

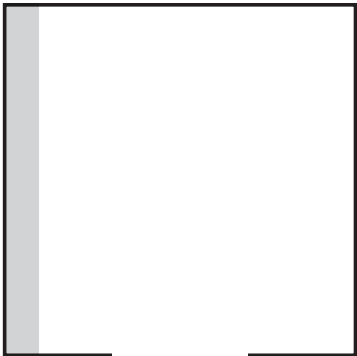
# Lisa Yuskavage *Drawings*

JUNE 27, 2025 TO JANUARY 4, 2026

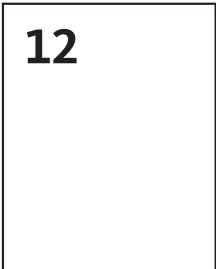
LARGE PRINT LABELS

The  
Morgan  
Library &  
Museum

East  
Wall



Entrance



## TIT HEAVEN

In the early 1990s, shortly after moving to New York, Yuskavage took a job teaching watercolor to continuing education students at Cooper Union, despite never having seriously engaged with the medium before. To prepare, she began assiduously studying Charles Le Clair's primer *The Art of Watercolor*. The resulting series, *Tit Heaven*, features invented landscapes originally intended as demonstrations for students, in which soft-focus, rounded breasts and bellies appear amid cascading foliage and fruit.

Writing about *Tit Heaven* in *Artforum* in 1993, Barry Schwabsky opined that the works depict “a squishy, infantile wallowing in polymorphously perverse gratifications.” The series, he said, is “more about touching and being touched” than “about seeing and being seen.” Put differently, these watercolors evoke a state that precedes our entrance into socialization and the self-awareness that it brings. They are utterly unselfconscious. “It’s like a blissed-out union of François Boucher and Walt Disney,” Schwabsky stated, referencing the French Rococo painter.

**1     *Love Scene*, 1993**

**Watercolor**

**The Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann Collection**

**2     *Tit Heaven #28*, 1993**

**Watercolor**

**Private collection**

**3     *Tit Heaven #8*, 1992**

**Watercolor on paper stretched over wood support**

**Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg**

**4     *Rapture #2*, 1993**

**Watercolor**

**Private collection**

## BAD BABIES

Yuskavage is most often associated with the works she calls *Bad Babies*. These provocative renderings of seminude girls have prompted accusations of misogyny and garnered her the label “bad feminist.” Whereas her *Tit Heaven* watercolors, which she made around the same time, envelop the viewer in a sensual reverie, the *Bad Babies* force us to confront emotions, desires, and social realities that we might prefer did not exist.

Yuskavage has hypothesized that what makes people so uneasy in front of her work is its frank trafficking in shame and vulgarity. With their feathered hair and cheap, pearl-button blouses, Yuskavage’s girls, while fictional, are distinctly working-class, like those with whom the artist grew up in North Philadelphia. And, just as we are uncomfortable looking at them, they also appear awkward in being forced into view, as they gaze out and down with apprehensive, seal-black eyes. In the early 1990s, reflecting on how gender entered her work, Yuskavage asserted, “I want to expose a specific state of mind that is female. . . . It’s an extreme state of vertigo—the fear, not of falling, but the knowledge that you want to fall.”

The drawings shown here are torn from sketchbooks and are purposely unrefined—attempts by Yuskavage to summon a “gut instinct” before making a painting.

**5     Sketch for *Bad Babies*, 1990**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**6     Untitled (sketchbook drawing), 1990**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**7     *Bad Baby 1*, 1991**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**8     *Bad Baby 2*, 1990**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

## DYSFUNCTIONAL DANCER

A student of Renaissance color theory, Yuskavage has been lauded for the way she uses color to direct the viewer's attention. "The color is the subject's aura and the subject's aura is, in turn, the subject of the painting," the curator Christopher Bedford has observed. Acid green is one of Yuskavage's preferred colors for its ability to suggest both the familiar and the otherworldly.

In *Dysfunctional Dancer*, a softer green pastel caresses the figure while propelling her into the foreground. Paradoxically, it is both the means of her escape and the vehicle of her exposure. For Yuskavage, color allows for a kind of transcendence, with light and luminosity granting her vulnerable protagonists a sense of grace.

