

ideas from his well-known figurative paintings, his new works for the first time delve boldly into abstraction. Some of the forms make use of cutouts left over from preceding pieces, but that doesn't explain their forthright energy or judicious interaction.

All of these large-scale abstractions (most from 1996) consist of bolted-together layers of oil-painted aluminum. There are no bases or frames. Usually they project from the wall a foot or less. Unlike Frank Stella's painted-metal sculptures, Wesselmann's are reliefs or sculptural paintings and do not become fully three-dimensional.

Wesselmann confirms his inherent nature as a painter in his commitment to rectangular formats. Slight curves and protrusions at the edges do nothing to destroy the overall effect of ideal rectangles. These metal works are as immediate as painted collage studies. The lavish paint strokes have the control of more modest-scale marks on paper. When Wesselmann uses very small cutouts to connote splatter, there is a satisfying interplay between generous and tiny scale.

In their size and freedom of design, the new works bring to mind the paintings of de Kooning and Kline. The colors can be raucous and jarring. In *The Lake* (94 by 173 by 12½ inches), several lime green elements lie on top of a Kelly green area, while behind that, a thick powder-blue line undulates as though forming a letter. The sensuousness of its curves is reminiscent of the human body, but, given the title, one seems to see a body of water, trees and earth. The large shapes are fre-

quently cropped and seem about to burst out of the rectangular format. In other works, such as *Beauty Brush* (66 by 72 by 10 inches), Wesselmann achieves subtleties of depth by over-painting a shape which echoes a shape physically behind it, giving his forms an illusion of transparency. He allows different colors to show through, which also adds depth.

Hancock (54 by 80 by 9 inches) contains four prominent tongues or flesh-color limbs, which creates a link to Wesselmann's nudes. The textural painting on the dark blue panel behind these, however, seems unnecessary and robs this work of some of its effectiveness. *Hancock*, along with *Blue*, contains a remarkable lozenge shape which is the single most thrilling thing in the exhibition, for it never ceases to breathe. Unlike some of the other shapes, which can seem arbitrary or derived (from Roy Lichtenstein's brushstroke pieces or from Wesselmann's own work), these lozenges have an unaffected power that is accentuated by their existence as discrete cutouts that float in space.

—Vincent Katz

Sal Scarpitta at Tricia Collins • Grand Salon

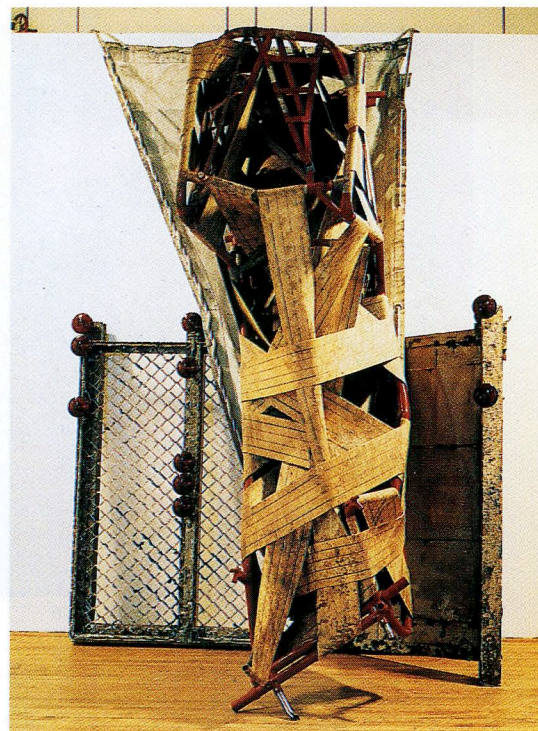
Sal Scarpitta's show of recent work consisted of two sled sculptures, a group of small bronze wall reliefs and some large ink drawings. One older piece, the small 1970 assemblage titled *Tub Leg Elk*, was also on view. All the newer works continue Scarpitta's Promethean theme of man versus the gods of motion

and machine, but any inherent melodrama is undermined by the artist's sense of absurdity and his use of mundane materials.

Sleds, finely crafted to look like archeological or ethnographic artifacts, have long carried Scarpitta's metaphors of human frailty and arrested motion. Often obsessively wrapped in various ways that suggest bandaging, or fitted out with canvas so that they evoke rescue stretchers, the sleds have also incorporated found objects such as army helmets to suggest macho human forms on absurdly slow vehicles. (These contrast nicely with Scarpitta's parallel life as a dirt-track race-car driver. For years he has been racing competitively in a car emblazoned with the name of his sponsor, Leo Castelli Gallery.)

