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Sanctuaries or Security Bunkers? The Artist Enoc Perez Paints American Embassies

Over the phone in New York, the artist [Enoc Perez](#), who was hiding from his three-year-old son so that we could talk, mused about what sort of embassy our current President would build. “It would be gold for sure,” he said. “It would have to have chrome, and it would be big...”

“And poorly made...” I ventured while I tried to distract my eight-month-old daughter with various kitchen utensils.

“For sure it would skip some building standards,” he laughed.

We were speaking on the occasion of the opening of Perez’s latest exhibition of work this coming Saturday, May 13, at the [UTA Artist Space in Los Angeles](#). The show, which will be open until June 17, 2017, features seven large-scale paintings of United States embassies in cities around the world ranging from London to Ho Chi Minh City to Baghdad.

Perez, who is best known for his paintings of architectural structures including One World Trade Center in New York, and Philip Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, had never painted an embassy before. But in the current political climate, where a battle over the identity of America is being waged, Perez could think of no better subject. “Embassies are a reflection of how we see ourselves as a country,” he said. “You look at the old ones, and they look

inviting, like things can happen.” The newer ones, he noted, are like security bunkers, often for good reason. “The world has changed.”

The process of creating the paintings began with extensive research. Perez combed through archives to find photographs of what embassies have looked like over the decades. “I went for the embassies that I thought were the coolest,” he said. “I’m not an architecture scholar in a way that’s freeing. I like architecture that looks like the future, or looks different, or has an aspiration beyond itself.”

He was drawn, for example, to the United States embassy in New Delhi, which he said looks like a spaceship that has landed, and grown. “It looks like a place you want to go to.” He was also interested in embassies that had dark and complicated histories. “The embassy in Saigon is where all of those famous photographs were taken of people being evacuated in helicopters at the end of the Vietnam War,” he said.

The technique of making the paintings nods to the printmaking techniques of legendary New York artists Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol. “I’m a painter in New York — I feel it’s important to have a connection to the history of the town where you’re working in,” he explained. The process is similar to that used to make architectural blueprints, resulting in images that are both precise and somewhat dreamy, like vintage photographs.

Perez intends to continue painting embassies until he’s captured them all, or until he gets sick of the subject. “The government hires architects on purpose to put out these ideas about what our country is around the world,” he says. “It’s beautiful, it’s heartbreaking, it’s like a great book you can’t put down.”

To see a selection of paintings from the exhibition, [click through the gallery.](#)

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