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Oral history interview with Eric Fischl and
April Gornik, 2008 June 6

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Eric Fischl and April Gornik on June 6, 2008. The interview took place in Sag Harbor, New York, and was conducted by Robert Enright for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art Oral History Program.

Eric Fischl has reviewed the transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT ENRIGHT: We're at Sag Harbor. It's June 6, 2008 and I'm speaking with April Gornik and Eric Fischl for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

You know, I want to start with this lovely trope that you came up with that you and Eric have a figure/ground relationship; he paints the figures, you paint the ground. I think that's pretty good.

So I guess we should go back to where you two first met, because it happened in Halifax at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Do you want to talk a little bit about how you got there and do you have a recollection of your first meeting with Eric?

APRIL GORNIK: I do [laughs]. I most certainly do. Well, the first time I remember being really aware of him, he came into my studio. I was in the studio department and he was in the painting department so, of course, I avoided him because I thought that the painters were uninteresting. And he sort of drifted into my studio and started making insulting remarks about what I was doing which, granted, wasn't very good and probably was insultable, but I likened it to the art version of dipping somebody's pigtails in ink. It was an attention-getting device but it wasn't very polite and I just thought, "What a jerk."

And then somebody later said, "You know who that was? It was Eric Fischl." And I was like, "So?" Because he was, you know, cute and popular, but I sort of didn't know it. I wasn't that aware of him until then, to tell you the truth. So but then we actually met subsequently at some parties and got stoned together and hung out and had a great time. And he had a great sense of humor and I found myself becoming more and more attracted to him.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: April's notion of this is your version of the dipping the pigtails in ink was interesting. Did you go in with that? Did you go in because you wanted to meet her or did you go in because you actually were doing something pedagogically important at the time as a teacher?

APRIL GORNIK: [Laughs] No, it was not pedagogically important.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: [Laughs] I didn't ask you that.

APRIL GORNIK: [Laughs] But I can still answer.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, I thought it would be a way of getting her attention, for sure. And, you know, she was incredibly attractive, as she still is.

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, honey.

ERIC FISCHL: And mwah, mwah.

APRIL GORNIK: [Laughs] Kiss, kiss.

ERIC FISCHL: And so I couldn't figure out any other way to approach her, so I thought maybe an insult might work. It took me about six months to clean up the mess, but—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: After this initial incident?

APRIL GORNIK: No, it wasn't six months. It was a couple of months. But it did take a couple of months.

ERIC FISCHL: It was a mess, anyway.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, it's interesting, though. You also had talked earlier, both of you, about the kind of rigor

at NSCAD. I mean, this is consistent with what you came out of CalArts with, you know. Insulting people about their art wasn't exactly new.

ERIC FISCHL: Right.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: There would have been some sort of teaching going on here as well, I assume, or an attitude towards what you should do when you're engaging something in the idea of what art is about.

ERIC FISCHL: Well, she wasn't working on anything that was that amazing. I mean, she was gluing pieces of wood to paper and then writing some sort of philosophical—

APRIL GORNIK: That was only one stupid thing I was doing at the time.

ERIC FISCHL: Deconstructionist kind of—

APRIL GORNIK: Don't try to limit it to that one stupid thing. I was doing many stupid things that I was all confused about at the time.

ERIC FISCHL: Anyway, my attack, I had good question. I mean, I simply asked her why anyone would glue a piece of wood to—

APRIL GORNIK: No, you didn't say that. You said, "I just don't see why anyone would make art by gluing a piece of wood onto paper."

ROBERT ENRIGHT: It was a statement, not a question, I gather?

APRIL GORNIK: It was definitely a statement.

ERIC FISCHL: Whatever. It worked.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: It worked.

[They laugh.]

APRIL GORNIK: Later. It worked later. And I just, you know, I just thought, "Who are you? Why are you asking this and why am I supposed to respond to you?"

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You really didn't know who Eric was? I mean, he had no reputation?

ERIC FISCHL: She knew.

APRIL GORNIK: I knew who he was, but he wasn't like kind of—

ERIC FISCHL:—On your radar.

APRIL GORNIK: On my radar, yes.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Now, you were both involved with—didn't you have a boyfriend at NSCAD at the time as well?

APRIL GORNIK: Yes, I did.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And you were—

APRIL GORNIK: An on and off again boyfriend, sort of. Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But you fairly quickly fell in love?

ERIC FISCHL: It took a while.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, it wasn't instantaneous.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Did you—

ERIC FISCHL: I wasn't, you know, I wasn't at that point looking for a long-term relationship.

APRIL GORNIK: And you had a girlfriend that had just left, right?

ERIC FISCHL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

APRIL GORNIK: He had another student girlfriend who had just left. All the teachers there had reputations for boffing students.

ERIC FISCHL: That's back when teaching was teaching.

[They laugh.]

ERIC FISCHL: They could pay you very little but there were perks. [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You couldn't get—that doesn't happen today.

ERIC FISCHL: That does not happen.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But this is the old days, that's right.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So as your relationship developed was it a relationship based on art as well as on mutual attraction?

APRIL GORNIK: Excuse me. You know, it should be said that all the teachers that taught at NSCAD, the vast majority of the teachers that were teaching at NSCAD at the time were no more than about six years older than any of the students.

ERIC FISCHL: Right. It was a young crowd.

APRIL GORNIK: It was a really young faculty, so it was kind of hard to keep them away.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And that was okay? I mean, the relationship with you students and the professors was an intimate one in lots of instances?

APRIL GORNIK: Well, it was something that was actually protested by some of the female students there, so it wasn't okay with everybody.

ERIC FISCHL: It became more of an issue, obviously, as it did everywhere else.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. I don't blame them.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: How long before you two ended up living together?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, it was like a year and a half later.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Oh, that long?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Oh.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, because we maintained separate places and we even went to Europe together for a while before we moved in together.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And you left and after you graduated you went off to Europe on your own initially, didn't you?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. Actually, we had met each other. We were having a great time. I think it was I who had the idea of wouldn't it be fun to go to Europe and did Eric want to go, and he said yes and at the last minute he sort of canceled. So he said, "But you could still go by yourself," and I said, "Thanks, I will." [Laughs.] And then I did. But it was an extremely awkward moment because, of course, it felt to me like not only do I not want to go to Europe with you but, you know, this is a good way of telling you goodbye.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But was that—that wasn't what you had in mind?

ERIC FISCHL: It might have been, yeah. I can't recall exactly. But I was not as, you know, sure I wanted to get involved in a, you know, full-time relationship at that point, so it could have been.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, what changed your mind then? You obviously decided you did want to get involved in a full-time relationship, it seems.

