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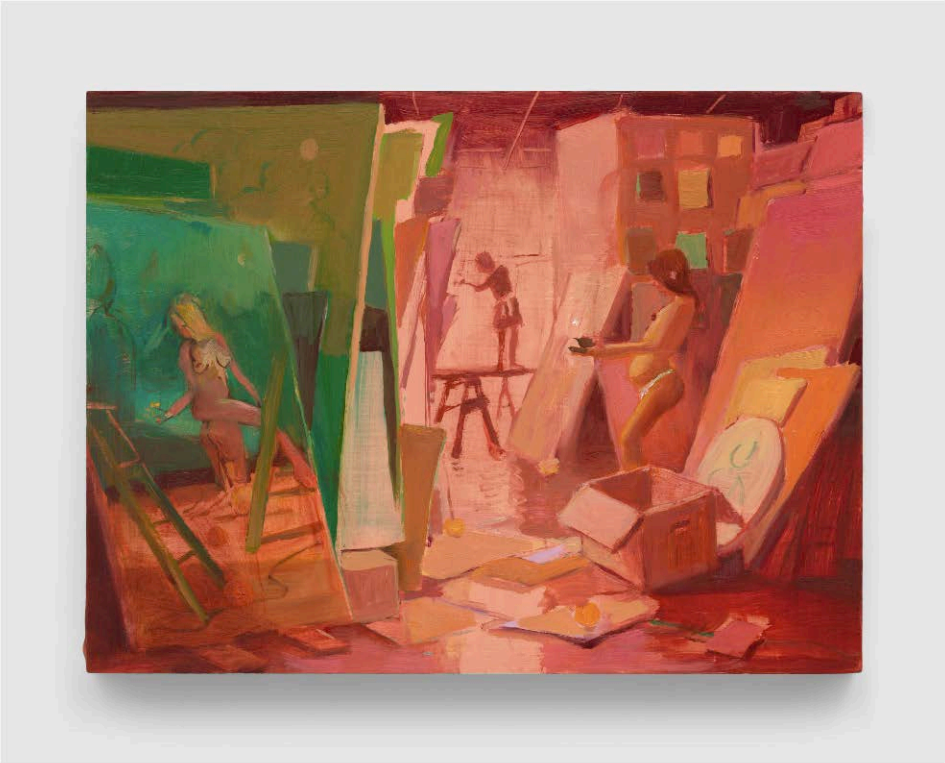
ARTNOWLA

Lisa Yuskavage:
Creating an Alternate Universe

by Eve Wood



Lisa Yuskavage
David Zwirner
February 18 – April 12, 2025

The most compelling and complex art often raises questions of authorship and appropriation, sometimes questioning the very nature of subjectivity itself. **Lisa Yuskavage** has long pursued these kinds of themes in her paintings and sculptural works, and her ninth exhibition at **David Zwirner** reiterates her unique vision. The show is a mix of both large and small-scale works that appear almost as theatrical tableaux where the artist postulates a kind of fictionalized universe set within the walls of her own studio.

In the company of models

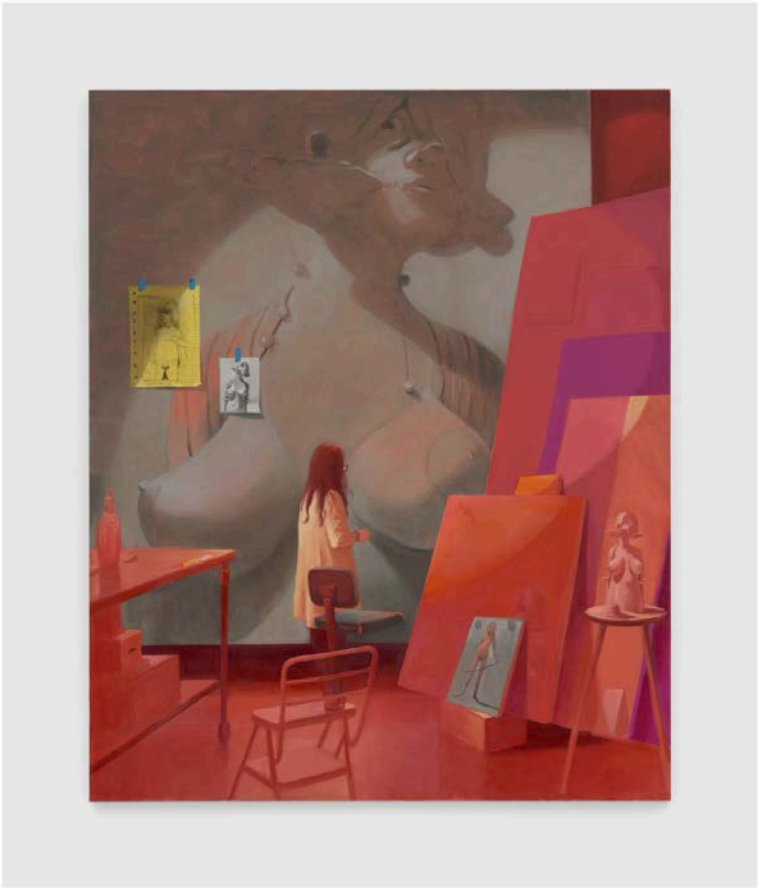
Characters come and go, yet within the set confines of each painting, time becomes its own character within the scene as it plays out, and yet time is historically and profoundly unreliable, pulsing forward even as it retracts back into space. Time, or rather its ultimate fickleness, is the one constant within all the works in this exhibition. The fact that

