

# Lisa YUSKAVAGE

THE NEW YORK ARTIST DOESN'T JUST PAINT THE FEMALE BODY; SHE CHARTS ALL OF THE FANTASIES, ANXIETIES, TABOOS, AND HANG-UPS WE HAVE ABOUT THE NUDE. IN TIME FOR A MID-CAREER SURVEY, LISA YUSKAVAGE TALKS ABOUT GROWING UP, ALMOST GIVING UP, AND EMBRACING THE ENEMY WITHIN.  
By TODD SOLONDZ  
Portrait SEBASTIAN KIM

Painting might be the most susceptible genre to trend in the visual arts. The usual arc goes something like this: A painter hits on an idea that seems relatively new or interesting and soon endless iterations of that technique or practice are popping up on every gallery wall. This is not a bad phenomenon, but it can often have the unintended consequence of fixing that initial painter's work to a certain fad-hopping period in contemporary art. All of this is the long way of saying that 53-year-old painter Lisa Yuskavage is so damned original, so provocative and epic and intimate and off-putting and exacting in her style, tone, and subject matter, that she has managed to avoid a million copycats (it would be nearly impossible to copy her), and a glimpse of her work past to present still feels as if it exists in its own eternal present.

Yuskavage rose to notice in the mid-'90s, during a particularly formidable period for figurative painting and women painters. But even then, she charted her own dark path, notoriously centered on young, zaftig female bodies with curves like guitars and, more often than not, enacting some mysterious rite that might be described as "Lolita witchcraft" or a Grimms' fairy tale mixed with someone's father's vintage basement collection of *Penthouse*. And this is precisely what is so mesmerizing and fascinating about Yuskavage's work: its seriousness and its play. No question, the New York-based painter has spent a lifetime studying European masters, from Rembrandt and Bellini to Vuillard and probably a number of altarpieces in Venetian chapels. But it also seems like she's tapped psychoanalysis, American porn, and a number of slightly hallucinogenic film directors. (Was Fellini's *Satyricon* [1969] an inspiration, I wonder? Or Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* [1972]?) A Yuskavage painting is a lurid, carnal, end-of-the-world or birth-of-the-world environment, and the relationships between subjects can often suggest pansexuality, masturbation,



birth, abandonment, voyeurism, rape, or love. Beginning this month, Yuskavage will present a retrospective-style survey of 25 years of her work—in 25 pieces—fittingly called "The Brood" at the Rose Art Museum in Massachusetts. In honor of the occasion, and just after her solo show at David Zwirner Gallery this past spring where men, or "dudes," finally made an appearance on her canvases, Yuskavage had breakfast in downtown Manhattan with her friend, the director Todd Solondz. If there are two bigger taboo-tacklers in the visual arts, I can't think of them. —CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN  
TODD SOLONDZ: Art has a smaller audience than,

say, movies or other forms of mass consumption. But that doesn't mean the work doesn't have an impact in a way that transcends just a few cultural arbiters. Artwork can be a portal, a kind of rethinking and reseeing of the world as we live it. LISA YUSKAVAGE: I talk kind of ad infinitum about the example of Philip Guston. I was aware of his work as a very young artist. My first take was repulsion. I saw a retrospective of his at the Whitney in 1981, and I didn't know what I was looking at. I didn't like it, but I continued to investigate it. Something drew me to investigate it, and I eventually became addicted to the energies in his work. Then you want so badly to paint in that style. But I knew that would be a really bad idea. To touch that style was the kiss of death. It's like the call of the Sirens: *You will crash*. Guston's style is so powerful. And yet what is just as powerful are the things he said about the work and the battles he personally fought to make it. That was an incredibly important guide for me as an artist.

ABOVE: PART OF LISA YUSKAVAGE'S TRIPTYCH *BLONDE BRUNETTE AND REDHEAD*, 1995. OIL ON LINEN, 36 x 36". COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK/LONDON. OPPOSITE: LISA YUSKAVAGE IN NEW YORK, JUNE 2015. HAIR PRODUCTS: BUMBLE AND BUMBLE, INCLUDING THICKENING DRYSPUN FINISH. HAIR: ADAM MARKARIAN FOR BUMBLE AND BUMBLE/DE FACTO INC. MAKEUP: EMI KANEKO FOR D+V MANAGEMENT. SPECIAL THANKS: DAVID ZWIRNER.



