



THE DESERT BLOOM

ENOC PEREZ

THE DESERT BLOOM

FOREWORD
BROOKE LYNN MCGOWAN HERZOG

CURATED BY
DYLAN BRANT

21 SEPTEMBER - 4 NOVEMBER 2017
LEILA HELLER GALLERY, DUBAI

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.





FROM BORINQUEN, WITH LOVE

A FOREWORD

‘The truth of the purloined letter is
the truth itself... Truth is ‘woman’
as veiled/unveiled’
– Jacques Derrida, *La Carte Postale*

‘So space acquires emotional even
rational sense through a poetic
process whereby the vacant or
anonymous reaches of distance are
converted into meaning’
– Edward Said

You will not find it on any map. The outline is there: the oblong form surrounded in blue, an island, in an often but not always tranquil Caribbean Sea. Indeed, it appears there on la carte, la carta, but the name, the signifier is missing: *Borinquen*, or ‘land of the valiant’, the name given to the isle of Enoc Perez’s birth, Puerto Rico, before its conquest by Christopher Columbus, in 1493, before the claiming of land, before the process of marking, which makes a map, which creates landmarks—utopian, imperialist, or otherwise. Executor in paint and canvas of the heritage of colonial and modernist desire to dominate space in the form of architectural landmarks, Perez applies his practice in this exhibition, *The Desert Bloom*, to the long history of marking land, in the portrayal of the power and desire in the production of place in the Near East from Istanbul to Dubai. And back again.

From the siege of Constantinople to the Roman Persian wars, from the conciliations of Lord Balfour to the contemporary controversy over the West Bank, from the depths of the Bosphorus to the heights of Mount Sinai, like the painter’s native island, the MENA region, which he approaches as a traveler in a land composed of at once fantasy and familiarity, has seen its its turns of ideology and ruins, returning once again in the present to the futurist longing in architectural terms for a ‘land of the valiant’, or a new frontier. Turning his gaze to the formal contours of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi, to the vaulting parabolas of Zaha Hadid’s Haydar Aliev Cultural Center, and to the 7th century foundational structure foundation to Islam the Dome of the Rock, Perez, famed for this persistent portrayal of the international style in the built environment—landscape in the form of portraiture—modernism in the form of memory—here traces an urban geography which is both deeply ancient and heroically contemporary. Or as Sarah Newman of the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. notes, Perez produces paintings as portrayals of place “as much mental and social as it is physical.”

The physicality of Perez’s paintings positions the artist as that rarely spotted species on the terrain of contemporary art: a painter, first and foremost, unabashed, unashamed, and, like the denizens of Dubai in which this exhibition takes place, unafraid to broach the boundaries of their material condition. As Newman follows, “as much as Perez’s works investigate place, they invite us to consider the faltering condition and enduring seductions of painting in contemporary life.” Enoc Perez transforms the iconographic allure of the art that went Pop met by the transfiguration of the ideological desires of the built environment to return at once affect to the stiff object of architecture and originality to the copy. Born in Puerto Rico, one of a number of American vestiges of the colonial era, Perez arrived to the bright lights and big city of New York in the twilight of the era of Pop Art’s stark

announcement of the death of painting. Following the artist’s graduation with a BFA from Pratt Institute in 1990 and an MFA from Hunter College in New York City in 1992, Perez sought to recuperate the medium through a reversal of Warhol’s infamous mechanistic gesture. As Bob Colacello, writer and Andy confidante conveys, Enoc became ...

... intrigued by Warhol’s trademark silkscreen paintings, which had the simultaneous but contradictory effect of transforming photography into painting and painting into printmaking. And yet, on an aesthetic level, Warhol’s paintings of Marilyn, Liz, and Elvis were singularly beautiful objects, pleasurable to behold, neo-Byzantine icons to a post-religious culture... Perez’s mission then was to find a way to acknowledge Warhol’s conceptual breakthrough while superseding its dead-end implications for painting as a relevant, contemporary art form. And, at the same time, to make beautiful pictures.

The seduction of beauty, even its its most weathered glamour, is not lost on the painter. However, utilizing photographic images as reference points, including those which retain the perfume of cinema, Perez does not reduce painting to the iteration of the infinitely reproducible image, but rather renders the process of printmaking, mimicking the CYMK process, into an expressive and deaccelerated painterly gesture. Perez constructs, building each image up in layers of saturated pigment, through consecutive layers of vibrant color transfer, finished by hand, as what he deems ‘printed paintings’. The results are, as Colacello states “rich, dense, thick, and highly human.”

Pleasure persists: carnal, even fleshy, like the contours of Perez’s tableaux themselves. Surpassing both painting and its death, Perez replaces the mechanistic with the emotive, investing each image with the visceral longing at the heart of Modernist architecture or colonial structures, both of which have occupied a central place in his previous bodies of work: from his portrayal of the admirable hubris of New York’s World Trade Center to the humbler historical dwellings inhabiting the landscape of Puerto Rico. This is the investment of the ‘highly human’ into the seemly artificial landmarks. The perception of desire in Perez’s practice is not accidental; his first portrayal of a building was also a portrait of a woman. “The first building that I made was in early 2001, a painting of the Normandie Hotel. I made that painting because I had just met this beautiful woman who was just married at the time, I wanted to make a show about her so I had to make the show in code because of her status... Carole is today my wife and mother of my children.” Perez’s printed paintings began as love letters; free signifiers whose veiled secret is desire itself.

