

# The New York Times

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## Art in Review

### Eric Fischl

'Early Paintings'

Skarstedt Gallery  
20 East 79th Street, Manhattan  
Through June 18

Eric Fischl produced some psychologically astounding paintings in the early 1980s. Made with a loose, Expressionist touch on medium-large canvases, his emotionally raw, semiphotorealist images of adolescent Oedipal confusion still project a dreamy, penetrating acidity.

Evoking the undifferentiated fluidity of the unconscious, water links the four most striking works in this show. "Sleepwalker" (1979) pictures a skinny, naked boy, standing in the shin-deep water of an aqua plastic pool, hunched over and masturbating in a suburban backyard. A pair of beach chairs at the outside edge of the pool are unmistakably watchful parental surrogates.

In "Squirt" (1982), a boy in a bathing suit, diving mask and flippers aims a water pistol at the back of a grown woman wearing only a bikini bottom and lying facedown on a chaise. In "Barbecue" (1982), a youth in the foreground performs a circus fire eater's trick, blowing a great burst of flame into the air as his topless, full-breasted mother looks on, smiling, from the in-ground pool beyond.

The exhibition's masterpiece, "The Old Man's Boat and the Old Man's Dog" (1981), updates Winslow Homer's harrowing painting "The Gulf Stream." Mr. Fischl's painting shows a nudist family of five and a Dalmatian lounging in an open motorboat, oblivious to cresting seas and approaching dark clouds in the background. Only in the fictions of writers like Cheever, Updike and Roth will you find similarly ominous visions of the modern, erotically overwrought nuclear family.

KEN JOHNSON