

Painter Eric Fischl Invites Our Interpretations

The artist's new solo show, "Hotel Stories," opens at Skarstedt on March 14.

By [Nadja Sayej](#) • 03/12/24 3:46pm



Eric Fischl, 'Companions,' 2023, acrylic on linen, 72 x 78 inches. Courtesy of Skarskedt

[Eric Fischl](#) is a figurative painter known for his cinematic, dreamy paintings of American life. Whether it's suburbia in the 1970s and 1980s, political scenes or photos of Halloween costumes, he captures the shadows of life with his paintbrush. Fischl's new solo show opens at New York City's Skarstedt gallery on March 14. Entitled "[Hotel Stories](#)," it showcases nine cinematic paintings that hint at a narrative—on their face, they offer a fly-on-the-wall look into a

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spectrum of relatively benign rented rooms, but the people who occupy them are somehow eerie and there is a palpable tension.

A woman observes a tragedy on a TV. A couple looks like they might be fighting. A man, seemingly at ease, strums a guitar, but an AK-47 leans against a nearby chair. Fischl captures the comings and goings of strangers. The scenes he creates offer glimpses into contextless moments in transient spaces; we give them meaning, and we imbue them with secrets.



Eric Fischl, 'Oct 8: Heading Home,' 2023, acrylic on linen, 72 x 78 inches. Courtesy of Skarstedt

After the Skarstedt show, Fischl will be working on a large-scale traveling exhibition that kicks off next year at the Phoenix Museum of Art and will travel around through 2027. Observer caught up with him to talk about his current show, the allure of hotels and the future of the United States.

What is “Hotel Stories” about? Are you traveling a lot?

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Not really. What I look for in my paintings is a place where something can take place. Like a backdrop of some sort, or an environment that has a richness of association. I never start out with paintings saying "I'm going to do a series." It has to start with one painting that leads me to the next. It somehow led to hotels.

Why hotels?

The strangeness is that it's a public but private space. It's public and intimate at the same time; it's a space rich with fantasy, romance, transgression, secrecy, isolation, dislocation and lots of things. I have done the paintings in the show, but it feels like I haven't even tapped into the depths of this theme.

Do you stay in hotels when you travel?

Yes, I do. Hotels try to make you feel at home. Either you're living a level above what you actually do, where their style is grander than your style, or you're in modest company. It plays into the fantasy of hotels. A hotel can be a destination or stop on the way home. One is anticipatory, the fantasy as it opens up to a trip. But if you go to a hotel on the way home, it closes down, in getting back to you where you are.



Eric Fischl, 'Hotel Service,' 2023, acrylic on linen, 54 x 68 inches. Courtesy of Skarskedt

Do you love five-star hotels?

Five-star hotels are like flying first class, you take advantage of everything you can within the time frame, but there's always something you feel you left out. Like sitting in first class—you sit before the meal they serve you and you ask yourself "Was this meal really worth \$2,000?" But if a hotel is two-star, as long as the sheets are clean, that's all that matters.

What hotels are the paintings based on?

They're all based on hotels found on the web—hotel websites presenting their rooms to their customers. They're generalized. One makes you feel like Rome is out the window, and another looks like Singapore or Las Vegas. They're all places

SKARSTEDT

that trigger something, but none of that matters compared to what's happening in each room. I didn't feature any motels. Some are banal, others are shocking, one looks like you don't know what you're looking at—one has a man with shampoo in his hair, in between a bathroom and a bed, where he stops in a moment.

It's almost as if you're dropping in on a scene.

Yes, one has a woman dressed up in a nice outfit looking at the outfit, you can feel the tension in her body. The title is "October 7" and it looks like she just realized something tragic she's seeing on the news. It's like being caught between two realities; it's an eruption of a deeper significance. There are a few of those things happening in this series. You expect something different than you set up for that night.



Eric Fischl, 'Scenes from a Marriage,' 2023, acrylic on linen, 62 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Skarstedt

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What are your thoughts on the upcoming election?

I'm not sure I have interesting insights into the world we live in. I'm completely freaked out about everything. What do I think? I don't know. Artists are hard-wired to bring order to chaos. This moment we have been living in is really straining. It feels like we are on the point of blowing up. Artists are supposed to reinterpret history in a way that's relevant to the present. It takes it into an empathetic space; it's just human.

You almost feel like we are going into the middle ages. There is world turmoil with invasions and wars everywhere, migrations, and cultures disintegrating. It was so disintegrating that no profound culture happened for a hundred years. Everything just went dark. Is that where we are? That's my total anxiety talking. Who knows? I wish there was a real Batman who would deal with the Joker. Now, we don't have anyone who seems like they get the Joker, so we're under that spell.

