

For immediate release

LISA YUSKAVAGE

April 23 – June 13, 2015

Opening reception: Thursday, April 23, 6 – 8 PM

Press preview with the artist: 9:30 AM



Hippies, 2013
Oil on linen
82 ¼ x 66 ½ inches (208.9 x 168.9 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of recent paintings and pastels by Lisa Yuskavage, on view at 533 West 19th Street in New York.

Yuskavage's works merge popular culture and a deep engagement with the history of art. Widely associated with a re-emergence of the figurative in contemporary painting, she has always maintained the primacy of color, with her narratives intricately based in her use of paint. In this new selection of works, atonal and prismatic spectrums appear as personifications of themselves, and her characters become like embodiments of various tones.

The exhibition takes its conceptual and chronological point of departure in *Hippies*, a painting from 2013 of five intersecting nudes. Behind a pale woman, four male figures fan out from her on either side, almost like a Hindu deity, each a different hue. The rainbow-like effect is reminiscent of the *cangiantismo* technique advanced in the Renaissance, in which tonal variations were used to indicate the presence of the supernatural in otherwise realistic subject matter. The effect is achieved against a muted, neutral background—here a dark landscape—where *grisaille*, an almost monochrome color scheme, is applied.

The unification of the five figures has an otherworldly feel, as if they are manifestations of the same character. Yet, rather than representing a bold

shift within Yuskavage's practice, this merging of male and female reinforces the complexities inherent within her previous, all female cast, where a straightforward understanding of the woman as the object of a male gaze was complicated by her simultaneous role as the aggressor.

Leading on from *Hippies*, a group of three-quarter portraits expands the dual, contrasting use of *cangiantismo* and *grisaille*, each work imagining its male or female figure through spectral color and its gray contrast. Yuskavage has referred to them as incubi and succubi—folkloric demons who exist to seduce—and their provocative appearances seem permeated with a sense of the ethereal. *Dude Looks Like Jesus* continues the subcultural theme introduced in *Hippies*, and is based on one of the characters behind the female lead. The artist presents the nude against a silvery background whose emptiness contrasts with his empathetic, saddened expression. The classic pose coupled with the invocations to Christianity recall the art-historical genre of the nude, which for centuries was shrouded as religious subject matter. In particular, the composition forms a visual parallel to Albrecht Dürer's unprecedented *Self-portrait in the Nude* (c. 1509), as well as to his imitation of Christ in another self-portrait from 1500.

Another painting from the series, *Dude of Sorrows*, depicts a similar male figure looking straight at the viewer with one eye seemingly swollen from a brawl. Likewise aggrieved, his visible tongue recalls the dichotomy in Yuskavage's work between viewer and painting, rendering it unclear in the present case who threw the first punch. As such, he forms the male counterpart to several earlier compositions by Yuskavage, including *Pie Face* (2007), in which a girl's portrait is humiliated by the slapstick element. Commenting on the particular relationship between the seer and the seen, the artist has noted that "The painting

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[is] vulnerable and then manipulative.”¹ *Dude of Sorrows* posits its protagonist in front of, and emerging out of, a *grisaille* background, and Yuskavage has further commented that she was inspired equally by Jasper Johns's painting *Diver* from 1962 and Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels* from c. 1450 for her use of this achromatic palette.

Characterized by its expansive color field approach and cinematic scope, the large diptych *Bonfire* presents two seated women against a dimmed, green background, perhaps identical twins offering a Rorschach-like mirror of one another. Behind them, hundreds of people await their turn to participate in a mysterious and seemingly violent act, while a veiled figure recalls the artist's *Triptych* from 2010, where babushka-wearing peasants occupied a stern contrast to the overt display of nudity. Executed in a similarly green palette, *In the Park* depicts a nude girl whose posture appears at once fearful and aggressive, and vies with the dramatic lighting for unlocking a narrative, which seems to hover between the subconscious and the conscious. Additionally, there are two paintings of couples whose narrative interactions are described by the way formal elements unfold to reveal tenderness, tensions, and playfulness.

The exhibition also debuts a series of large-scale pastels by Yuskavage, including three-quarter and full-body portraits of some of the figures featured in the paintings. The pastels introduce a new technique developed by the artist in which she draws onto unique inkjet grounds created in the studio containing gradations of color. She has additionally used scans of details from unfinished drawings as material support, where the resulting graininess—and by implication, the history of her own work—inform the backgrounds. In *Lovers*, which depicts an intimate meeting of a male and female character, the same tones are used for bodies and background, which together with the tinted surface affords a rich and textured depth to the subjects. A portrait of a reclining female, *Peekaboo*, provides a visual metaphor for the almost meditative layering of color on the paper, with the woman partially covered in light sheets.

Born in 1962 in Philadelphia, **Lisa Yuskavage** received her B.F.A. from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, in 1984 and her M.F.A. from the Yale University School of Art in 1986.

Since 2005, the artist's work has been represented by David Zwirner. In 2006, two solo exhibitions were concurrently presented at David Zwirner and Zwirner & Wirth, New York, followed by presentations at the gallery in 2009 and 2011. The present exhibition marks her fourth solo show at David Zwirner, New York.

Lisa Yuskavage: The Brood, a major solo exhibition spanning twenty-five years of the artist's work, will be on view at The Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts (September 12 – December 13, 2015). The exhibition will be accompanied by a large-scale, comprehensive publication by Skira Rizzoli, created in close collaboration with Yuskavage. Included will be texts by renowned art historians, curators, and writers including Christopher Bedford, Suzanne Hudson, Catherine Lord, and Siddhartha Mukherjee, as well as an interview with the artist by Katy Siegel.

Yuskavage's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions worldwide, including The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (organized as part of the Dublin Contemporary 2011); 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).

Museum collections which hold works by the artist include The Art Institute of Chicago; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Yuskavage lives and works in New York.

¹ Lisa Yuskavage, cited in interview with Katy Siegel, *Lisa Yuskavage: The Brood* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2015; forthcoming).