

# Bathing Beauty

Artist Lisa Yuskavage livens up the shower curtain.

Photograph by RICHARD PIERCE



Above: Lisa Yuskavage.  
Below: A model with her *Nana* shower curtain.

**W**hen the painter Lisa Yuskavage was a five-year-old growing up in Philadelphia, she was obsessed with, of all things, the shower door in her Italian grandmother's bathroom, which was etched with the image of a naked woman bathing.

"I was completely mesmerized, but it freaked me out," says Yuskavage, now in her early 40s, as she watches her Chihuahuas, Lupe and Lola, race around her downtown New York studio.

"It was the first time I'd seen a nude."

Three years ago the Art Production Fund, a not-for-profit organization that helps artists realize difficult-to-produce works, asked Yuskavage, who is known for her brightly colored, almost cartoonish paintings of voluptuous women, to make a reproducible piece on plastic that the fund could sell to raise money. With her grandmother's bathroom still locked in her memory, she decided to make a shower curtain.

Yuskavage recognizes that the idea of bathroom accessory as art is more than ridiculous. Indeed, every time she uses the words "shower curtain" she emits a cozy giggle. But there's no denying that the piece, which will be produced as a limited edition of 300 and sell for \$1,500, is a far cry from the sort of thing you'd see at Kmart or Bed Bath & Beyond. Titled *Nana*, in homage to both her grandmother and the famously curvy 19th-century Parisian model depicted in Manet's *Nana* (*Study of Henrietta Hauser* 1877), the curtain features a reproduction of *Northview Flowers Falling*, her painting from 2000 of a nude looking out a window. It comes with custom-made rings that echo the colors in the artwork.

As was the case with her grandmother's shower door, Yuskavage's curtain creates the illusion that a naked woman is with you in the tub, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. "I like the idea of someone else watching you shower," she says. "There's an interesting story going on inside and outside."

Though she is amused by a sexy object being put to practical use, the artist doesn't expect many people to actually bathe with her creation. And as for the showers in her studio and her East Village apartment, both have glass doors. "So," she says, "I'm completely screwed." Maybe people will just hang it up, she hopes, or even better, use it in an outdoor shower, so it blows in the wind.

Yuskavage will earn no profit from the sale of the curtains. "That would look weird, like I'm making shower curtains to make money," she says. "I'm not interested in getting into that part of the art world. I'm already pushing the limits of my comfort zone in making this." But, she adds, it would be a nice, erotic touch if a hotel chain decided to copy her idea and put nudes on its shower curtains.

While she's enjoyed the project, which, from soup to nuts took three full years—the rings alone were six months in the making—Yuskavage seems happy to be turning her attention back to canvases. She's currently planning a show of new paintings for next fall at the David Zwirner Gallery. "I'm out of the shower-curtain business now, so don't be calling me about shower curtains," she says. And then, with that last "shower curtain," she bursts out laughing.

—MARSHALL HEYMAN

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