

to a generally fictionalized idea of life in the Middle East and to the iconography of the larger Orientalist movement of the period.

The most effective installation is in the house's signature space, the Court Hall leading into the Stair Hall, where a light-peach dragoman's suit—collected by Charley Langdon, brother-in-law to Mark Twain, and on loan from the Cornell Costume and Textile Collection—stands next to a brilliant gray-blue Ottoman Empire dragoman's suit owned by Church. Dragomen were guides and interpreters for tourists, and hanging adjacent along the staircase there is a marvelous blown-up photograph of Church and his young son Frederic Joseph atop a camel whose reins are steadied by a similarly garbed dragoman in Beirut, Syria (1868). The catalogue notes that most tourists to the region collected the flashy gold-embroidered garments of the urban upper class, and this is what generally survives in greatest numbers in museum collections. While several garments of that sort are included in Church's collection, he seems to have been particularly interested in the garb that originated with the common people of the villages and desert—and that is what is primarily seen in his paintings.¹

All this is compelling, if rooted in the past. Despite a short video from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art about clothing in contemporary Middle Eastern Art in its collection, unconnected to the Olana display, an opportunity has been missed to engage the present. Church and his toddler son, mother-in-law, and eventually very pregnant wife Isabel travelled through contemporary Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and then Switzerland and Rome. The catalogue notes that Damascus, which gave rise to the term "damask," was famed for its textiles from ancient times, and that Aleppo was a commercial hub of textile production and trade. The enlightened attitudes of intrepid American travelers, who thrilled to the products of these age-old cultures, form a stark contrast to present perceptions of Syria, inflected by the misery of endless war and enveloped in a regrettably resurgent "Grand Game" involving Russia, Iran, and the United States. Here was an opportunity to highlight Church's open-mindedness and inquisitiveness about the region and its various inhabitants from all classes, an admirable example for a wary and removed present.

The interest in Middle Eastern subjects, materials, and design termed Orientalism is also present downriver from Olana at Lyndhurst in Tarrytown. This precursor to Church's riparian retreat was built in two campaigns between 1838 and 1865 by the great American Gothic Revival architect and contemporary of Cole, Alexander Jackson Davis, and was occupied from 1880 by the railroad magnate Jay Gould. Unlike Church's handcrafted house, which he designed and outfitted, the Lyndhurst of today represents the renovations of Gould and his eldest daughter Helen, an aesthete and philanthropist who filled the home with sheer opulence culled from the best craftspeople in New York City.

The present exhibition concerns Louis Comfort Tiffany's parallel evolution from painter to designer with new evidence of Helen's patronage of Tiffany for Lyndhurst and the family's Fifth Avenue mansion. Beautifully installed in the former carriage barn turned modest gallery space, the display also includes Tiffany lamps in ten rooms in the mansion. There are exquisite objects on loan from private and public collections in the United States and Great Britain, a good catalogue, and sharp wall texts written by Roberta A. Mayer and Lyndhurst's director, Howard A. Zar.

Like Church, and around the same time, Tiffany traveled to the Mediterranean and the Middle East; the resulting Orientalist oils are more than competent, and the artist paid particular attention to locals and their clothing—in this sense the exhibitions at Olana and Lyndhurst are complementary. In addition, the National Trust-run Lyndhurst has attractive grounds that are presently being researched and restored to

their nineteenth-century designs; it may well come to be seen as a kind of proto-Olana complex, only twenty-seven miles from Rockefeller Center, although it was the product of political and corporate wealth rather than an owner's creative endeavor. Previously musty interiors, newly enlivened through such exhibitions, make for enlightened motoring up the various parkways and thruways that snake their way north from the New York metropolitan area. ☞

Lynda Zacek Bassett, *Costume and Custom: Middle Eastern Threads at Olana* (Hudson: The Olana Partnership, 2018), 13.

JASON ROSENFELD, Ph.D., is Distinguished Chair and Professor of Art History at Marymount Manhattan College. He was co-curator of the exhibitions *John Everett Millais* (Tate Britain, Van Gogh Museum), *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (Tate Britain and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), and *River Crossings* (Olana and Cedar Grove, Hudson and Catskill, New York). He is a Senior Writer and Editor-at-Large for the *Brooklyn Rail*.