ERIC FISCHL: Well, you know, I think I was recovering from the wound of a former marriage that had ended very badly, so it took me a long time to get over it and April was the one that kind of cracked me open again.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Was the atmosphere there, once you became partners in a sense without living together, was the atmosphere good for both of you as artists? I mean, you were teaching. You were both making work at this time.

APRIL GORNIK: No, no, no. I was, I graduated. I went to Europe. Then I came back to Halifax and stayed there. Eric and I were seeing each other but I was not in school there. So I was waitressing and I got a little studio and I was just trying to make art by myself. He was still teaching. Then he went on sabbatical. Then we both went to Europe together like January to April 1977. That was a risky [laughs] venture for people.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Why?

APRIL GORNIK: Well, for people who are not really committed to like decide they were going to go travel together for four months.

ERIC FISCHL: It's a test.

APRIL GORNIK: You know, it was like what were we thinking. That was sort of amazing that we survived that because we were living in, you know, penurious traveling circumstances and it was, you know, we hardly knew each other.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And was it exciting? Did it work?

APRIL GORNIK: It was a lot of fun.

ERIC FISCHL: It was great.

APRIL GORNIK: And, I mean, they say that traveling with somebody is a test of how well you're going to get along with them and maybe it's true, because we did survive it. And then not so long after we got back we moved in together. I think it was like July or something of that summer. Sometime during the summer, as I recall.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Was that trip a seeing art trip? I mean, was that why you wanted to go to Europe?

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So you could actually see what it was you might be interested in in the art world?

APRIL GORNIK: Well, for me it was like more art and for Eric—because you hadn't been there, right, before?

ERIC FISCHL: No. It was the first time.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, and then when I went there the summer previous I went more in the north, and when we went in January it was cold and we ended up just, you know, instinctively and intelligently heading south. Like I'd landed in London and then went south around northern Europe. And he, when we went together we landed in Paris and then immediately went south, because it really was cold. I mean, I don't think we had any real concept of like what's the weather like in Europe. [Enright laughs.] We just sort of went. We had no, we hadn't really planned a specific itinerary. There were a couple of people we were going to meet that we knew were going to be over there. But we didn't have a really planned out itinerary at all.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So you didn't really know what museums you were going to see except in a broad way you'd want to see—

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. You know, we just sort of knew countries and cities we knew to some extent.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. We went to Spain. I hadn't been in Spain the other trip. We went to southern Italy more. I hadn't been to Rome. We went to Rome. And we went to Greece.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Were you sort of setting the agenda for the trip primarily, or was it really a mutual decision about where you would go and what you would see?

APRIL GORNIK: I can't remember. I think it was mostly mutual. I mean, there were so many places to see that were south of where we'd been. And I wanted to go back to Paris because I just loved Paris the minute I was there. I desperately wanted to go back, so that was easy for me. And, of course, it's the seat of so much art.

ERIC FISCHL: We were also going to, you know, we were going to meet up with Bruce Ferguson in Spain. We were going to meet up with Tim Zook and Robin.

APRIL GORNIK: Tim and Robin Zook. He was with Robin then.

ERIC FISCHL: In Greece. And so there were a few places we had that we had ways of getting to to meet them at certain points.

APRIL GORNIK: And we'd gotten shots to go to Egypt but we never made it because there was some political unrest at the time, as I recall, and it just all seemed too difficult so we ended up skipping that.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Did you find that you two could talk easily and with mutual interest about art? I mean, was that very much a part of your relationship apart from the physical attraction and he had a good sense of humor and you enjoyed one another's company?

APRIL GORNIK: I think so, yeah.

ERIC FISCHL: Absolutely.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. I mean, we would take long, long, long walks and just talk and talk and talk and talk. Yeah, a lot of talk about art.

ERIC FISCHL: And certainly when we were walking through the museums and stuff like that we were talking about this or that revelation or experience.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So you come back to Halifax and then by May of '78 you've, Eric, said that your ambition was to get to New York. He was in a way prepared to stay in Halifax or at least in Canada and not enter New York yet but you decided to go to New York. Was that primarily your impetus to get there?

APRIL GORNIK: I always wanted to be in New York, like, I mean, since I started art school practically. Yeah, I just didn't think there was any place else to be, really, so—and I was just getting kind of tired of being in Halifax in this kind of strange art environment. You know, it's very small there. It felt a lot bigger than where I came from but, you know, at a certain point you kind of get to know everybody. And, you know, there's more going on down in the big city so I just wanted to get there a lot. And we had a couple of friends and a couple of connections down there. And somebody told us about a sublet on 20th Street, so I went down and like checked it out and signed on. And then, you know, we moved down like about a month later or so.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So what was it like when you first get to New York? What did it feel like? Because you were reluctant to even sort of come.

APRIL GORNIK: Cockroaches. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. The first night we arrived we were sleeping in this rental loft. You've heard this story?

ROBERT ENRIGHT: No.

ERIC FISCHL: We were sleeping in this rental loft and all of a sudden it was like raining or something. There's something dropping on our heads. We flipped the light on and it was like infested with cockroaches.

APRIL GORNIK: They had, the people—

ERIC FISCHL: I mean infested.

APRIL GORNIK: The people that sublet the place to us had kindly bombed it before we got there that day, like the day before. And what happens is that when you bomb, you know, with whatever they use for cockroaches, it gets into the walls and then at night, of course, they're like panicked and they're trying to get out. And, of course, it doesn't get rid of them. So they literally were falling on our heads when we were asleep. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: I mean, it was like a horror movie.

APRIL GORNIK: It was really gross.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: It sounds just like a horror movie.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. Yeah. So there was that. And then I came down pretty soon after that with a virus that—

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, that was terrible.

ERIC FISCHL: You know, I couldn't stay awake and I couldn't walk around and I had these giant blood blisters on my legs and I thought I was dying.

APRIL GORNIK: He had canker sores in his mouth.

ERIC FISCHL: Canker sores in my mouth. I thought I was dying of cancer and here I'd made my move to come be a serious artist in New York. Meanwhile, April is pissed at me because I'm not going to get a job and she thinks I'm doing this—

APRIL GORNIK: I'm waitressing already. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: Doing this just so that I won't have to go look for work. [Laughs.]

APRIL GORNIK: And I go, "Get up. It's just psychological. Snap out of it."

ROBERT ENRIGHT: The canker sores and the boils were something he invented?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, well, I was so panicked at seeing him looking so sick and like how am I going to take care of this big guy who, you know, all of a sudden seems so—

ERIC FISCHL: Who refuses to work. [Laughs.]

APRIL GORNIK: Who refuses to work.

[They laugh.]

APRIL GORNIK: It was really bad. There was a little tension when we first got there.

ERIC FISCHL: Yes, there was that and whatnot. But, you know, the rest of it, the sort of thrill of, you know, being there, working in the studios in New York was exciting.

