

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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Stephen Wallis, writer



Enoc Perez at his Studio in East Hampton, NY, with paintings that incorporate works by Picasso.  
Portrait by Joshua McHugh

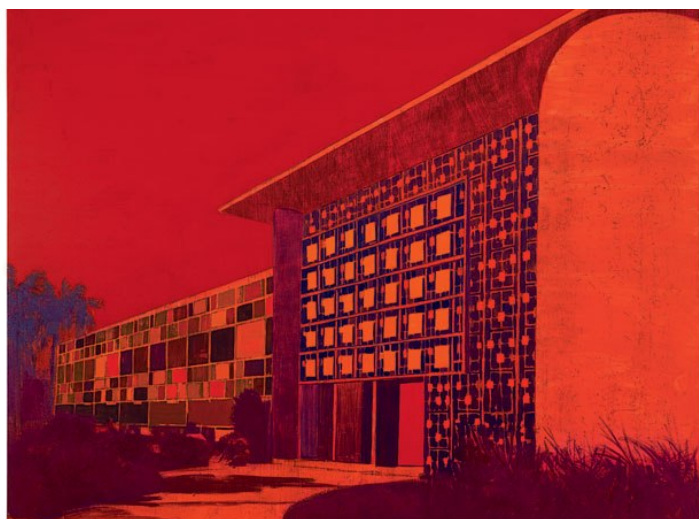
Chalk it up to middle age, but Enoc Perez has never been more productive or creatively rangy. “You reach a point where you don’t feel like you have to prove anything, you just paint for yourself,” says the 46-year-old Manhattan-based artist. “I’m going to keep making art. Lately more is more.” Perez’s signature works – large, seductive paintings of modernist buildings, from hotels in his native Puerto Rico to icons such as New York’s Lever House and Chicago’s Marina City towers – are owned by major museums and influential collectors like Peter Brant and Aby Rosen. The earliest examples were made via a meticulous process of transferring oil-stick drawings to canvas, sometimes dozens of layers of them, by hand. A couple years ago Perez began using a brush as well, giving the works a more painterly, abstract feel, with thick drips and daubs adding texture and complexity – “almost a sense of decay,” he notes. At the same time, his colors got more extreme, trending toward acid hues or dark, moody tones. “It’s not a naturalistic palette, because I want the works to be discovered as paintings first, not as images of architecture,” says the artist, who just completed a series on buildings by Swiss architects for a spring show at Thomas Ammann Fine Art in Zurich.

But Perez is also moving into entirely new territory, namely with sculptures based on his collection of vintage swizzle sticks, most from Caribbean hotels. The finished works, several of which he debuted in January at Acquavella Galleries – his New York dealer – are cast in bronze or aluminum then painted white, and stand up to ten feet tall. Composed of enlarged versions of the stirrers fused together, the pieces suggest playful, oddly enchanting totems commemorating some faded tropical paradise. “They look like disasters – they’re broken,” the artist says, acknowledging the sense of “failed utopia” and disillusioned modernist ideals that pervades his work.

Perez also paints retro-ish, slightly kitschy nudes (the full scope of his output is chronicled in a monograph coming out from Assouline in December), and he has embarked on another series that involves making digital prints that combine those nudes with works by Picasso, no less, and then adding layers of paint and silver leaf. “I’m addressing perhaps the most important artist in history – that makes anyone nervous,” says Perez. “It’s about shifting out of my comfort zone.”



A 2013 painting of a Herzog & de Meuron building under construction in Beirut. Biblioteca Jose M.  
Photo: Kent Pell/courtesy of Acquavella Galleries



Lázaro, UPR, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, 2010. Photo courtesy of Acquavella Galleries