

LISA YUSKAVAGE

MARIANNE BOESKY



Lisa Yuskavage, *Shrugs (detail)*, 1998, oil on linen, 84 x 100".

in the work might have been hewn. Yet all the forms of life intimated by these paintings emit a peculiar, acetylene aura. This is especially so in the clusters of black and bronze dots that help constitute the brackish vertical rectangle on the left side of *Muddy Waters*, 1998. And in front of *Orange*, 1998, one moves from remembering the dismal allure of petroleum slicks in water to a dispassionate apprehension of the reconciliation between the natural and the human domains.

There were three large black-and-white oil paintings in the exhibit that seemed to take on nothing less than the cosmos as their subject. In *Lacemaker*, 1995, swirling clusters of white that recall galaxies stretch a foamy skein over the painting's dark background. In the stark, predominantly black diptych *Rainmaker*, 1995-97, Klauber comes closest to abandoning his signature round drip that in *Rocket Science*, 1995, has become something of an obsession. It's on these canvases that the artist's style, pared down to essentials, becomes somehow vulnerable or awkward, an effect that militates against what can begin in some of the other work to feel like primarily decorative concerns.

Abstraction is a natural painterly language for Klauber, and while one can identify a number of gestural abstractionists as his influences (as B. H. Friedman does in his helpful introduction to the exhibition), these paintings mark out unique artistic terrain. They operate as friendly initiations into the processes, chemical and microscopic, through which life draws itself from the inanimate world. One almost suspects they are growing.

—Tom Breidenbach

If in the '80s, standing in front of one of the *Untitled Film Stills*, you wondered what Cindy Sherman really looked like, today you might be pondering Lisa Yuskavage's cup size. In a 1996 interview with Chuck Close, she teasingly described her cheesecake images of naked ladies: "The impulse toward self-portraiture runs through the work from the beginning all the way to the end." Like many artists who are women, Yuskavage has been playing both the one looked at and the one doing the looking; now, like many women who aren't artists, Yuskavage has distanced herself from critiques of the male gaze, exchanging that reflective discourse for a gut response of female misogyny and internalized anger. This new anti-theoretical underpinning jibes with what I see here—I often suspect self-loathing when I see kitsch recycled in young artists' work. Something we once enjoyed wholeheartedly (big-eyed Keane kids, romantic love) we now admire queasily from a distance. But, however interesting, these issues of subject/object and hi/lo aren't what pushed this show or pulled me in. The real draw was Yuskavage's inventive manipulation of the stroke that synchronizes abstraction and representation.

Yuskavage's new work is her most sophisticated and, excepting digressions into surreal abjection (*Now You Can Dance*, 1998) and Thomas Cole/sci-fi fantasy (*Manifest Destiny*, 1998), her least Freudian to date. The best paintings (and there are several very good ones) want simply and totally to personify themselves. Yuskavage told Chuck Close, "When I think about different types of painting, I automatically anthropomorphize [them] into different types of women." In works like *Loved*, 1998, and *Big Little Laura*, 1997-98, she merges the figure and the painting through mutually empathetic choices of image and style. In the former, a glorious Vargas body emanates from a lush green atmosphere and a profusion of silly, sexy flowers. In the latter, a pubescent Vermeer golden girl is profiled in a raking light against an equally golden surface. Figure and ground share a shallow depth, in which even the "wall" refuses to lie flat; button-tufted, it puffs and tucks like a vinyl banquette.

Not surprisingly, it was a thrill to see this marriage of human figure and pure paint break up in other works. The blond devil-girl in the foreground of *Shrugs*, 1998 (playing Manet's Victorine to the virginal

Velázquez Infanta behind her?), burns hot pink and red, glowing out of a grisaille setting; at her knees, however, the somber tonal coloring abruptly resumes. Suddenly the red seems to separate from the nude flesh, literally becoming a "coat," or in this case pants of paint—either the toreador skin tights of nineteenth-century *espagnolisme* or the capris of summer '98.

Representation and the real rarely sit easily together, especially in modern art. De Kooning, asserting paint over both images and real people, flattened his women, spreading their breasts and knees and other sundry protrusions in an oil slick across the canvas. Yuskavage does the opposite—these breasts are strongly modeled, parodically bodacious, playing social conventions of sexual beauty (roundness) against aesthetic conventions of modernist beauty (flatness). The grotesquely erect nipples threaten to but never quite poke through the canvas into the real world.

Another critic has elegantly described Yuskavage's paintings of women as seeking out the minimal condition for representational work. Finding it, however, they insist on exceeding it—these women aim for maximum picture.

—Katy Siegel

"CONCEPTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE 60'S AND 70'S"

DAVID ZWIRNER

Although Conceptual art was largely an attack on the primacy of the visual, it often took photographic form. What this excellent, if uneven, exhibition of forty-eight works by seventeen artists suggested is that the field of Photoconceptualism included diverse rather than uniform strategies. Many of the pictures, though seemingly ad hoc, function as secondary documents of more transitory, often site-specific or performance work. Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, 1974, and *Etant D'Art pour locataire* (Conical Intersect), 1975, for instance—both of which feature buildings "cut" by the artist with chainsaws and other power tools prior to demolition—act as records of ephemeral events and gestures. Likewise, Hamish Fulton's *Seven coca leaves on the path from Cusco*, 1974, featuring leaves arranged by the artist during one of his signature walks, along with a number of photographs by Richard Long, Hans Haacke, and Vito Acconci from the late '60s and early '70s, capture performances and