

EROS



"What holds the world together, as I have learned from bitter experience, is sexual intercourse." — Henry Miller

Hans Baldung Grien

Adam and Eve, 1531

Oil on panel. 147.5 x 67.3 cm

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.

Anais Nin

...Or as we secretly want to be...treated, viewed, touched, adored, violated, loved, fucked, kissed, held, worshipped, degraded, caressed, seduced, hurt, restrained, entered, torn apart, made whole again.

Secluded in the bottom drawer or high up in the closet under the winter trilly there may have been a cache of "visual material" in many apparently bashful households. Those blessed with guardians whose clandestine stack of erotica was easily discoverable, felt highly exotic and fortunate, particularly when compared to the neck to ankle modesty that many of us suffered.

It was the study of Art History that set me free, just prior to the discovery of Henry Miller and Anais Nin, though Xavier Hollander and Pauline Réage's *The Story of O* helped in the earlier, more discombobulating years. Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* and Courbet's *Origin of the World* offered a candid introduction to the sweep and sensuality, folds and lustre, of both the male and female body. But I think perhaps it was my brush with Nabokov's *Lolita*, and the paintings of Balthus that first enfolded eroticism with a psychological and aesthetic complexity that was, and still is, provoking and disquieting in equal measure.

This small exhibition doesn't pretend to be more than it is - a curious collection of evidence that we are and always have been surrounded by beautiful, dark, joyous, covert and occasionally unmasked eroticism. That this everyday eroticism gives force and poignancy to our existence, bliss to our temporary animation, and surprisingly regular highlights to the sometimes dry narratives of AH101.

What is clear from this slice of Eros is the range and distinctiveness of how we approach the erotic. From Gideon Rubin's underemonstrative and highly sensitive paintings that are tuned to a more "domestic" eroticism; to Hayv Kahraman's loaded compositions that conflate cultural and art historical references with a deeply personal self-examination; to Aiko Robinson's contemporary resuscitation of Japanese "shunga" pornography. For all of these artists there is lengthy precedent for the conceptual basis for their work but they bring idiosyncrasy and freshness to the aesthetics of Eros.

Against this familiarity, Hoda Afshar's suite of photographs *Behold* offer an intimate view into a concealed world where tenderness rubs up against illegality, where sexuality is necessarily covert, not because some audiences might feel the need to claim protection but the protagonists depend on it.

Tracey Snelling's humorous but confronting dioramas are exposés of strip-tease at the strip-mall. The collision of uptight Christian morality going head-to-head with those giving head declares the discord. Oddly both venues welcome you with open arms and promise certain ecstasy.

It is this tension between public and private, between extroverted and cloistered that goes to the heart of the Eros dilemma. The confusion about morality, sexual orthodoxy and pleasure is so extreme at this moment, the moral compass spinning so wildly out of kilter, that surely it is the repugnance of so called “moral judgement” that is more terrifying than the evidence of some consensual fucking.

The museological objects in this exhibition make it clear that before the avalanche of jpegs and gifs traded on the internet and the growth of the porn film industry, there was room for a kind of everyday eroticism, be it in the form of a finely painted vase, a precocious pot handle or an exquisitely carved marble fountain. Whether such sexual candour displayed on your pots and fountains, brought the bedroom into the kitchen or backyard, was evidence of the imminent fall of Rome, is far less interesting than the ubiquity of the erotic life that all cultures recognise, and some chose to dignify.

Andrew Jensen, May 2019



Artist Unknown, Late 4th Century BC
Red figure painting on pottery
Apulia, Italy

Nike holding a wreath, flying above a male attendant who is presenting a wreath and garland to a seated lady who holds a parasol. The reverse shows a lady holding grapes and a mirror before Eros seated on a rock and holding a phiale.

“When a woman takes off her robe, takes off her shyness as well.”
— Herodotus, 480-420 BC

Hayv Kahraman uses her own body as a measuring device. In mapping her contours to express a personal tabulation of function and beauty - her own Vitruvian blueprint. But more importantly Kahraman recognises the entangled cartography that the female body poses across all cultures. This self-portrait as contortionist so shifts the body's coordinates and yet we navigate it with an ease that belies its dislocations. Kahraman's paintings are wilfully erotic at times, their deep sensuality rooted in the biography of arabesques that form her work.



