall mesmerizing, decorative atmosphere. A snake-like form curls between the figures, with one of the Vespucci heads seeming like the head of a mighty python. Pate elaborates, “Europeans snaked their way through the new world, slithered in with diseases and weapons, and the natives of North and South America were conquered and decimated. There seemed to have been a certain amount of hucksterism within the early explorers who began this exploitation, particularly evident in many of the bombastic claims of Amerigo Vespucci that haven’t been able to withstand historical examination. There are invasions happening today, even though every square inch of the planet has more or less been explored and mapped. These invasions are more ideological than physical, more based on corporate greed than infected blankets and gunfire, and are propelled by hucksterism in the form of commercial advertising and propaganda. When there is little physical geography left to exploit, the royally funded explorers of today must conquer the minds, culture, livelihoods, and pocketbooks of the people.”

In Pate’s first solo exhibition at Marine Contemporary, Camp Alpha, Pate continues his political and ideological exploration of America and Los Angeles in particular. The artist sees the US military base Camp Alpha in Babylon, Iraq, as a touch point for how history becomes fodder for progress. Camp Alpha was controversially constructed upon a sensitive archaeological site in which areas were leveled to accommodate helipads and parking lots for heavy vehicles.

The exhibition Camp Alpha is not specifically an investigation of the base and its political and moral implications, but rather a meditation on the type of human activity it represents. Residents of Los Angeles are keenly aware of how artifacts of the past are built upon, demolished or otherwise cleared away for new construction, often at an alarming rate. This layering, whether violent and destructive, or carefully considered and engineered, enables new forms, while leaving behind an irreversible void and sense of loss. We hold on to all we can grasp in the process, knowing that what we have before us will someday fade as well.

Pate explores this effect in paintings on burlap featuring found fabrics, collage-oriented works on paper and digital prints. The works feature a dynamic hybridization of abstraction and representation. A dialogue is formed not only with the historical content of the collaged elements, but with the style and sensibility of past graphic designers and in some cases, imagery of the art and artifacts of Native Americans. In the process of making these works, destruction and obfuscation of imagery takes place on surfaces that are abraded and layered upon. The resulting works are provocative, mesmerizing vortices of image, color and form that are as much melancholy odes to the past as paeans to future possibilities.

Christopher Pate Bio

Christopher Pate
(b. 1965, St. Louis, Missouri, USA)
Lived and worked in Los Angeles for over 20 years.

Solo exhibitions include

- Amerigo at PØST, Los Angeles, CA, 2011;
- Flyover at Jail, Los Angeles, CA, 2008;
- Float Some and Jet Some at Cartelle, Marina del Rey, CA, 2005;
- Horizons and Archipelagos at Roberts and Tilton, Los Angeles, CA, 2000.

His curatorial ventures include the series of four Rogue Wave exhibitions at LA Louver (2001–2009), Hef at Jail, Los Angeles, CA, 2008, and Tripindicular at Lemon Sky, Los Angeles, CA, 1999.

Arizona 2011
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
46 x 46 in./117 x 117 cm



California 2011
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
46 x 46 in./117 x 117 cm





Alaska 2011
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
58 x 58 in./147.3 x 147.3 cm

Hawaiian Islands 2011
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
46 x 46 in./117 x 117 cm



South Dakota 2010
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
46 x 46 in./117 x 117 cm





United States 2010
Collage and mixed media on paper
19-1/2 x 19-3/4 in./49.5 x 50.2 cm

Simplified Touring Map of California 2011
Acrylic and collage on paper
19 x 19 in./48.3 x 48.3 cm