Yet, however personal or clandestine, the artist’s printed paintings might be, however much each rationally constructed image might belie intimate urges, each of the artist’s works completed in The Desert Bloom, as elsewhere, achieve the level of what Jacques Lacan or Jacques Derrida might call the envoi/renvoi—the structure of desire couched in the epistolary logic of the carte postale —or the effect of the postcard—and exceed

beyond. Imbued with the cartographic resonance and writ with a painting passion at a luxury of scale, Perez’s noir portrayal of the Louvre Abu Dhabi for example—itsself belongs to the future, not even open to the public at the time of the writing of this essay—contains a promise, like a letter sent from abroad, no less at once elusive, possessive, and productive for the society which built it, than the hope for the love of a woman might be to the painter himself. If it can be said then ‘That a letter always arrives at its destination’ then the destination of Perez’s paintings, love letters, open secrets, unsealed and available for anyone to read, returning the cartographic romance, heroism, and history of the landmark to itself.

For a region, besieged by thousands of years of attempts of domination, incursion, and occupation, the imperial aggression which would attempt to map, conquer, and produce its own names for the markings on the land, Enoc Perez’s image attempts to return to them their own landmarks; he invites his viewers, in his envois, open intimate messages finding their destination everywhere, to rewrite their own map, the promise of their own future, with letters new and old.

– Brooke L McGowan-Herzog
New York, NY

Sarah Newman “Utopia” in *Enoc Perez*. New York: Assouline Publishing, 6. 13.

Ibid, 13.

Bob Colacello. “Enoc Perez: Stirring it up” in *Enoc Perez*. New York: Assouline Publishing, 6.

Ibid, 6.

See Jacques Derrida. *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* University of Chicago Press, 1987. First published in French in 1980.

See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar on the Purloined Letter*. First published in English in 1972. (<http://www.lacan.com/purloined.htm>)



"A lot of painters paint to question the medium, which might be perfect for them, but I'm one of those who really believes in painting."

– Enoc Perez

THE DESERT BLOOM

A LETTER FROM THE ARTIST

I must have been around eight years old when I first saw pictures of the of the Middle East in a set of postcards my parents owned. They were images of the great Egyptian Pyramids, and I was shocked by their monumentality and blistering color. Awash in yellow, these images felt familiar but at the same time a world away. In Puerto Rico, the sun is inescapable and the color yellow pervasive. The treasured antiquity and romance of these images pulled at my heart, reminding me of long days at the beach in my home town of San Juan.

I'm now older and have had the fortunate opportunity to pursue a career as an artist. As an artist, aesthetic pursuits are paramount, and two of my most persistent ones have always been architecture and painting. Thinking back to those familiar postcards forty-two years ago, I'm in awe as to how brilliantly they married those two great loves so seamlessly. Color, Painting, and Architecture.

So when Leila and Alexander Heller proposed I tackle a show extensively focused on the Middle East, I immediately said yes. The Middle East and its architecture have always strongly influenced my work, but now I have

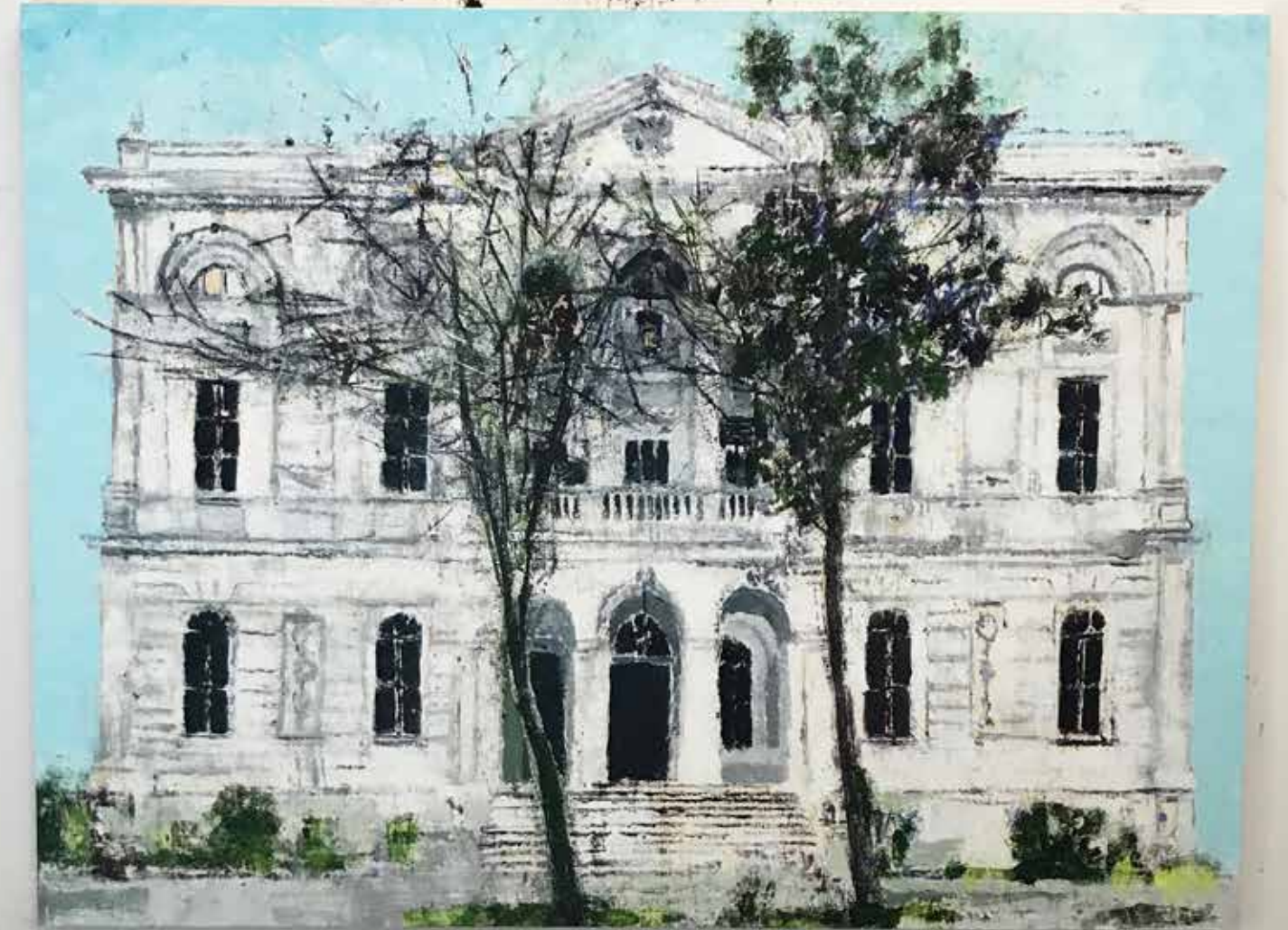
had the opportunity to give it the attention it so rightfully deserved.