HOPE AND HAZARD: A COMEDY OF EROS

HALL ART FOUNDATION, READING, VT
MAY 6, 2017 – NOVEMBER 26, 2018

BY STEVEN PESTANA

A buxom blonde nude with bright red lips plays joyously atop a white fluffy cloud, stars overhead. Beneath her cloud, crude blue lettering reads, "We are just complicated animals." This neon sculpture, by Dan Attoe, casts a cool glow through a gallery that was once a farmhouse, highlighting the kind of tongue-in-cheek wit that animates much of Eric Fischl's own work. In this multi-generational group exhibition, curated by Eric Fischl, representations of mankind's most basic and everlasting instinct—the compulsion to copulate—waver from existential to carnal in a vein that is often ribbed with humor. While

none of Fischl's own work appears in the show, his taste is everywhere apparent.

Hope occupies three of the Foundation's buildings. The first, the aforementioned farmhouse, is intimate and domestic, the ceilings low. The majority of work here depicts the female form, ranging from abstract to hyper-realism. As with Fischl's own paintings, the imagery is largely sexual, though less lascivious than Balzacian: a human comedy, blindly underpinned by our opaque animal natures. In one room a trio of paintings by Ellen Berkenblit, Marcel Dzama, and Tala Madani, respectively, portray cartoonish figures in the midst of performing or insinuating sex acts (in one case, while wearing a horse mask). Their partners? A human-sized mouse, a surly pack of dogs, and a playmate suggestively wielding a hobbyhorse. The absurdity of the work is perfectly in keeping with Attoe's neon aphorism. Complicated indeed. On the neighboring wall, a diminutive salon grouping of five small paintings by Ridley Howard, Walter Robinson, Aura Rosenberg, and Tom Wesselmann depict the female nude as it is so often represented in contemporary eroticism: recumbent, faceless, depersonalized, and sexually available. Seductive though the imagery may or may not be, taken together, the selections lean towards a transactional view of desire, with the body as currency. What is the psychic cost of a culture grounded in objectification? This question resonates throughout *Hope*. As with his own voyeuristic canvases, Fischl mostly abstains from overt judgment, leaving viewers to draw their own conclusions.

In the rear gallery of the second building—a larger and brighter room, previously a horse barn—two oversized wall works address the complexities of real-world relationships that spill into public view through visual art. Judith Eisler's canvas *Liz and Rock* (2014) recreates a moment of onscreen tenderness from the 1956 film *Giant* between co-stars Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson. Eisler's hazy brushwork and soft, cool palette create an air of wistfulness, or perhaps tension; cinéastes might complicate this reading with a knowledge of the actors' lifelong friendship. Towards the end of Hudson's life, following his revelation of off-screen homosexuality and AIDS illness, they grew even closer. By contrast, the pseudo-eroticism of *Fingers Between Legs* (1990), from Jeff Koons's photographic series, *Made in Heaven* (1989 – 1991) is



Installation View, *Hope and Hazard: A Comedy of Eros*, Curated by Eric Fischl. Hall Art Foundation, Reading, Vermont. Photo: Jeffrey Nintzel. Courtesy Hall Art Foundation.

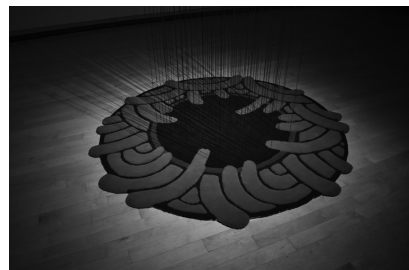
anything but tender, and, in reality, the relationship between Koons and the porn-star turned politician, Ilona Staller, was ill-fated. Appropriate to any exercise in high conceptualism, that disjunction occurs in the mind of the viewer.

Standing ten feet tall, a lumbering giant, *Egg Figure I* (2009) by Thomas Houseago, awaits in the far corner of the cow barn, the third and largest of the buildings. The figure is backlit, on the verge of ominous, except that his crestfallen shoulders and gloomy disposition are more likely to inspire pity than fear. Houseago's forlorn behemoth stands in, fittingly, as this comedy's sole representative of loneliness.

