

**Girl, interrupted:** Yuskavage's *Big Little Laura* (1997-98)

## SHOCK OF THE NUDE

An artist whose work surprises even herself

**T**he women Lisa Yuskavage paints often have large breasts. Impossibly small waists. Tight, perky behinds. Wandering hands. But these are no *Playboy* pinups: The young seductresses—wide-eyed, wanton, and subtly distorted—are too creepy to be the real thing, yet too conventionally sexy to cry feminism. The longer you look, the more provocative the figures become, which may explain why the Whitney chose them as poster girls for last spring's Biennial, plastering their distorted bodies on bus shelters across New York. This month, Yuskavage, thirty-eight, returns to her native Philadelphia to open her first solo museum show, at the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art.

Although she has made a name for herself by injecting ambiguity and edge into that most fundamental of genres, the female nude, the Yale-trained Yuskavage insists she's a traditionalist in many ways. "I would have preferred to paint beautiful odalisques," she says. "But my problem was, How do you paint a nude today? Most figurative art from the twentieth century looks like art on a diet." So she forged a style she describes as "loaded"—fusing high and low, borrowing as much from the Renaissance era as from the culture of *Playboy*, and throwing in an ironic dose of Kewpie-doll sentimentality.

"I know my work is probably confounding to most people," she says, but that's her point: At a time when figurative painting is not considered particularly cutting edge, Yuskavage's va-va-voom iconography challenges expectations. "I try to make pictures that look so wrong they shock even me," she says. "I dare people to think about painting." —ROSA SEIDLER

## TORONTO 2000: NO MORE MR. NICE GIRL

Film festivals are more fun when there's something to fight about. At Toronto, it was a little French number called *Baise-Moi* ("F--k Me"). Made by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, this dark, witty tale of young hookers on a killing spree is structured like *Thelma & Louise* but shot like a porn movie, complete with X-rated close-ups. This time, only the customers get screwed. Guys got huffy at this toxic shocker, but I loved its impudence. Another kind of rude girl was on view in two terrific German movies. *The Legends of Rita* by Volker Schlöndorff (*The Tin Drum*) is a riveting portrait of a former terrorist who becomes a political pawn when the Wall comes down. Rita's beliefs wrecked her life; they also gave it meaning. Less sympathetic is the limousine Leninist in Oskar Roehler's *No Place to Go* who preached revolution from the comfort of her chic Munich apartment because it helped sell her novels. These women have their counterparts in our own country. American directors, please take note. —K.D.

## FESTIVAL REPORT

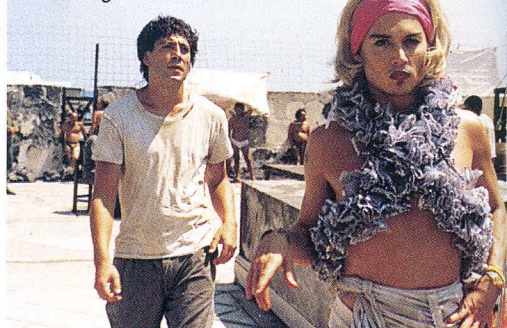
## And Go See . . .

### **O Brother, Where Art Thou?:**

Recasting the *Odyssey* as an exuberantly low farce set in the Depression-era South, Joel and Ethan Coen scale Olympian heights of tastelessness with a Ku Klux Klan rally that resembles Nuremberg staged by Busby Berkeley. George Clooney heads a trio of the silliest fugitives from a chain gang ever to reach celluloid. This is humor at its most fearlessly offensive—effective, too.



Bardem and Depp in *Before Night Falls*



**Before Night Falls:** Artist Julian Schnabel (*Basquiat*) proves himself as a filmmaker with this tough, passionate biopic of Reinaldo Arenas, the late Cuban writer imprisoned by Castro for the subversiveness of his writing and his sexuality. Go for the flashy fun of Johnny Depp in drag; stay to have your heart wrenched by Javier Bardem's Arenas.

**State and Main:** William H. Macy, Sarah Jessica Parker, and Alec Baldwin cover themselves with vainglory playing world-class egomaniacs in David Mamet's sly spoof of the movie business. The film is less consistent than *The Spanish Prisoner*, but the funny moments are very funny indeed. —K.D.