Ice Man Sled (1993) is consistent with the human scale and archaic tone of Scarpitta's evocative earlier sleds. It has no runners but carries a wire-mesh headless torso connected by leather reins to cutout wooden feet: this seated rider is going nowhere. *Sling Shot* (1996), the show's centerpiece, was a larger, jazzier installation. A 10-foot structure made from the frame of a wrecked racing car was twisted into a sledlike shape, upended, and wound with wide dirty-white bands identified in the checklist as industrial slings. The frame leaned against the wall, supported in a canvas hammock, against a backdrop of a wooden race-track barrier and a chain-link fence that was accented with red warning lights. *Sling Shot* integrated Scarpitta's characteristic obsessions and called forth the gut-level empathy of *Ice Man Sled*. It was more singularly sculptural and less theatrical than his installation at Greenberg Wilson Gallery in 1990, the amazing *Race Car on Idaho Potato Track*, a life-size, mud-splattered race car resting ignobly on a pile of potatoes.

Scarpitta's deep affinities with Arte Povera and the Beuysian metaphors of healing and mysticism were evident here, even in the small reliefs, collectively titled *Face Trap Bronzes* (1993-94). For these works, mundane



Sal Scarpitta: *Sling Shot*, 1996, mixed mediums, 10 by 7 by 5 feet; at Tricia Collins • Grand Salon.

objects such as shoes, lasts, shoe trees and boot jacks are often individually wrapped in bandages or tape before being cast in abstract compositions resembling animal heads or tribal masks à la Picasso. They echo the earlier *Tub Leg Elk*, a spare and witty combination of chair and bathtub leg that evokes a poor man's hunting trophy. Art-historical precedents are overshadowed by the consistency of Scarpitta's themes and his knack for combining empathic materials. The delicate imprint of wrappings remaining on the surfaces of the reliefs imparts a tender, personal quality even as the works offer another of his allusions to stopped-in-their-tracks human mortality. One thinks of Pompeii.

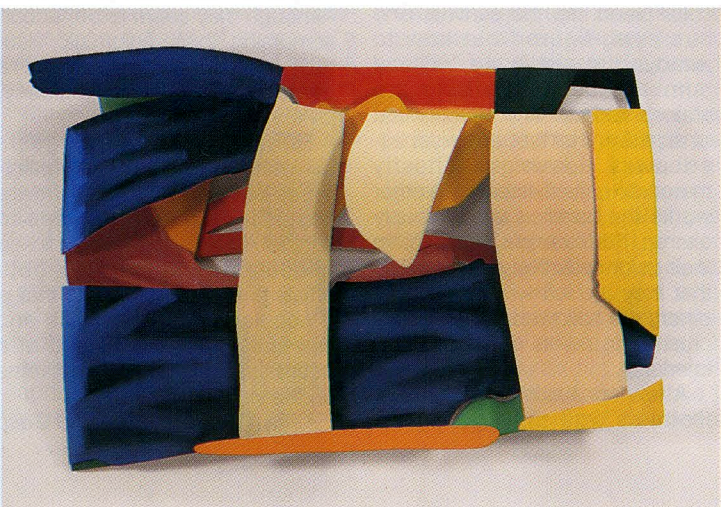
(*Dirt*, a narrative film directed by Greg Schnabel that focuses on Scarpitta's alternative life as a race-car driver, was privately shown at The Screening Room in conjunction with the gallery show. It's apt subtitle is "The race always wins.")

—Ann Wilson Lloyd

Lisa Yuskavage at Boesky & Gallery

Anyone who suspects that the contemporary art world is essentially puerile will relish the career of Lisa Yuskavage. This 34-year-old has had it all—Yale

Tom Wesselmann: *Hancock*, 1994-96, oil on cut-out aluminum, 54 by 80 by 9 inches; at Sidney Janis.





Lisa Yuskavage: *Bad Habits*, 1996, oil on linen, 84 by 72 inches; at Boesky & Gallery.

MFA, representation by good New York galleries, several prestigious fellowships and steady kudos from the critical press. Moreover, she has garnered these rewards by doing just two simple, mildly naughty things: using her exceptional facility to produce knowingly dreadful paintings, and trafficking in exaggerated versions of what she takes to be typical male sexual fantasies.

This show of works from 1996, Yuskavage's third New York solo, was composed of 13 paintings and one cast Hydrocal sculpture incorporating ten 6-inch female figures that served as models for the pictures. The statuettes are all white, while the painted images feature keyed-up flesh tones on kitschy orange, green or blue backgrounds. The figures themselves, nude or partially draped in filmy shifts, have been compared to Barbie, to Kewpie dolls and (by Yuskavage herself) to Keane kids. But in fact, they are much more grotesque. Though these young sexpots often have '50s-style turned-up noses and blonde bangs and flips, they sometimes lack discernible eyes.

Their breasts, if not small and obnoxiously pert, are pendulously overfilled. Their stomachs look bloated; their rear ends protrude geometrically. Pulled high at the shoulders, their arms resemble long sausages—dangling appendages that emphasize an extremely sway-backed posture.

