

# NEW ART EXAMINER

## LISA YUSKAVAGE

### BOESKY & CALLERY

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Lisa Yuskavage's paintings of young female nudes dwell in an onanistic trance unbroken by the luster of their surfaces. The figures engage in a simultaneously active and passive auto-eroticism, as both initiator and recipient. Empowered by their self-absorption, they are, nonetheless, thwarted in the satisfaction of their own pleasure, creating an endless loop of desire and frustration.

Painted from sculpted hydrocal models, the small oil studies and full-scale canvases depict figures with fanciful hairstyles and exaggerated body parts. Enormous bottoms and spindly arms are commonplace. In this exhibition, called "Bad Habits," works bear titles like *Asspicker* and *Wee Foodeater*, identifying the obsessive cycle of self-loathing, self-love, desire, and failure that accompanies the figures' bodily functions. In *Foodeating Hardplace*, a woman's tongue lolls towards her nipple, which strains against gravity to accommodate her wish. A truncated arm rests upon her sizable hip, unable to help. A painterly relish for detail—such as the garish rainbow colors that highlight folds of flesh and a swollen yellow eye—mocks her

efforts toward satiation with spectacular effect.

Bad habits can offer refuge to those whose desires threaten both themselves and others. They allow their practitioners the safety of weakness and protection through incapacitation. There is pathos in bad habits, but here that pathos is leavened with scorn. The subject of *Motherfucking Rock* has hair so stiff it juts out from her face like a rock formation. The shape is echoed negatively in another painting, subtracted from the face of the squinting schoolboy of *Feminist's Husband*, a visual warning that beauty's empty promise extracts its pound of flesh.

Yuskavage resists sentiment to the point of contempt. She appears to despise her subjects despite her labor in service to them. With cool appraisal, she documents the appetites and compulsions of the untrammelled female id. While her paintings are cruel, their shifting view of desire is real. Contributing the gooey aesthetics of an adolescent girl and the complexity of female self-regard to a traditionally male art-historical canon, these works use the seductiveness of paint to entice. For Yuskavage, painting itself culminates in the fulfillment of desire. Those looking must find their own relief from fantasies too scary to submit to and too persistent to ignore.

ELISABETH CONDON



LISA YUSKAVAGE

*Foodeating Hardplace*, 1996. Oil on linen, 42" x 36."  
Courtesy of Boesky & Callery Fine Arts.