SOLONDZ: Can you talk about those battles, and how you see a parallel to your own struggles?

YUSKAVAGE: I think one important thing that happens in the studio is accepting yourself as the enemy and painting from that point of view. So instead of pointing the finger outward and passing judgment, instead, you start with yourself as your own worst enemy. I think that's an incredibly honest place to begin. Guston himself became fascinated with imagining his work to be evil and up to no good. And I imagined what that would be like too. I realized that misogyny is a pretty powerful force in the world. It's talked about a lot but it's never really depicted. So I took that on. People can ask, "Why paint women in that way that is upsetting?" But it's not about being right; it's about opening something up that's wrong. I'm not trying to be a finger-wagger at society. I sort of start with myself.

SOLONDZ: It's easy to attack an artist as misogynist, but that's really such a facile epithet. And if an artist is constantly worrying about how others will judge a work, it can end up being a block to investigating certain areas of human nature or certain truths about sexuality. I think your work embodies a certain courage in exploring those elements of sexuality—particularly childhood sexuality. Some of the faces of women in your paintings have a childlike quality to them. And, of course, that evokes a very controversial response. Once childhood and sexuality converge in any way, you're dealing with the forbidden. But I've always felt that what you do is in earnest. And you're exploring something that is very scary for many people. There's so much hysteria that can accompany looking at paintings like yours. I think it takes time in the same way as when you first saw Philip Guston; it took time to absorb the shock of what is really going on there. Would you say that exposure to Guston was a turning point for you?

YUSKAVAGE: I think the turning point was more in leaving and thinking about it for a long time. It didn't happen on a dime. Seeing it was the catalyst. But then it was years of thinking about it and realizing how profound that was. And also another aspect was the amount of grief there is in his work. That might have something to do with his love of Christian Renaissance paintings—which are masterpieces, but they're essentially pictures of grief. I find art that can accommodate humor and grief at the same time extremely compelling. I also think it's important to make art that is not that easily absorbable, that is a challenge to the authorities. Guston's career was fascinating because he was so successful over and over again. He changed styles a few times—from representational to lyrical abstraction and back again. And he was fucking great at it. And it's fascinating to me that his work is still difficult and challenging. We have to change in order to accommodate an artist's vision as opposed to the artist changing to accommodate our vision. That's really important.

SOLONDZ: It's a good example of someone who wasn't enthralled with his success and was able to take risks and go elsewhere. And if you're not taking risks and you're not afraid of some sort of embarrassment or humiliation, it can make you wonder what you're really doing and what value it has. I think those primal fears turn out to be a big motivation in creating serious work.

YUSKAVAGE: What are those fears for you exactly?

SOLONDZ: There's always the fear of failure. And the

fear of embarrassment. I have said in the past only half blithely that my aims in making a film are (a) to survive it and (b) not to embarrass myself. You always feel very vulnerable when you put your work out there. You feel a kind of nakedness. And you expose something of the inner workings of the way you experience life.

YUSKAVAGE: You say you don't want to embarrass yourself, but that's precisely what you do—or risk doing—when you take on certain subjects: the imperfections of life that you've embraced or the less-than-admirable aspects of human nature. In a way, for artists, it's almost a reversal of what other people would find embarrassing or not embarrassing. SOLONDZ: How early in your life did you have a sense of yourself as an artist? Maybe it wasn't a conscious understanding, but looking back there must have been certain behaviors or experiences that make



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sense of the route you took.

YUSKAVAGE: There were so many moments. I tried to be a ballet dancer, and I would go to performances. There was an expression of intensity in dance that was so compelling to me that I wanted a piece of that action.

SOLONDZ: Were you a promising dancer?

YUSKAVAGE: In my mind I was. I felt so intense doing it. [laughs] But it was like Miss Piggy in toe shoes. I remember seeing a photograph of myself en pointe with my hand over my head and the other hand turned in under my breast curtsying. I took dance lessons at Miss Debbie's Dance Studio, and she put this picture of me in the storefront window. I was so unbelievably humiliated by the sight of myself. I still have this picture. I had this budding little pubic boob. I was like a straight line, and then this bump of a breast. It was so horrifying to me. But