APRIL GORNIK: Didn't I tell you that—

ERIC FISCHL: The scene was, you know, our friends, you know, it was a very sort of active kind of scene among our generation of artists there. You know, so there was lots of, you know, parties, show going, you know, hanging out at bars and talking.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Your first night isn't there a dinner party?

APRIL GORNIK: Didn't I tell you? Didn't we talk about this before that like—no, it was the second night we went to dinner at David Salle's. I was telling Robert this. And he made spaghetti and Sherrie Levine was there and that's how I got that waitressing job inadvertently.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: She needed a waitress?

ERIC FISCHL: She was leaving.

APRIL GORNIK: She worked at—no, no, she wasn't leaving. She knew that Magoo's, which was a very famous like art hangout restaurant on, near Canal and West Broadway, she was working there and, you know, the first practically minute I met her she said, "Oh, what are you going to do for money while you're here?" And I said, "Well, I waitress but I've saved up some money so I'm hoping that for the first couple of weeks I'll just sort of like be in New York and then I'll look for a job." And she said, "Oh, we—" this is, you know, Sunday night. She goes, "Oh, we need a waitress at Magoo's. Come in tomorrow." [Laughs] And I felt like, "Oh, damn it. All right, I will." But I didn't really want to start working so fast, but then to like have something handed to you when you know you're going to need a job, it just seemed stupid to refuse.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So you said yes while the slug is at home not working. This is—

APRIL GORNIK: No, no. I mean, he, you know, I didn't know what Eric's plans were. We had just gotten there like the day before, literally. Like we moved on Saturday morning. The exterminating came Sunday morning. We went to David's for dinner on Sunday night and I started working Monday. It was just like, boom, like very, you know, total immersion or something. But it was fun. We met great people and, you know, if you hang around at Magoo's and the right bars which, of course, any artist with a head on his or her shoulders is going to figure out which are the bars you're supposed to go to and can afford. You know, you just start it up and meet people and, you know, one thing leads to another. So we met people pretty fast and made friends fast.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: What about studios? What did you do for studios when you first got there?

ERIC FISCHL: Well, we were in a loft and it had two studios basically. You know, it was a fairly open plan. There were these two rooms.

APRIL GORNIK: We could divide—we were in shoebox lofts like when we first got there, and then when we, we actually built from a raw space. We subletted a raw space down on Reed Street from someone who was looking for someone to take half the space, and it was the same exact kind of space that we'd been in, you know, what I always think of as a shoebox loft, where we did the same exact thing as we'd done in this sublet that we were in for the first year, which is to make like a kitchen/living room area in one end and then have a studio in the middle and a studio at the other end.

ERIC FISCHL: At the other end, yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So you were working in pretty close proximity then?

ERIC FISCHL: Yes.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Then you could see one another's work, obviously?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, my God, it was horrible. [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Really?

APRIL GORNIK: Well, it's so, I mean, no privacy. You know, you just can't really have privacy in a situation like that.

ERIC FISCHL: Battling, you know, music tastes and stuff like that, so that was—

APRIL GORNIK: That I don't remember as being so much of a problem.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, you're a classical fan. That's all you want to listen to at the time and you probably want to listen to rock and roll.

APRIL GORNIK: So, I was—no, I was listening to Talking Heads and stuff like that then. I mean, I've always liked classical music and I've always listened to it during, but we had other musical interests.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But this was an exciting time, though, for you. You're young, you're in New York, you're with your generation, as you say. So were things, ideas—

ERIC FISCHL: It just felt like everything was rolling along in a kind of fabulous way and expanding in terms of people we met, situations, you know, things we could get involved in. I found it very stimulating.

APRIL GORNIK: It was really—

ERIC FISCHL: It was fun.

APRIL GORNIK: It was really fun, really exciting. And I'd mentioned to you too that—

ERIC FISCHL: I mean, we had some bad things happen. You know, April got mugged within six months of us being there in the elevator of our building. You know, a later later or something like that we witnessed somebody getting killed. It was, you know, it was—

APRIL GORNIK: New York in the '70s—

ERIC FISCHL: New York was rough.

APRIL GORNIK: New York in the late, late '70s was, yeah, it was still like coming off of an extremely bad time. It was so much dirtier and so much more, I guess it was really more dangerous.

ERIC FISCHL: It was violent, yeah. It was ugly.

APRIL GORNIK: And gruesome, you know. But also poor and for an artist it was possible to go live in Manhattan.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: Now it's wealthy and clean and full of rich people and no young artist can afford to move there unless they're a trust fund baby, and that's not fair. I mean, that's a whole other drag in itself. It's not tragic, tragedy. It's not violence, but—

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. And we were also there at a time when—the shift came over several years but it went from being sort of artists hanging out at bars to artists hanging out at restaurants. And, you know, that change was, I think was kind of a fundamental change in the way artists talk to each other.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: From the Cedar Tavern to Max's Kansas City, that sort of thing you mean?

ERIC FISCHL: Well, the Cedar Tavern, Max's Kansas City, it was still a bar environment that sold food. And, you know, Magoo's was a restaurant but it was really a free flowing one.

APRIL GORNIK: A hangout. And Spring—

ERIC FISCHL: And, of course, Spring Street Bar and—

APRIL GORNIK: Puffies.

ERIC FISCHL:—Finnelli's and all of those. And then what happened was, you know, eventually it became like the Odeon and it started being a little bit more formalized. And in that case it was great. I mean, the Odeon is like one of the most beautiful restaurant rooms in New York. But it was one of those things where artists started to stay at their tables and talk to their table and not sort of flow back and forth in a way. It became a little more isolated. And the food, you know, got more expensive so then different kinds of artists were—the successful ones were in those places, not just everybody. You know, it moved in that direction.

APRIL GORNIK: But that was in the '80s, really.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: It took a few years for that to happen.

ERIC FISCHL: It was a few years.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You had already started working on the work, I mean, begun to do landscapes by the time you got to Halifax. And Eric, you were doing the glassine and brought the idea of that kind of figuration into your subject matter here. How long before your careers begin to move forward? When does Edward Thorp first decide that he wants to show you? You come in May of '78.

ERIC FISCHL: In May of '78. When was my first show at Thorp? Seventy-nine or '80. 1980.

APRIL GORNIK: You had an introduction to him from David True when we came there.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, right.

APRIL GORNIK: So he was already kind of set.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And so you—

ERIC FISCHL: I mean, Thorp was eager to show my work when I was living in Nova Scotia. I showed him the glassines. He would have done a show of the glassines but he said, "Wait until you move to New York and we'll discuss that." And then we decided instead that the first show would be paintings, which happened.

APRIL GORNIK: But he never came up to Nova Scotia before.