these paintings are populated with young naked women who oscillate between artist's model and master painter further suggests familiar art historical themes and allusions.

Painter (Kelly Marie)

Arguably, the truest and most reliable "character" in these paintings is color, and Yuskavage embraces an array of riotous pinks and reds as simultaneously voluptuous and melancholic. In Yuskavage's world, even a small pink table can carry the same visual weight and solemnity as the naked body posing beside it. Color is what binds them and defines them as vital and alive.

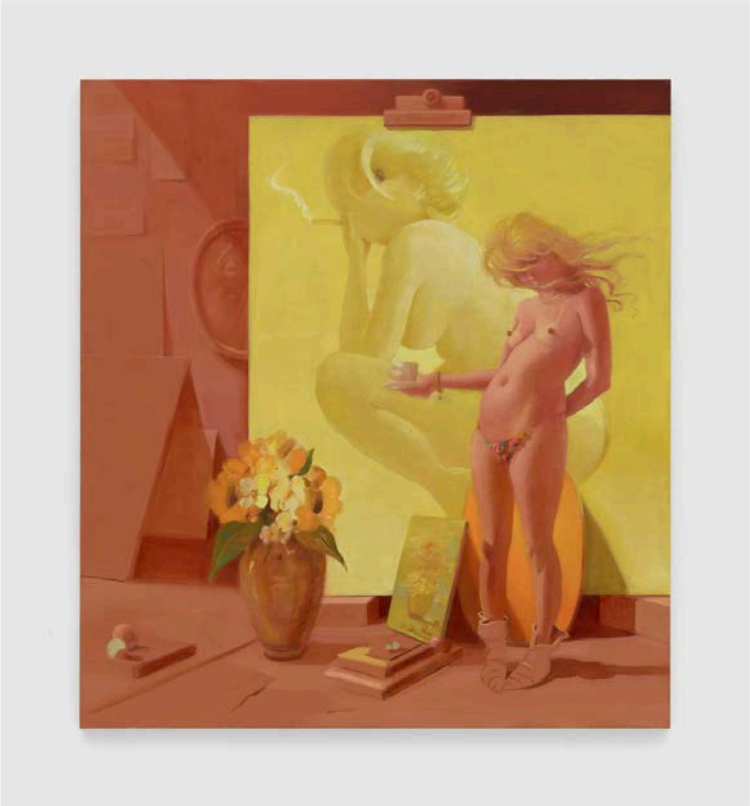
These paintings also propose a cinematic sensibility, and standing in front of them somehow feels akin to watching the 1968 cult movie classic ***Barbarella*** where **Jane Fonda** wields her high-powered laser gun with the same panache as Yuskavage's heroines who stand on the brink of creative genius, or at the very least, a moment of fleeting self-awareness. Other artists like **John Currin** and **Kim Dingle** come to mind, both of whom mine similar territories in their work. Like Currin and Dingle, Yuskavage celebrates and often deliberately dramatizes the present moment, elevating it and the characters that operate within its confines to a point of near absurdity, yet somehow, these exchanges appear sacred.



Painter Painting

For example, in the painting ***Giant Studio***, (2024) we are shown three separate representations of the *"artist,"* each figure holding an object. The first is the model already painted onto a finished canvas, the second is a young pregnant woman standing opposite, and the third and most enigmatic of these figures shows a woman standing on a table and leaning to her right. She wears what appears to be a maid's uniform and is holding a feather duster. Or is she? The image is blurred and leads us to wonder about the authenticity of each of these women. Do they know they are being looked at with such scrutiny, and if they do, do they care?

The familiar stereotypes of artists having affairs with their models (think of **Camille Claudel** and **Auguste Rodin** or **Victorine Meurent** and **Edouard Manet**), is a phenomenon we have come to accept at face value, often discounting the female "models" completely when in fact many of these young women were creative forces in their own right. In Yuskavage's world, all three of these figures have a definable purpose, if only to be seen to be curious and engaged with the living world around them.



Tea and Cigarettes

Finally, I would argue that these paintings are ultimately surreal in that they suggest an alternate universe where young women are both the purveyors of their own fates as well as the ones making commentary. It's a tough job, but as Yuskavage so eloquently suggests, her women are always up to the task.