

Lisa Yuskavage BY GIRL

If ever a painter captured female anxiety incarnate in girlie-flesh, it's Lisa Yuskavage. Welcome to her sexy candy-colored nightmare, starring a blankly pensive male-fantasy nymph trapped in hallucinatory chiaroscuro—where the fleshly familiar distorts to monstrosity before your eyes. The luscious light licks and beguiles, scary boobs swell and point pornographically; even against your will it's a turn-on, until some edge of eroticized excess curls into nausea and shoves you away. This isn't new territory—men have been painting babes with lust, fear and loathing for cen-

turies but Yuskavage paints babes as imprisoned objects of desire with a kind of tender horror and slick hostility, simultaneously empathizing and objectifying, that feels strangely like life right now. This queasy mix, expressing grotesque depths of powerless self-loathing and heady heights of glorious, lubricious female sexual power, is both an angry retort to the male gaze and a painful awareness of that we yearn, still, to seduce it. I think her paintings really nail something about female bodily experience, and it isn't pretty. •