ERIC FISCHL: No, he didn't. I brought glassines down. But then also he came to the studio on 20th Street.

APRIL GORNIK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ERIC FISCHL: Which is where he saw your work.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, but not that first time. Not the first time he came to see your work. It was like the third or fourth time he was over.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You said the understanding you had was if Edward or any dealer was coming to see you you would turn your work to the walls—

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. Remember—

ROBERT ENRIGHT:—so as not to—

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: Remember he came like in the morning, like it was a Saturday morning. I had gone out. I didn't know he was coming over.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: What was the reason for that, you two? Like why did you want to keep those things discrete?

APRIL GORNIK: Because it didn't seem fair to distract from someone's studio visit with somebody. That's just normal. I mean, that's why it's good to have separate studios. You want the person that's coming to your studio to focus on your work, and we both respect that.

ERIC FISCHL: We've always tried to keep it as separate as possible.

APRIL GORNIK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ERIC FISCHL: Not speak for the other and, you know, if somebody calls—

APRIL GORNIK: Not to mention our lives for a long time. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, that too.

[They laugh.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: What do you mean?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, you know, like not getting married for 22 years, little things like that. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, there was that. That's right.

APRIL GORNIK: Details, details.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: [Inaudible] wedding invitation was a great joy to get then. One wondered why after 22 years, yeah. We can get to that later on. So the fact that you're working in such close proximity, does that mean that you were also talking to one another always about the work that you were doing? I mean, were you your best studio visitors?

ERIC FISCHL: We only talked to each other when asked, pretty much, I think.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, but we did talk a lot about art.

ERIC FISCHL: We did. We talked a lot about art and when asked we would talk specifically to each other about what we were doing, you know, in terms of critique of the pieces and stuff.

APRIL GORNIK: I'd like to say just for the record that Eric always had, it seemed to me, a wonderful certainty about what he was doing, even when he was searching something out. And when I first met him I was doing much more abstract stuff and I was very influenced by the fact that he was doing figurative imagistic work, you know. I mean, that was, I think as I mentioned to you, new image painting was happening in New York almost simultaneously with that. I mean, there was definitely something in the air. But, you know, I was definitely very inspired by that in his work.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: By his certainty and the fact that he could move in that direction was also a permission for you, in a sense?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Someone so close to you was prepared to do that.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But you never, you didn't move towards figuration, obviously. I mean, the figure/ground thing has always been consistent in the work—

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, not figures, but, I mean, recognizable images, shall we say.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: You know, that sort of thing.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Would there be a case where you would go to Eric and say, "Eric, look at this painting. What do you think?" I mean, would it be that direct when you wanted to get some feedback from one another?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. But as Eric said, it wasn't constant. It was regular but inconsistent, I'd say, that we'd want the other person to give a critique or whatever. It takes a long time to work out something in your studio. You don't want somebody to like be in there in the middle, you know, before you yourself have time to formulate the image. I don't know artists who would enjoy that. I'm sure there are some, but neither of us is that sort of person, so.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Yeah. We were talking actually at lunch that Leon Golub and Nancy Spero, there was a wall between them and even though they yelled at one another, I mean in a fond and loving way when they were talking about art, there was still something between them. Something kept the work separate, one body of work from the other. That's probably a good idea, rather than having an open space where you're constantly in visual dialogue with work that you perhaps aren't being asked to talk about, after all.

APRIL GORNIK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I mean, when did you get in a position where you had separate studios so that, in fact, this proximity wasn't something being forced on you?

APRIL GORNIK: Eric got his own studio outside of the house—

ERIC FISCHL: In '82, '83.

APRIL GORNIK: Was it that early?

ERIC FISCHL: On Canal Street?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. Anyway—

ERIC FISCHL: I think it was around then.

APRIL GORNIK: Okay, so like several years after moving to New York but not many. And then, you know, I was sort of amazed at his ambition. [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: How do you mean?

APRIL GORNIK: Well, he had a studio at home and it just seemed like convenient. But, you know, he was clearly like making a move that was, I think, especially in retrospect, showing more independence, showing more, you know, confidence in what was going to happen, that he would be able to afford the studio, et cetera, et cetera. I always have been really insecure about money, I think more so than Eric. So I was, you know, impressed that he did that.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So did you keep your studio where you were living and then Eric moves out to Canal Street?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And that began to work better from the point of view of your work being independent one from the other?

ERIC FISCHL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. I think that was helpful, definitely.

ERIC FISCHL: And then we've always had different schedules for working, too.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: How do you mean? Are you an early morning, an earlier morning worker?

ERIC FISCHL: No, it wasn't that, although probably at the time I would start early in the day. But it was more that, you know, April had, does a lot of different things in the course of a day and I don't. I don't do as much. I can spend much more time doing nothing [laughs] and April can't stand doing nothing so she's always doing something. So she busies herself, not just around the house but she'll go out and, you know, do shopping or research or whatever.

APRIL GORNIK: Or shopping research.

ERIC FISCHL: Or shopping research.

APRIL GORNIK: He always, Eric always says that I used New York more than he did.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, she did.

APRIL GORNIK: I really know the city.

ERIC FISCHL: She'd go all over town to sort of, you know. She goes to 10 different stores to fill an order of whatever she needs, whereas—

APRIL GORNIK: It's a kind of adventure. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. And so I think, you know, in terms of that it was quite often that one or the other would be in their studio working and the other one wouldn't be. So it wasn't, you know, we weren't competitive in that way.

APRIL GORNIK: Well, we worked it out. I think under the circumstances we worked it out really well because there could have been incessant friction and we've always been really respectful of each other's time, needs and privacy and whatnot.

ERIC FISCHL: I think for the most part whatever, you know, and it's difficult being artists and it's difficult being artists with artists, et cetera. The one thing artists understand implicitly is that there's need for space, need for time, need for—and that those aren't necessarily the negative, you know, selfish things. They're just, that's what one needs.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: How did you react to the unusual success that Eric's first show had at Thorp's gallery? I mean, he became almost, I mean, the myth is overnight, and while that may be a condensed sense of time it was pretty quick what happened after that first show. Was it exciting for you to see your partner get that kind of success or was there also a residual "When me?" kind of thing?

APRIL GORNIK: I think I felt more jealous than anything, even though I love his work, I've always loved it and I thought he deserved it. You know, like I think my immediate response was, you know, yeah, like, "Why not me?" But—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I love your candor. It's not what I thought you'd say, actually. [Laughs.]

