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**Art in America**  
November 2007  
p. 219-220

## Emilio Perez at Galerie Lelong

Emilio Perez started this year's fall season at Galerie Lelong with a visual bang: 12 large-scale, acrylic-and-latex-on-wood-panel paintings (all from 2007) depicting graphic, Matthew Ritchie-esque maelstroms of line and shape that explode, converge and pulsate with the kinetic force of a natural disaster. Not quite abstract yet not quite figurative, the paintings in this show—the artist's first at Lelong—borrow

Emilio Perez: *doin the sleepwalk*, 2007, acrylic and latex on wood panel, 60 by 52 inches; at Lelong.



the sensibility of animation and comics but forgo the recognizable imagery that tethers such genres to the realm of "low" culture.

That said, Perez's nonreferential forms practically beg for a literal read: it's impossible to look at them without searching for a clenched fist delivering a blow or a sword being plunged into a villain's gut. Perez, however, makes a game of dodging such concrete interpretations. His punchy, flip titles underscore this by teasing viewers with incomplete or misleading clues. For instance, in the impressively scaled *drowning on dry land* (the largest painting in the show at 7 by 18 feet), a tsunami-like mass of churning ribbons of pewter blue, algae green, beige and light sienna pound against something that might be a gigantic propeller blade or part of a railway car but is too obscured to identify. Conversely, titles like *fishing while you dream* and *doin the sleepwalk*, attached to paintings that look more like depictions of tornadoes than nocturnal activities, lend a certain spunk to the work but provide no interpretative clues.

Released from the inclination to associate the imagery with recognizable forms, one relaxes and begins to appreciate the formal sophistication of Perez's work. Broad black and white lines swoop and curl like graffiti letterforms, with thousands of thin

tongues of color weaving into passages that tighten into dense areas of frenetic energy and then release into sinewy spirals. Several of the paintings have a vertiginous effect: the writhing

forms in *born all over*, for example, converge into swirls near the center of the composition, and it's difficult to tell whether you're speeding headlong toward a black hole or freefalling toward the churning eddy at the bottom of a waterfall.

Curiously, Perez's restrained, chalky palette—deep burgundy and creamy salmon are as saturated as the colors get—actually exaggerates the tension by directing the focus to the character of the line. And his meticulous process, which entails applying layers of paint to a wood-panel support and then cutting away the layers to reveal the colors underneath, lends

the work deliberateness and heft. In the spirit of the Futurists' aim to "exalt all aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap," Perez explores the nature of dynamism with a distinctly contemporary voice.

—Casey Ruble