

SKARSTEDT

# The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By: Roberta Smith

June 1, 2017



“Face Off,” by Eric Fischl. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Skarstedt, New York

## ERIC FISCHL

Through June 24. Skarstedt, 550 West 21st Street, Manhattan; 212-994-5200, [skarstedt.com](http://skarstedt.com).

In “Late America,” his show of new paintings at Skarstedt in Chelsea, Eric Fischl has returned to first principles, and his work is the better for it. He has taken up the sparsely populated, intensely private moments that established his reputation in the early 1980s, again centering on the pain and confusion of youth in isolation, which is not necessarily alone, or in psychologically fraught family interactions. These families are white and well-to-do, like the one Mr. Fischl grew up in — a reminder that most art of any depth is identity art.

The five paintings here benefit from formal continuity: Each centers on a large backyard swimming pool, its turquoise water edged in white stone and chaise longues and backed by sharp green grass and green-black shrubs. Sterile modern houses or hired, possibly immigrant, gardeners are sometimes visible. Mr. Fischl has said in interviews that he is painting “white culture,” which implies “white privilege.” Some people may object that the paintings lack sufficient edge, irony or criticality, but their atmospheres seem toxic enough. In “Face Off,” an older man whose belly suggests a lifetime of indulgence stands in the pool looking at a boy standing on its edge, his body language telegraphing both anxiety and defiance. The man’s face is set, ready for disappointment or on the verge of rage.

I’m not sure Mr. Fischl has ever painted with such ease and economy. His surfaces are quick and thin, with little reworking; bits of bare canvas show through and some larger areas are left blank, as with the intimation of a pool umbrella in “Face Off.” This terseness seems well matched to his subtle portrayals of damage being passed from one generation to the next.

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