The region's rich history imbued with a multitude of architectural masterpieces made the task of selecting only ten daunting to say the least. Spurred by this research, I began to further discover additional corollaries between my own history and the Middle East's colonial past. This understanding made clear to me a lived perspective that is impossible to acquire without knowing of the colonial experience itself.

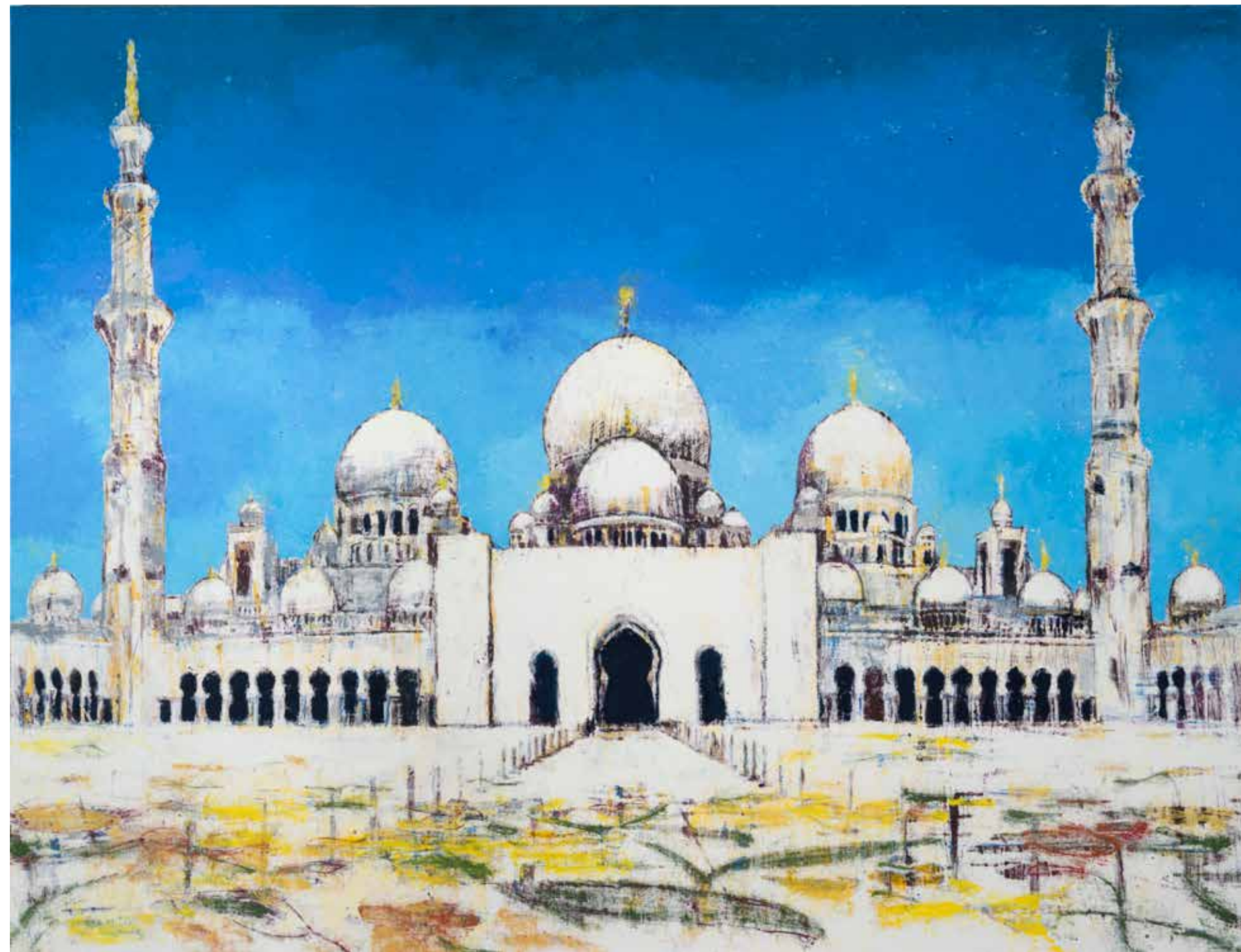
I hope that these paintings convey the pleasure that I acquired from their production, for in them, I feel as if I found a part of myself. A subject matter seemingly foreign to me was made familial. For me, architecture at its best is a true reflection of ourselves, our ideas, and our own humanity as a people.

