

Ingrid Luquet-Gad "Lisa Yuskavage the history of art for bad girls " (18 juillet 2023): [ill] [TRANS English online]

los Inrockuptibles

Lisa Yuskavage or the history of art for bad girls

by Ingrid Luquet-Gad
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Lisa Yuskavage, "Big Flesh Studio", 2022 © Lisa Yuskavage Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner



Lisa Yuskavage, New York's leading painter of the 1990s, has always been shrouded in scandal. His system of representation reads the history of art from recurring characters, the "bad babies", ultra-sexual young girls who combine the feminine voyeurism of classical painting. The David Zwirner gallery is finally hosting its very first presentation in France, around the theme of the artist's studio.



Ingrid Luquet-Gad

Arts & Scenes

Anne-Charlotte Finel: "I had to wait, come down from my human pedestal in front of other living people"

They have chubby faces, ultra-voluptuous breasts, often swollen bellies and cotton or candy panties. Sexual? Obviously, with this forbidden perfume of mischievous innocence. They are the " *bad babies* ", the bad girls of Lisa Yuskavage. These are the main protagonists that the painter, born in 1962, has represented since the 1990s.

Since his first exhibition in 1994, which earned him, unsurprisingly, a murderous review in the art bible *Artforum*, the New York artist has made these young girls his trademark. Something as effective as a patent visual acronym like post-war *Playboy* magazine pin-ups , or for later generations, Bratz dolls from the 2000s.

The academic nude, a quick little story

Except that Lisa Yuskavage is an artist. Of extreme erudition in the history of art. This field therefore, this other, which will have consecrated the academic nude as the ultimate form of expression. There too, a story of acronym, of artist's trademark, if you will: for painters, it could go from Degas to Courbet for the moderns, from John Currin to Rita Ackermann for the 1990s, and today today, from Anna Weyant to Emma Stern.

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The female figure, represented, object of the gaze: obviously, painting is a voyeur business. A perfect excuse for the scopic, elevated, ennobled drive. Except here, Lisa Yuskavage escapes it in two ways – or rather, she plays on it. On the one hand, she is a woman who looks at others and who knows something about it: during the 1990s, years when the “*male gaze*” was theorized, she was also a model.

On the other hand, nothing about her is precisely ennobled. On the contrary, the linchpin of his system consists in the pairing of opposites, outside of inherited taxonomies: neither high nor low, neither noble nor kitsch, here pop and the academy converge and come together rather well. After all, the 1990s was also the decade of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, sculptors of course, but working in the same line.

The vision spaces of modernity replayed

So, looking at his paintings, we also receive all these levels of analysis. The history of art with the established tropes of the model, the studio, the mirror. The de-hierarchization of the canon infused with pop culture, advertising and counterculture. Cultural studies, too, with the arrival of theoreticians, such as Griselda Pollock, who precisely analyzed the spaces of modern painting, bars or brothels, according to the prism of access to women.

And then, finally, the contemporary, and this return to center stage of a pro-sex feminism, long denied or decried. The pictorial system of Lisa Yuskavage, during these three decades, has not moved, at most it has been amplified, deepened. But this summer, we discover it for the first time in France.

Certainly, we owe it to the establishment in France of its historic David Zwirner gallery, which with the *Rendez-vous à Paris* proposal marks its eighth exhibition with it. The layout takes this first in France into account: the first room is devoted to his exploration of the theme of the artist's studio from 2016 to 2023. Already, we understand that his painting is a matter of resumptive and borrowings, not only from the history of art, but also from his own paintings.

The artist's studio, naughty girls are happy there

And then, the great room of the nave hosts recent paintings. In this case four of them, XXL format, quasi-monochrome chroma for each – green, yellow, red –, each constructed according to the principle of the painting within the painting. Or a palimpsest of eras and choices of representation, where we find the covers of earlier paintings by the artist, but also artists' studios, from Bruce Nauman to Jérôme Bosch.

Everything happens then, in Lisa Yuskavage's new series, as if the history of art was doing wonderfully well by simply reversing the polarities. It is no longer women who paint like men, or women who explore the male nude in a simple inversion. On the contrary – these distinctions, the “*bad babies*” don't care; they have transcended them and allow themselves to ignore them. The bad girls go where they want and above all, paint what they want.

Lisa Yuskavage. *Appointment*, until July 29 at the [David Zwirner gallery](#), Paris.