As for what these nice-little-bad-girls do all alone or in small groups, let the titles suffice. The exhibition as a whole was called "Bad Habits," and the individual canvases included *Wee Ass-picker* and *Wee Motherfucker* (an anatomical conundrum). These named actions are, however, generally implicit. Mostly

the nubile tarts just stand there in a timeless pastel limbo, waiting to be looked at.

Much has been made of the supposed complexity of Yuskavage's strategy. Certainly, like Hannah Wilke and Cindy Sherman before her, she critiques yet simultaneously exploits the "wiles" by which women have traditionally negotiated for power. In one interview, she said that she "decided to make paintings that would be the dumbest, most far-out extension of . . . male desire." In another, she admitted that those expectations had been internalized in the form of "shame, guilt, fear, self-loathing, the longing for romance, flowers, a Barbie-doll body, a perfect painting surface and pretty colors."

One would like to accept this artist-as-martyr rationale, were it not for the fact that so many of the works (e.g., *The Feminist's Husband*, depicting a towheaded boy in a dark suit) seem like cheap shots, and certain others (e.g., *Still Life*, focusing on a bowl of flowers in a ghastly blue wash) push "bad painting" to the point where it's truly awful all over again. Rather than satirizing shopping-mall art, Yuskavage's luscious oil technique virtually reproduces it. And, sadly,

unlike Marilyn Monroe's comic characters or Nabokov's *Lolita*, her pouty nymphets really are as callow as they look. —Richard Vine

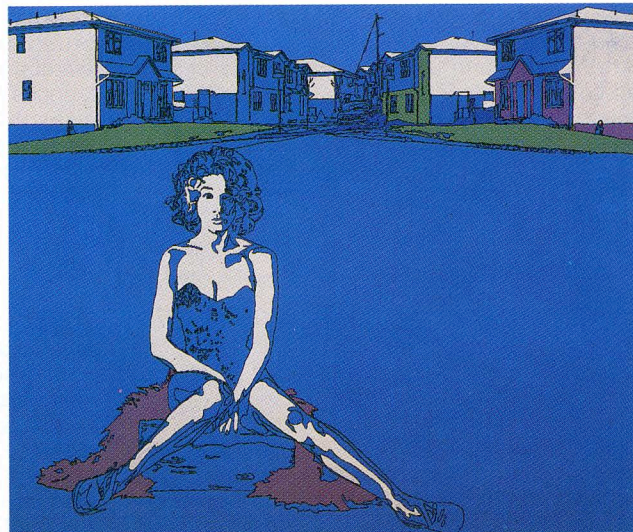
Martha Benzing at Caren Golden

Martha Benzing's work involves soaking, staining and sucking, all of which she does with or to m&m's candy. Yet Benzing goes beyond the obvious pop culture connection by referencing art history in works that imitate the formal qualities of earlier modernist art movements.

On mostly small, variously shaped canvases, she uses m&m's (both plain and peanut versions) and their pigment as her material. Benzing often soaks the candy to remove its pigment and uses it as conventional "paint," occasionally suspending the pigment in wax; or sometimes

fields of color bleeding almost to the edge of the canvas. The irregular pools of pigment in others are reminiscent of Frankenthaler's staining. Works that include the actual candies are particularly enticing. For example, Benzing used the full rainbow of m&m's on a tilted canvas so that the colors ran in Morris Louis-like squiggly streaks. In another, Benzing jumbled m&m's with other edible tidbits, such as a triangular turquoise Vicks cough drop, and coated the entire work with a thick, gloppy layer of resin mixed with sugar to give it a grainy appearance.

A separate group of small works consists of isolated white peanut m&m's (the pigment has been sucked off), each resting on a bed of cotton within a frame. Each egg-shaped candy has a piece of pink clay embedded in the end that resembles a nipple



Lisa Ruyter: *Altar Keane*, 1996, acrylic, permanent marker on canvas, 40 by 48 inches; at One Great Jones.

she places the candies on the picture's surface and lets the color bleed into the canvas. She has even figured out how to remove the applied "m" and sometimes applies it to the stained surface. The effect is that of an m&m that has entirely melted away, leaving a ghostly memento of its existence. In other works the candies are variously altered. For example, some have their color selectively removed so that they are left with polka dots; others are hollowed out or slightly crushed to reveal their chocolate interiors.

A few encaustic works are like Rothkos with their geometric

or tongue. The form is unmistakably, yet abstractly, female. Although they seem to be "about" something, these enigmatic, visually subdued works were overshadowed by their glossy, jovial neighbors.

Benzing's work suggests Minimalist and Color Field paintings, but on a more intimate scale. It also has affinities to Janine Antoni's gnawed or licked chocolate sculptures—both artists employ a substance that is a popular emotional crutch and sex substitute. Yet instead of a neurosis, Benzing's work fixates on the visual.

—Stephanie Cash

Martha Benzing: Installation view, 1996; at Caren Golden.

