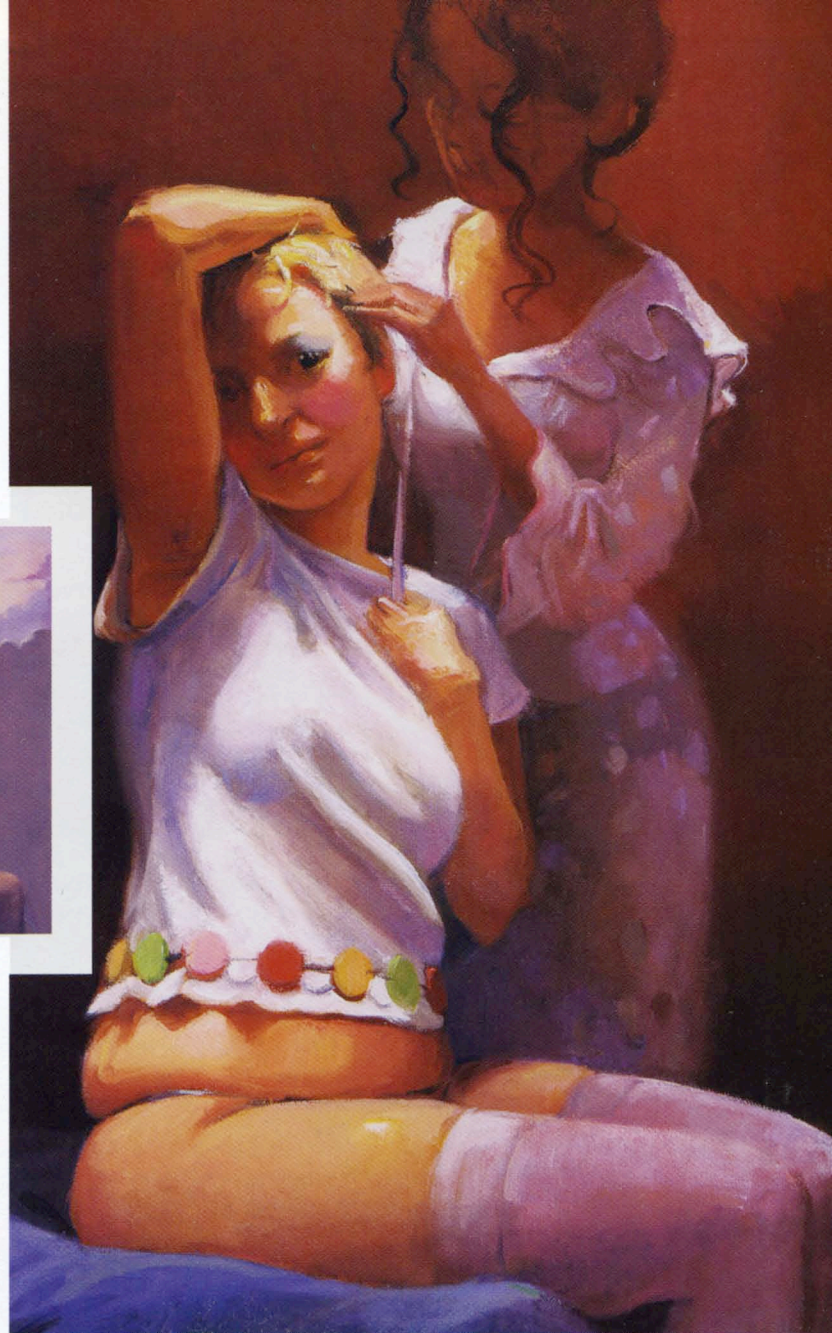
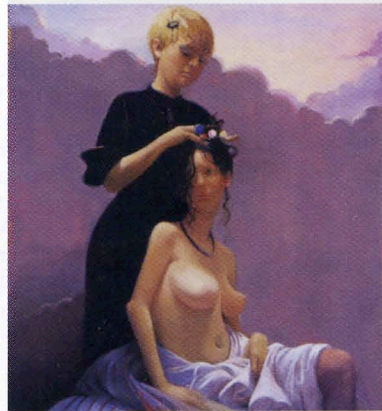
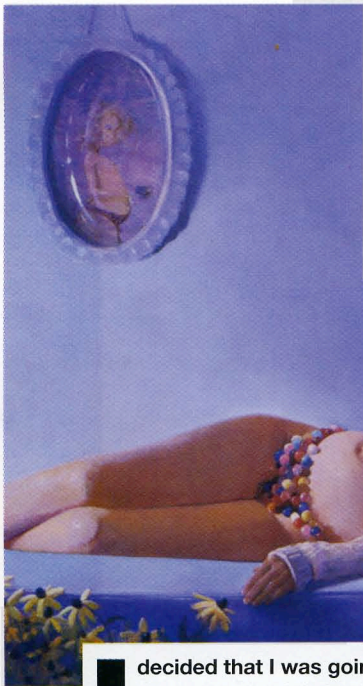


# WHAT IT FEELS LIKE FOR A GIRL

ARTIST LISA YUSKAVAGE, BEST KNOWN FOR HER SERIOUSLY VOLUPTUOUS NUDES, SHOWS US HER SOFTER SIDE. CLAIRE MITCHELL TAKES A PEEK.



**I** decided that I was going to take from something that I understand very well, which is being a girl," says artist Lisa Yuskavage of her various paintings of girls—girls with pert noses, girls with large breasts, big-bottomed girls, innocent girls, not-so-innocent girls, girls who know exactly what it is to be a girl. "Women are more self-critical than men, and it just seems to be a waste of time," continues the Yale MFA grad. "I became very interested in that because I was doing it myself—women just can't stop! Basically I had an image that there was a hole in my head, and shit was dripping out. I was wasting my mental energy, so what I decided to do was put a hose in there and focus it on a subject, an artwork, so if you can't get rid of the problem, you can at least make something out of it."

Yuskavage's work, a collection of vignettes that often cross the boundary into soft porn, is jam-packed with the traditions and techniques of great Italian painting, but it takes a modern, feminist stance. She portrays seductive women with pendulous breasts and gorgeously distended bellies—sex objects who are comfortably sexy in their own skin, which is how Yuskavage feels women should be. Moreover, as a woman painting women, her eye is attuned to many subtleties. "I'm interested in the whole range of experiencing, obviously the theme of looking out at others, and also being looked at, and also being inside and looking at yourself. There's a whole range of emotions; some of it is exhilaration, some of it is pain, embarrassment, or humiliation, some of it is

joy, some of it is erotic, and some of it is just plain bizarre and weird and goofy," she says.

Though Yuskavage typically works in oils, she has also produced a series of watercolors, called *Tit Heaven*, that offers a slightly different interpretation of femininity—more free and dreamlike than her deliberate, more paranoid oils. The series was painted in the early '90s, when Yuskavage began teaching a watercolor class in New York City to the students she calls her "old ladies"—although some of them weren't old, and many of them weren't ladies! Not having worked with watercolor before, she had to "bullshit" her way through a little bit. "The thing that the 'ladies' always wanted was flowers, but I had to do something subversive, a subversive situation inside this seemingly cozy picture of flowers, and hence *Tit Heaven* was born," she says. The result is a group of fantastical, spontaneous watercolors of flowers interspersed with the odd nipple here and there.

What always comes through in Yuskavage's art is the essence of being female. Whether she's painting vulgar naked blonds or demure dark-haired women, as she does in her most recent work, she's exploring what it means to be a girl. Make that what it's like to be a woman—the artist's newest work reflects a quality that comes with age and experience. "It's more about being graceful," she says.