



Lisa Ruyter: *I Am a Camera 4*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 59 by 71 inches; at Team.

Lisa Ruyter at Team

For “*I Am a Camera*,” her first New York solo exhibition in nearly four years, Lisa Ruyter returned to Team, a gallery she co-founded with owner Jose Freire a decade ago. Departing from the scenes that previously occupied her—alcoholic parties, high fashion, suburban vistas or, in a 2001 outing, cemeteries—she here turned her focus on herself in a group of self-portraits (all works 2006). The show and each of the paintings were named for a passage in Christopher Isherwood’s 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin*: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.” Most of the works are close-up views of the artist staring intently out at the viewer; a tight focus on her androgynous, un-pretty face and body, and the paintings’ large sizes, ranging from 5 to 7 feet high, amplify the force of the encounter.

For some years Ruyter’s photo-based paintings have been marked by bright and arbitrary colors frequently described as toxic or corrosive. These hues have often combined with stark black outlining to give the canvases the look of paint-by-numbers projects gone horribly wrong. By contrast, here the palette is reduced to 11 shades of gray, and the black outlines have vanished. Highlights and shadows are reduced to simplified blobs

that flatten the forms rather than indicating modeling in space.

In *I Am a Camera 4*, Ruyter’s frowning, down-turned face appears in dark gray shadow; coupled with spiny hair sporting highlights like barbed wire or tiny explosions, the look radiates menace. In *I Am a Camera 6*, her eyes are cropped away, and her lips are parted; her wrists are crossed, hands resting on bare shoulders, her neck ornamented with a glittering necklace. *I Am a Camera 9* finds Ruyter, shown from midriff to forehead, nude, hugging herself, topless, with one nipple exposed. While this might in another context suggest sensuality, her blank stare and the cool blue-gray palette work to defuse any sexual charge.

Other pieces, too, adopt the standard poses of celebrities and models, as though what the titular “camera” is recording here are stock images of women, which Ruyter bleeds of color and eroticism. At times the images have a softer, more introspective or playful effect, such as in *I Am a Camera 3*, where her chin rests in a gloved hand covering her mouth as if to hide a stifled laugh. But these are the exceptions to a largely darker mood.

In *I Am a Camera 8*, the show’s largest painting at 79 by 189 inches, the artist has employed a mirror to double her image; varying hair and wardrobe shades give the appearance of twinned

figures in a symmetrical pose, gesturing mysteriously with arms outstretched against a leafy backdrop. The mirroring conceit in particular belies the way Ruyter has, now playfully, now critically, circumvented the limits of being a passive, unthinking camera.

—Brian Boucher