SoCal 2011
Acrylic, graphite and collage on paper
19 x 19 in./48.3 x 48.3 cm

NorCal 2011
Acrylic, graphite and collage on paper
19 x 19 in./48.3 x 48.3 cm



OreCal 2011
Acrylic, graphite and collage on paper
19 x 19 in./48.3 x 48.3 cm



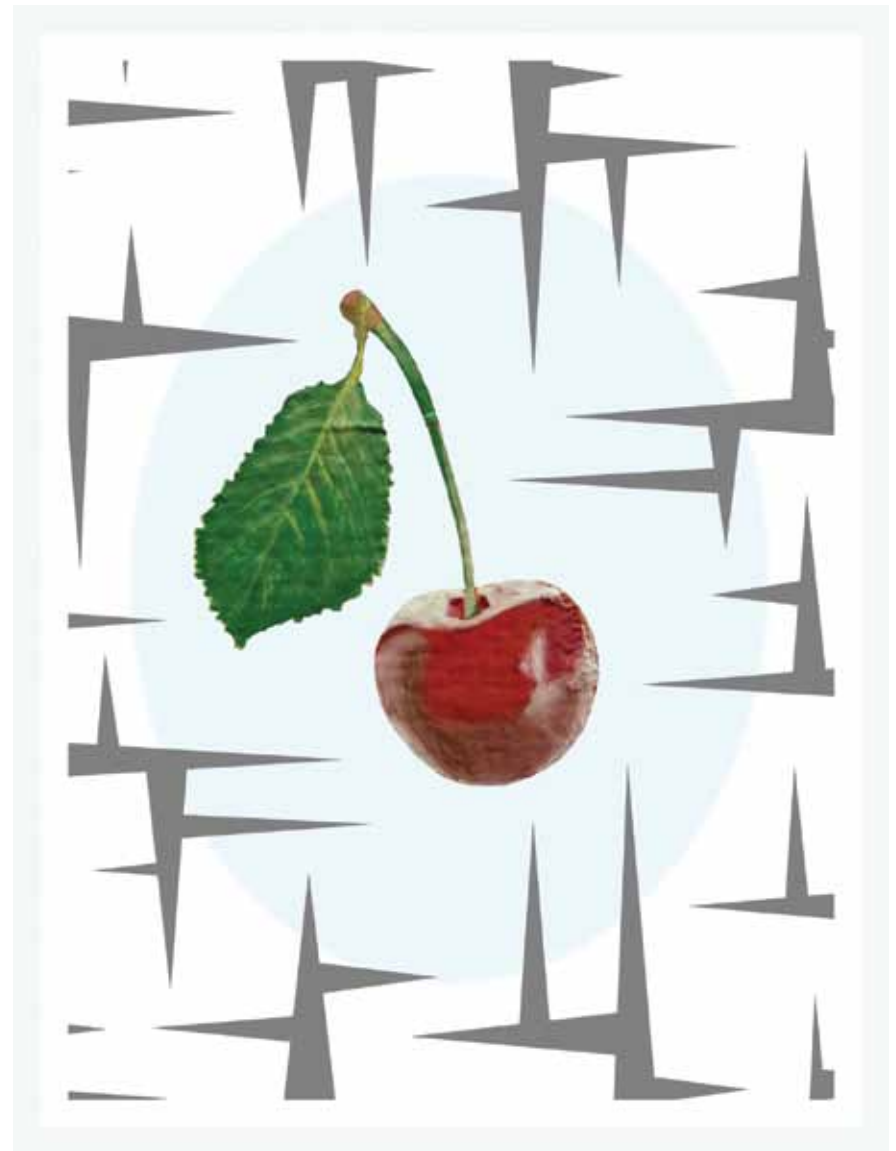
Cherry Sunset
Edition of 5 with one AP
Archival digital print on paper
40 x 40 in./101.6 x 101.6 cm (image)

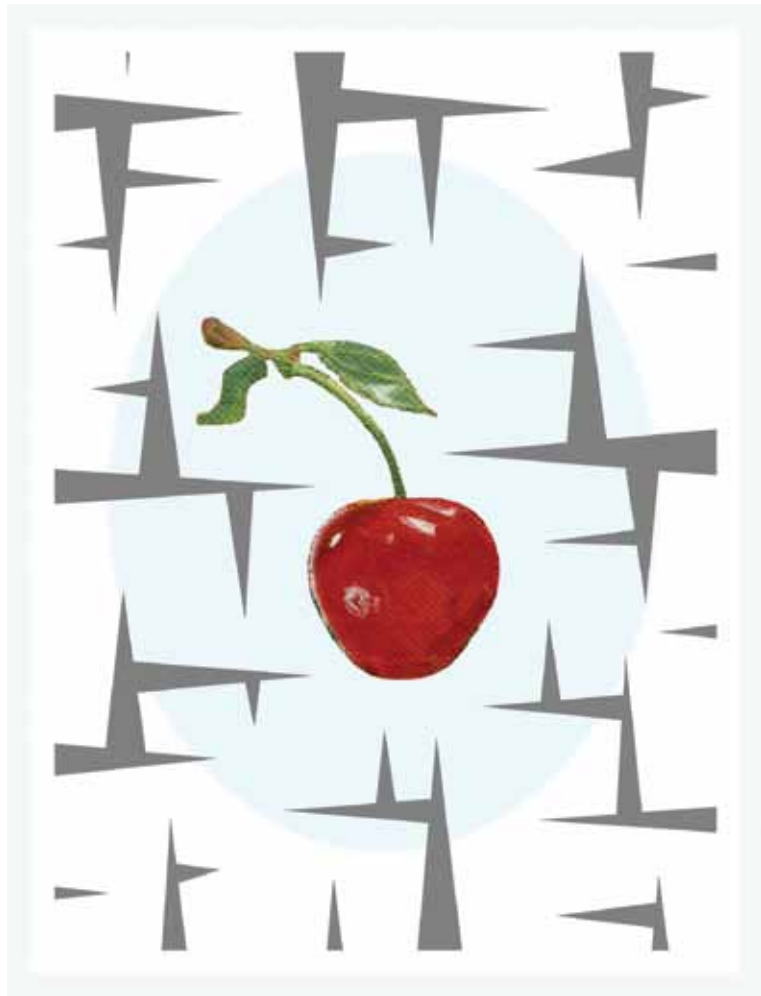




California (detail) 2011
Acrylic and found fabric on burlap
46 x 46 in./117 x 117 cm

First Cherry
Edition of 3 with one AP
Archival digital print on paper
40 x 30 in./101.6 x 76.2 cm (image)





Twelfth Cherry
Edition of 3 with one AP
Archival digital print on paper
40 x 30 in./101.6 x 76.2 cm (image)



Fourth Cherry
Edition of 3 with one AP
Archival digital print on paper
40 x 30 in./101.6 x 76.2 cm (image)

Camp Alpha 2011
Graphite on paper
33 x 19 in./83.8 x 48.3 cm





Camp Alpha
Installation



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