

# eric firestone gallery



## Lauren dela Roche is Sick of the Word Vulnerability but “No Man’s Land” Proves She’s Not Afraid to Harness Her Own.



Lauren dela Roche, *Camel Back*, 2024

By ANNIE LYALL SLAUGHTER June, 2024

Having dropped out of high school, left an abusive relationship, escaped a Pentecostal cult, and uncovered her repressed sexuality, and all before the legal drinking age, Lauren dela Roche felt aimless at twenty-three. Untethered to few places or people, she moved to her family’s wooded farmland in East Central Minnesota—property acquired by her Swedish potato farming ancestors in the 1800s—arriving with little more than a few pairs of clothes and a machete. Seven years later, she was living in a straw bale cottage she had constructed from the ground up, and sustaining herself off food she had grown in soil composted with her own manure.

### EAST HAMPTON

4 NEWTOWN LANE  
EAST HAMPTON, NY 11937  
631.604.2386

EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

### NEW YORK CITY

40 GREAT JONES STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012  
646.998.3727

EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

# eric firestone gallery

In preparation for her first solo show at [Eric Firestone Gallery](#), on view through June 29, dela Roche seized the same grit, fortitude, and commitment to self that building a house and a life from the earth requires. From late December 2023 to mid-April 2024, she shut herself in her rural Illinois studio, feeding her body with a regimented diet and her brain with a melange of transcendental meditation, podcasts on near-death experiences, and Irish mythology, existing mostly in a hyper-concentrated creative state somewhere between wakefulness and hypnosis. The 16 paintings in “[No Man’s Land](#)” were all completed in four months yet collectively cover 526 square feet of wall space—undoubtedly a record in Firestone’s four-year history on Great Jones Street. The artist may prefer to work in isolation, but after the triumph of this exhibition, dela Roche may have to go the extra mile to find it.

Cotton feed sacks passed through decades of agricultural production, her substrate of choice is also the metaphoric foundation of this body of work. Falling into obsolescence in the 60s, these antique sacks are now a “finite resource,” she says, evoking a bygone era when natural materials—including women’s bodies and spirits—were used to the point of depletion. In their final life cycle, the worn, sewn, and mended containers have been recycled one last time into sweeping narrative paintings showcasing the capaciousness of the female experience.

Beautiful, messy, errant, the women in “No Man’s Land” coexist in bliss and repose, exuding a freedom that the male-dominated art historical canon and the patriarchal rule over agricultural economies denied them. In dela Roche’s world, a brunette’s mane can become a river, females can exchange divine powers through their fingertips, women with thigh-high stockings over heavy set legs can lounge peacefully in each other’s flesh, and all in the company of dancing oryxes, flowing fountains, prancing swans, and pastel patterns that bring a sense of balance to these panoramic depictions of womanhood in all of its duality.

Her female subjects embody—maybe even parody—the multiplicitous roles women have played in mythology: as goddesses, tricksters, heroines, caretakers, muses, and femme fatales. Replete with cultural references, the imagery draws inspiration from a wide range of sources not limited to Irish folklore, Egyptian mythology, and cult cinema, and is infused with echoes of Hilma af Klint’s mysticism and the feminist writings that emerged from the Goddess spirituality movement of the 70s. Above all, these 16 narratives make a case for the divine power of femininity, or the innate intuition and capacity for nurturing that unifies and harmonizes the reciprocal relationship between womanhood and Mother Earth.



# eric firestone gallery

*Lobster Tail*, measuring nine feet wide, contains a trio of ladies with overlapping limbs at the canvas's center—the nexus from which all other natural and abstracted occurrences flow: an undulating blue pattern coalesces at this point, a staircase rises above, and a string of flowers dangles vertically beneath. Drawing on the tale of the Egyptian God Seth, she implants oryxes into the piece who look for trouble. As the myth goes, Seth, the God of chaos and violence, kills the God of agriculture and fertility, Osiris (who happens to be his brother), wreaking havoc on the natural world. Draw an imaginary line connecting the three places in the painting where oryxes appear, and you'll have a triangle whose center is these intermingling women. Proud plump peacemakers, women restore the natural order as lovers, supporters, and friends.