The remaining selections are the most painterly, a vibrant and tactile playground of gesture and chroma. Sensuous moments abound, such as Bjarne Melgaard's *Untitled* (2005), a lusciously liquid pink, beige, and green-slathered abstraction, and André Butzer's heavily impastoed, monstrous, phallus-headed *Portrait Carl Zuckmayer* (2004). They are messy physical documents of fugitive bodily encounters between the artists and their materials, singing the body erotic. In a walled-off area at the heart of the gallery, two orgiastic scenes face one another: the first a 2009 riff on Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827) by Peter Saul reinterpreting it as gaudy caricature (although, given the theme, some might say it was already this), and a frenzied bedroom scene, *Session*, (2005) by Peter Schoolwirth, where wild, disjointed limbs defy the bounds of space and time. Joan Semmel's 1971 coital devotional, *Untitled*, composed of luminous color fields, revels in unselfconscious abandon. Another wall features three paintings focused on comically exaggerated male and female derrières. Two by Carroll Dunham, *Untitled I (July 28, 2005)* (2005) and *(Hers) Night and Day #2* (2009), feature humorously grotesque physiques demarcated with swollen black lines. They appear on either side of a third butt painting by C.O. Paeffgen, also featuring bold outlines but this time more anatomically correct. The differences are more compelling than their similarities, with Dunham's brushwork layered, loose, and lawless, while Paeffgen's is muted, harmonious, and oddly classical.

Even in the earliest Greek comedies, sexual foibles played a key role in the farces of deeply relatable and even poignant characters. In Fischl's exhibition, the motivation is Eros, god of sexual desire, and, in Hesiod's words, conqueror of "the mind and wise counsel in the breasts of all gods and men"—in other words, hope and hazard captured in a single archetype. Throughout *Hope*, Eros appears in sundry forms of attraction, seduction, tribulation, and consummation with Fischl in the role of chorus. Nevertheless, *Hope and Hazard: A Comedy of Eros* does more than extrapolate these themes through others' work. In fact, it locates them within a powerful framework for understanding human nature, namely that of the ancient tradition of drama and its enduring visions of love, lust, and the utterly inscrutable. ☞

STEVEN PESTANA is a visual artist and writer living in Brooklyn. He holds an MFA in Digital Media from Rhode Island School of Design and a BA in Art History from New York University.



Analia Segal, *contra la pared*, installation view, Aldrich Art Museum, 2018. Courtesy the artist.

ANALIA SEGAL: CONTRA LA PARED

THE ALDRICH
CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM
MAY 20 – SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

BY JONATHAN GOODMAN

Analia Segal is a New York-based artist, but before she arrived in the States nearly twenty years ago, her life in Argentina was under the cloud of the Argentinian dictator, Jorge Rafael Videla, who took power when Segal was only seven years old. It was a time of extraordinary violence, and although the artist suffered no direct harm herself, she was marked by the general sense of disorder and genuine mayhem taking place. This deep sense of unease surfaces in, *Analia Segal: contra la pared*, which in Spanish means “against the wall” or “cornered.” The show is composed of abstract geometric patterns covering the entry doors. Inside there are three videos on three of the walls, as well as a relief sculpture of white chipboard volumes, meant to be seen as books, and a work consisting of strings of yarn descending toward a circular rug. These discrete pieces function as a totality, making the entire installation feel like a singular work of three-dimensional art.

Segal's work picks up on the technical advances achieved in New York in environmental art and in the fierce emphasis on political awareness, and also the idea of a home—a safe personal environment—beyond the violence of the moment. Segal's work does not begin and end with personal feeling alone. Rather than focus on things being done to people, the artist abstracts the experience of her youth, investing her videos with word play that create a soundtrack to abstract images from the Internet that reference wallpaper, drapes, doors, and other indoor objects.

Collectively titled *Inland*, the videos communicate disorder and distress through simple repetition of words from language tutorials in which the listener is enjoined to repeat the phrase that is spoken. The very act of doing so is an example of someone following a command—an interaction that could easily be read as the use of authority, as simple as the act of verbal repetition might be. The use of words amplifies the power and pathos of Segal's installation, which leaves an aura of mistrust, even suspicion in the viewer's mind.

