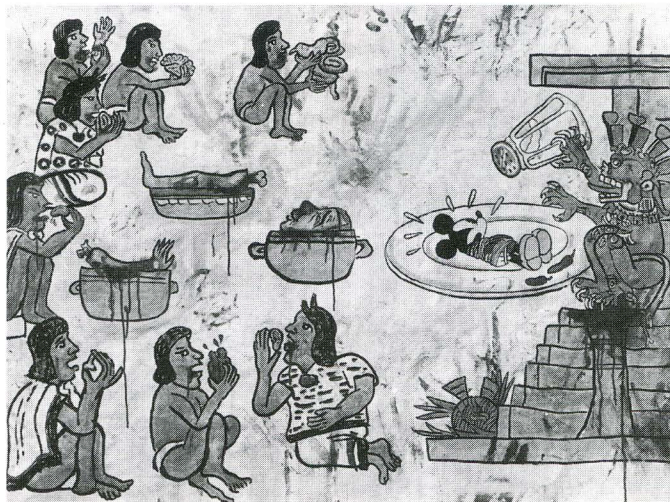


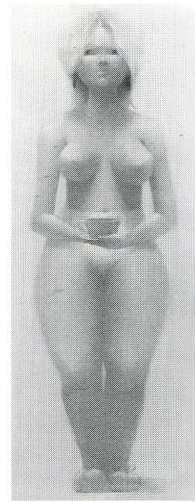
Oyl—into a matrix of the rich, highly diverse visual traditions of Chagoya's native Mexico. By juxtaposing Aztec gods and DC Comics superheroes, Mickey's three-fingered glove and the Mexican-Catholic image of a bleeding hand, Chagoya comments not only on the clash of cultures, but on the Newest World—the multiracial, multicultural society that, whether we like it or not, will predominate in the coming decades.

Most of the works shown date from 1994, although a small selection of earlier pieces gave viewers a sense of how Chagoya's work has developed. The real centerpiece of the exhibition, however, was a group of large paintings on *amate*, a handmade paper from Mexico. Into these beautifully executed appropriations of images from different codices—ancient Mesoamerican documentary paintings of religious and cultural life—Chagoya introduces other layers of information, bringing the viewer face to face with everything from cultural imperialism to xenophobia. (Ironically, many codices survived through the centuries because they were collected by Europeans as New World curiosities.) In *The Governor's Nightmare*, 1994, a group of Native Americans crouch on the ground, avidly consuming various body parts from a recent, very bloody, human sacrifice. The victim's gore-embellished head bears a suspicious resemblance to California's present governor Pete Wilson, known for his rabid antiimmigration stance. On a pyramid to the right, a savage-looking, blue-skinned god holds a giant salt shaker over an alarmed Mickey Mouse, trussed up and garnished with chili peppers. This mordant exaggeration of Wilson's alarmist propaganda—that "real American culture" will be swallowed up by the "savage hordes" from across the border—foregrounds the profoundly racist fears that motivate it.

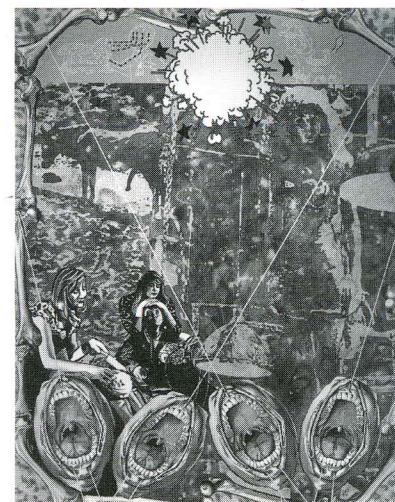
The ghost images of penitenti rise faintly to the warm, rough-looking surface of these paintings, suggesting suppressed voices or lost, unspoken thoughts. These brushed-over traces are also reminders that Chagoya's enterprise is not purely one of appropriation, but rather one of juxtaposition and interpretation: rereading the text of the present through the stained palimpsest of many different versions of history. Although many artists affect alienation, Chagoya's point of view is available only to those who actually leave home. Since moving to the United States in 1977, his opportunity to examine the history and culture of his native Mexico form a distance—as well as to see his new home through the eyes of a stranger—has resulted in a body of work whose emotional tone is remarkably complex: a mixture of sadness and beauty, rage and laughter. What Chagoya keeps reminding us, with a fierce, graphic insistence, is that, in the world we've made and/or inher-



Enrique Chagoya, *The Governor's Nightmare* (detail), 1994, acrylic and oil on *amate*, 4 x 6'.