Hayv Kahraman
Bend 2, 2019
oil on linen
63.5 x 63.5 cm

"I'm a commodity. My paintings are a commodity. My figures are a commodity. I pose in the nude and photograph my body to use as outlines for my paintings. My figures then are visual transitions of my own body. They (the buyers) are buying my body. The figures are rendered to fit the occidental pleasures. White flesh. Transparent flesh. Posing in compositions taken directly from the Renaissance. Conforming to what they think is ideal. Neglecting everything else. Colonizing my own body to then be displayed gracefully into my rectangular panels. Carnal and visceral palpability. I provide for you in my rectangles. I know you like it. That's why I paint it. To catch your gaze. To activate your gaze. I want you to buy me so you can look at me all day long. I'm your little oriental pussycat. You can pet me I don't bite."

—Hayv Kahraman.

Suzuki Harunobu
A Cotton Picker (Watatsumi onna), 1750
color woodblock print



Aiko Robinson is busily updating the lengthy tradition of shunga pornography made in a Utemara style. Robinson's deep attention to detail, both conceptual and aesthetic runs counter to much of her generation whose abandonment of such concerns is not just deliberate but convenient. Curiously Robinson's figures are all headless, their identity playing second fiddle to the real "action". One of the multiple low-points in Netflix's *Escape from Dannemora* has Patricia Arquette's character being "shagged" in the bushes. It's grim in every sense. Robinson's coital adventurers get out in the bushes too but there is much that is playful about these romps in the forest, with Tokyo in the distant background. It speaks to naturalism, organic fucking ... raw, wholesome...like it should be.



Aiko Robinson

A Rustling in the Trees, 2019

pen and colour pencil drawing on washi paper

26.4 x 61 cm

Tomislav Nikolic is a painter with a deeply visceral sensibility. So aroused by colour himself it was always going to be the currency of his practice but his is no pedantic enquiry into the 'thickness of white', the 'resoluteness of black' or whatever...rather Nikolic's paintings are chromatic metaphors for our human conditions. ...is an openly erotic painting. Boudoir in scale, it offers a glimpse of flesh and warmth, interior and intimacy. The finest layers of soft pinks assemble like a dermis, fragile and responsive to touch.



Gustave Courbet
The Origin of the World, 1866
oil on canvas
46 cm x 55 cm
Location: Musée d'Orsay (since 1995)

(right) **Tomislav Nikolic**
just let me in a bit, 2019
acrylic polymer, marble dust,
rosenoble double gold
platinum & 24ct gold leaf,
museum glass on linen, wood
and hand carved frame
48 x 58 x 8.5 cm





"In a nervous and slender-leaved mimosa grove at the back of their villa we found a perch on the ruins of a low stone wall. She trembled and twitched as I kissed the corner of her parted lips and the hot lobe of her ear. A cluster of stars palely glowed above us between the silhouettes of long thin leaves; that vibrant sky seemed as naked as she was under her light frock. I saw her face in the sky, strangely distinct, as if it emitted a faint radiance of its own.

Her legs, her lovely live legs, were not too close together, and when my hand located what it sought, a dreamy and eerie expression, half-pleasure, half-pain, came over those childish features. She sat a little higher than I, and whenever in her solitary ecstasy she was led to kiss me, her head would bend with a sleepy, soft, drooping movement that was almost woeful, and her bare knees caught and compressed my wrist, and slackened again; and her quivering mouth, distorted by the acidity of some mysterious potion, with a sibilant intake of breath came near to my face. She would try to relieve the pain of love by first roughly rubbing her dry lips against mine; then my darling would draw away with a nervous toss of her hair, and then again come darkly near and let me feed on her open mouth, while with a generosity that was ready to offer her everything, my heart, my throat, my entrails, I gave her to hold in her awkward fist the scepter of my passion."

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

Gideon Rubin
Untitled, 2019
oil on Canvas
25.5 x 20.5 m



There is a delightful contradiction in Gideon Rubin's paintings. Often his works are humble in scale, the brushwork has a prosaic, undemonstrative character and yet the candour and welcome immodesty of the images is utterly engaging and human. There is a casualness that recalls the polaroid moment and yet despite the lack of ostentation in the brushwork these are paintings made with a great affection for the act of painting and the communicative power of colour, composition and the human body.