mostly I had in my mind an image of greatness, of profound expression, that was squashed by looking at that picture, which did not match the image in my head. I ended up stealing the picture. I remember sticking it in my tutu and going home and never going back. And then I went to a public high school for girls in Philadelphia. It was a magnet school, not unlike Stuyvesant. They had a boys school and a girls school. We were separated. You had to test to get in, and when you got in, they further tested you to put you in these programs where you were given extra-special goodies if you were smart. Which is really weird. You would think the kids who were not as smart could use the extra goodies. But this is how society works. So unfair. Anyway, I was given some extra privileges, where I was brought to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and allowed to draw

nudes as a young person. It was so profound to be around artists; it just blew me away. I kept having that feeling, "These are my people. I want this life." We were also given the after-school privileges of being taken to things like the Philadelphia Orchestra. The music, the passion, and the intensity was so incredible, but I dared not learn to play an instrument because of my failed experience with dancing. I knew that was not the right area for me. But I went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and saw a van Gogh painting for the first time and thought that was the most incredible thing I'd ever seen. I just felt his spirit.

SOLONDZ: How old were you?

YUSKAVAGE: Probably 15. I felt his spirit so strongly—kind of like a friend visiting me. And I wanted to visit him for the rest of my life.

SOLONDZ: Did you go to an art institute or a conservatory for college?

YUSKAVAGE: We only had the money to go to state school. And, of course, I felt very sorry for myself because I wanted to go to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and it was too expensive. My mom talked me into Tyler School of Art at Temple University, which I thought was the biggest let down in the whole world and I hated my mother for that. I thought she was mean and cruel and my life was

ruined. It had a good reputation, but it was not what I wanted. It turned out it was really good for me; I really feel like there's a big plan and I don't know who's in charge, but it's all working itself out. Either that or I just decided to make the best of it. One of the things that led me to be the kind of artist I am is that I always wanted to be a figurative painter. I wanted to paint pictures of people. I thought, "Why bother doing anything else. Everything else is a waste of time. I want to tell stories about people and their feelings and emotions. Why do it if you're not going to be part of the big story?" So if it had been up to me, I would only have studied with figurative painters. But because of my mom's forcing me to go to this other school, I was also studying with people who were abstract painters. They had a totally different understanding of painting. And, as artists, they weren't afraid of the present. I think that was really important. And I really liked that training—of not thinking objectively but understanding the power of fiction in picture making.

SOLONDZ: Did you go straight to Yale after college, or did you take time off?

ABOVE: YUSKAVAGE'S *BROOD*, 2005-06, OIL ON LINEN, 77 x 69". COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK/LONDON. OPPOSITE: YUSKAVAGE'S *NIGHT*, 1999-2000, OIL ON LINEN, 77 x 62". COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK/LONDON.

YUSKAVAGE: I was afraid to take time off, because I realized I didn't really know enough. I probably would have benefited emotionally from having a little time off because Yale's graduate school in art is a bit like boot camp, and I was a very willing participant in that—the breakdown will break you down and build you back up kind of mentality. I got there doing big, beautiful, brave, crazy paintings that were actually quite confident. I mean, they had a long way to go. And within one month I was making the most insipid still-life paintings. You do two critiques a year, and I remember at my first critique, someone gasping, "Mel," meaning my teacher Mel Bochner, "What did you do to this artist? Is this the girl who painted the swimming pools? What happened?" And I was totally like, "Oh shit." I had no idea they thought I was good. They did this bullshit thing with me that was like, "You suck. How did you get in to this school?" And I totally bought it. Not knowing that, apparently, I had been the first person they picked. And I now try to look at things that way more. Like, maybe there's a possibility that everyone's just fucking with me.

SOLONDZ: When did you gather that your paintings were touching upon something controversial?

YUSKAVAGE: When I first made the Bad Baby paintings. It was actually a painting called *The Gifts* in 1991. I had already had my first exhibition [at Pamela Auchincloss Gallery in SoHo in 1990]. And I'd had this bizarre experience where I walked into the show on opening night and was appalled at my own work. It was so shocking. Have you ever had that experience? Where you know everybody else is celebrating something, and you know it kind of sucks?

SOLONDZ: No, I haven't had that experience so much. I certainly had the experience of doing terrible work and people reinforcing that, yes, my judgment is right, it is terrible. But sometimes I could say that people may have celebrated or appreciated my work in ways that I didn't intend, just as much as they may have denigrated it in ways that I think missed a point. But I can't say I've had the experience you're describing. Were you appalled at the celebration?