APRIL GORNIK: Well, you know, I'm just being honest. You know, it doesn't make me love his work less. But it's hard. I mean, I don't—I think it's very hard to live with another artist. Of course, I actually, when I first had my first show at Edward Thorp, I had quite a bit of success. And people have asked me, "How does it feel to have started off with such a great response to your work and then be eclipsed by Eric," you know, as if he were the only other horse in the race. You know, [laughs] it's a long time of that sort of response from people. It's annoying, frankly. But I still love his work and I still think he deserves everything he's gotten. So, you know, it's just the breaks. And I'm not exactly suffering, so.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Yeah. I understand. That's very interesting. How does it work for you? Your career took off quicker, I assume. Did that—I mean, I don't want to say "guilt" but how do you deal with someone you love whose work you also admire enormously and want to see it get more attention?

ERIC FISCHL: Well, I was very protective of April, so—and I think very sensitive to, you know, how many times in the course of a day she would be insulted by somebody who was overlooking—

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, come on. It wasn't incessant.

ERIC FISCHL: It was fairly regularly, anyway. Certainly when you'd move out into the public aspect of the art world there was, you know, people who were, you know, wanting to get to me via her or were talking to her on and on about me without acknowledging her. I think, you know, and I was, I saw it, I felt it, I was aware of it.

APRIL GORNIK: But it's—

ERIC FISCHL: But sure I—and, you know, I think we spent a lot of time trying to find our center as a relationship amongst that, recognizing that it was problematic. But again, it didn't have to do with disrespect for what each other did. It was more an understanding of forces outside the relationship that were, you know, abrasive and having, you know, a kind of negative effect. You know, we dealt with it. It's one of those things you deal with over a long—

APRIL GORNIK: It's not, it's not different now. It's the same thing.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Is it really?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, of course it is. Of course it is. It still happens. Occasionally people will be really insulting. People have been insulting to Eric too, inadvertently, but it more often happens to me. So, but, you know, by and large we hang around with people who know us, who respect both of us, you know, and don't, you don't seek out people who won't be sensitive to art generally, and anyone who is sensitive to art generally would be,

have some sense of both our work, you know, so.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Do you rely on one another when things are being written about you or when there are catalogues and books involved, do you always—I mean, do you pass things around so that you are each seeing what else is being written? Are all these things discussed in your relationship now as well or do you keep your careers separate, too, as far as those kinds of things go?

APRIL GORNIK: It's a mixture.

ERIC FISCHL: It's a mix, yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Because I have a sense in being around you for a number of days that you're very close about all those things, that it isn't really—I mean, it's a working and a workable relationship in that way. Because I can—it's not that I see the tension but I know enough about being in relationships where you have two people who are really good at things and one person gets more attention for all the wrong reasons. I mean, that does make it difficult. It puts a pressure—

ERIC FISCHL: Excuse me. For all the wrong reasons? [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, no, but, you know—

ERIC FISCHL: What's wrong with my attention?

[They laugh.]

ERIC FISCHL: What's wrong? Why did I not deserve it? Excuse me.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I'm not going to rephrase that. It's too obvious now. But I mean has it been difficult or you now are able to take it in stride more when these inequities apparently come up as far as the art world goes?

ERIC FISCHL: I'm going to check the "In stride" box on that one. I think we deal with it in—

APRIL GORNIK: It needs to be—

ERIC FISCHL:—a direct way.

APRIL GORNIK: It still needs to be dealt with, let's put it that way.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: It hasn't gone away and it's not as though, you know— I've said before and I think I mentioned to you, I'm a thin-skinned person. I'm sensitive. I'm sensitive to people generally. I watch people carefully so I know if I'm being dissed or whatever and, you know, it always bothers me. I would never not notice it. But it is definitely something that you deal with better and better, you know. And if it's a condition of relationship, of being with someone that you truly love and you don't want your relationship to be ruined by it, you better learn to deal with it, you know, so.

ERIC FISCHL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: How do you guys use travel together, because you travel a fair—was there a period where you traveled more together and now that's happening less? But let's deal with the first part of the question. How was travel a part of your life together and what function did it serve other than just the joy of being able to go to other countries?

APRIL GORNIK: I don't know. We're both really curious people. We like the stimulation of travel and we like the input from other cultures. I think we're both really just fundamentally curious people, as all artists I think should be.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But you don't—

ERIC FISCHL: April's a sort of a better traveler than I am in terms of adventure, in terms of sort of overt curiosity for whatever, whether it's, you know, going to India or Africa or things like that. I mean, Europe for the first time, et cetera. I think she's the one that initiates those things. And certainly the years we spent going to France was largely because there was a real passion for her, you know. She was, you know, absolutely in love with the French culture on so many levels and so we would go there frequently and spend a lot of time there.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And you learned to speak French or did you already speak French before?

APRIL GORNIK: I learned, such as my ability to speak French is, which is okay.

ERIC FISCHL: Oh, come on.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But it exceeds Eric's, obviously.

ERIC FISCHL: No, she's, April's very fluent in the language. She learned well and people always mistake her for French when she speaks French.

APRIL GORNIK: But that's, I can imitate an accent pretty well. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: She has a beautiful, beautiful thing to it. We both tried to learn and we started at the same time. She surpassed me quickly.

APRIL GORNIK: [Laughs] We had this funny thing of—I said, "Let's go learn French." I was dying to learn French when I came back from my first trip by myself.

ERIC FISCHL: Learn Halifax.

APRIL GORNIK: Learn Halifax. So we find an adult French learning class and I'm all excited, you know, my little notebooks and our pens.

ERIC FISCHL: It's taking place at an elementary school at night.

APRIL GORNIK: It's a middle school.

ERIC FISCHL: Middle school.

APRIL GORNIK: With little desks, you know. We walk in and we look around and the teacher's not there yet. And without even looking behind me—I walk in first and I immediately move to the front row and plunk myself down in the first desk in the middle. And Eric stands over me and goes, "What are you doing? I can't sit here." [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: I'm like at the last desk as far away from the teacher as I could possibly be, you know.

APRIL GORNIK: We were—

ERIC FISCHL: Here we are, two grownups behaving exactly the way we did when we—

APRIL GORNIK: Regressing instantly.

ERIC FISCHL:—were in sixth grade or eighth grade or whatever. And she's looking at me like, "Are you out of your mind?" I mean, you know.

APRIL GORNIK: "Get up here. We're here to learn."

ERIC FISCHL: And so we compromised. I sat behind her and—

APRIL GORNIK: Towards the front.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, towards the front. And then the class would, you know, begin and, you know, there would be this repetition thing, you know. And I was totally there. I was on it, man. You know, so the teacher would say something and we'd repeat it. It was all fine. Then she'd ask questions and it would go down the aisle and everyone would have to say the answer. And I was participating in my head but the closer it got to me the more white noise went off in my head, so that by the time April had finished her perfect answer and it was now my turn to answer, I'm like blank. And I'm sitting there going [whispering], "April, what's the answer? What's the answer?" She's looking at me like, "I cannot believe I'm with this person." [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I gather you were learning French at a gallopingly faster rate than Eric was. [Laughs.]