(left) **Gideon Rubin**
Red Trousers, 2019
 oil on Canvas
 31 x 25.5 cm

Linda Gamble
 photographed by Mario Casilli
 Playmate of the year 1961
 Playboy Magazine



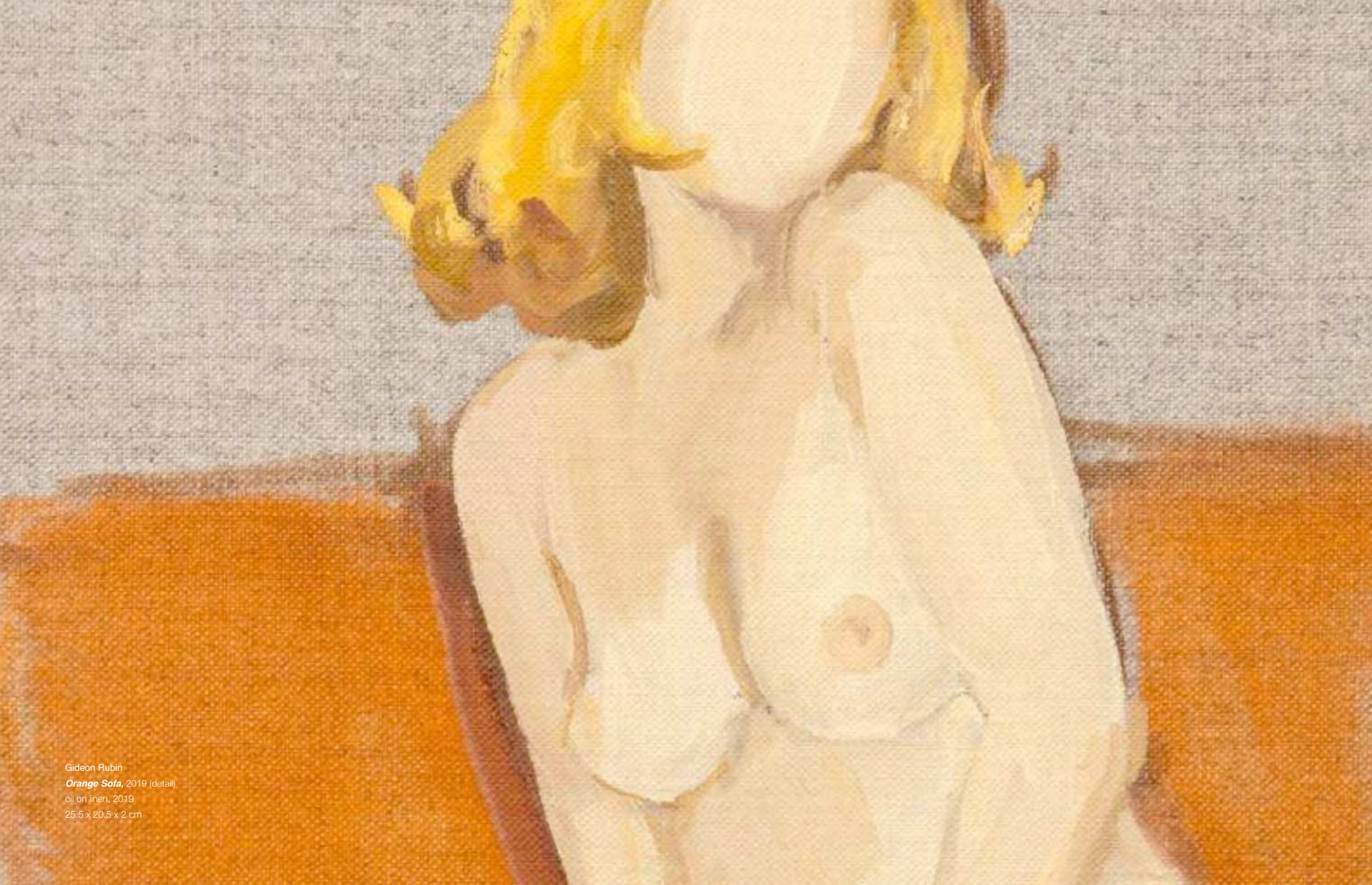


Playboy Magazine
 70's Playmates Collector's Edition
 2014

(right) Gideon Rubin
Untitled, 2019
 oil on Linen
 25.5 x 20.5 cm



17.



