

Lisa Yuskavage (b. 1962, Philadelphia) lives and works in New York City. Solo exhibitions include David Zwirner, New York (2006, 2015); Zwirner & Wirth, New York (2006); Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City (2006); Royal Academy of Arts, London (2002); Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2001); and the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2000). Yuskavage's work is housed in numerous museum collections, such as the Art Institute of Chicago; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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Lisa Yuskavage: The Brood was curated by Christopher Bedford, Henry and Lois Foster Director of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, and organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Jeffrey Uslip, Chief Curator.

Related Events

Artist Talk: Lisa Yuskavage

Saturday, January 16, 11:00 am

Free & open to the public

Preeminent New York-based artist Lisa Yuskavage is joined by Chief Curator Jeffrey Uslip for a conversation about her twenty-five-year practice as a figurative painter.

Picturing Women

Tuesday, March 8

Doors: 7:00 pm / Program: 7:30 pm

Free & open to the public

In this presentation by Second Tuesdays, a monthly storytelling event, eight speakers share personal stories exploring feminine identity, sexuality, gender roles, and the body.

Perspective: Artist on Artist

Saturday, April 2, 1:00 pm

\$10; free for members; or subscribe to

Take 5 series at camstl.org/artist

Join St. Louis-based photographer Heather Bennett on a walk through Lisa Yuskavage's exhibition and listen to her perspective on the art.



The Big Pile-Up, 2015. Oil on linen, 84 × 72 inches.
Private Collection, Aspen.



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Lisa Yuskavage:
The Brood

Lisa Yuskavage: The Brood presents twenty-five years of the New York-based artist's work, espousing her bold vision for contemporary figurative painting. *The Brood* is Yuskavage's first solo museum exhibition in the United States in over fifteen years, comprising key paintings that chart her emergence in the early 1990s to the present. Merging the grand tradition of portraiture with the expansive vocabulary of female transgression and empowerment, Yuskavage's sensuous palette and confrontational subject matter provoke the imagination and create a sometimes polarizing space: the artist presents the female body as a site of defiance and decadence.

The Brood is not so much a comprehensive survey as it is a thorough account of Yuskavage's development and identity as an artist, presenting her signature paintings in three compositional formats: diptychs, triptychs, and what the artist calls "symbiotic portraits." While the first two categories conventionally describe artworks in two and three parts, the third—symbiotic portraits—refers to single-panel paintings that feature multiple figures, often elaborately intertwined. This overarching structure allows viewers to focus on relationships between panels, figures, and the works and their own bodies. *The Brood* positions Yuskavage as one of the most significant painters of her generation and presents a cogent argument for figuration's importance, promise, and renewed agency.

Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

January 15–
April 3, 2016



Brood, 2005–06. Oil on linen, 79 ¾ × 70 × 2 ½ inches.
Collection of Jeffrey A. Altman.



Audio Tour
Visit camstlaudio.org or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artist and curator on the audio tour.

Model Woman

Lisa Yuskavage spoke with Katy Siegel, professor of art history and chief curator of the galleries at Hunter College and curator at large at the Rose Art Museum, for the catalog *Lisa Yuskavage: The Brood, Paintings 1991–2015* (Skira Rizzoli, 2015). The following is an excerpt from their conversation.

Katy Siegel: There is a sense of submission and aggression in the viewer’s relationship to your paintings. You’ve spoken about realizing you were letting painting be on top, and that you were being submissive to it.

Lisa Yuskavage: It’s very easy in a studio to get overwhelmed by all the things you could possibly do, or should do, or the things you’re responsible for. You get to a point where you have to be stronger than those noisy currents. It comes down to flipping the dynamic. One of the most effective paintbrushes is one’s willfulness.

KS: How have other artists responded to your work?

LY: When I showed the *Bad Babies* in 1993, it wasn’t resoundingly positive, although some were very positive and sought me out when I didn’t show again for a while.

KS: Like whom?

LY: Laurie Simmons, who was a complete stranger to me at the time, very sweetly wrote me a postcard that said, “I saw that show. What happened to you? I look forward to seeing more.” Chuck Close and Cindy Sherman, too. Interestingly, it was artists who emerged in the 1980s.



Day, 1999–2000. Oil on linen, 77 × 62 inches. Private collection.

Their generosity taught me that artists are another artist’s most vital ally. And Chuck was the first to tell me that one of the problems people will have with my work is not the sex but the vulgarity, which is still culturally unacceptable for women artists.

KS: Did you think those positive responses came from an older generation that maybe didn’t feel competitive with you?