### 9 *Dysfunctional Dancer*, 1994

Pastel

Private collection

## CUATRO

In the early 2000s, Yuskavage became fascinated by how her friends' bodies began to resemble the watercolors she had been making ten years earlier. Comparing this drawing with the *Tit Heaven* series makes clear that the evolution of Yuskavage's work is far from linear. Here, the fantastical elements found in the watercolors are incorporated into a very real situation.

### **10 Sketch for *Heart*, 1996**

**Graphite**

**Collection of Ashton Alexander and John Kline**

### **11 Sketchbook page for *Blonde Brunette and Redhead*, 1995**

**Collage, graphite, oil, and watercolor**

**Force Villareal Collection**

### **12 *Cuatro*, 2003**

**Conté crayon on vellum**

**Force Villareal Collection**

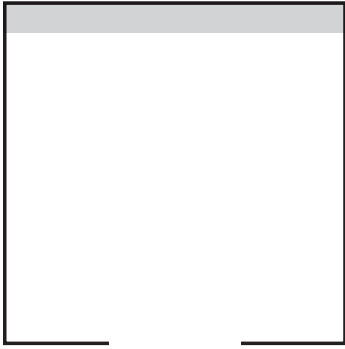


## BAD HABITS

In 1995 Yuskavage embarked on *Bad Habits*, a series inspired by Italian Renaissance artist Tintoretto, who made wax figures to understand how better to compose and illuminate complicated scenes. At the same time, Yuskavage began to ask: What is a model? What does it mean to draw from life? She took an experimental approach to these questions, thinking about the German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945–1982) and his tendency to cast the same actors across multiple films. Choosing a figure from a painting, she sculpted it along with some companions, and then redrew it. She arranged—then continually rearranged—her figures into groups, allowing herself to discover infinite possibilities.

From there, she began asking people, often friends, to be her models. She bought costumes and dressed them up. And she paid attention to her materials: how watercolor on porous paper produces an entirely different experience of physicality than, for instance, pencil on smooth paper. In mono-prints and watercolor, distemper and gouache, she explored the variations in form that different implements yielded.

**South Wall**



**Entrance**

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## MODELS

Following *Bad Habits*, Yuskavage spent several years closely studying live models, often working with people she had grown up with, or with newer acquaintances who reminded her of her prior imagined figures. Her process moved in and out of fiction—for instance, when a European peasant shirt showed up in a painting, she bought a similar one and redrew it; or a model sparked her interest because they resembled a *Bad Habits* character. For *Biting the Red Thing*, Yuskavage hired a model who she thought people would mistake for her. She was starting to find a way to include herself in her work.

Regardless of the project, Yuskavage has allowed her materials to be her guide. There is something about the wateriness of blue gouache, for example, that she associates with the realm of fiction, whereas the precision of pencil on paper demands a greater adherence to life.