ERIC FISCHL: Much, yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: I was very motivated.

ERIC FISCHL: I have a learning disability, for God's sake. Anyway, it was run. But, yeah, needless to say, April learned French and we spent a lot of time in France and it was incredibly stimulating ultimately really for both of us.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But you didn't travel with specific ideas in mind, that you would gain material for your art?

APRIL GORNIK: No.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: That was never the primary purpose of the travel?

APRIL GORNIK: I don't think that's ever been. You know, there have been a couple of instances where I've seen pictures of places that I tried to extrapolate from online or in a book or something like that, that I'm made up pictures from and painted or whatever, and then really wanted to see those places in real life. But, you know, for the most part traveling was just about going and having fun and expanding our horizons without any specific goal.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, you go and you see if there's something there that, you know, you internalize how it would come out again. So you go pretty open to the experience.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So as you're living in New York is there a period where you're intensely involved in a community of artists and that you then began to in a way to pull back from that? I mean, we can talk about where you are now, but what was the height of your New York experience, because you used to spend all of your time there other than when you were traveling?

ERIC FISCHL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

APRIL GORNIK: The height of it? What was the height?

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, the height of your intense involvement with the community of artists in New York and living in New York. In some senses you've withdrawn from that now here at Sag Harbor. You know, it's a different world that you occupy in lots of ways.

APRIL GORNIK: I guess, but our best friends are still all of those people.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

APRIL GORNIK: So I certainly don't feel removed from them. And no one in our group feels to me like they're so deeply involved in the art world in as central a manner as they used to be because it's no longer our generation's time. So it's just the facts, you know.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. I mean, there's a natural maturing process, too, where you need less and less external approval or dialogue to keep yourself focused and whatnot. So, I mean, I think that there was a natural course that that took. But in the beginning, I mean, I was naive in that I came out of my school experience, which was, as we've talked about, this kind of intense critique of, you know, like every artist who showed their work was vulnerable to intense critique dialogue, et cetera, and thinking that that was, that we were modeling ourselves off of a New York model of this is how artists talk to each other. And getting to New York to find out, in fact, that's not [laughs] the way artists talk to—professional artists don't talk to each other that way. They have other ways of communicating and so the direct assault—

APRIL GORNIK: Right. It would be like, "Hi. What's your theory? Mine is, you know." Like, "Well, I'd like to lambaste you for your theory, asshole."

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. Yeah. "Your work sucks."

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah.

ERIC FISCHL: It wasn't that way. But there was definitely communication happening on a lot of different levels, a lot of different ways that whether it was, you know, talking about what's going on in the music scene somehow referring back to studio practice, you know, or whether your art was in some way engaged with that, what's going on in music. You know, so you'd be going to club scenes and so, you know, that has an influence. Or, you know, what movies or, you know, other popular culture things. They were feeding into it.

But also, at the time I think it became—there was a thing where there was an explosion of media covering art, whereas when we moved to New York it was sort of dominated by *ArtForum* and *Art in America*. Now there was like, you know, umpteen magazines and newspapers and weeklies and stuff.

APRIL GORNIK: You mean now?

ERIC FISCHL: Well, even in the '80s, early '80s it started to happen, to the point where you could almost not talk to your artist peers directly but you could read about them all the time. You know, it's one of those things where there was an availability of, you know, if I wanted to know what David Salle was thinking I could pick up the

profile of him in *Art in America* or *ARTNews* or *Flash Art* or whatever and read about it without actually having to talk to him, even though we did. But it became a different way of communicating, you know. And then also the artists, it wasn't a big practice of artists going to other artists' studios on any regular basis. I mean, we hung out in certain artists' lofts but—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But not studio visiting?

ERIC FISCHL: But not jumping around studio to studio.

APRIL GORNIK: A little bit, but not—it was more like a by invitation only thing. There were a couple of artists that we knew that would maybe like have lunch or something for people in their lofts, but they were Europeans. That was not—

ERIC FISCHL: Who are you thinking of?

APRIL GORNIK: I was thinking of Baldo.

ERIC FISCHL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Baldo Deodato.

APRIL GORNIK: Baldo Deodato. And I think of like [John] Toriano having dinners and stuff like that. There were a couple of people—

ERIC FISCHL: Like Paul and Nancy.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah.

ERIC FISCHL: Paul McMann and Nancy Chun.

APRIL GORNIK: Paul McMann and Nancy Chun. They would have parties and stuff. There were people that were more convivial about the whole thing and their work sort of took place in that context a little bit more. But most people were more formal than that.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And did you wait for shows? Was the show of an artist the opportunity to sort of see the work and also be convivial?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, very, it was very, you know, openings were so exciting. I mean, really exciting. I don't know if, you know, somebody showing right now has the same level of that. I mean, there's so much, there's so many openings that take place at the same time now as well, like Chelsea on a Thursday or even a Tuesday night will have like a million different shows that you're supposed to see. But so now it's like the gallery tends to be the draw. You know, if a person is showing at a particular gallery then that will make it seem more important rather than the artist, him or herself oftentimes. I just realized that. That's really true. You know, it's like kind of skewed from the artist to like the event at the gallery itself.

It's, you know, Eric has the best line about the change from when we were first in New York and developing and now, which is that it used to be the art world and now it's the art market. I think that's sadly true. You know, there just is much more of a sense of, you know, determination of success and worth by sales.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: The openings used to be exciting?

APRIL GORNIK: Oh, they were great. Yeah.

ERIC FISCHL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

APRIL GORNIK: Even, you know, like rival artists' openings or something were, you know, it was just nice. It felt like a big energy.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. I mean part of it, I'm sure, is that it was young and new and, you know, we were energized by it. But yeah, it was definitely an exciting time.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Were there camps that you—

ERIC FISCHL: Absolutely.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I mean, was it fractious?

ERIC FISCHL: Sure. Absolutely.

APRIL GORNIK: Somewhat. They weren't clearly defined. You know, maybe artists feel exactly the same way

now. You know, some 28 year old artist feels exactly the same way.

ERIC FISCHL: I would hope so.

APRIL GORNIK: It just looks different from where we are.

ERIC FISCHL: I would hope so.

APRIL GORNIK: Money-wise and everything. So I hope so, too.

ERIC FISCHL: I think the difference is that younger artists now expect more sooner, you know. They actually feel their careers are over at 28 if they haven't, you know—

APRIL GORNIK: It's become like ballet dancing.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, exactly, or sports or something.

APRIL GORNIK: [Laughs] Better get your career in there before you get to be too old.