What a beautiful desert bloom this has been.

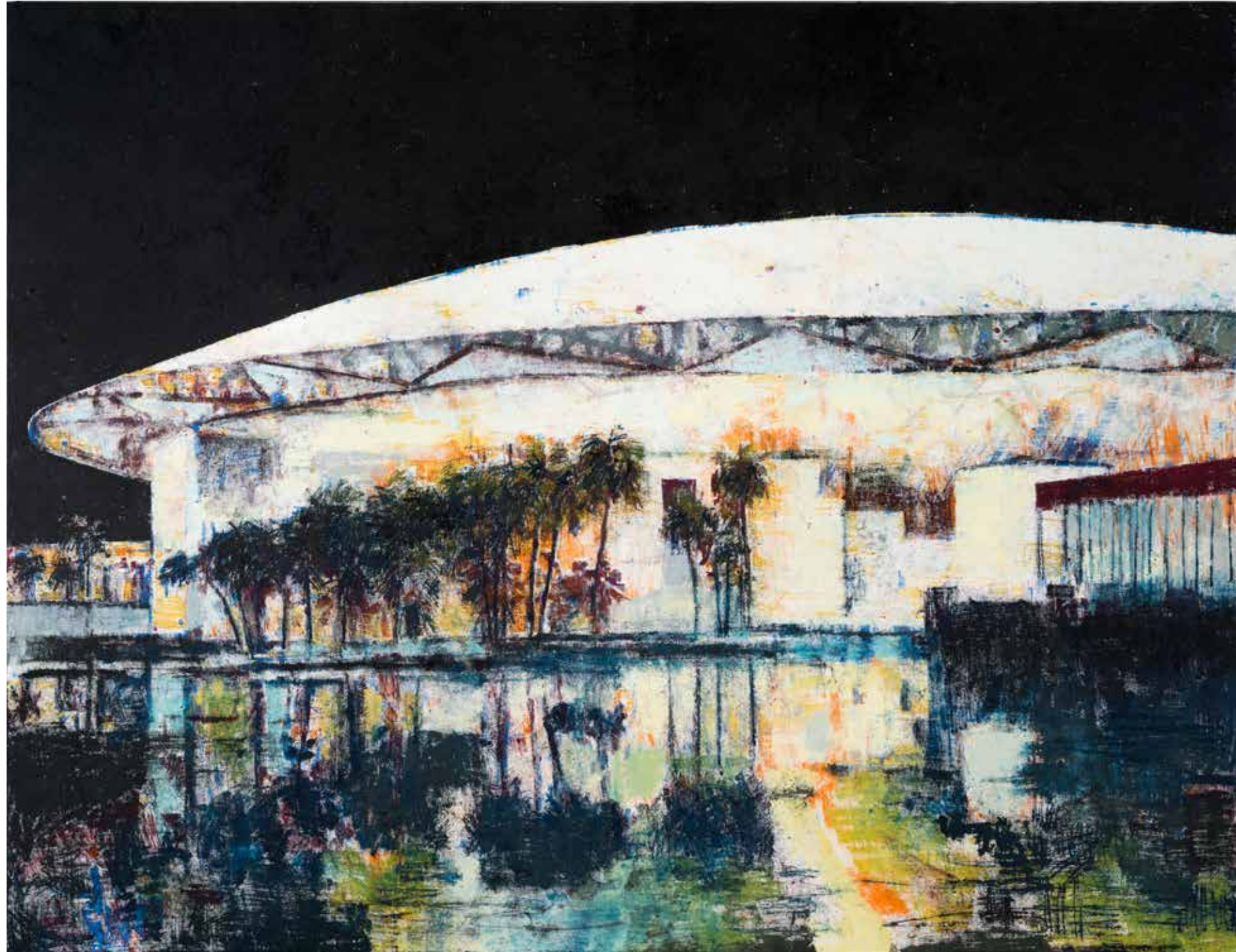
– Enoc Perez



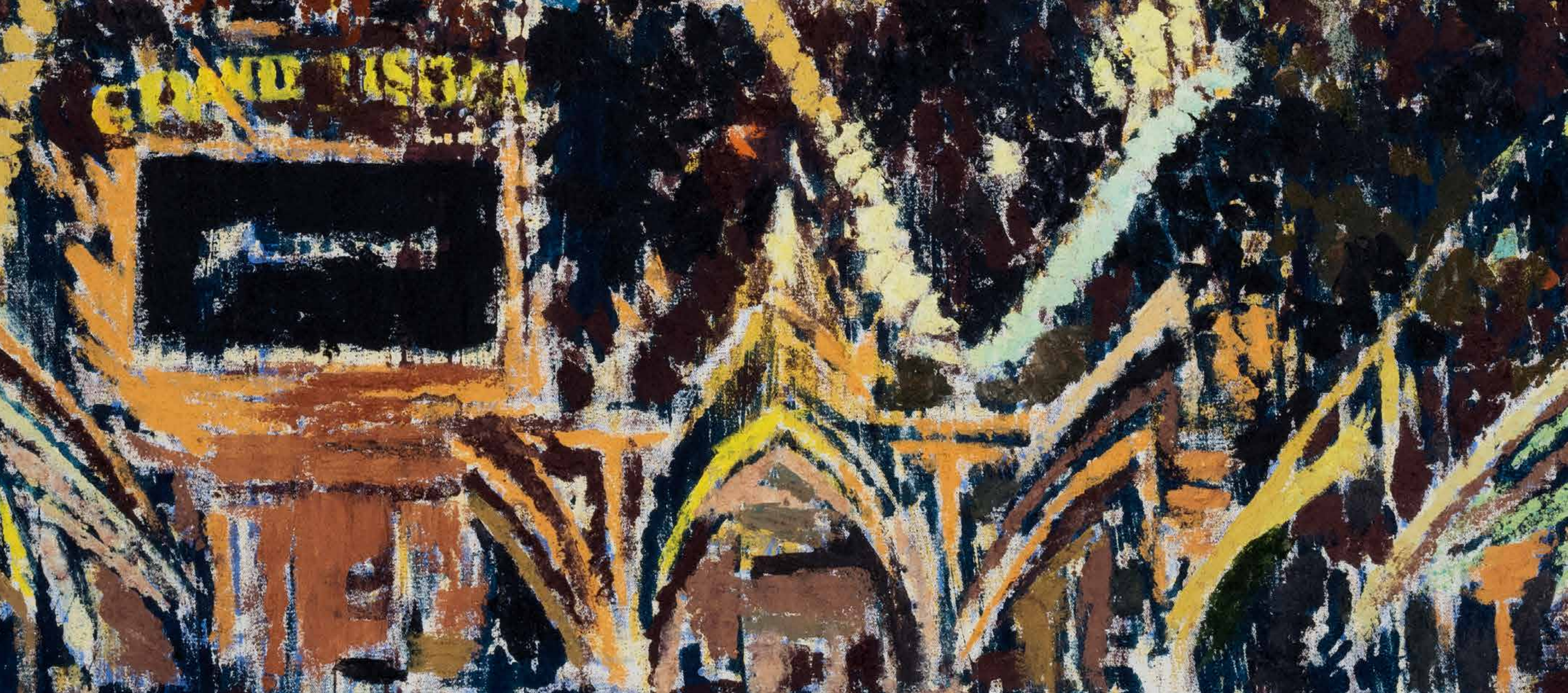
Sheikh Zayed Mosque
2017
Oil on canvas
92 x 120 in (234 x 305 cm)







Louvre Abu Dhabi
2017
Oil on canvas
92 x 120 in (234 x 305 cm)



Grand Lisboa
2017
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 in (204 x 153 cm)



*"In a way, these architects
really believed in the idea
of utopia. There's a true
sense of believing in these
buildings..."*

