

In the mid 1980's I saw the painting *Bad Boy* by Eric Fischl and felt the powerful combination of shock and recognition. I had never seen an image like this before – one that was so transgressive and yet thoroughly mundane. Nor had I come upon a picture that was such a compressed and elegant depiction of the psychological complexities involved in the act of looking. In the painting the viewer is placed in a suburban bedroom behind a adolescent boy who sneaks his hand into the purse of a woman who is laying naked on the bed in front of him with her legs wide apart as she trims her toenails. While the picture is utterly direct the narrative remains ambiguous – available to the viewers speculations and projections. What is the relationship between the boy and the woman? Is he looking at her sexually or just keeping an eye on her so he doesn't get caught red handed? And what about the meaning of the purse, the light, the toes, and the woman's indifference?

While this particular image was entirely a new experience for me the feelings it evoked were familiar. When I was on the cusp of puberty one of my favorite things was to sneak into my parents bedroom and poke around their things. I'd go through their dresser drawers, rustle through their closet, peek into unmarked boxes. I'd find countless treasures: strange jeweled objects, notes, old photos, panties and condoms. The room was suffused with amber light - the morning sun glowing through the drawn shades – the perfect light for secrets.

For me the greatest experience that a work of art or literature can provide is to make visible something I know inside but cannot yet name or see. Simply put, it is the gift of vision. Yet for me, a great picture not only lets me know what is possible but also gives me permission to try my own hand at it, if I so choose. That's where Fischl comes in. This painting (among other he has painted) is one of a set of signals that, for the past 20 years, allowed me to wander back to the suburbs where I grew up poke around again in my parent's and other's bedrooms, in backyards, living rooms, and over fences; to make pictures that hopefully portray the complex and often dark and bewildering world of suburban life.