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. You'd better reconsider your ambition if at 28 you're not in a museum collection or, you know, whatever. It's a different thing. So but, you know, yeah, I hope they're excited about their first shows and friends' first shows and, you know, the thrill of standing in your show and all of a sudden a famous artist walks in and you think, "Oh, my God, I can't believe, you know, Richard Serra came to my show." You know, everyone is like desperately wishing that Jasper Johns would walk in the door. You know, it's such an acknowledgement of sorts.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And those things were understood? I mean, that was part of the protocol that you would watch for these things and people would talk about it, there would be a buzz around it?

ERIC FISCHL: You'd be on the phone the next day going, "How come so-and-so didn't show up," and, you know, whatever. "Did you see," you know.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Do you still feel the—when you get negative critical responses does it still hurt or did it ever hurt? I'm always surprised in talking to sometimes senior artists how it actually matters, if they get a small negative review in *ARTNews* it bothers them. And you'd think that it would be ducks and water off their back, you know.

ERIC FISCHL: It bothers me so much I don't read them. I just, you know, for the most part stopped reading the criticism, reviews.

APRIL GORNIK: Which I think is a genius response to the whole thing, frankly.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You haven't managed that yet, I gather?

APRIL GORNIK: No. I mean, I tend to read them and I will still get upset. I would say I get a little, probably a little less upset but I was, you know, flatlined by it once. So, you know, a little less upset for me means still way upset.

ERIC FISCHL: April got—

APRIL GORNIK: Killed.

ERIC FISCHL:—three reviews that killed—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: In the early '90s.

ERIC FISCHL:—a show, yeah. They were so vitriolic and—

APRIL GORNIK: We talked about that, right?

ERIC FISCHL:—so personal and it took her, it put her into a depression. I mean, it took her several years to sort of really find her way back out of it.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: No, we didn't talk—did you feel that they were personal attacks, that this had less to do with the work than with how people were regarding you?

APRIL GORNIK: At the time I couldn't quite sort it out but I remember like running—I remember specifically running into Peter Sheldall after the one in the [*New York Times*] came out, which was by Michael Kimmelman,

and Peter Sheldall looked at me with this puzzled expression and said, "What did you do, run over his dog? Why did he attack you like that?" You know, I mean, so I'm not, I don't think it was just me. It was like, you know, "I'm going to take this artist and I'm going to destroy her."

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah. Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: It was so mean. It was like, yeah, it was unbelievable vitriol. But frankly, I was just sort of reeling so much from—that one was the worst and then another one was just more negative. But, you know, like, you know, the uppercut and then the—

ERIC FISCHL: The final blow.

APRIL GORNIK: The blow to the jaw [laughs] yeah. I was like pretty much down for the count for quite a while. And, you know, I don't know what to say about that at this point. You know, I hope it never happens again. It's, you know, you're damned if you do, damned if you don't. You want people to pay attention so you don't want to not have reviews. And, you know, I've been pretty lucky to get a review in a major magazine after most shows, so.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Do you think that you were somehow set up, not consciously, but that Kimmelman—or that because you'd been getting such positive press you were—

APRIL GORNIK: Well, a lot of people suggested that but I really, I don't really know. You know, it makes me feel better to think that, you know, there—people have said that there's this natural thing that happens after you've had a lot of good response, that somebody will all of the sudden, you know, there's this kind of, this kind of episteme feeling, you know, within the critical mass where, you know, "That's a little too much. That's a little too much praise for her. We've got to take her down a peg." You know, and then all of a sudden nobody likes you for a while. I've kind of seen that with other artists. I think it's possible. But I don't want to be the one to say like, "Oh, that's all it was." You know, I don't want to be whiny about it.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: As a working journalist and critic for 30 some years there is a sensibility that sets in place where you—and you want to resist it because it is sort of mean-spirited, but you somehow feel that somebody has got too much attention or—

APRIL GORNIK: Yes.

ROBERT ENRIGHT:—that you have to find the place where he or she isn't working as strong as they might and so that's what you concentrate on. So you get this strange dynamic happening inside a critical community. They don't even have to talk about it. It just kind of develops.

APRIL GORNIK: It's like fashion. It's like everything else. And fashion is like everything else, too. You know, there is mass response to things and that does happen. And people get tired of an artist, you know. They get too much and then all of a sudden everyone is tired of them. They don't want to see anything. And no matter what you do, you know, it's like, "Oh, it's that again."

ERIC FISCHL: The other thing is any artist that's worth their salt is an artist who is pursuing their vision and that takes them wherever it goes. People plug into an artist's work at different times in their life and then that becomes the most important work the artist ever did because it was the point at which they had a revelation triggered by that artist's work. You know, and then they get upset that the artist changes, that the artist somehow doesn't continue to thrill them in the same exact way that they did at the moment of revelation. But the artist can't concern themselves with that audience because the artist is pursuing this—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: The artist's compulsion is to keep moving.

ERIC FISCHL: Is to keep moving, broadening, you know, experiencing, et cetera.

APRIL GORNIK: Well, and it's enough to drive you crazy because if you maintain a consistent vision you're criticized for not changing enough, and if you change too much you're criticized for changing too much and not maintaining a consistent vision. It's like—

ERIC FISCHL: And then every artist is criticized for being a mid-career artist. [Laughs.] Just because that's like no-man's-land, you know. "Oh, he's a mid-career artist."

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I had a friend, a writer in Canada who said, "Why in the hell don't they establish a prize for the best sixth novel?"

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: There's always a prize for the best first novel, you know.

ERIC FISCHL: Right. [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: That youth gets it all the time.

APRIL GORNIK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But if you stayed in it long enough to have done five more books isn't that worth recognition?

ERIC FISCHL: The sixth. I love it. [Laughs.]

APRIL GORNIK: Part of entertainment is what's new and what's new is what's the first thing from the next person or the next generation. You know, it's natural.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You moved out here and now you spend, it seems, most of your time here in Sag Harbor. Is this the ideal place for both of you to be able to work? You have these wonderful separate studios. Your time seems yours here as much as anyone's time is their own by themselves. But is this the ideal place to work now?

APRIL GORNIK: For me not only is it the ideal place, my favorite place I have ever worked, but it's also my favorite home I've ever had. It's the place that I feel more like I live here and I'm happy here than any place I've ever been. And it's taken me a really, really long time to have that feeling of real satiety in a place. It's so different for me and it's, you know, so far I'm still thrilled to experience that.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And for you?

