

Lisa Yuskavage

CATHY LEBOWITZ INTERVIEWS JA



CATHY LEBOWITZ: In many of Lisa Yuskavage's recent paintings, someone is watching her naked women in the background. Tell me how it is with Lacan. Someone is always watching?

JOSEFINA AYERZA: Lisa Yuskavage's recent paintings could be inferring a voyeur, which could even be you—the viewer—trying to see the woman as devoted to the jouissance of her own body and realizing that even in solitude she is looked at by an Other...



CL: Apparently the viewer is not enough for Yuskavage anymore. Now she has built the voyeurs into the picture. In one, people stand in the background watching one woman feed another. How do you see this functioning?

JA: Of the one woman feeding another, the nurturing stuff she provides is not coming from her actual breast—multicolored

bubbles stand for words, more so signifiers, much as signifiers are empty, like the bubbles are empty. Still, in that the nurturing function is a structure, the supplier will conform to the M(Other), Other, her psychedelic words conveying raw desire. The voyeurs come to fill up the scene. Even if their nature is tacit, where the essence of words is language it belongs to all—they own it.

CL: Why “raw desire”?

JA: The desire of the mother is the phallus: the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire. The division immanent in desire, to be experienced in the desire of the Other—what the child has is worth no more than what he does not have—because the actual demand requires that he be the phallus. And desire is raw: the mother/child phallus is without equal. Again, it remains secret.



CL: And what about the painting where one woman presents herself to the viewer, naked, legs open, belligerent? Another woman stands behind her, very close, but in the shadows, with a mischievous expression. How might desire function here?

JA: I don't think the woman, legs open, belligerent, is in direct want of presenting her nakedness to the viewer. Her actual belligerence remits to the other woman, "standing behind her, very close, though in the shadows, with the mischievous expression," her hands, one on each side of the naked one's head positioning her. She could well be the one to orchestrate the exposure issue.

Now the naked woman stands for the very object. However the other objects—fruits or what's in pots on the table—may together appeal to what Lacan called the eye's appetite. To the extent that it offers something to sight, the image appeases the appetite of the eye of the one who is looking. That is the true function of the eye as organ, and this is being voracious and malevolent, to embody what is called the evil eye.

The function of art is to dispossess the evil eye of a look that kills. For it is the look of this eye that fixes an object in the sense of arresting its movement and ending its life. Again, the moment, that the subject suspends or stops his gesture, Lacan said, he is mortified.

One lack—the woman—is placed over the other—food. The dialectic of the objects of desire, in so far as it creates the link between the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other goes through the fact that the desire is not replied to directly. "It is a lack engendered from the previous time that serves to reply to the lack raised by the following time."

CL: In the triptych, we see a woman's sex but we don't see her head. There is an echo of this in the woman to the left. From the hills, a righteous crowd of kerchiefed people descends. The sense is that they come in disapproval of the anonymous naked women

lolling about frivolously. Does this change the equation of desire?

JA: Like the actual woman lying on the triptych, her sex exposed but we don't see her head, drive is acephallic. The echo of this in the woman to the left evidences a privilege – she can emulate the drive. Rather the object in the painting that is standing in for the painting itself that object is the disembodied look from the back of the canvas.

So the back of the painting represents the missing representation of the painting—the painting is not represented in the painting—and the figure, the stain in that space represents the look of the spectator as it is present in the painting within the painting.



A representation, Lacan said, is seen, and anyone can see it.

What changes the equation of desire is that the painting, is about the fact that you do not see from where the painting is looking at you.



LISA YUSKAVAGE, *Fireplace*, oil on linen, 77 1/4 x 65 inches, 2010.