YUSKAVAGE: Not so much the celebration—the work was not wildly celebrated. I'm saying, you have an opening and there's a dinner. I was sitting at the dinner wishing I didn't have to go through with the evening. I just thought the work was bad.

SOLONDZ: And it was only at the opening that it hit you? Up until then you were oblivious to that?

YUSKAVAGE: Yes.

SOLONDZ: But how did that lead to the point where your work actually elicited that controversial response?

YUSKAVAGE: Well, I stopped painting because I was so shocked at what I was doing and how much I wasn't in the work. The work was alien to me. I didn't know how to paint in a way that would get me out of this funk. I didn't know how to redirect, so I wisely just stopped painting. I spent a lot of time at the New York Public Library, the main branch. I was one of those people. If you ever spend a good amount of time there, you realize there are people who spend the entire day there. They're bookish homeless people. And I was kind of one of those bookish homeless people. I looked at every book that I possibly could. Like, I was looking at books and reading the indexes and finding a next book and reading that book, and then from that index ... It was

a version of surfing the internet before the internet. I was surfing the New York Public Library. It was back when you had to fill out a form and put it in a chute.

SOLONDZ: I love that.

YUSKAVAGE: I love that chute. Do they still have that? It was so awesome.

SOLONDZ: I haven't been there in years.

YUSKAVAGE: It was very exciting. I did a lot of thinking, reading. I started therapy because I was very depressed. It racked me full of self-doubt about everything I had done in my life up until that point. Somehow it seemed like all of my gambles were wrong. Everything had led me to the wrong point. I had plenty of time. Life was cheap for us. We lived in a railroad apartment on Ludlow Street and shared takeout Chinese. Food was nothing. We didn't do anything.



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SOLONDZ: This was with Matvey [Levenstein, Yuskavage's husband and a figurative painter]?

YUSKAVAGE: Yes, Matvey and I were living together. I had no studio. I was just wandering around the streets of New York, maybe teaching some watercolor classes, looking at art. I had plenty of time on my hands. I wasn't making art. I was in therapy in earnest. And I went to a lot of film festivals at Film Forum.

SOLONDZ: How old were you?

YUSKAVAGE: 27 and out of school about three or four years. And just really thinking that it was over and I had to reinvent myself. But I found so much solace in film festivals. And I'm not just preaching to the choir here by saying that to you. I found film very interesting. Telling stories in a form other than painting seemed like a very viable alternative. Because, you know, watching Fassbinder really made me happy in

a year of extreme unhappiness. The only moments I felt free, undepressed, light, and happy were during a Fassbinder film. And that's pretty nutty because these are not supposed to be the happiest films.

SOLONDZ: I don't think there's anything nutty about that. A good film is always nourishing. It's not about it being hopeful or bleak; it's about how it touches you, how it moves or stirs you.

YUSKAVAGE: Yeah, there were Tarkovsky festivals and Fassbinder festivals. And I had the time to sit through every single movie—the little ones, the big ones, the famous ones, the not-so-famous ones.

SOLONDZ: It's a loss that you didn't get to actually know Fassbinder. I think he would have responded to your work—much more he than Tarkovsky. [Yuskavage laughs] So how did you get back to painting?

YUSKAVAGE: The analytic process was extremely important in all of this: spending time nourishing myself and noticing the nourishment, but also going around SoHo, which was a small place, and feeding myself on the art that was there. And walking into these galleries and saying, "Wow, I had no idea you could make art like this." I thought they were pretty badass. I had nothing left to lose. I was shot out of the cannon and fell flat on my face. Falling flat on your face is an invaluable experience. It's the most painful experience, but it's the kind of thing where you're like, "I have nothing to lose." I was then and still am a person with a desire to be involved in conversations of great intensity. So I was searching for ways to reinvent myself. I considered screenwriting. I considered, interestingly—this is weird because you teach at NYU film school—enrolling at NYU film school. And then it occurred to me that the problem with my work was not my education; it was the way I was activating or not activating painting. It was the way I was thinking. I knew I had to reinvent how I thought about painting. I remember one of the inspirations was Diane Arbus and the possibility of that kind of artist. How can I be that direct? How can I include these raw emotions? I recognize that I was not a dolt as a person, but my work was coming across that way. I was like, "How can I express this?" I didn't want to be a pleaser or suck up to fancy people. I realized that I wasn't getting anywhere wanting to be liked.