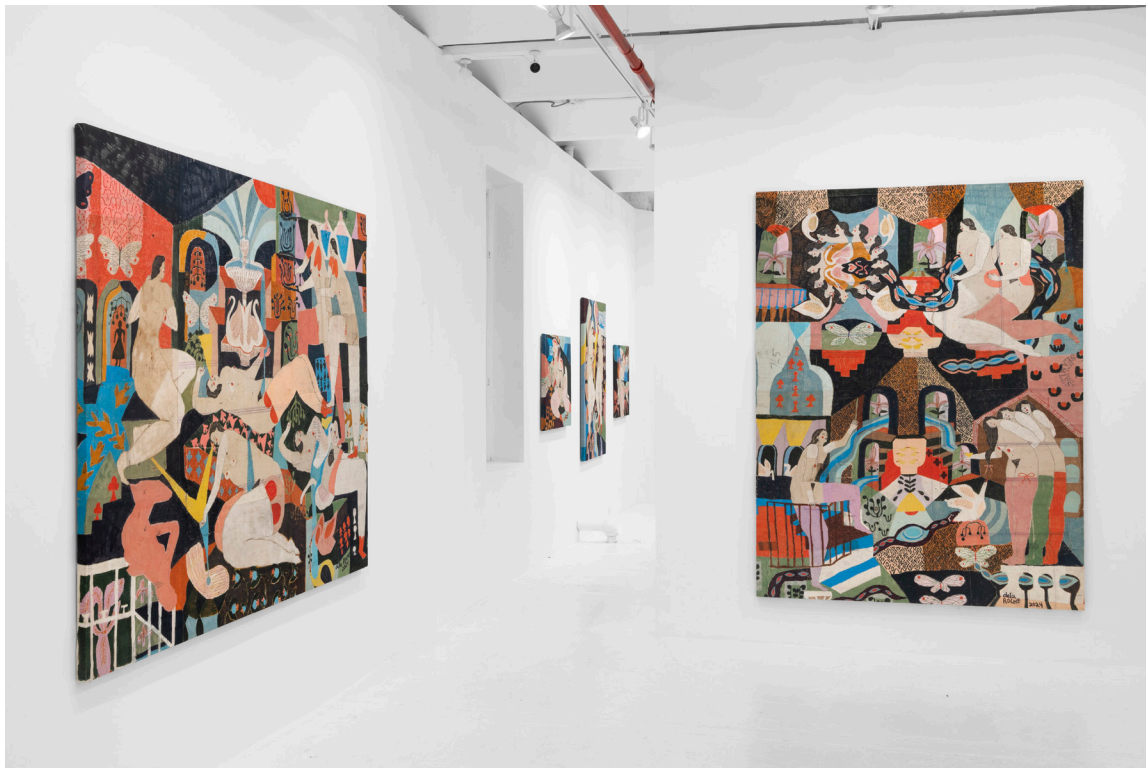


Lauren dela Roche, *Lobster Tail*, 2024

The "powerful but vulnerable" mindset dela Roche accessed in her studio allowed these ethereal scenes to flow. Reading the tears, textures, and language of each sack, she developed a personal relationship with her material, evoking the feelings of "psychological and emotional intimacy" with other women that the artist long sought. Coaxed by the Pentecostal church into believing she possessed demons, it has taken her many years—and a deep dive into transgressive cinema, Karen Finley's performance art and poetry, and Kathy Acker's radical writings (who once said "I'm so queer I'm not even gay")—to unearth the beautiful artist, person, and feelings hidden beneath the veil of trauma. Now, this plentiful land where women are not only the desired but the desires feels like the ultimate avowal of self-love and forgiveness. A long time coming, it's a liberation from her "complicated, confusing" past.

# eric firestone gallery

These immersive paintings fuse spirituality, sexuality, and extreme emotion, blending them into a visual bliss perceivable to all, no matter how queer or straight, in or out of the box the viewer may be. While the out-of-body experiences the church evoked in the artist may not have been “real”, this show is compelling evidence that transcendence exists—a liminal space between heaven and hell, or a divine third realm some might simply call creativity at its most healing.



*Lauren de la Roche: No Man's Land, Eric Firestone Gallery, NY, 2024*

Authentic, purposeful, and powerful, de la Roche is bursting with the fecundity her figures represent as golden rays fall from their chests, rivers run from their hands, and swans kiss in the hills of their hips. Featuring women as the creators, stewards, and keepers of the earth, “No Man’s Land” is not simply a show but a book about harmony and regeneration, one that promises to give and grow as it ages. **WM**