### **13   *Big Shrink*, 1997**

**Pastel**

**Collection of Debbie Landau**

**14 *All's I Got Are Big Boobs*, 1996**

**Pastel**

**Collection of Marianne Boesky**

**15 *Bad Habits Facing West*, 2000**

**Gouache on black paper**

**Collection of Bill Contente**

**16 *Motherfucker 3*, 1996**

**Pastel**

**Private collection**

**17 *Foodeater*, 1999**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**18 *Still Life Wearing a Wig*, 1999**

**Watercolor**

**Collection of Daphna and Ariel Bentata**

**19 *Asschecker*, 1999**

**Gouache and graphite**

**Private collection**

**20 *Nude #4 (Sick Clown)*, 1998**

**Charcoal with pastel heightening**

**Collection of David Maupin, courtesy of Lehmann Maupin**

**21 *Northview (kk with weird monkey sculpture)*, 2000**

**Ink**

**Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg**

**22 *Talia Posing*, 2001**

**Distemper on cardboard**

**Private Collection**

**23 *Leg*, 2002**

**Conté crayon on prepared paper**

**Private collection**

**24 *Lauren Sleeping*, 2011**

**Walnut ink and gouache with pastel**

**Private collection**

**25 Study for *True Blonde at Home*, 1999**

**Pencil on Mylar, mounted on paper**

**The Morgan Library & Museum, gift of Teiger Foundation  
in honor of David Teiger; 2025.41**

**26 *Kathy and Elizabeth #1*, 1998**

**Monotype**

**Collection of Nina L. Collins**

**27 *Biting the Red Thing*, 2004**

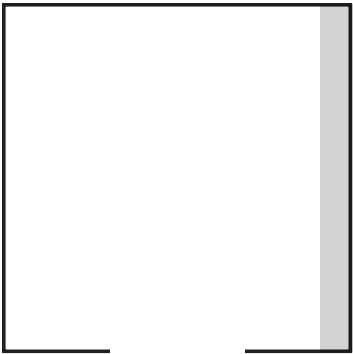
**Watercolor and graphite**

**Collection of Ricki Conway**

**28 *Drag*, 2007**

**Charcoal, graphite, and pastel**

**Collection David and Monica Zwirner**



**West  
Wall**

**Entrance**

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## SYNTHETIC WORK

In recent years Yuskavage has expanded her focus, adopting a synthetic approach that explores latent possibilities in her earlier work. Single-figure scenes have given way to multigure compositions set in more complex environments, including a series of postapocalyptic landscapes that she began around 2010. Although the characters in these works are frequently imposing—like the monumental duo in *Piggyback Ride*—a feeling of vulnerability persists, as they often find themselves in precarious situations. As with *Bad Babies*, the viewer asks: What are these figures doing here? Why are they stranded in this space? “Being an empath is one of the most important parts of Yuskavage’s artistic practice,” explained the critic Jarrett Earnest. Here, grief and tenderness, isolation and care commingle as the soft gray and pink pastels lovingly envelop the figures.



**29 *Piggyback*, 2006**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**30 *Piggyback Ride*, 2009**

**Charcoal and pastel**

**Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, New York,  
courtesy of the FLAG Art Foundation**

# HIPPIES

This pastel reflects Yuskavage's interest in Italian Renaissance painter Jacopo Pontormo and his use of color to foreground specific characters and moods. Like with the *Bad Habits* series, she here presents a proliferation of selves. "I like multiplicity," explains Yuskavage, "because it means there's an endless array of possible characters inside us that . . . all can interact, and we are aware of them and they play their given role."

In *Hippies*, does this gathering of selves portend a societal disintegration or herald a glorious integrated future? For the artist, these possibilities go hand in hand: "I was really interested in the idea of raising something up out of a kind of darkness."

**31 *Hippies*, 2013**

**Pastel on toned paper**

**Private collection**

## STUDIO DRAWINGS

Around 2019 Yuskavage directed her attention to another classic art historical genre: the artist's studio. She refers to this body of work as a *sacra conversazione*, or holy conversation, with fellow artists; her images are filled with references to the studios of artists she admires as well as to her earlier work, including objects used in her compositions (teacups and flowerpots) and older paintings and drawings propped against easels and tacked to the walls. And yet this series is no less fictional than any of her others. In *Studio Study* one of the artist's characteristic buxom blondes—the model for this work is the same as the one for the rider in *Piggyback Ride* (2009)—faces off against a bust of Cubist painter Georges Braque (1882–1963), who appears to have materialized out of one of the many canvases and settled atop a ladder. The blonde protagonist is as out of place in this environment as the phantom head—indeed, more so. But, according to Yuskavage, this character is here and must be reckoned with. She has shoved her way into this hallowed place, much like the artist herself.

**32 Study for *Wilderness*, 2009**

**Charcoal**

**Private collection**

**33 *Wee Outliers I*, 2012**

**Drypoint and monoprint with pastel pencil touches**

**Private collection**

**34 Study for *Snowman*, 2007**

**Pastel on toned paper**

**Private collection**

**35 *Wee Outliers III*, 2012**

**Drypoint and monoprint**

**Private collection**

**36 *Lolipop*, 2009**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**37 *Art Students*, 2017**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**38 Study for *boschmademedoit*, 2023**

**Graphite**

**Private collection**

**39 *Studio Study*, 2020**

**Graphite on vellum**

**Private collection**

***Iridescent Studio*, 2025**

**Pastel and ink**

**Private collection**

***Neon Sunset*, 2013**

**Monoprint with hand additions in pastel, mounted  
on aluminum**

**Private collection**



*Asspicking, Foodeating, Headshrinking, Social Climbing, Motherfucking Bad Habits*, 1996. Cast hydrocal with artificial pearls and artificial flowers. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner.