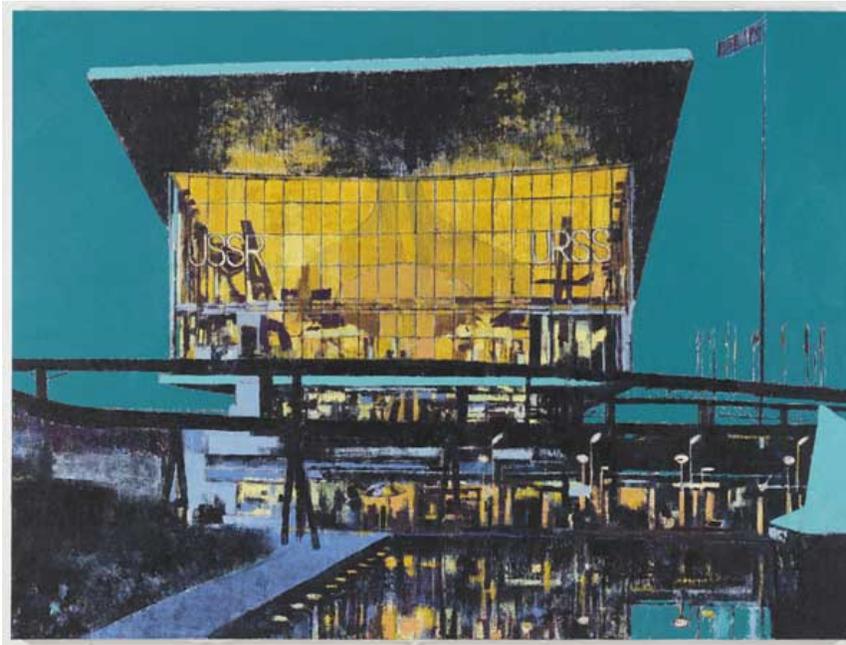


Enoc Perez at Mitchell-Innes & Nash

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Hilarie Sheets, writer



Enoc Perez, Pavilion of the Soviet Union, Expo 67 2009.
Oil on canvas. 60 by 80 inches. Courtesy the Artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash

In this unabashedly gorgeous show, Enoc Perez uses the contours of modernist architecture and feminine beauty to explore ideas of longing, nostalgia, optimism and melancholy. These large-scale canvases faithfully reproduce the dynamic forms of utopian buildings such as the Palacio da Justica, Brasilia, and the Nakagin Capsule Tower, Tokyo, or the nude torso of a woman, yet the unnatural palette—by turns high-keyed, brooding, and shimmering—pushes the emotional content and abstraction further than in the artist's previous paintings.

The San Juan-born, New York-based artist continues to construct his paintings without using a brush. Working from reproductions and photographs he's taken, Perez makes multiple identical drawings with the aid of a projector and transfers each individual color to canvas via oil stick on the back of the drawings in a process akin to color printing. While this painstaking method of building images layer by layer can produce

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grainy results, typical of his earlier paintings, here Perez experimented as well with broad swaths of thickly applied pigment.

In “Alma Bank, Georgia,” for instance, the futuristic-looking structure, crowned by two crossing arches, is rendered in a thin, streaky manner evocative of old color photographs from the 1960s. Yet the sky is a vivid, richly textured marigold yellow that seems to be enveloping the flying curves and dark foliage in the background—or is the black landscape eating into the unreal sky? The ravishing image, idealized yet wistful, feels plucked from memory.

The dramatic undulating façade in “Teatro Popular, Niteroi, Brasil” is even more removed from time and place. The pale pinkish-white ribbons of architecture, with a sketchy plaid of brown, blue, purple and yellow defining an indeterminate foreground area, are suspended in murky black space that heightens the pure sculptural voluptuousness of the subject. In another canvas nearby, Perez treats the sensuous architecture of a woman’s torso viewed naked from behind similarly. Her white skin tone, flecked with bits of pink, yellow, blue, purple, red and brown, seems illuminated against the black background. In his boldest move toward abstraction, Perez paints a solid deep purple biomorphic form running up her side from one buttock to the shoulder and down the arm and another purple ovoid shrouding her face peering over her shoulder. In both paintings, he captures the promise—of love, of a better tomorrow embodied in modernist projects—and its slippery unattainability.

The standout of the show is “Pavilion of the Soviet Union, Expo 67,” of an outward-oriented structure built for the future that Perez paints with a melancholic glamour. The glassed-in pavilion glows a fiery yellow that seems to give off heat under its soaring cantilevered roof and is cloaked with a saturated teal sky signaling dusk or the end to happiness. In the foreground reflecting pool, Perez paints an expressionistic tour de force of dazzling color and light, suggesting the artist is loosening the yoke of his painting method and enjoying the application of paint unhinged to representation.