–Enoc Perez



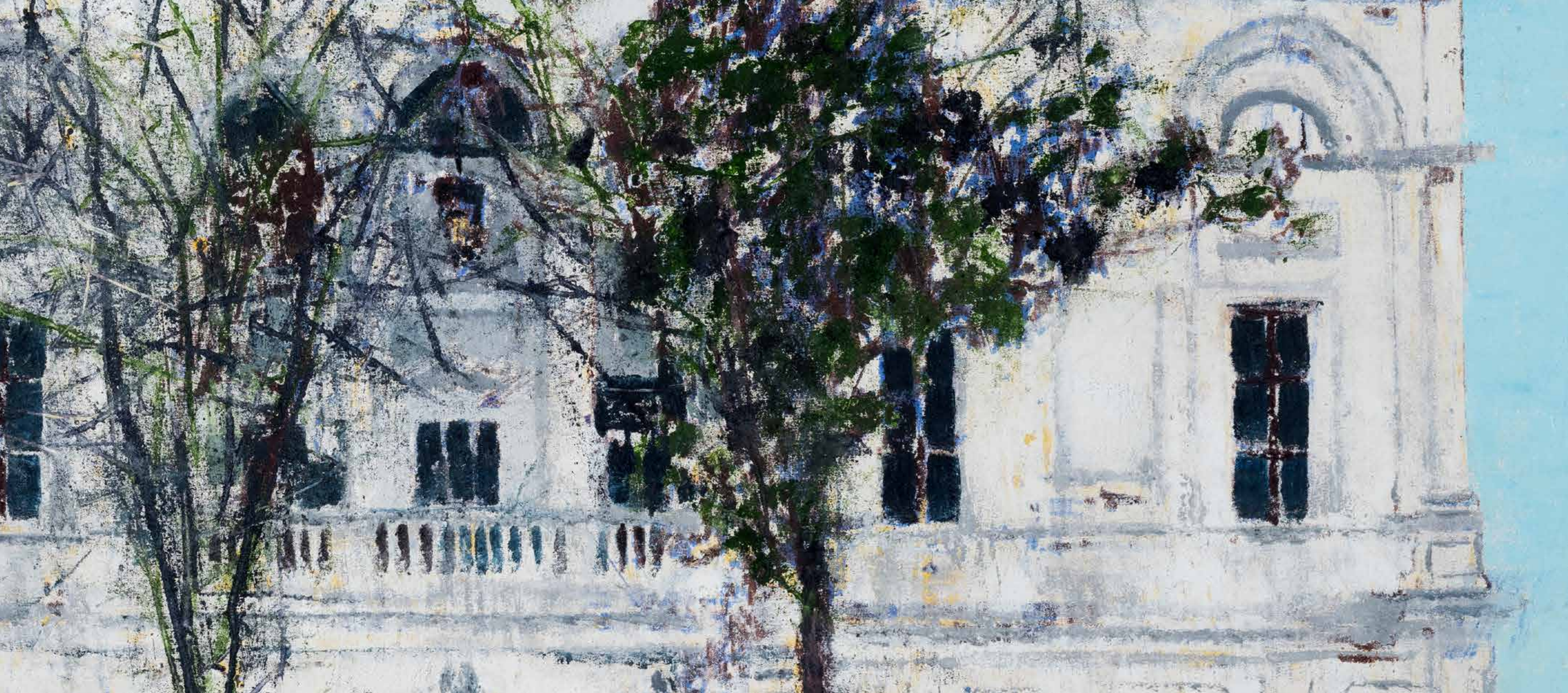


Supreme Court of Pakistan
2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 in (153 x 204 cm)



Senate of Iran
2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 in (153 x 204 cm)



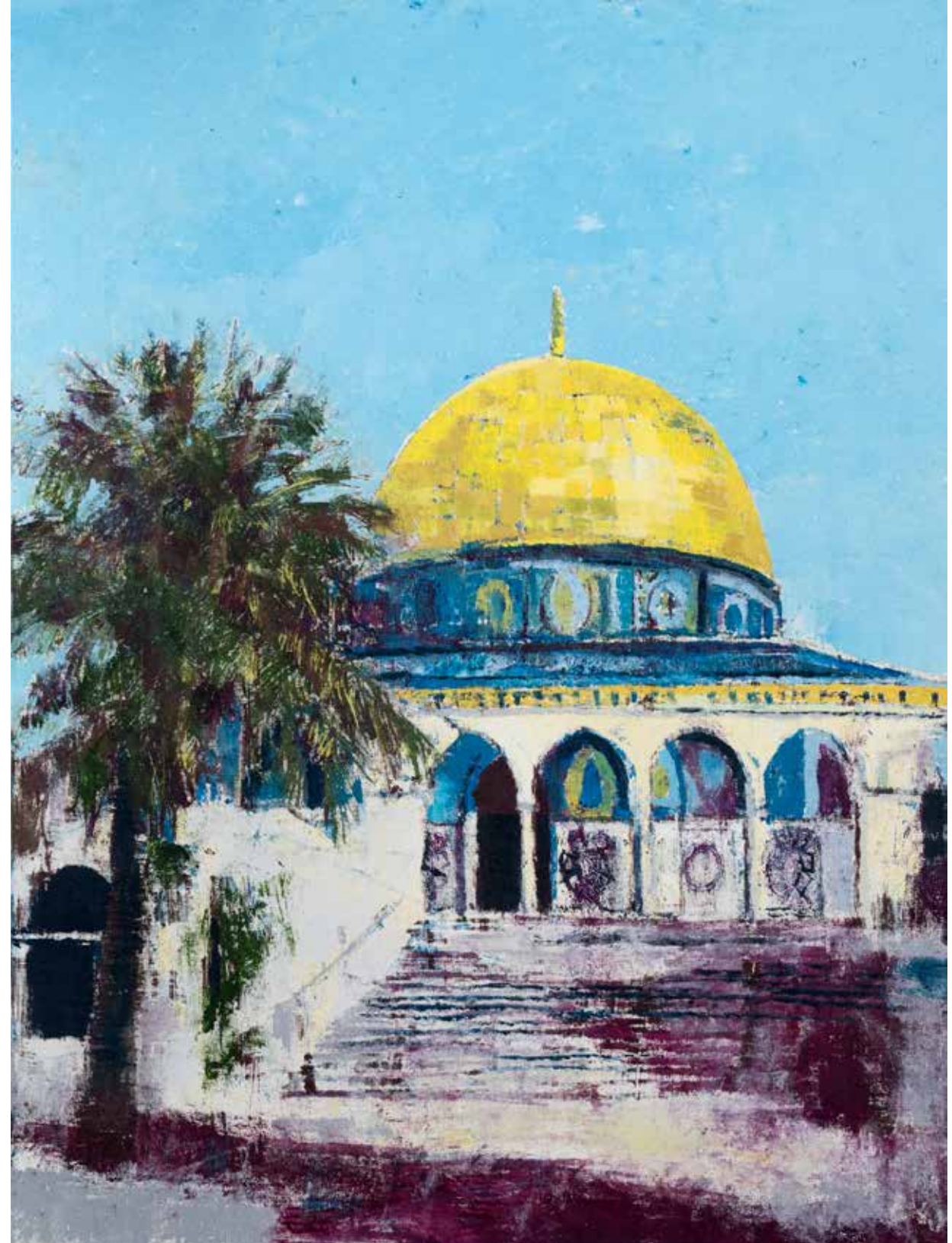




Soho House Istanbul
2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 in (153 x 204 cm)



