

ARTFORUM

José Lerma

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY
525 West 24th Street
December 11–January 22

Relegated to this gallery's smaller rear room, José Lerma's latest exhibition, "I am sorry I am Perry," would have benefited from the larger main space. His show is brimming with ideas, which deserve the additional real estate.

The show's title is sourced from a Spanish joke that reflects on the limits of language. Lerma conceived of the included paintings as portraits of bankers produced by a bureaucrat using office tools that might be at hand, such as Bic pens and pink highlighters. Keyboards playing ambient music act as supports for some of the paintings—the result is something like Chris Ofili's dung balls replaced with Korgs. (The music resembles the kind characteristically used on the sound tracks of art documentaries, which might well be a wry joke on the artist's part.)

The inspiration for many of these works seems to be Philip Guston's late figuration; the pieces play off this source material without feeling pretentious. In looking at *John Law*, 2010 (possibly based on Alexis Simon Belle's depiction of the Scottish economist, which hangs in London's National Portrait Gallery), viewers could lose themselves tracing the intricate faux-Bic swirls (created with a doctored airbrush) of the figure's wig; these whorls threaten to take over the whole painting. One is then entirely sideswiped by the seeming reverse of this formal approach: wide pressings of paint in wasabi greens, light grays, and slightly creamy whites. A hanging reflective curtain feels disconnected from the other works until one notices how it continually changes the light in the room, splits the viewer's shadow into three, and extends the experimentation further.

— *Matthew Israel*



View of "I am sorry I am Perry," 2010. From left: *Samuel Bernard*, 2010; *De la Nada Muerte a la Nada Vida* (From the nothing death to the nothing life), 2010.