



Lisa Yuskavage
David Zwirner, 533 West 19th Street, New York
October 18 – November 18, 2006

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Zwirner & Wirth, 32 East 69th Street, New York
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Dear Lisa,

Welcome to the gallery. We are so happy to have you here.

Lisa, I commend you, because you have accomplished something enviable for an artist: you have staked out your own personal playing field on which you can build and expand. Even better, you have become a painter's painter. The luminosity of your work, your radical approach to color and the increasing complexity with which you negotiate figure and ground are admired by an unusual range of your colleagues.

Yet while your work has grown and matured in recent years, it seems to me that the discussions and rhetoric around it have run aground, after running in circles for a while. There are plenty of writers out there who've attempted to decipher, claim, categorize and marginalize your project, but enlightening discussions have been few and far between. While trying to understand this paradox, it occurred to me that somehow the discussion around your work got turned on its head, and the very qualities of your art making are being held against you. Yes, your work can polarize, but I perceive that as a great quality, after all, nothing is worse than no reaction. But while most critics would suggest that this polarization is a function of your subject matter, I believe that the real issue is not the subject matter itself but actually how strangely inexplicable it is. Very few things make a person more uncomfortable than wanting to understand, but not being able to. We want to understand figuration; we want to "read" the narrative and then propel ourselves to that higher level where "meaning" resides. Somehow your work short-circuits that. It's almost as if you are able to clear the picture plane of meaning and instead create a surface onto which your audience can project. And project they do; your work is being claimed as high culture, and as low culture. People see beauty, and they see kitsch. You are mentioned as a feminist and a misogynist. There is plenty of talk about sexuality, and somehow you have become a "bad girl" artist. What is that?

When I look at the work, I don't see all of that. I see women who are fragile, vulnerable, and exposed, looking back at me. They are not real but they still make me uncomfortable. And I can't help thinking that it's the painting itself looking back at me: naked, heavy, with all its baggage in tow and yet still viable and alive. Then I can stop worrying about where your women are going or where they are coming from, but instead lose myself in the medium itself. Frankly, I am not sure what your work is about, and I don't think it gives itself away easily. Contrary to some opinions it is certainly not ironic; it is utterly sincere. That leads me to believe that what you do is, first and foremost, personal. I am not sure I need to know it all, but thank you for sharing it with us.

Yours, David