Dome of the Rock
2017
Oil on canvas
72 x 54 in (183 x 138 cm)







National Parliament House of Bangladesh
2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 in (153 x 204 cm)



Palace of Assembly Chandigarh
2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 in (153 x 204 cm)







Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center
2017
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 in (153 x 204 cm)

BIOGRAPHY

Born in San Juan in 1967, Enoc Perez first took painting lessons at the age of eight. As the son of an art critic, he spent family vacations traveling to museums in different countries and learning about the history of art. In 1986, Perez moved to New York to study painting at the Pratt Institute before earning his master’s degree at Hunter College. Finding himself at odds with the program at Hunter, where students and faculty criticized his paintings as overly seductive and decorative, Perez maintained his belief in the importance of the aesthetics and pleasure in art. Embracing art’s potential for pleasure and beauty, Perez paints sensuous nudes, still lives, tropical resorts, and modern architectural icons in a sleek aesthetic with dazzling, vibrant colors.

Perez is best known for his paintings of modernist buildings that nostalgically capture the utopian ambitions and optimism that inspired their construction. He describes his inspiration for these paintings of architectural icons:

“In a way, these architects really believed in the idea of utopia. There’s a true sense of believing in these buildings, and if you look at contemporary architecture, that’s not as much the case. The fact that they’re from a different era makes them nostalgic. I love painting, and I believe in painting, and I share that with these architects who believed in utopia. A lot of painters paint to question the medium, which might be perfect for them, but I’m one of those who really believes in painting.”

Living in midtown Manhattan since 1997, Perez has been surrounded by the great skyscrapers and architecture of New York. Among other buildings, he has made series of the Seagram building, the Eero Saarinen TWA terminal, the United Nations building, and the Lever House. In 2007, he exhibited a series of Lever House paintings in the lobby of that very building. He is attracted not only to the optimism that went into constructing these skyscrapers but also to their now-lost sense of power and permanence, which has been compromised by the tragedies of 9/11 and the destruction of the World Trade Center.

For twenty years, Perez worked in a technique related to the printmaking process. Inspired by the influence of Andy Warhol and his silkscreens on the New York art scene, Perez developed his own innovative method that mimicked the process of color printing. Working from both reproductions and his own photographs, Perez made separate preparatory drawings for each color he desired in his finished painting. He applied oil paint to the back of each these sheets and pressed them to the canvas to transfer the color.





ENOC PEREZ

Lives and Works in New York, NY (b. San Jan, Puerto Rico, 1967

EDUCATION

1992 M.F.A., Fine Art, Hunter College, New York, NY
1990 B.F.A., Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

2018 Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, TX
2017 UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, CA. "Embassies"
Brand New Gallery, Milan, Italy. "Casitas"
Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. "Desert Bloom"
Harper Books, East Hampton, NY. "Nudes"
2015 Koenig & Clinton, New York. "Digs"
Peter Blum Gallery, New York. "One World Trade Center"
The Philip Johnson Glass House. New Canaan, Connecticut, "Lipstick"
Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris. "Recent Paintings"
Danziger Gallery, New York. "Cut-Outs"
2014 Harper's Books, East Hampton, NY. "Summer Jobs"
Thomas Ammann Fine Arts AG, Zurich. "New Work"
Le Royal Monceau, Paris. "Paintings"
2013 Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris. "Paris Mon Amour"
Acquavella Galleries, New York. "The Good Days"
2012 Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington D.C.. "Utopia"
2011 Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Bruxelles. "Works on paper"
Faggionato Fine Arts, London. "Nudes"
2010 Acquavella Galleries, New York.
Galerie Michael Janssen, Berlin. "Monochromes"
2009 Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York
2008 Galerie Michael Janssen, Berlin. "Tender"
Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy.
Faggionato Fine Arts, London. "Suite 720"
2007 Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami
Lever House Lobby Gallery, NY
Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris "Faraway"
2006 Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, NY, "New York"
Faggionato, New York, "Works on Paper"
Mario Diacono at ARS LIBRI, Boston, MA, "The United Nations, New York"
2005 Faggionato, London, "Deluxe"
2004 The Happy Lion, Los Angeles, CA, "Caribe Club"

Sammlung Sander, Berlin, Germany "The Party"
Elizabeth Dee, New York, NY "Works on Paper"
2003 Elizabeth Dee, New York, NY "Monuments"
2002 Kunstverein Heilbronn, Germany, "Holiday"
Elisabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY, "New Work"
Dee / Glasoe, New York, NY "Enoc Perez"
2001 Galerie Michael Janssen, Cologne, "The Secret"
1999 Bronwyn Keenan Gallery, New York, NY, "Winter"
Turner & Runyon, Dallas, Texas, "Daydreaming"
1993 White Columns, New York, NY
Galeria Uno, Caracas, Venezuela

TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2016 Chimento Fine Arts, Los Angeles, CA. "Enoc Perez & Carlos Rolón/Dzine"
Roberto Paradise, San Juan, PR. "Casitas"
1998 Bronwyn Keenan Gallery, New York, NY (two-person with Jeremy Blake:
Silver Hill), "A Year Without Love"

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017 König Galerie, Berlin, Germany. "THREE POSITIONS. SIX
DIRECTIONS. CHAPTER II: DOOR TO THE FUTURE, WINDOW TO
THE PAST"
Brintz Galleries, Palm Beach, FL. "Garden Party"
Marc Straus Gallery, New York, NY. "Lob des Schattens"
Joyce Varvatos, Sag Harbor, NY. "Chaos Theory"
Kim Heirston, Bridge Hampton, NY. "Endless Summer"
Leila Heller Gallery, NY, NY. "Grisaille"
2015 Planthouse Gallery, New York, NY. "Exquisite Corpse"
BYU Museum of Art, Provo, Utah. "No Place Like Home"
Pavillon de l'Arsenal, Paris. "Dimensions Variables"
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine, New York. "Metropolis"
2013 MICA, Chicago. "City Self"
AD&A Museum, California. "POP: Politics of Place"
2012 Collezione Maramotti, Italy. "Painting as a Radical Form"
Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Bruxelles, "In Between"
Museum of Contemporary Art ,Chicago. "Skyscraper: Art and Architecture
Against Gravity"
Spring Fever, Tony Shafrazi Gallery. New York
International Print Center NY, New Prints 2012 - selected by Shazia Sikander
Caribbean : Crossroads of the world, Studio Museum in Harlem, Queens

Museum of Art, and El Museo del Barrio
Joan Prats Art Grafic, Barcelona. "Jorge Pardo / Enoc Perez"
2011 Espacio 1414, Berezdivin Collection. San Juan. "Painting...Expanded"
2010 Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Bruxelles, "Portraits"
Gagosian, Los Angeles, "Meet Me Inside"
Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Bruxelles, "Best of"
2009 Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy, "Transitions: Painting at the (Other)
End of Art"
Faggionato Fine Arts, London, "Works on Paper"
2008 Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, "Painting the Glass
House"
2007 Triennale Bovisa, Milan, "Timer 01/Intimacy"
Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY. "NeoIntegrity"
Galerie Michael Janssen, Berlin, Germany "Blood Meridian"
Faggionato Fine Arts, London, "Small Format"
2006 Perry Rubenstein, New York, NY
2005 Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY, Group Show (with Alex Bag, Rowena
Dring, Virhil Marti, Carl Ostendarp, Enoc Perez)
Galerie Michael Janssen, Cologne, "10 Years! Galerie Michael Janssen"
Perugi Arte Contempoanea, Padova, Italy, "Ciao Manhatten"
2004 UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, "The Undiscovered Country"
Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT; Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan,
"None of the Above: Contemporary Work by Puerto Rican Artists"
Galerie Tanit, Munich, Germany, "Looking at Painting 2"
2003 Kunstverein, Oldenburg, Germany "hands up, baby, hands up"
Feigen Contemporary, New York, NY, "Environs"
The Happy Lion, Los Angeles, CA, "Preview 2003"
2002-3 Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthalle Wien; Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt,
""Dear Painter, paint me... ' Painting the Figure since late Picabia"
2001 Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, San Juan, "Art in Puerto Rico through the
Ages"
Exit Art, New York, NY, "Boomerang: Collector's Choice"
2000 Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas, "Two by Two for AIDS and Art" (To
benefit the American Foundation for AIDS Research)
Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, British Columbia, "1900-2000: Paintings from
a Misshapen Century"
White Columns, New York, NY, Annual Benefit Exhibition
1999 Museum of Contemporary Art, Lake Worth, Florida, "At Century's End"
Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, Washington, "Fresh Flowers: Floral Imagery
in Contemporary Art"
El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY, "The S-Files: The Selected Files"
1998 Turner & Runyon, Dallas, Texas, "Encyclopedia 1999"
Thread Waxing Space, New York, NY, "Message to Pretty"
Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York, NY, "Home & Away"

1997 Bronwyn Keenan Gallery, New York, NY, "Road Show '97"
1996 The Art Exchange Show, New York, NY, "The Most Important Thing in the
World: Oasis vs. Blur & Artists Who Rock"
Cuenca, Ecuador, V Bienal Internacional de Pintura
1995 White Columns, New York, NY, Annual Benefit Exhibition
1994 Havana, Cuba, Quinta Bienal de la Habana
1993 White Columns, New York, NY, "Update 1993"
Sala Alternativa Galeria de Arte, Caracas; Venezuela Invitational Show
Luigi Marrozzini Gallery, San Juan, Puerto Rico, "Pequenos Formatos"

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington D.C.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
Museum of Contemporary Art, Suan Juan, Puerto Rico
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL
British Museum, London, United Kingdom
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wiconsin, Madison, WI
New York Public Library, New York, NY
Vera List Center, New School, New York, NY
Richmond Center for Visual Arts, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI
Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
RISD Museum of Art, Providence, RI
Art, Design and Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA
Queens Museum, Queens, NY
University Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA
William College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA
Hammer Museum, University of california, Los Angeles, CA
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY
Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
San francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

ENOC PEREZ:
THE DESERT BLOOM
September 21 - November 4, 2017

Image Credits:
Photographic portraits of the artist by Katherine Slingluff
Photographic documentation of the works by John Berens
Studio shots courtesy of the artist, Enoc Perez

Catalogue design by Nadine Nour el Din and Nicoline von Finck

LEILA HELLER PUBLISHING .

I-87, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE
www.leilahellergallery.com

A special thank you goes out to the following for
their crucial support and for making the publication
of this book possible.

Alexander Heller
Dylan Brant
Thompson Harris

Publication © 2017 LEILA HELLER GALLERY, Dubai

