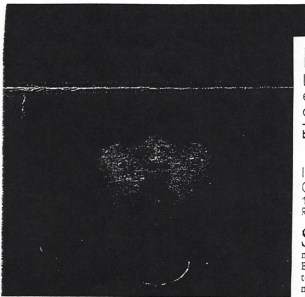


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*The Bad Laura*, Oil on Linen, 55"x 55", 1997.

## BUSTY BABES

Lisa Yuskavage's groundbreaking exhibit at the ICA fuses sensuality and caricature to define womanhood

by Raiha Tep

Institute of  
Contemporary Art  
118 S. 36th Street  
Runs through February 9, 2001

Sunday mornings are meant for viewing Mary Cassatt's mother and daughter stills or Edgar Degas' ballerinas on tiptoe. Sunday mornings are not meant for Lisa Yuskavage's jarring images that border on pornography. Nevertheless, it was a Sunday morning that I entered the Institute of Contemporary Art, where Yuskavage's first solo exhibit is currently on display.

The work of this native Philadelphian and graduate of both the Tyler School of Art and Yale University isn't just something to glide by. A line or an image in one of her shocking paintings can jolt the viewer into 10 minutes of standstill reflection. Her exaggerated caricatures of women and Lolita-esque child-women pose the question of why anyone, especially a woman, would create such images.

Her art is arresting, as is the way it's displayed. There are many standouts, each seemingly with a twist. The prototypical Yuskavage piece could be *Ass Checker*, where a skimpy light

blue dress is lifted to reveal a tanned ass and huge, protruding breasts. Everything else seems peripheral — her big hair and thin arms are treated like mere accessories. *Night*, on display in another room, is *Ass Checker's* aged variation. The same woman, in the same dress and nearly the same pose, now has graying hair. In her portrayal of the aged, Yuskavage makes a statement, albeit an ambiguous one. Either her subject is praised for still reveling in her sensuality or is pitied for not being able to escape sex-kitten imagery.

While *Ass Checker* and *Night* serve to question women's sexuality, *Day* proffers a celebratory answer. A young blond, in flesh-toned polka-dotted panties and a tank top lifted to expose emerging breasts, is peering at her body for what seems like the first time. In the warm orange sunlight, she appears amazed. Perhaps she's doing this on a Sunday morning.

Maybe Lisa Yuskavage revels in the sleepy, peaceful Sunday mornings of the world. But her art screams a wake-up call to examine female sexuality.

*Lisa Yuskavage will visit Meyerson Hall on Tuesday. See Guides for more details.*