

# NEW YORK OBSERVER

## Critic Walter Robinson on 9/11 Art and Moving Past Schmalz

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Walter Robinson, writer

The wreckage at Ground Zero had barely stopped smoking before plans were set in motion to build on the site again. It's a commonplace: no sooner does one epoch come to a tragic end than a new one begins its ominous rise. At Ground Zero, the symbolism is stark, as a destroyed "world trade center" has been replaced by an architectural emblem of Fortress America. The so-called Freedom Tower, as yet barely tenanted, now commands the New York City skyline with an ominous authority.

First to mark this new era, to look forward rather than back, is the New York artist Enoc Perez, whose exhibition of new paintings at Peter Blum Gallery on West 57th Street takes as its subject the Freedom Tower, or "One World Trade Center," as the building is formally known.

"I thought it was time," said Perez, who has been for a while known for evocative and simple images of classical modernist buildings. A series of ten vertical paintings, measuring 80 by 60 inches each and done with thick paint in primary colors on a silver ground, ring the large open space like Stations of the Cross. It is a series, with each picture being a variation on a single image.



Enoc Perez, *One World Trade Center*, 2015  
oil on canvas, 80 x 60 inches (203.2 x 152.4 cm)  
EP15-08

Perez suggests the uncertainties of our communal future by using a triple, overlapping image of the tower, as if seen with eyes that can't quite focus. The triplicate image on silver—a spattered and clotted field, evocative of a building site that once was ashes, as Perez notes—is an easy reference to Warhol's Elvis paintings, not to mention his eight-hour-long film *Empire*, both ready emblems of the world domination of U.S. pop culture. The coming century promises to be even cooler and tougher, if that is imaginable. One World Trade Center itself is famously reinforced, an armored tumescence that rises to a geometrically blunt tip, a shape that is lethal but curiously undistinguished, like a truncheon or a cattle prod.

Where the artist's older works look back retrospectively at the architectural triumphs of the 20th century, embodying a kind of dream image of the modernist utopia, his new paintings look forward. They remind us that we are in the 21st century, an era overshadowed by an increasingly dystopian American sovereignty. It's painting as a blunt instrument, as unthinking and brutally powerful as the country itself.