Lisa Yuskavage, *Big Blonde with Teacup*, 1994, oil on linen, 64 x 50".



Carole Caroompas, *The Power of Naming*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, ca. 10 x 8'.

ited, the spirit has no borders—since all of us are immigrants, in one way or another.

—Maria Porges

LOS ANGELES

LISA YUSKAVAGE

CHRISTOPHER GRIMES  
GALLERY

Not since the days of "bad painting" has someone tried as hard as Lisa Yuskavage does to make a travesty of the medium. In her saccharine portraits of prepubescent nymphets, girlish innocence and sexual awakening are given thoroughly ham-fisted treatment. Yuskavage mobilizes the entire cutie-pie repertoire—big eyes peering through thick bangs, plump cheeks, pouty lips, upturned noses—to doll-up a field of semiclad and naked bodies swollen as much by baby fat as sexual ripeness. The result is a litter of Hello Sex Kitties. Garish background color catapults each figure toward the viewer, and even Yuskavage's schooled paint handling, which looks borrowed from a how-to book for hobbyists, comes across as an effort to temper the work's gitchy-goo obscenity with reassuring touches of class—there are minor painterly outbursts, bold dabs of white glinting from erect nipples, not to mention a kind of battery-acid sfumato in which many of the Smurfish pinups appear to steam bathe.

Though these works whistle obnoxiously for our attention, we're made to feel that these are scenes on which we're deviously spying. The young pixie in *Big Blonde With Tea*, 1994, exhibits her nakedness frontally, though she seems aware only that she's bringing us something to drink; the full-figured naif with the

oven mitt and no pants in a 1994 painting stands in profile and looks across at us as if surprised by our presence. Yuskavage boasts no strategy of appropriation that might distance her work's icky pandering; on the contrary, though informed by cabbage-patch kitsch and *Playboy* cartoons, the images seem more invented than stolen, which in turn makes their pandering feel distressingly earnest. But what's perhaps most embarrassing is how familiar these paintings look—they give flesh to a cultural wet dream as common as it is inadmissible, one unspooling beneath our daily rations of happy-face sadotainment, with its cast of missing kids, recovered memories, Michael Jackson updates, et al. The paintings' real creepiness emerges at the moment of mutual recognition—they wink as if we too belong to the audience of drooling average Americans for which they're obviously intended.

To attribute a critical position to Yuskavage's canvases seems a cowardly response, like reining in outlaws by deputizing them. They're scandals, visual stink bombs launched for the sole purpose of watching the rationalizations fly. A fine-art pedigree does exist in which Yuskavage's jailbait could be inserted and thereby ennobled: you could seat them along side Hans Bellmer's photos of mutilated dolls, Balthus' underage seductresses, the corrupted innocents of Larry Clark's series "Tulsa," 1972, and the X-rated Brooke Shields in Richard Prince's *Spiritual America*, 1983. But then again, Yuskavage's visions of feminine purity and beauty fit just as well snuggled up with those of Nazi Realism and Mel Ramos.

Getting too worked up over these paintings feels a bit like playing the fool. The figures are so cartoony, so lacking in volume, that they discourage reading much significance, let alone anything like mystery, into

them. Instead Yuskavage treats them like visual PlayDoh to knead and stretch, and asks that the extremity of her distortions be measured in distance rather than depth ("How far will she go?" instead of "How low will she sink?"). But to go ahead and participate casually in such deformation only abets the work's devious depiction of innocence, condoning its evacuation of a political dimension from its misogyny. Despite all their cotton-candy frothing, Yuskavage's paintings look downright grim compared to the bevy of recent art celebrating the triumph of molten libido over static form. The desire to which she sacrifices her thumb-sucking virgins is instead marshalled by a power-hungry gaze, one that demonstrates its might in a single violent gesture, at once caricaturing women in ideological shorthand and raping them.

—Lane Relyea

CAROLE CAROOMPAS

SUE SPAID GALLERY

Carole Caroompas paints with a vengeance, producing enormous seminarrative canvases with a cheeky disregard for what artists—especially feminist artists—are "supposed" to be doing in the '90s. Not a single piece of fur, not a single body part, no installation objects, nothing but acrylic paint on rectangular pieces of canvas, yet these large-format paintings are anything but conventional.

Since her emergence within the feminist art community in Los Angeles in the '70s, Caroompas has developed an individual yet recognizably Angeleno style: with minimal brushstroke texture she renders repetitive patterns associated with upholstery or interior decor in bright Day-Glo colors. Merging Pop's interest in the rendition of