

ARTnews

A woman in a floral bikini is floating in a blue, ethereal space with light trails. The background is a deep blue with white light trails and a soft, glowing effect. The woman is positioned in the center-right of the frame, floating horizontally. Her arms are raised, and her legs are slightly bent. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and artistic.

MARCH 2013

Where Art
& Science
Collide

It's Alive! Paula Hayes's Green Art

The Military Is Present: Art & Veterans

The Cindy Sherman Dessert

UP NOW

A.R. Penck

Michael Werner
Through March 9

A.R. Penck (born Ralf Winkler) has come a long way since the 1960s, when he, together with Jörg Immendorff, Georg Baselitz, and Markus Lüpertz, were recognized as major artists. All four, along with Gerhard Richter, have shown affinities with German Expressionism, and all have used their national tradition to establish links with their public. Over time, some have deviated from that history of "figuration" or object representation, even abandoning it in favor of total abstraction. But with these ten new paintings, Penck shows that consistency and fidelity to origins are admirable traits.

Penck is unique among the German painters of the post-World War II era in that, while continuously modifying his style, he has avoided radical mutation. And, unlike the others, he has never, despite reworking themes, become tedious. A look at *Im Fluss der Ereignisse* (The Flow of Events), 2011, confirms this notion. Black and white, the work echoes Penck's "cave-painting" thematic, with a stylized masculine figure surrounded by possibly symbolic elements



A.R. Penck, *Im Fluss der Ereignisse* (The Flow of Events), 2011, acrylic on canvas, 63" x 51 1/2". Michael Werner.

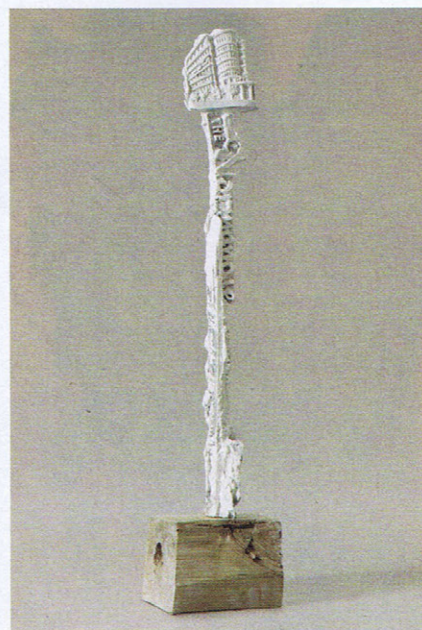
(eyes, a perhaps Minoan deity, spears, a bird of prey, a perhaps fertilized egg) suggesting some fertility rite. But Penck, even as he deploys all these potentially symbolic elements, liberates them from predetermined meanings and narrative destiny. This is no Freudian dream; it is an artistic mind at play.

Wenn der Zufall es will (If Chance Permits), 2011, riffs on the idea of play, represented here by dice. Again, Penck incorporates a vaguely human icon along with wavy lines suggesting water (formlessness) and a serpentine line suggesting the lines on a hand a palm reader will turn into destiny. The painting's cultural echoes evoke Mallarmé's poetic quip "a toss of the dice does not abolish chance," that is, the commitment of this moment—the composition of this specific work—does not constitute an acceptance of artistic fate. To the contrary, Penck's roll of the dice simply pauses his esthetic kaleidoscope long enough for him to capture this splendid composition. As he has for decades, Penck invites us to interpret his work, fully knowing it will always elude us. —Alfred Mac Adam

Enoc Perez

Acquavella

Enoc Perez continued his exploration of aging Caribbean resorts in his newest paintings, and the buildings appeared more gorgeously deteriorated than ever. Back in the early 2000s, Perez made captivating paintings of these same hotels—including the Art Deco Normandie Hotel and the International Style skyscraper El Miramar in the artist's native San Juan, Puerto Rico—extracting the images from vintage postcards. His earlier works were rife with details, such as palm trees, swimming pools, cabanas, and lounge chairs, that provided points of entry into the unpopulated compositions. It was the Caribbean of the 1950s and '60s, evoking Ernest Hemingway gambling in Havana, Frank Sinatra crooning at the Fontainebleau



Enoc Perez, *Normandie*, 2012, painted bronze on wood base, 32 1/2" x 6" x 5". Acquavella.

in Miami, and a young Hunter S. Thompson crashing swanky parties in San Juan.

In this show, titled "The Good Days" (all works 2012), each building appeared to float in a void, enveloped by swaths of pale green, yellow, pink, aqua, or periwinkle. Consumed as they are in this thick haze of pastel pigment, the hotels become architectural apparitions fading into the silvery distance. Perez achieves his multilayered illusion of decay by pressing painted sheets of paper onto canvas in a painstaking version of printmaking, although for these recent works, he added anguished brushstrokes to his repertoire.

The exhibition also marked the first time Perez displayed his sculptures in a gallery. These chunky plaster or pallid painted-bronze pieces appeared as brilliant, in-the-round Brancusian monoliths, depicting collisions of outsize swizzle sticks. The logo-clad cocktail stirrers that inspired these pieces often come from the Modernist resorts shown in Perez's paintings. The sticks are topped with such kitschy-classy motifs as royal crowns, naked pinup girls, palm fronds, and even a miniature Normandie.

But like so many mid-20th-century neocolonial dreams in the Caribbean, the swizzle-stick sculptures came off as crushed and dilapidated, just as Perez intended. —Trent Morse