

approaches the idea of suburbia with delicacy and restraint. Suburbia has suddenly become the hot new conceptual bugaboo for contemporary artists. It's an easy mark for white, middle class urbanites, most of us having fled one suburbia or another to get here. But most of the work on the subject has become disingenuously condescending and painfully formulaic: just shoot a picture of a new-ish housing development, and you're sure to provoke a few shudders in Soho. Artists like Catherine Opie, Gregory Crewdson, Jeff Burton and Ricardo de Oliveira have recently weighed in with images ranging from deadpan benign to downright icky. Yes, all the houses are similar and that's sorta creepy (but is there something innately evil about a lawn sprinkler?)

Yes, somehow this evokes false utopias like our conception of the 1950s. But like suburbia itself, most suburban-themed art and its accompanying self-righteousness are just so *dull*.

Clementine's *Home* doesn't poke fun or take cheap shots at anyone's lifestyle, nor does it measure virtue by a floor plan. The focus of both Harris' and Bieber's work is so narrow as to encourage and support multiple interpretations. *Home* is borders within shelter; it sustains the dialectics of privacy and isolation, of comfort and claustrophobia, of nourishment and poison, of function and dysfunction. Domestic culture is complex, and it is refreshing to see it treated modestly rather than arrogantly. (JD)

Lisa Yuskavage

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You know the type in an instant: the woman or man who is universally adored by the opposite sex, and universally denigrated and mistrusted by their own. They have few friends of their own gender, who tend to see them as manipulative and sleazy, and whom they view primarily as competition. Instead, they relentlessly pursue, and usually achieve, the affections of the opposite sex. Lisa Yuskavage seems to be that kind of

artist: willing, perhaps eager to alienate half her viewing public in exchange for certain adulation from the other half.

Which is not to say that Yuskavage's appeal seems to be split down gender lines. Her gorgeously painted near-monochromatic environments containing luridly endowed female caricatures appear to have manifold admirers of both sexes. But her predilection for the hip, the easy and the crass shows such an antagonism toward thoughtfulness or depth that she surely knew her work would engender some serious critiques. In fact, one gets the feeling she gets off on them. Her work has a built-in defense against criticism. Since its subject matter is female sexuality, it is a simple move to say that any detractors she may have are merely disturbed by the sexuality of women, and that the problem is within *them*, not within the work itself. This attitude presumes that there is no other reason one could dislike the work, which is not the case here.

Into an alluring ground of near-fluorescent colors, Yuskavage inserts her trademark doll-girls, theatrically lit, skillfully modeled with dramatic chiaroscuro effects, and most often alone in their fields. Her towering nymphets are round and doughy, with emphatic boobage of all shapes and sizes, skinny arms like bent twigs and butts that could feed and shelter a small village. Their bodies are more exaggerated than distorted. But it's actually their infantile faces that are so disturbing. The word "cute" is taken to new depths by these round cherubic cheeks, turned-up (if any) noses, thick bangs and perky curled hair; the faces are images straight from Hallmark (TM). Three characters, crowd-pleasingly named *Wee Asspicker*, *Wee Motherfucker*, and *Wee Foodeater* appear and reappear in the series of paintings, collectively called *Bad Habits*. A huge still life and an uncharacteristically dark painting of a boy-man entitled *Feminist's Husband*, 1996 feel like merely token non-doll

paintings, though *Still Life*, 1996, with rolling marbles casting long shadows on a vast ground, is strikingly pretty.

Into this show are crammed the greatest hits of 90s cynicism: the waif on the one hand of female sexual imagery and exaggerated boob and booty cartoons on the other, our conception that something called post-feminism makes it all okay, nostalgia for the kitsch of the 1970s, and the faux irony under which we attempt to hide these pitfalls. There is almost no way these paintings won't be popular.

But precisely because Yuskavage's paintings contain so many of the things I find most discouraging in popular culture, I have a hard time dismissing them. And yet the work utterly rebuffs any attempt by this viewer to pursue meaning or intent. In fact, it somehow makes me feel stupid for trying. I read these paintings as a deliberate attempt to push our cultural buttons and then run away; it's a cheap artistic game of doorbell ditch.

Along with Rita Ackerman, Kim Dingle and others, Yuskavage can easily be seen as the female equivalent of the juvenile trend in male artists of the last decade or so, encompassing Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Jim Shaw, Raymond Pettibon, Keith Boadwee and "Candyass." The difference is that these men's work most often presumes a male viewer.

Perhaps I've found in Lisa Yuskavage the artist for Sonic Youth's next album cover. The band, revered precursor to all that is now called alternative, has featured artwork by hipster artists like Richard Kern, Raymond Pettibon and Mike Kelley (as well as, redeemingly, Gerhard Richter), and singer/guitarist Thurston Moore's solo project features the artwork of Rita Ackerman. While their attempt to bring serious art into popular culture is admirable, and their choices are well informed, they are somehow obviously the choices of non-artists. It's not that these artists' work is necessarily *bad*, it's just that some of it is a bit too simply gratifying. (JD)