SOLONDZ: For many artists, wanting to be liked is a trap—it becomes an impediment to exploring those things that you have to risk. So much as you're a slave to being liked, your work will always be compromised. And I think it does take a certain amount of life experience to get to that point where you let go of what other's expectations and desires are. You have to be true to who you are and discover who you are.

YUSKAVAGE: The writer Michel Houellebecq talks often about wanting to be loved for his imperfections. He wants to be loved for his unlikeableness, which I think is absolutely well said. And it reminds me also when I read Bette Davis's biography about how she found her real voice as an actress when she finally allowed herself to be disliked by the audience. Sometimes audiences love you because they get to boo you, too. She said something about how it wasn't something she wanted, (CONTINUED ON PAGE 357)

DIRECTOR TODD SOLONDZ IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON *WIENER-DOG*, AN ENSEMBLE FILM STARRING BRIE LARSON, DANNY DEVITO, AND GRETA GERWIG. ABOVE: YUSKAVAGE'S *KINGDOM*, 2005. OIL ON LINEN, 58 x 46". COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK/LONDON. OPPOSITE: YUSKAVAGE'S *DAY*, 1999-2000. OIL ON LINEN, 77 x 62". COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK/LONDON.



but she had to embrace it. It's those kinds of examples that gave me a path.

SOLONDZ: You pick up so much about a person before you even meet them. In your artworks, there is a lot of control in what exactly you are revealing and how you want your work to be experienced. But I think great art goes beyond the control of the artist. In some ways, art often makes itself and reveals things about that artist that maybe the artist is not fully conscious of. If you don't have your unconscious working for you, you're really out of luck as an artist. YUSKAVAGE: I agree. And when I finally went back to painting, I decided to do the opposite in terms of my attitude, to create a persona for myself in the studio that was not me and that I would work through. Because I thought I was a sappy loser when I painted. I was fresher and more original as a human being than as a painter. So I wanted to access that. And I remember *Blue Velvet* [1986] had recently come out, and I liked the character of Frank [played by Dennis Hopper] and how he's sucking that weird gas and says something weird like "Show me your pussy." He's just such a fucking nightmare of sorts. And I just tried to make art where I was talking to the painting from the voice of Frank. And when I was successful, the painting totally clicked, it's like being Dr. Frankenstein and you scream, "It's alive! It's alive!" Everything I did before that was a corpse. And when the damn thing stood up and actually started running around causing trouble, it became its own troublemaker. I was so delighted that I had created life.

SOLONDZ: It stands up independent of the creator.

YUSKAVAGE: Yeah, and the first person to come to my studio was Matvey. He looked at it and said, "But, Lee, is this even a painting?" which was apparently what Jackson Pollock said to Lee Krasner when he invited her into his studio to see one of his drip paintings. So Matvey saying that delighted me, and I could feel his energy change. Something had changed and that was a matter of life and death to me. You know, I was dead, and my depression was due to the fact that I was constantly bearing still-born creatures as opposed to something alive—they may be little monsters, but they are alive and coming out kicking and screaming and swinging. So then the next person who saw it was my friend [the artist] Jesse [Murry], a very erudite gay man who, unfortunately, at that time, was suffering with an onset of AIDS and was in and out of the hospital. He said something like, "Holy shit, you really have to have your pussy screwed on straight to make this work. And you are going to have to buckle your seat belt. It's going to be a bumpy ride." He loved to quote Bette Davis. And he predicted the ride. Other people came and were deeply offended and said I was taking the wrong path. Some thought it was a corrupt path, which I fought tooth and nail about. I felt like I had no choice and it may be corrupt, but it felt awesome.

SOLONDZ: You're part of a group of artists who have elicited very strong responses—people like Sally Mann. And I know also that you created those paintings over the years, not with the intention of shocking—arousing, yes. But shock only to the extent of the shock of something that's true. What I mean is there's nothing sensationalistic. It isn't affected; it doesn't just exploit some cultural moment. If it did, it wouldn't have the life that it has.

