



WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

Lisa Yuskavage

The Rose Art Museum // September 13–December 13, 2015

WHILE YUSKAVAGE'S earliest critics denounced her work as a form of misogyny, curator Christopher Bedford writes that the artist participates in a vocabulary of empowerment.

This retrospective exhibition covering Yuskavage's 25-year career instead presents a more complicated relationship to the female nude, mediated through issues of class, kitsch, pornography, and beauty. By focusing on the artist's multi-panel series of diptychs, triptychs, and "symbiotic," or multi-figure scenes, the exhibition emphasizes her engagement with the relational aspects of power.

Naïveté takes on double meaning in Yuskavage's paintings. The faux innocence of her subject's simpering faces is representative of a femininity complicit in its own subjugation, the same means by which her subjects manipulate power. Each of the earliest paintings in the exhibition, a quartet of color studies from the series "The Ones That Don't Want To," 1991–92, features a woman whose face and pubis emerge from a sfumato haze of intensely saturated purple, pink, red, and green. Each face displays a pout or a plea that morphs into a blank-faced stare of defiance. The *Penthouse* sexuality of Yuskavage's women paired with the sad, wide-eyed faces of Precious Moments figurines reorganize the terms of submission and domination by topping from the bottom and bottoming from the top simultaneously.

The artist's masterful handling of the medium borders on naive painting, engaging with the stylistic tropes of kitsch and pop-culture aesthetics. References to dated pornography, too, are found in more than just the subject matter, as with her approach to light in *Day*, 1999–2000, where a figure in a room awash in yellow sunlight is illuminated from behind as she lifts her shirt to examine her exaggerated anatomy. Her Technicolor sunsets also nod to animated and illustrated graphic traditions from the 1970s. Set against such a lurid backdrop, *Piggyback*, 2006, negotiates comfort at its turn into dependency by depicting two figures whose tight embrace makes their position on the edge of a cliff precarious. Throughout her oeuvre, Yuskavage introduces a cringing discomfort that implicates us as viewers in the roles that we perpetuate in looking and in life. —RP

Lisa Yuskavage
Big Agnes,
1994. Oil on
linen, 64 x 50 in.

NEW ORLEANS

Jacqueline Humphries

Contemporary Arts Center // November 19, 2015–February 28, 2016

THE VERBIAGE SURROUNDING Humphries's large-scale abstract paintings—including the two series here, of silver-pigmented works and canvases with ultraviolet paint that glows under black light—might lead you to believe that she's an artist consumed by seductive special effects. "I think a painter's first job is to get someone to look at a painting," she notes in the press materials for this museum survey in the city where she grew up. This straightforward and honest statement, however, belies the visually complex surfaces that characterize her work.

Downstairs, canvases bring to mind the metallic glint of Warhol's "Silver" works, the smudges of Christopher Wool, and the recent markmaking tendencies of Julie Mehretu. Humphries is acrobatic in her use of varying patterns and techniques. Visible throughout is a struggle between orderly, bounded geometries and more expressive marks, erasures, gouges, and drips. Color contrasts are stark, pitting black and shining silver against reds and purples. One work, (), 2015, is covered in a staticky pattern of crimson, like a hazy rain of blood falling down the painting's surface. Elsewhere, Humphries's compositions are filled with row upon row of hole punch–like painted black circles, which appear mathematically precise from a distance but, up close, are often irregular. *O*, 2015, is the standout in the room: Its grid of thick, tarlike circles is scratched and disrupted, and the background itself is covered in densely repeated symbols—including what appear to be first-generation emoticons, like :) or :/.

Upstairs, a gallery outfitted with black lights provides a coolly psychedelic environment for a series of canvases painted with ultraviolet enamel pigments. What might have been a nifty gimmick is instead an awe-inspiring, alien experience, bringing to mind everything from Gerhard Richter's brash 1980s palette to the high-impact graphic nature of skateboard design and the fuzzy glow of one of James Turrell's spaces. The colors here are thoroughly unnatural, the hues of Mountain Dew or Orange Crush. One canvas in a ghostly, ghastly green resembles a computer monitor that has imploded or blown out, left to emit a swelling glow. With these works, Humphries shows the ways in which she's

influenced a younger generation of abstractionists, from Patrick Brennan to Keltie Ferris. These are paintings that indeed encourage and demand looking, but they move beyond the retinal into registers that are more sensual, and even physical. —SI

Jacqueline Humphries
O, 2015.
Oil on linen,
100 x 111 in.