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, I mean, it's totally conducive to working out here. It feels, I feel much more integrated into my natural rhythms. And, you know, the city had really begun to stop feeding me in terms of, you know, critical needs, a while ago. And I don't need that kind of stimulation on a daily basis. It's fun to have it, you know, when I do need it and, of course, we're accessible to it so we can. But it's amazing how much you can go on, you know, growing and, you know, delving and whatever even though you've missed so-and-so's show and so-and-so's show and, you know, didn't see this play, this movie, you know, et cetera. You can still find, you know, you're pretty fulfilled.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I've got to say that both of you, all the artists I've known over a long period of talking to artists, both of you have always struck me admirably as being remarkably engaged in the world of ideas, ideas outside just the world of painting. It seems you find ways to sort of feed your heads in ways that are really rich for you. I mean, is that something that you've had to cultivate or is that just natural to your sensibilities that you both seem alive to ideas no matter where you are?

ERIC FISCHL: I'm not as alive as April is to ideas. [Laughs.]

APRIL GORNIK: That's not true.

ERIC FISCHL: All my ideas come from meditations on art, you know. I spend a lot of time thinking about not just my art but art generally, art of my generation or art of my time, you know, in relationship to historical. So whatever—

APRIL GORNIK: You think about the culture, though, more broadly. You think about politics and the state of the culture. Maybe it's through art, but still—

ERIC FISCHL: Yeah, but I think of it coming through art. It's like how it finds its way either as an expression or an absence in art. But it's—I'm pretty limited that way.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But I—

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah, but somebody could say you're a true artist that way.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I see what Eric means about—

APRIL GORNIK: That's not always—it's not a bad thing.

ERIC FISCHL: It's just the only thing I know. You know, it's the only way I understand the world is through the language of art and stuff.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: But see, when I mentioned to you that I thought that you were so well read you looked surprised, but you read—

APRIL GORNIK: Compared to you, hello. [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: No, no, no, no. No, compared to—

ERIC FISCHL: Certainly compared to me, hello.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: You read poetry, you read novels, you read essays. I mean, you seem to be very much—

ERIC FISCHL: Yes. She reads fiction, she reads nonfiction, science books.

APRIL GORNIK: I just, I'm like a totally antsy person [Enright laughs] and I have a lot of interests in a lot of different things and I just, you know what happens is if I get interested in something I'll just go with it. I'll just pursue it. So, you know, if I, you know, if I read an article on chaos theory in the *Science Times* then I'm, you know, likely to pick up a book or two and actually read the books. You know, so I think not everybody does that but—

ERIC FISCHL: And understand them.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Yeah.

APRIL GORNIK: If it's written for a layperson. So but, yeah, I do have, I've always had a lot of interest in other arts and other art forms and science and other stuff. I just like all that stuff. I seem to thrive on it. I don't know if it has a good or bad effect on my work or my life or whatever but it's just, it's me.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, I think it clearly plays into the way you think about your work. I mean, that whole sense of poetic structure that you talk about. I mean, you talk, you slide from one art form to another in language. It seems quite natural and it seems, if not revelatory, certainly instructive for the person looking at it. I mean, to hear you talk about your work through the various scims of the things you read is useful to the person you're talking to.

APRIL GORNIK: Well, you know, it's no accident that I'm painting landscapes and landscapes for me are the most other thing I can think of. I mean, they're the most, they're the thing that's the furthest outside of me. And everybody projects onto art. Everybody projects onto everything. You project onto other people. You project onto art. You project onto the world because you're always being subjective.

And so landscapes seem like a naturally metaphoric complex thing and essentially abstract in that way. So it seems to make sense to me that if I'm doing something that's from that far away from myself that there might as well be all these other influences and other projections and other things coming into the interpretation, because how else do I make sense of them? You know, it's not like a narrative. It's not the same as a narrative, which also has its own kinds of complexities, but—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Let's talk then about the I think famous portrait that you did of April called *April in Paris* [1998]. What made you decide to do it? I mean, there are also drawings. I gather there's other paintings, too, of April.

ERIC FISCHL: I don't remember what it was. I mean, but certainly wanting to paint her and paint her in a complicated and powerful way. But, you know, was I thinking past that? No, probably not. I had some great photographs of her in this hotel we were staying in in Paris and the light was right. You know, the feeling was right. So that was pretty much it.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: And how do you feel about the process? I mean, being the quite literally muse for those paintings?

APRIL GORNIK: For that one painting.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Yeah.

ERIC FISCHL: Well, you've been in several paintings of mine.

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah.

ERIC FISCHL: Either disguised, thinly disguised or literal.

APRIL GORNIK: I'm happy to be represented in Eric's work, you know, because I love his work. But I like that, I particularly like that painting.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: *April in Paris*?

APRIL GORNIK: Yeah. I mean, I liked it when I looked at it when he finished it because I thought, "Oh, I look comfortable in my body," which is not always the case. [Laughs.] So I felt happy that it was that moment. He's painted other paintings of me that have made me really uncomfortable, so just because I didn't like what I was, I thought I was projecting. And so I was happy with that one.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: It's a complex read because Eric is a reader of character when he does portraits, obviously, and the subject of a portrait is a projector of character either consciously or, you know, as a construction or just in their natural being, so there is that dialogue. Do you sense in *April in Paris* that he got an essential you in that particular painting?

APRIL GORNIK: He liked a me that I like [they laugh] more or less.

ERIC FISCHL: He captured a me that I liked. Go on.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: So but how does it read to you? I mean, I look at it as kind of leonine, magnificent, powerful, tough.

APRIL GORNIK: Does it look ferocious? A lot of people have said ferocious.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: Well, ferocious in that don't mess with me. I mean, here I am and I'm sort of available. But, you know, it seems to me to be a powerful, powerful figure. Whoever that woman is, whether you knew her or not, you would think. Okay, so if that's the you that people are apprehending and looking at that painting does that correspond in any way to the way it looks to you?

APRIL GORNIK: Yes, and I'm fine with that. And it's also—I don't have that much to say with it because, about it, because it's a little hard for me to see past my own self looking at it. But I certainly like, I kind of like the idea of there being a nude of myself out there just because it's just sort of pleasant to know that people know what I look like naked. [Laughs.]

ROBERT ENRIGHT: There are other ways to do that.

APRIL GORNIK: I know, but it's actually—

ERIC FISCHL: There's YouTube. [Laughs.]

APRIL GORNIK: I actually think it's kind of pleasant that—

ERIC FISCHL: MySpace.

APRIL GORNIK:—it's like, it's out there.

ROBERT ENRIGHT: I never heard anyone say that. That's an interesting way of looking at it. It's pleasant that there's a nude image of you, a painting.

APRIL GORNIK: I know, it sounds funny, but it's just like, you know, it seems—

ERIC FISCHL: One more thing about that painting is that it's titled *April in Paris* for two reasons. One is because that's where it takes place and the other is because April was named after that song, so—

ROBERT ENRIGHT: No kidding?

APRIL GORNIK: Yes, I was.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]