

BLONDE AMBITION ^{T13BW}

Searching for a single meaning in Lisa Yuskavage's paintings is a quixotic endeavor, even for the shrewdest observer of contemporary art. As soon as we come close to sticking a convenient label (stylistic or otherwise) on Yuskavage's portraits of deformed pin-ups and vacuous nymphets (imagine the Barbie doll who crashed her pink Corvette and underwent several reconstructive surgeries), the label inevitably flies off. "The intelligent way to look at this art is dumbly," concedes critic Peter Schjeldahl.

Yuskavage, whose paintings straddle the border between abstraction and representation, feminism and misogyny, revels in their interpretive possibilities. "I believe that when you look at a painting, you see whatever you want to see," she says. "A lot of people are afraid to relax with my paintings ... and think whatever they want to think." The title of her 1995 *Rorschach Blot* serves, then, as a profound compression of her artistic philosophy, one that charges the audience with both the responsibility and the joy of making meaning.

Her images of baby-doll women—either sans appendages (*Blonde*, 1995) or grotesquely over-endowed (see *XLP*, below)—have repelled some audiences, but even Yuskavage's most ardent detractors acknowledge her technical skill, particularly her deft use of light, color and atmosphere (derived from Italian Renaissance painters Bellini and Giorgione). Claudia Gould, who curates Yuskavage's first solo exhibit at the Institute of Contemporary Art (December 2nd to February 9th), confesses that she can't refrain from "salivating over Yuskavage's colors" and predicts that even the most flesh-fearing Philadelphians will take pleasure in these canvases. 118 S. 36th St. 215-898-5911. —*Geoffrey W. Melada*

TOPTIX

