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Enoc Pérez, *Lever House (Indigo)* (2011).

Following the success of his exceptional 2009 monoprints with the Lower East Side Printshop (*Pan American Terminal*, *Kennedy Airport* and *Teatro Popular*, Niterói, Brazil), Enoc Pérez was again invited to work at LESP in 2011. The result is a suite of four screenprints portraying Lever House, the iconic Skidmore, Owings and Merrill “glass box” at 390 Park Avenue. When it was built in 1952, the building revolutionized skyscraper construction. As the first ‘curtain wall’ skyscraper in New York, it became a prototype for

the kind of corporate office buildings that soon marched down Sixth Avenue and around the world. Like the structure they depict, Pérez’s images exude a monumental yet understated authority. Yet under his hand, the building is transformed—no longer an unmitigated symbol of Modernist optimism and rigor, it reflects instead the ambiguous and conflicted nature of the postmodern era.

Pérez—who was born in Puerto Rico and studied in New York, where he now lives and works—has long

investigated the contemporary implications of the International Style. He has returned to the subject of the Lever House a few times since he was first commissioned to paint it in 2007; the resulting series of four paintings highlighted the building’s stringently geometric construction. Pérez worked from his own enlarged snapshots of the subject, applying color to the canvas in layers in an indirect transfer process related to printmaking, entirely eschewing handwork. (This approach grew out of Pérez’s admiration for Warhol (discussed in a 2008 video with *Interview* magazine). Like Warhol, Pérez is interested in what happens when the same subject matter is rendered in different colors and tones. This approach also echoes Monet’s considerations of light, atmosphere, and weather conditions on architectural monuments such as Rouen Cathedral or the Houses of Parliament, but Pérez’s recent palette is more stridently artificial.)

Despite his proto-printmaking, Pérez had never created an editioned screenprint until he was invited to LESP in 2009. The hand-colored monoprints he produced then inspired him to incorporate brushwork into his studio practice. He now combines the two, selectively blurring the neat angles and planes of his subjects to infuse them with a paradoxical, decaying inner life that can be both thrilling and macabre. The effect is enhanced by colors ranging from somber to acerbic.

In *Lever House (Silver, Indigo, Purple, and Red)*, though we recognize the building, the edifice itself is not the subject at hand; rather, the artist conveys the charged history of emotions and ideas associated with it. Each image shimmers, suggesting the excitement and ambition the building inspired in its youth, but also the illusory and transient nature of that cultural esteem. Like the optimism of the postwar period it symbolizes, the building appears to be dissolving; shaking at its foundations, burning from within, or simply melting away under an acid sky. ■

—Sarah Kirk Hanley