Gideon Rubin

Orange Sofa, 2019 (detail)

oil on linen, 2019

25.5 x 20.5 x 2 cm

Eric Fischl's brushstrokes alone radiate a certain kind of erotic flourish. Were his eye and wrist not so carefully tuned to a more knowing distrust of sentiment there would be risks. But Fischl's observations of the glitches and awkwardness of sexuality as much as his delight in cheeky voyeurism and the weight of breast and belly give his paintings a gravitas that finds little competition. Fischl paints and sculpts in the wake of Degas, Balthus and Rodin. He has their virtuosity, but he stamps it with the forceful realism that ignores theatre in favour of drama.



Eric Fischl
Bad Boy, 1981
oil on Canvas
167 x 244 cm

Untitled 004, 2011
watercolour on paper
152 x 100 cm





Tracey Snelling's humorous but confronting dioramas are exposés of strip-tease at the strip-mall. Her work celebrates the underbelly of western culture, religion included. She seems to run a 'neither confirm nor deny' policy about her either loving or loathing this seediness, but its grimy aesthetics have a sincerity and unexpected poignancy in her hands. *Adult books* makes it clear that one man's eroticism is another man's blow job and the brutality of the transaction, whilst shocking, has a simplicity that a fundamentalist can appreciate. The collision of uptight Christian morality going head-to-head with those giving head declares the scale of the discord. Oddly both venues welcome you with open arms and promise certain ecstasy.

Tracey Snelling

Adult Books XXX

wood, paint, lights, electroluminescent wire,
cold cathode lights, LCD screen, media
player, speakers, transformer
34.3 × 48.3 × 33 cm

Jane Bustin
(left) *Tulip*, 2019
cotton bedsheet, beetroot dye, oxides,
oil pastel, cotton thread, copper pin,
wood, copper, acrylic
105cm x 50cm overall

Artist Unknown
Erotic scene Pompeii, Napoli
between 50 and 79 AD
fresco
venereum, private building, Pompeii





The paintings of Frank Kenis deliver an eerie eroticism to the junction of gothic and romantic. It is as if he painted these very intense oils 'plein air' – "down by the river, all bloody and wild" with Elisa Day. In Kenis's work the sensuous flirts with the dangerous, the tender with the punitive and all the while he is determined to solve them as paintings rather than relying on their seductive noirish narrative. Follow the Rules has the limbs of a naked woman bound at her wrists and knees. It is more marionette than Bettie Page but the depersonalisation of the figure invites a less playful atmosphere, there is more menace to it.



Frank Kenis
Follow the Rules, 2014
 oil on canvas
 70 x 70 cm

(left) *Story of O*, 1975
 directed Just Jaeckin
 Yang Films, France

"The artist's experience lies so unbelievably close to the sexual, to its pain and its pleasure, that the two phenomena are really just different forms of one and the same longing and bliss." — Rainer Maria Rilke