LY: My guess is that they could just see that my work was weird and worth supporting. In some ways, I was in step with the identity politics that ruled the art of those times, but I also didn’t fit in either. Back in the early 1990s, I remember naively thinking that I was in trouble because I wasn’t in the *Bad Girls* show . . .

KS: Which one? There were six.

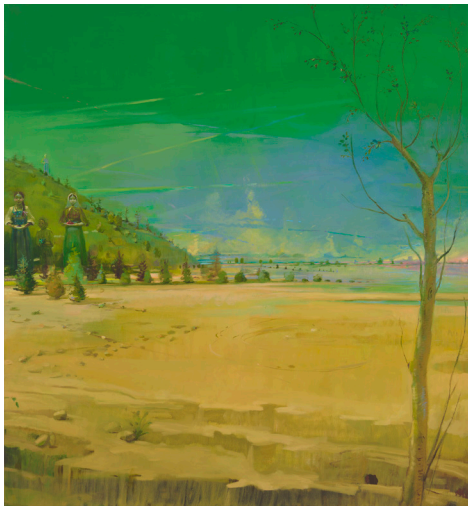
LY: The one at the New Museum, organized by Marcia Tucker. Marcia and I became close friends, but she was not tuned into my work in time for that show.

KS: You’re often talked about as a member of the gang of “bad girl” painters. Aside from not being on Marcia’s radar, why weren’t you ever grouped with those other women?

LY: I was listening to an interview with the writer Isabel Wilkerson about how she chooses what she reads in the hope that it will change her opinions. She posited a fascinating idea, “confirmation bias,” that people favor information that confirms their preconceptions, regardless of facts. My work did not neatly fit a preconception of what a heterosexual female should be making in 1992. I actually overheard a young woman looking at a painting of mine say, rather angrily, “She *better* be gay!”



Night, 1999–2000. Oil on linen, 77 × 62 inches. Private collection.



Triptych, 2010–11. Oil on linen, 77 ¼ × 210 ¾ × 1 ½ inches overall. Collection of Liz and Eric Lefkofsky.

KS: The question of being a woman and how that situates one socially and psychologically is so basic to your work. It’s clear that you belong to that moment when artists were asking those questions. That sense of social type and generality, playing with it and questioning it, got gradually more specific through the 1990s. I think you first announce it in *Blonde Brunette and Redhead*. You’re an enormously abstract thinker for someone who doesn’t want to say that she is a conceptual painter.

LY: More synthetic than conceptual.

KS: It’s abstract in the sense that it’s structural thinking—seeing the types and categories, rendering them as characters, as archetypes. The women are archetypes, too: blonde, brunette, and redhead. It was such a central tenet for the Pictures Generation to point out the images we see and their deep conventionality.

LY: Once you understand conventions, you can start playing with them.

KS: What’s unusual about your work is that you developed an interest in the conventions of how things are made.

LY: Yes, pictorial conventions, and then upending them, are quite important to me. That’s the reason I moved on from that early work and began making the maquettes and working from *Penthouse*.

KS: The ability to move back and forth between being the person who’s looking and being the person who’s looked at seems very active in your work, especially in the *Penthouse* images.

LY: On a YouTube video related to the opening of one of my exhibitions, some troll wrote: “Well she *clearly*”—and I like the word “clearly” in this context—“desperately wants to be the women in her paintings, but can’t.”

Those *Penthouse* chicks—I remember looking at them as a girl, thinking, “If that’s a woman, then what the fuck am I?”

KS: Going back to the kind of representation you saw when you were young, and figuring out the typology and its conventions, is really important.

LY: I took the images that had stunned me the most as a kid—or stung me the most, or made me hot in the face. I decided to create my own images based on those pictures and pose my own models.

KS: But it wasn’t just any model; it was the model, “model” in the sense of being the original, the most essential.

LY: Yes. That’s when I thought that if I was going to work from a live model, it should be Kathy.

KS: As opposed to a regular model, an artist’s model, you chose your first blonde, your “ur-blonde” archetype.

LY: Kathy was one of my first childhood friends. She was the foxiest girl in school and a cheerleader, a seemingly lighthearted person who was actually extremely complex. I was the dorky studious one, as a type—I would help with school work and she would help procure the boys. A perfect gal pal symbiosis. Years later, I thought that if I was going to have a living person pose for me, it would have to be someone profoundly integral to my imagination. Every part of her image was very loaded as material for me.

KS: She doesn’t feel inert in those paintings. She feels powerful, potent—as if she’s collaborating.

LY: Well, yes. It takes a lot of psychological strength to lift something out of the gutter . . . these may be dumb ideas until they’re not.