

SPRÜTH MAGERS

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By David Pagel

Review:

Forget sexy. Eric Fischl paints the dark dramas amid all that skin



"A Surprising Sense of Urgency" by Eric Fischl, 2019. Oil on linen, 62 by 72 inches.

(Eric Fischl and Sprüth Magers)

Sex, on first blush, seems to be the subject of the nine life-size paintings that make up Eric Fischl's show "Complications From an Already Unfulfilled Life" at the Sprüth Magers gallery in Mid-Wilshire district of Los Angeles. All depict attractive women, men and teens — alone, in pairs or in small groups — as they stand or sprawl on sunlit beaches or in the shallow ends of swimming pools.

But the real subject of the New York artist's loosely brushed oils-on-linen is anxiety.

Fischl's pictures make palpable the interpersonal tension turning otherwise beautifully luxurious settings into disquieting dramas suffused with apprehension, insecurity and dread.

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"Self-Reflection" by Eric Fischl, 2018. Oil on linen, 65 by 50 inches
(Eric Fischl and Sprüth Magers)

Conversation comes to a standstill in the seven paintings that depict multiple people. Most of the individuals have turned their backs to someone, the bright afternoon sunshine no match for the icy atmosphere of entrenched and habitual antipathy.

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In one stunner, a man and woman stare in opposite directions, emotionally disconnected despite their physical proximity. A pair of bright yellow kayaks slices through the composition, dividing the blue sky from the brown sand and leaving the couple lost in a world that is anything but Edenic.



"On the Beach" by Eric Fischl, 2019. Oil on linen, 80 by 98 inches.
(Eric Fischl and Sprüth Magers)

In the most action-packed painting, "A Surprising Sense of Urgency," a young woman strides to catch up with a friend who walks away as if she were working a catwalk and not ditching a friend.

Nothing is innocent in Fischl's images. People pose. People preen. Naked protagonists bend their limbs and contort their torsos as if their goal is to press as much flesh as they can against the picture plane — up close but hardly personal.

When they shorten the distance between their bodies and your eyeballs, you feel the vast chasm between physical proximity and intimacy. Fischl is a master at making such interpersonal alienation palpable and poignant. The sense of disconnect pictured in his works spills from their surfaces and catches viewers in an undertow that drowns the superficial pleasures some viewers see as the point and purpose of his paintings.

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There's a lot more to them than that. Nothing is simple or direct about pleasure in Fischl's deliciously queasy paintings. Guilt and repression — along with denial and release — are integral to the existential dramas his pictures enact.

Similar contradictions fan the flames that burn in his brushstrokes. Laid down with wicked efficiency, Fischl's gestural marks come with urgency. The flick-of-the-wrist decisiveness and thrust-of-the-arm punch leave no room for second-guessing, much less regret.

Second looks — and second thoughts — are necessary. That's where the magic happens.

Eric Fischl

Where: Sprüth Magers, 5900 Wilshire Blvd., L.A.

When: Tuesday-Saturday, through Aug. 30

Info: (323) 634-0600, www.spruethmagers.com

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"More Things to Come. Promise." by Eric Fischl, 2019. Oil on linen, 68 by 52 inches.
(Eric Fischl and Sprüth Magers)