

whitehot | July 2008, Steve Martin, Eric Fischl and April Gornick panel discussion @ Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

By Abby Luby

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Left to Right: Eric Fischl, April Gornick and Steve Martin, photo courtesy Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT

Steve Martin, Eric Fischl and April Gornick jocky about art

Steve Martin, comedian, writer, art collector, was talking about art at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. He was joined by his friends, artists Eric Fischl and April Gornick. Martin couldn't resist by first throwing a conversational curve ball to offset the serious subject of art.

"We're supposed to talk about art and art collecting—but we're actually going to talk about scientology—with our particular spin on it."

Martin then jumped right in and asked Fischl why he decided to become an artist. "Boredom. Art is definitely a way of staving off work," said Fischl. Martin said "I think collecting art is that way too – it's a form of shopping. It's better to say 'let's look at art' rather than 'let's go shopping.'"

Martin's collection includes works by Georges Seurat, David Hockney, and Robert Crumb. Fischl said he thought Martin's current art collection was unpredictable. "There's definitely a sensibility of play there," he said, "Steve is able to collect what one would consider minor artists, obscure artists and big time artists' masterpieces—in a way that is so cohesive."

Martin became interested in art since his college days in the 1960's and many of his friends were artists. "There was a lot happening in the art world, we were just coming out of abstract expressionism and going into color field and pop and it was making news, Andy Warhol was making news." He said art collecting has changed since he first started collecting in the 1970's, "It used to be that you could collect art by movement—like the American modernist movement, abstract expressionist or minimalism. But now there are no movements. It's so diverse that you can't say 'this is what is happening now.' Even though people think my collection is so cohesive, it's really made up of whatever was available and what I could afford."

Gornick said many art private art collections today are predictable with everyone owning work by the same artists. "It's so much more interesting to see people collect art that challenges my sensibility as well as theirs, rather than the same cookie cutter, rote version of what art is supposed to be today."

Someone asked Martin if he ever tried to paint or draw. He said, "When I draw on a piece of paper, that paper is worth less than it was when I started." Then he spoke about how hard it was for artists to

explain their art. "I saw in an upcoming art auction catalogue that quoted Damien Hirst – whose work I really like a lot. It was about one of his canvases with essentially poke-a-dots. They have his quote which said (Martin slipped into a plodding, dopey jokester voice in mimicking Hirst) 'I think of the dot as being alone. But, also with other dots.'"

Martin has made many friends in the art world, including husband and wife artists Fischl and Gornick. The painters have distinctly different styles; Fischl's work is predominately figurative and generally based on middle class American while Gornick paints ethereal, mystical landscapes.

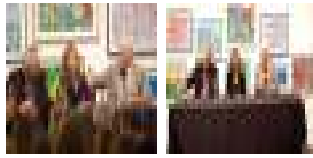
Martin asked the two what inspires them. Fischl said that his 1982 painting *Squirt* was based on a real experience with his nephew. The painting shows a young boy misbehaving at the family swimming pool. "It was a family reunion where April and I were sitting around the pool with my sister and her kids. My nine year old nephew was incredibly bored. He filled a squirt gun from the pool, and then he turned it on his mother's crotch and unloaded this squirt gun on her. I'm watching this thinking 'this looks like one of my paintings,' and my nephew turns to me and says 'Hey Uncle Eric, you could paint this!'"

Fischl said at that moment he realized that art works. "What he had seen of mine made him aware of the moment that, had he not seen it, he probably wouldn't have been aware of it in two places, in the participating and the knowing. There's something about art which, when you see it, it gives you permission to acknowledge it, and that's the most important thing about it."

Gornick said she often gets calls from friends who see what they think is an 'April Gornick landscape' and they describe it to her hoping it will inspire. If she's at the beach her friends sometimes take pictures of what they think she might paint. "They are virtual scene stealers," she said.

Martin said to Gornick "You've taken a 19th century aesthetic and you have changed in it in some way to made it modern. I can't describe what it is but it's like a different type of modern landscape, but romantic and beautiful."

Then he added "I think of certain pictures as never letting me down.... I don't know if it's that you're still mystified, but there's something that keeps you looking at it."



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