Aleph II (2018) consists of a round rug whose circumference includes thick lozenge-shaped forms in red. Lines of black yarn rise up in columnar fashion to the ceiling. There is no overt political content, but the catalogue essay by artist Richard Klein (currently interim director of the gallery) intimates the black-and-red rug as violent, pushing into the space above it with the black lines of yarn. Like the injunctions we hear in all three videos, we also experience the violence in this very interesting work of art as implied—but inevitably hovering in near distance. Klein invokes the slashed canvases of Lucio Fontana, an Argentinian native, as a precedent to Segal's work in its elegant, implied distress, in which passionate invasiveness stands for what it is as a simple visual. Like the gallery walls, *Aleph II* makes use of red, black, and white abstract patterns, whose colors themselves seem menacing enough but which do not directly, or in realist form, convey violence.

Before becoming an artist, Segal studied industrial design, and one of the considerable strengths of her installation is its creative sense of placement—*Aleph II* is placed where it is to encourage her audience to move through and around the exhibition, supporting the view that the entire installation is a sculpture. Indeed, Segal is extremely aware of the audience's

movement across the room. *Aleph II* helps make the total environment cohere in a manner that affects us first as a visual statement and then, over time, as a political treatise despite its essential abstraction. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the personal hovers over the show like a low cloud—Segal invests her work with the emotion that comes from her difficult childhood. The feeling of oppression is primarily achieved by the addition of sound; the seemingly benign quality of the repeated commands turns dark over time.

Perhaps the most striking work is the wall sculpture *Blind Volumes* (2017 – 18). Consisting of white chipboard against an otherwise unadorned red wall, many of the individual pieces—which stick out roughly six inches from the wall and look rather like patterns meant to convey literary content—are deformed. They display extrusions or small but sharp changes. Classically modernist in its overall gestalt, *Blind Volumes* also repudiates the high, clean lines of modern sculpture by deforming many of the individual elements that the work is made up of. Segal is paying homage to a childhood past that has stayed with her, but her visual presentation is remarkable for its terse schematics. Her art lasts as remembered patterns informed by the memory of a dysfunctional, bloodily vindictive state.

This does not mean we must read everything as a symbol of a troubled younger life. The tension between art and social commentary in this environment is extreme, and it makes the work(s) memorable. Segal's art poses questions more than it answers them, and this is how it should be; as a piece that indirectly reminds us of early life events that, in the artist's case, are publicly—not privately—originated, *contra la pared* demonstrates that memory can seep from one milieu to another—even if we do not want this to happen. ☞

JONATHAN GOODMAN is a teacher and author specializing in Asian art, about which he has been writing for more than twenty years.

VINCENT FECTEAU

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY, LOS ANGELES
JULY 14 – SEPTEMBER 29, 2018

BY ALEX JEN

Vincent Fecteau's sculptures feel intimate but conflicted. Elegant in form but grimy in finish, his painted papier-mâché sculptures and photographic collage creations are painstakingly handmade—obvious in their materiality yet cagey in their references. Fecteau works by slow, attentive exploration, and his untitled papier-mâché and collage series (from 2016 and 2014, respectively) at Matthew Marks Gallery in Los Angeles recall car parts, animal carcasses, or grade-school dioramas gone wrong—as if Fecteau found the pieces in fragments on the side of the road baking in the sun, and tried to fix them as best he could. The results are arrestingly but uneasily alluring: the sculptures' abstract, irregular bends and hidden crevices seem like comfortable places to hide, until they abruptly give way to hard drops and open expanses as viewers circle them.

Ultimately, Fecteau's sculptures are charming in their illogic—there's a breathy fragility to their heavy but hollow forms, vaguely scaled to the body—and are relatable for anyone who's ever lost a spark, or had intense feelings suddenly dissolve into confusing apathy. His work is affecting in its restraint: Fecteau doesn't give you everything at once, whether by hiding certain textures on the side or back of a sculpture, or choosing found and taken photographs for a collage that depict something familiar but still unrecognizable. The sparse, thoughtful installation also adds an air of uncanny