YUSKAVAGE: I know the people who are lovers are much quieter than the haters, but I was surprised, 15 years ago, just how that work was perceived as being diabolical—like I had concocted the perfect stew to get attention. What I was expecting to be a warm reception was as bracingly cold as any I could have expected. And it really took me by surprise. But I think it's really important as an artist not to be drawn

to the haters, because there are so many people who are nice and quiet. There is a lovely kid, Rayon Richards, who came to take my picture recently who went to this school for performing arts, and he grew up in Brooklyn. And he said that it was such a big deal for him to meet me because when he was in high school, he saw the Whitney Biennial. How many years later is this? That was 2000. But he said how important it was for him in becoming the artist that he is. And this is not someone who's a rich white man who's buying the paintings; this is a poor kid who was inspired by being brought to a museum in high school. I was floored by this guy. I spend way too much time by myself in my studio. And the things that I'm actually going to try to realize is that for what we do, Todd, there are people out there who might be invisible to us now who are taking notes. I was so touched to have had that impact on even one person. And that's the thing: the presumption is that this is just a bourgeois object for some dirty rich man who wants to hang something on his wall, blah, blah, blah.

SOLONDZ: Well, in order to attack the bourgeois, you have to work through the bourgeois system to really have any real impact. Flaubert had a quote about this: You have to be polite with your friends and your family, but in your art, it's important to not be polite.

YUSKAVAGE: I know the quote. It's about being a perfect bourgeois gentleman in your life, but a bohemian in your art. Okay, now I want to ask questions.

SOLONDZ: Let me do this part, and then we can let you run with it. But let me keep directing this part.

YUSKAVAGE: You want to be top to my bottom? You're such an awesome top. [laughs]

SOLONDZ: We'll flip. Because we're versatile here. So what about your work now? You've just done a solo show at Zwirner this past spring.

YUSKAVAGE: I was supposed to have that show last November. And I had already delayed the show a long time. And the show was three and a half years in the making. I still could have used another six months to fully investigate what really began to gel for me in a way that was supersexy to myself. And I don't mean sexy as in a subject; I mean sexy as in me connecting to it. Me being Ginger Rogers to the paintings. You know Fred Astaire? I was just dancing on air, enjoying the process. Like in science, each painting had to be its own proof. There's a small painting in the show called *Pile Up*, where a pregnant woman is lying on the ground. And there's a large woman in a kind of a cornucopia standing on her, with other people sort of piled on her back. It's like this weird sculptural mass. And all these people are just rising above the pregnant woman. It's kind of mean. You might get mad at me for saying this, but I think we're both good when we're a little mean. I love when you're mean, Todd. There's this line that I always think about in *Happiness* [1998], which is, I think, so truthful and so fucked up, I've actually talked about it in therapy, and I'm sure a lot of people have talked about it in therapy; it's the moment when the child says to his dad, "Would you ever fuck me?" That is so fucking insightful. Most of us should not even go back and graze on that pasture. And you just go there. I think that for me to be mean in a painting, like putting the weight of a thousand people standing on a pregnant woman, is supermean. I am not a person who's been pregnant. I won't even say that I've never wanted to have children. I just didn't have children in this lifetime. But I always thought it would be really cool to be pregnant. [laughs] It's such an extreme state.

SOLONDZ: I always think of that movie *Demon Seed* [1977], where Julie Christie was pregnant with this monster inside her. It always gives me the shakes

when I think of that.

YUSKAVAGE: But isn't that sort of a metaphor for creation itself? That one's work is the *Demon Seed*? Like, I made a painting where there's a very nubile girl in the foreground reclining. The painting is called *Reclining Nude*. I was being an asshole with that title, because her vagina is so close to the foreground. I mean, it is the foreground. And it's so perfect and tight like nothing has been in or out of that thing. And she's so skinny and her hipbones are sticking out. Nothing's going on in that body. And in the background is this baby in the darkness just off on its own. And it was important to me that the baby be her baby, but it didn't come out of her. The painting bothered people so much, because it was like, "You can't put a baby and a vagina in the same painting. It's too mean." And I thought, "Isn't that wild?" Obviously, the pornographic source material for that nubile girl was not intended to make you think about babies, but to think about fucking the girl. But I repurposed it in this way that threw everything off. And a lot of people were like, "That's so mean to put a baby in this situation." And I was like, "But that's where babies come from."

SOLONDZ: And, of course, you want to subvert certain expectations. Otherwise, you may as well just be looking at wallpaper, you know? I love wallpaper, but it's just pretty.

YUSKAVAGE: It was just kind of crazy to me at how upsetting it was to a lot of people. But I also appreciated it.