

ELLE PÉREZ
La DESPEDIDA

JUNE 25 –
NOVEMBER 29
2026

DES MOINES ART
CENTER

ELLE PÉREZ: FINESTRA VELATA

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In Elle Pérez's photograph *untitled (light window)*, 2025, the artist renders daylight shimmering through white lace curtains, casting a diaphanous shadow on an interior wall alongside the window jamb. The glass pane reflects the fabric's filigree, creating a three-layer cake of fine thread and floral patterning. Beyond the veil lies a verdant setting discernible only as blurry patches of green and yellow, the real-life floral counterparts to the symmetrical blooms depicted on the drapes. The obscured window conceals as much as it reveals.

In Leon Battista Alberti's 1450 treatise *De Pictura*, or *On Painting*, the Renaissance polymath described painting as *una finestra aperta*—an open window—a metaphor in which the ideal picture was an ordered, lifelike depiction of nature. Alberti's idea of the open window describes a perfectly controlled and intelligible view, putting the viewer in a position of mastery. In Pérez's 2025 series “La Despedida (the world is always ending, the world is always again beginning),” the artist negotiates with this formulation, offering a different way to understand a picture's description and circumscription of place: *la finestra velata* (the veiled window).

In *untitled (light window)*, and in many other photographs from this series, Pérez masks one layer of visual information with another. The curtains hung atop the artist's “window onto the world” are a scrim that draws attention to the photograph's framing device. In veiling the view, Pérez also blocks full access to the image, thus prompting a pattern of searching, pondering, and imagining. The photographs induce a central question—*where am I?*—and answer it by appealing to subjective somatic and sensory details.

With *untitled (light window)*, viewers can locate themselves by finding the warm glow of the sun trickling into a dark interior, the uneven perforations of lace on fingers, and perhaps a childhood reminiscence of feeling melancholy or bored while trapped indoors at the home of an older relative. The *finestra velata* prompts a personal interaction with place. In obscuring just enough information, the photographer invites the observer to use their own experiences, senses, and memories to fill in the blanks, constructing an embodied connection with the image.

“La Despedida” encompasses photographs made in the gardens of two very different sites: Impressionist painter Claude Monet's home in Giverny, France—the site of *untitled (light window)*—and Pérez's grandfather's backyard in Puerto Real, Puerto Rico. The photograph

untitled (pink house), which renders the latter location, positions the viewer at the corner of a white structure with apertures clad in pale pink metal grating. At this particular vantage point, one stretch of metal bars is visible through another, doubly obfuscating the brooding sky behind. Visual information is stacked and tangled within the *finestra velata*. Compositionally, several diagonal lines converge into the bottom center, pushing down into areas of deep shadow in the lower register. There is a friction between the compression of space and its expansion into a strip of firmament at the image's top edge. To locate oneself here, the viewer might think of the stinging sensation of metal warmed by the sun, bumpy stucco covered in several layers of paint, and air dense with humidity.

In *untitled (plantain grove view)*, the play between shrouding and displaying continues. A boat christened *MONALISA* peeks out from behind long, slatted plantain fronds. As in *untitled (light window)* and *untitled (pink house)*, there is an area of darkness in the foreground, contrasted with brightness beyond. At right, the fibrous veins of the leaves disappear into a field of pure black, like organic shapes laid atop the picture. This vegetation enacts the device of the lace curtain, a delicate patterned scrim over the image that makes it more complicated for onlookers to situate themselves in this place, as they see one thing through another. This effect is even more pronounced in *untitled (water-lily view)*, in which a snarl of pondside foliage obscures the lily pads beyond. The enmeshment of foreground and background is intensified by the black-and-white palette. Using their own sensory knowledge of leaf, bramble, and algae, beholders must pick their way through the visual thicket.

The question *where am I?* is not only spatial but temporal. The *finestra velata* is also a metaphor for thinking about places through the film of history and memory, invoking the people who moved through them before. Knowledge of the past is always incomplete. Imagining it requires fabrication, making it feel real by referencing one's own experiences. The tactile details in Pérez's closely cropped photographs conjure embodied memory, helping the viewer connect to sites and how they were alive for previous inhabitants. In meditating on their departed grandfather's plantain groves or Monet's pond of water lilies, Pérez engages with people who are gone through places that were important to them. Because the images are not definitive, explanatory, or didactic, the observer is invited to do the same. By offering fragmentary views, Pérez opens the picture up to infinite individual meanings.

Untitled (break shore) pictures a beach that is a short drive from Pérez's grandfather's property. Cropping in tight on the shoreline, the artist documents a slanted line of surf, investing the image with a sense of the water's movement as well as the photographer's, responsive and improvisational. The viewer can feel the rush of effervescent saltwater and the grit of sand. The softly rendered foaming water is like gauze, flitting in and out with the tide. These haptic details allow spectators to think of their own experiences, even as they also render a site of specific family memories for the artist.

In another photograph of the same beach, *untitled (the world is always again beginning)*, the viewer approaches the ocean through a perforated jumble of leaves, bushes, and vines, all in shadow, like a covering of black netting. The seascape behind is visible but out of focus. A slim tree trunk in the center eclipses the sun behind it, shielding it from view. Even if the viewer cannot be sure of exactly where they are or what time of day it is, they still know how it feels to observe the rising or the setting sun, the sensations of daybreak and day's end. The title of this piece invokes one half of the name of the series as a whole: "La Despedida (the world is always ending, the world is always again beginning)."

The series title itself is a *finestra velata*, only completely comprehensible to people who speak both English and Spanish. La despedida means "the farewell" and the images of Pérez's grandfather's home document a visit made by the artist to say a final goodbye to an ailing patriarch. Giverny, too, was the site of Monet's passing. Yet, as the subtitle indicates, parting is not quite permanent. Goodbyes and endings—browning blooms, sunsets, and ebbing tides—accompany beginnings such as new buds, sunrises, and returning waves. We contemplate our own losses, our own witnesses of renewal. The tangled layers of the artist's photographs ask us to keep one thing in view while contemplating another. The "ephemeral condition of living," as Pérez has described it, is enmeshed with the ephemeral condition of dying. Understanding is only ever a partial view.

Exhibition Checklist

untitled (break shore), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (car body), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (cleaning the pond), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (cut path and yellow flowers), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

Collection of Jenny Osterhout and Santiago Martinez Govea

untitled (king), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (light window), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (pink house), 2025

Archival pigment print
40 x 32 in.

untitled (plantain grove view), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (shadow garden), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (the world is always again beginning), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

untitled (water-lily view), 2025

Archival pigment print
32 x 40 in.

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York unless otherwise noted



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A.H. BLANK GALLERY
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