

Visions of Seduction, Repulsion

ART REVIEWS

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

At Christopher Grimes Gallery, Lisa Yuskavage is showing paintings of doe-eyed females who are less pulchritudinous than pathetic. Here are Vargas girls minus the sex appeal, Barbies minus the *soignée* proportions, post-adolescent Kewpie dolls minus the pedophilic charm.

Like Hostess Twinkies, these girl-creatures consecrate themselves to the task of seduction, yet are only able to master repulsion. They are obscenely sweet, absurdly bloated and leave a distinctly chemical aftertaste.

Yuskavage preps us for a series of soft-core *mise en scenes*, dressing her figures in costumes that suggest choreographed sexual encounters (the bellhop, the ballerina, the suburban housewife), or dressing them in next to nothing (a polka-dotted diaper or a strategically placed cup of tea). With no narrative context, just color-coordinated backdrops of leaf green, lemon-yellow or tangerine, only the imagination limits the fantasy.

Yet, with their massive thighs and narrow shoulders, knocked knees and pointy breasts, the would-be pinups wholly elude the



Christopher Grimes Gallery

"Big Marie" is included in Lisa Yuskavage's show in Santa Monica.

reach of the pornographic. Yuskavage exaggerates their proportions such that they become less failures than mutants.

This sense is redoubled as you study the images: a squatting

blonde has only one foot; another has breasts at cross purposes with one another, one shown in profile, the other head-on, so eager to please they wind up shattering the

Please see ART, F7

ART

Continued from F6
illusion.

To a large extent, all this comes out of formal concerns. First impressions aside, Yuskavage is very much a Minimalist, struggling to portray the figure in the most efficient manner, even if that means tossing out body parts and limiting her palette so that each element is knit into an overall ensemble.

Yet the subject matter is deliberate, and as far as feminism goes, difficult. These paintings depict the

man's Amazon warriors, who whoop it up with their booty of lopped-off penises. There is nothing empowering about these vulnerable if overstuffed waifs.

Yuskavage is not interested in role models or role reversals. She works in a much more complex way, cajoling us into acknowledging our dread power as viewers, and into experiencing the shame we provoke in those things and people upon whom we habitually and relentlessly gaze.

■ Christopher Grimes Gallery, 916 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 587-3373, through July 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays.