

“I don’t differentiate between male and female artists,” says Lisa Yuskavage, who dove into the eye of *that* storm with her first retrospective at the Institute Of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia last year. Yuskavage’s large, meticulously painted canvases caused a sensation because her chosen subject matter is nude or semi-nude women with cartoonishly enormous breasts, big eyes and glowing golden skin. How would her paintings be received if she were male? She chooses not to dwell on that.

Think ’70s *Penthouse* layouts through the eyes of an old master and you get Yuskavage’s work. She’s a Philly native in her thirties living in New York, a so-called ‘bad girl’ of the art world. But she wants you to look at the paint itself, not just the subject matter, because “any other way doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. It’s a painting, not an agitprop.”

The oils are seductive in their own right; she is a deft painter, sometimes labouring for months on a canvas. The formal qualities entice the viewer just as much as the blonde lifting her shirt to look at her breasts, as if for the first time. Perhaps she can’t believe how big they are either.

The work seems uniquely American to this American. Too big! Too much! Too fast! But it’s not. The slow craft of Yuskavage’s technique shows in strokes and colour and light. She plies the same craft in watercolour, too, having exhibited five large pieces at Milan’s Studio Guenzani in October.

As influences she cites “most of the 15th century Italians and the 18th and 19th century French painters. The colour in Impressionism and in the followers of the Cennini method [the orthodox technique of tempera and fresco painting in

medieval and renaissance Italy] are related visually by means of ‘colouring up’, with the brightest colour in the darks. I’m also influenced by the mood in the novels of James Joyce, the stories of Kafka, and the films of Fassbinder and Polanski, et cetera, et cetera.”

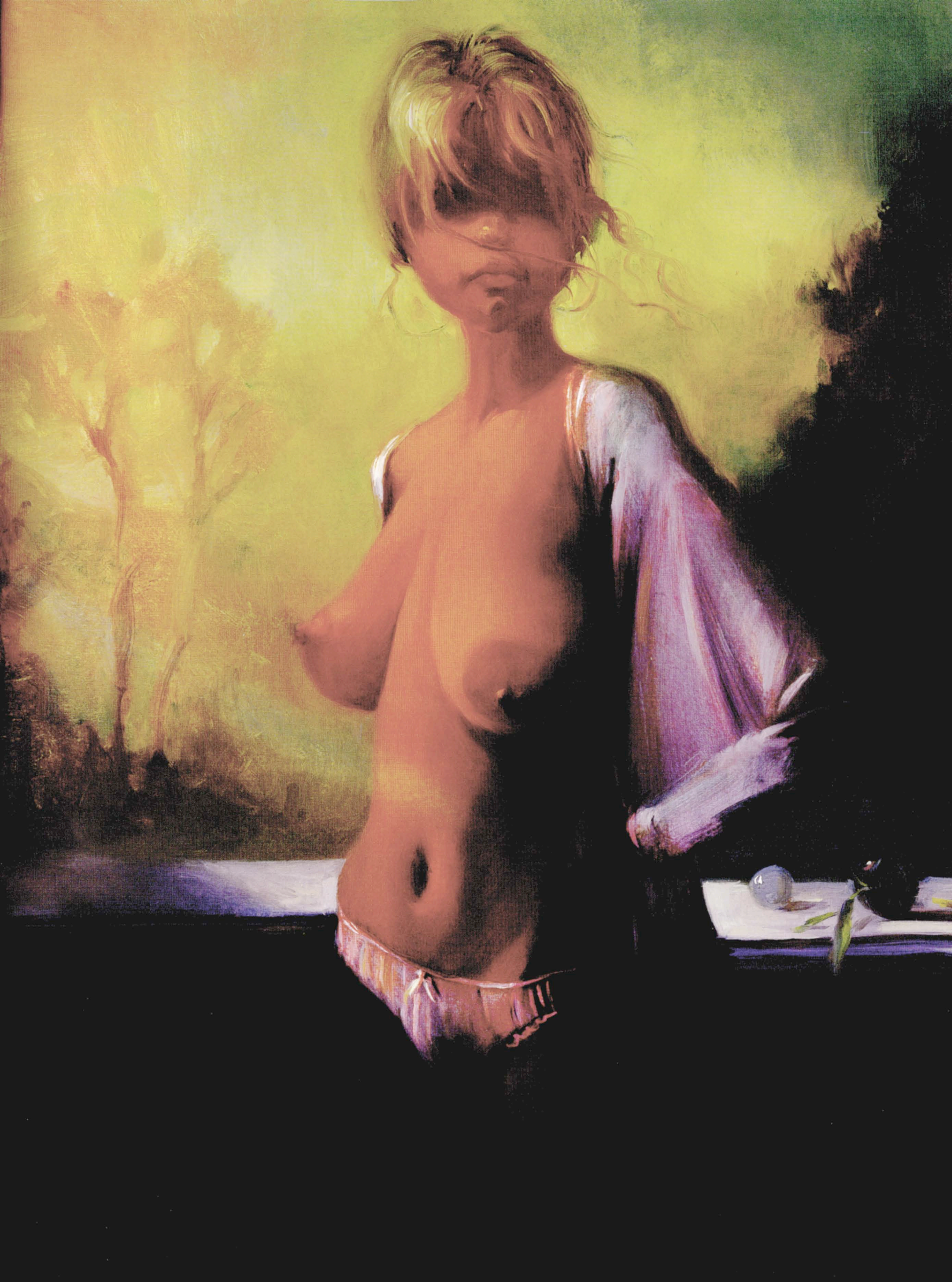
That mood is the allure of reverie – and in that daydream is *True Blonde* (1999), with her sad face, one stocking and erotic pose, playing with herself or covering up? And the reverie passes to the beholder: who hasn’t wanted to fuck – or to be – a big-titted, blue-eyed blonde bimbo? At least for five seconds? Yuskavage’s women show us the female psyche as well as the female body. They are vulnerable and, if you want them to, they want you.

Images courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. www.marianneboeskygallery.com



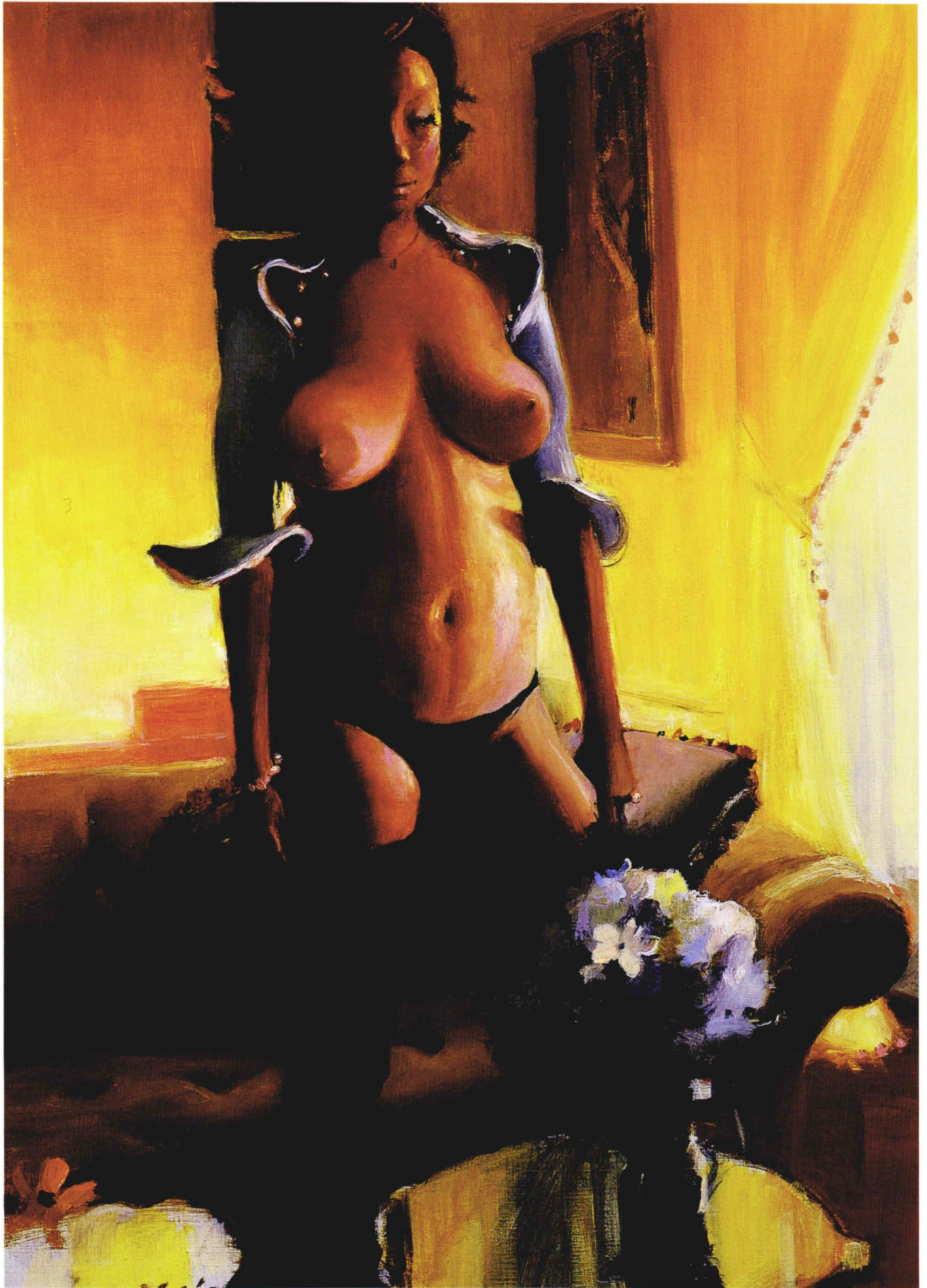
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Big canvas es, big breasts, big talent. The paintings of Lisa Yuskavage are well endowed to the point of kitsch.





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