

Reviews: International

Eric Fischl

Thomas Gibson Fine Art

London

Eric Fischl operates at the opposite extreme from Alex Katz, in a John Updike world of implicit backstories and complicit desires. Fischl's drawings in oil and watercolor on paper convey intimacy in a dashing sort of way. His naked figures loll on the seashore or step out of the shower to perform fitness routines or simply stretch and wait to see what the day will bring.

Suggestive as they are, these studies commandeer snapshot effects: telephoto close-ups and arrested gestures. They are painterly, though. The brush swishes over coated paper, speed being essential with this type of beach and boudoir reportage. Where Sargent tackled Alpine scenes or reflections of ripples on Venetian marble, Fischl delights in the bedside lamp, panama hat, and window blinds.

When he turns to watercolor he goes with the flow, letting blotches puddle like big disfigurements on a naked knee or elbow. This technique adds to the impression of spontaneity; the expression, however, is calculated. What may initially appear to have been set down from life proves, on inspection, to be pretty artful. The bodies are neatly turned out, with virtuosity showing in the curve behind a kneecap or a tendon in the neck. When Fischl copies Thomas Eakins's



Eric Fischl, *Untitled*, 1989, watercolor on paper, 12" x 9".
Thomas Gibson Fine Art.

bathers, he strips away the detailing and creates a blaze of highlights.

This show brought together 29 studies spanning from the mid-1980s to the present. The absence of full-scale paintings meant that Fischl's skills were highlighted instead of the awkwardness that characterizes his canvases. These drawings

demonstrate the makings rather than the eventual accomplishment, and their flair is consistently impressive.

—William Feaver

Juan Bautista Nieto

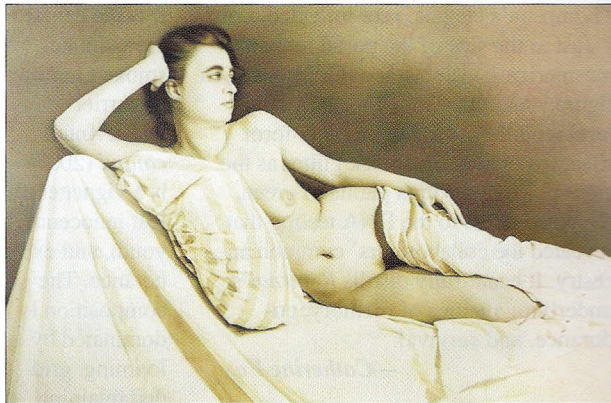
Albamarle

London

Juan Bautista Nieto creates a compelling illusion of reality. In this show, what appeared to be 39 black-and-white photographs were actually paintings. His subjects were spare still lifes and female models, often reclining or pulling off clothes. On view were five virtuoso figure studies in watercolor, and a larger group of paintings painstakingly rendered in acrylic and oil with a combination of fine brushwork and sophisticated air-brush techniques.

To achieve his artifice, Nieto first prepares a porcelain-like surface with gesso, and then builds up his image layer by layer, detail by detail, finishing with a silky glaze to enhance definition and smoothness. Following this systematic approach, the artist can take up to nine months to complete a large work.

For Nieto, photography is not something to mimic as true Photorealists did, but a tool to help him extend the concept of realism beyond literal transcription. He delights particularly in breaking the flat surface with dramatically jutting elbows, the sensuous round of his models' bodies, and foreshortened hands. Also notable is his facility with surfaces: he captures the subtle contrast between smooth and creased skin, stretched and draped cloth, and the soft lumi-



Juan Bautista Nieto, *Maria I*, 1997, mixed media on panel, 35" x 54". Albamarle.

osity of flesh against fabric, as in his reclining nude *Maria I* (1997).

Nieto seeks to link the Spanish tradition extending from Zurbarán's dramatically lit realism to Dalí's exacting Surrealism to the current school of hyperrealism, in which the suggestion of narrative is as important as meticulous description. In the visionary *Bodegón Imposible IV* (Impossible Still Life IV, 2006), the artist is at his most mysterious, posing a vase of roses on seemingly unsupported drapery.

—Judith Bumpus

'French Kiss'

JGM.

Paris

The voice of June Anderson singing arias from French operas set the tone for this eclectic and thoroughly enjoyable group show by mostly American artists who had been inspired by French culture. Artist Rob Wynne selected works that either borrow iconography from France's art, cinema, literature, and fashion or refer to French celebrities from Marie Antoinette to Marcel Duchamp, as well as others closely associated with the country. To further illustrate the cross-cultural impact, Wynne stocked a shelf near the entrance with books about France by authors ranging from Ernest Hemingway to Julia Child.

Opening the exhibition were several works whose variety showed the breadth of American infatuation with Gallic culture. There was Man Ray's stunning photographic portrait of Henry Miller; James Brown's bronze antique table topped by a Brancusi-designed base; a flat-screen TV playing Jim McBride's 1983 remake of Jean-Luc Godard's 1960 *Breathless*; and Patrick Kelly's showstopping *Eiffel Tower Dress* (1986), a department-store