Frank Kenis

Unfulfilled Desire, 2019

oil on canvas

40 x 40 cm

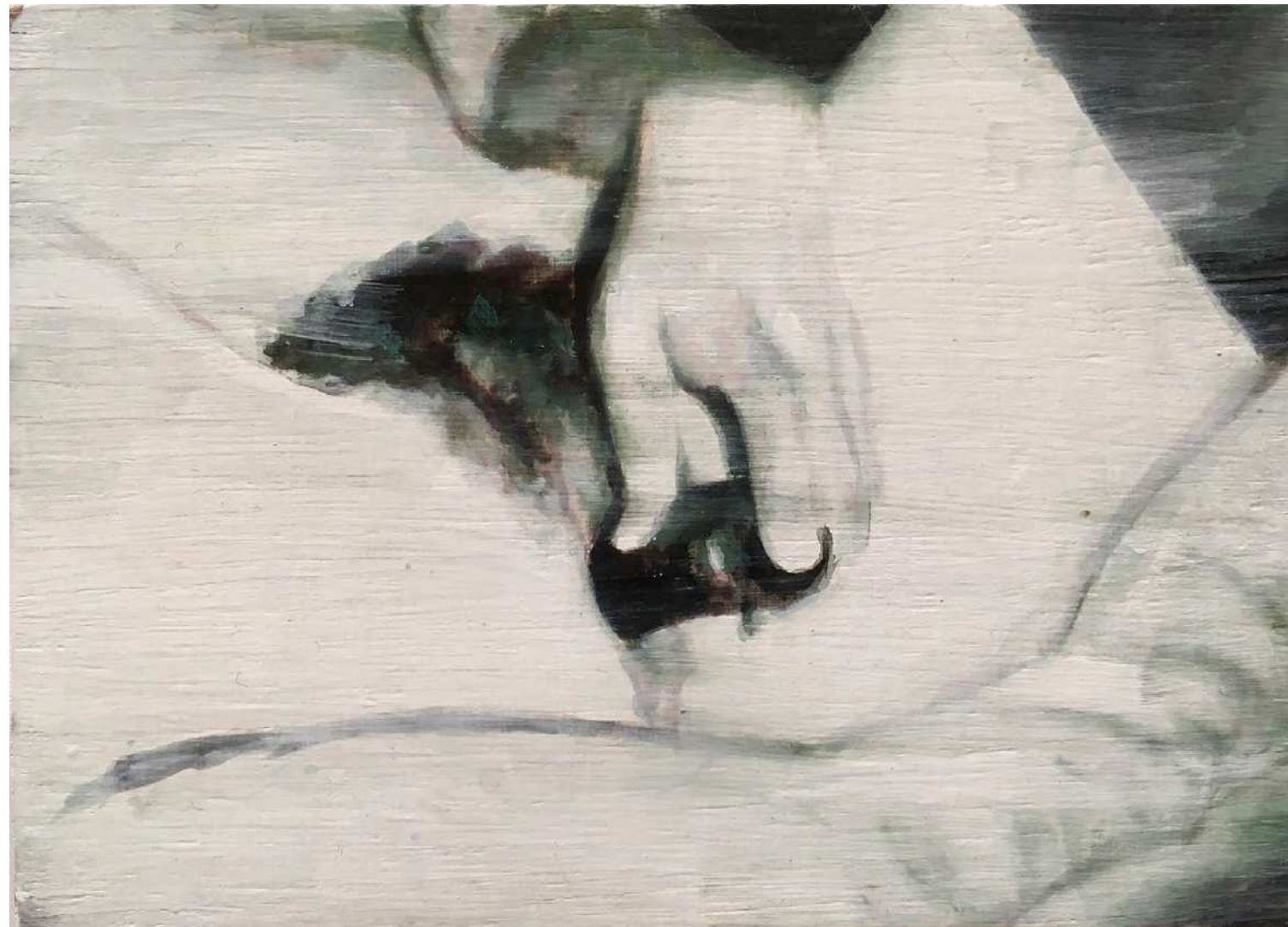
Balthus

Les beaux jours (Golden Days), 1944-45

oil on canvas

148 x 200 cm (58 1/4 x 78 1/4 in)

Hirshorn Museum, Washington



A Roman marble reclining Hercules

Circa 1st – 2nd century A.D

81 cm long

Once part of a larger figural fountain group, the divine hero shown naked, reclining on his left side, left leg bent in the front, left arm propping up his body on his lion skin and a wine skin above, his hand steadying the fountain spout.

Provenance:

Said to have been found on a Greek island.

Yanakopoulos collection, Paris 1913.



Hoda Afshar's suite of photographs Behold offer an intimate view into a concealed world where tenderness rubs up against illegality, where sexuality is necessarily covert, not because some audiences might feel the need to claim protection, but the protagonists depend on it. Other than the fact that they exist at all, there is little shocking in these images. Their directness and sensitivity subdue the inferred sexual engagements and remind us of the benevolence and kindness that Eros sustains.



Francis Bacon
Two Figures, 1953
oil on canvas
152.5 x 116.5 cm

Hoda Afshar
(left) *Untitled #2 (Behold Series)*, 2015
digital photographic print, 95 x 120 cm





Man Ray

(left) La Prière, 1930

Gelatin silver print

24 x 18.1 cm

(Detail) Lakshmana Hindu Temple built by Yashovarman

Dedicated to Vaikuntha Vishnu

Stone carved erotic bas relief

Khajuraho, India



