

Painter's latest work is little more than skin-deep but it is voluptuous

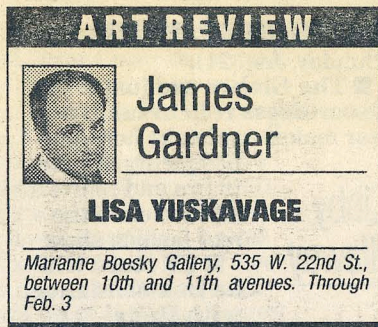
LIKE all good pornography, the paintings of Lisa Yuskavage work with admirable dispatch. Paint textures, symbols and psychological density are not allowed, even for an instant, to obscure the essential prurience of her art.

Yuskavage made quite a splash at last year's Whitney Biennial when several of her pouty, big-breasted bimbettes received the rare canonization of appearing in the show's dozen or so official postcards (which suggests how the Whitney, doubtless correctly, reads the interests of its visitors).

Now an exhibition at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, coinciding with a retrospective at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art, has

put the painter's latest work on display. The proportions of the females are closer to life than in the past, and their impact as pornography is even greater than before.

It is not every woman who understands so intuitively or so well the subtleties of male desire: the voluptuous s-shaped curves along the backside, the navel glimpsed between sheets,



ART REVIEW

James Gardner

LISA YUSKAVAGE

Marianne Boesky Gallery, 535 W. 22nd St., between 10th and 11th avenues. Through Feb. 3

the remarkable softness and pliancy of the flesh.

According to an interview with Yuskavage, these images are based on photographs that appeared in Penthouse and Playboy back in the '70s, before the age of hard bodies and implants.

And they make very telling use of the soft-focus, moody lighting of the time.

All told, there would be little point in objecting to Yuskavage's paintings. In-

deed, there would be nothing to say about them were it not for the preposterous claims being made for them. In discussing her influences, for example, Yuskavage finds it necessary to cite Leo Tolstoy, because of the

way he "allowed his characters to be full of contradictions and ambivalence."

One art historian writes that Yuskavage "revisits classic techniques of handling perspective, coloring, light, texture — in a manner worthy of a Vermeer, a Raphael, a Bellini, a Bronzino."

Though you might be excused for thinking that only an idiot could write that, it is sobering to consider that its author is Marcia Hall, who happens to be one of the finest art historians at work today. That so estimable a scholar would have allowed her mind to be debased in the service of this art is not the least evidence of the corrosive effect that it and everything like it (for it is hardly unique) have already had.

Only a generation ago, the flimsy, flashy soft-core vulgarity of these images, with their inert clumps of paint, their feeble compositions and their total lack of drawing skills, would have rendered them immediately legible as the pinups that they are.

But such is the general infantilizing of contemporary taste that, in the words of one woman who was touring the gallery with her toddler, "You don't have to be a baby to appreciate all these bare breasts, but it would certainly help."

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Female gallery-goer