

LINDSAY McCRUM

'WHEN YOU CREATE SOMETHING AND IT'S ALL YOURS, IT DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER THAN THAT.'

ARTIST AS MODEL



MIXED MEDIA
Not surprisingly, this painter has developed a personal style as definite as her artistic vision. Left: Turtleneck, Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, \$360. McCrum's skirt and smock. Right: Beaded argyle-pattern cashmere vest, Valentino Night, \$4,595. Jeans and turtleneck are hers. All jewelry, Bulgari. For details and stores, see Shopping Guide.

Forget about a husband—I need a wife," declares Lindsay McCrum. This may come as a blow to those men who noticed McCrum listed in a magazine recently as one of the most eligible women in the country, but for the time being, gentlemen callers will have to be satisfied with her answering machine. The 29-year-old painter has an agenda.

McCrum has been serious about art since her teens, when she commuted from Connecticut to New York for a program at Parsons School of Design that gave college credit to high-school students. One summer she made animated films, one summer she taught art to kids with learning disabilities, one summer she studied with a master printer. Then came Yale, where she was Scholar of the House. "They chose 12 students from the entire university," she explains, "and senior year was devoted to independent study. Some people wrote novels, some people did research in molecular biology, and since I was a painter, I became essentially a graduate student at the Yale School of Art."

After graduation (*magna cum laude*, gobbling up most of the prizes there were to be had at Yale, and a designation of Exceptional Distinction) McCrum escaped to the farm of her 89-year-old friend, Catherine Christy, to paint, and when she arrived in New York three years ago she set about the starving artist's time-honored process of getting her paintings shown and her name known. "First, to save wear and tear on your feet, you call up the galleries and say, 'Are you looking at any new artists' work?' 'No, no, no, no, no.' Sometimes they say yes, and then they look at your slides. When you're starting off, you just want to get your work out there. There's a great piece of sage advice offered to new artists that goes, 'If you're given a show in a shit house, you take it.'"

Last year she had four shows: an invitational at Yale, a drawing exhibit, a group show in the East Village, and her first one-woman show on Madison Avenue, where the fans included Mayor Ed Koch. "I hate hearing, 'You're so lucky,'" says McCrum. "It's kind of funny: The people who are 'lucky' usually turn out to be those who work seven days a week, from six in the morning till nine at night. For every acceptance there are usually 20 rejections. You have to be persistent and believe enough in your

BY AIMEE LEE BALL



SIGNATURE STYLE
McCrum's own
T and leggings
worn with the
smoking jacket,
Saint Laurent
Rive Gauche,
\$1,390. Moiré
loafers, Maraolo,
\$90. Jewelry,
Bulgari. For de-
tails and stores,
see Shopping
Guide. Hair,
Trevor Bowden
for Clive Summers.

faces

vision to stick with it when times get grim. One of the real fallacies about creative people is that they rely largely on inspired moments. It has more to do with discipline and tenacity than anything else."

McCrum's "vision" relies heavily on mythology and Christianity but stretches all the way to comic books—a juxtaposition of ancient landscapes and figures with modern, often whimsical images—and her paintings are given irreverent titles like "Barbie's Dinner Party" or "John and Luke on the Go." "I've had a classical training," she says. "I have a great love of art history, and for me it's a continual source of inspiration. It's nothing new—there's a whole tradition of masters learning from masters. Picasso supposedly said, 'Good artists imitate; great artists steal.' So many young artists are trying to do something new and they say, 'I don't want to look at other work because I don't want to be influenced.' *Nothing's* new. If you have a full command of your craft, it doesn't hinder self-expression. Down the road it's increased tenfold."

McCrum deplors what she calls an incredible emphasis on youth in the art world today—

"all these kids who are frustrated and discouraged if they haven't had a one-man show at a major museum by the age of 30. Art isn't about that." Her own sense of competition comes from within, not without. "I never envy anybody," she swears. "You know how you meet certain people and think, Oh, God, they've got it all: They're smart, they're talented, they've got scratch. But things are never what they appear to be, ever. I'm always fascinated by people's indicators, what you see and then what *is*—completely incongruous, completely different. People rely so heavily on the indicators to assess character. And sometimes they're not even out in left field, they're in the bleachers scarfing the chili." This is true of McCrum herself: With her extraordinary good looks—somewhere between Grace Kelly and Jessica Lange—she is often misjudged. "I'm always puzzled when people say, 'Oh, and she can talk too?' Do unattractive people have a monopoly on intelligence and talent or on the capacity to work hard?"

These days she works out of a SoHo studio—where the room dividers are plastic shower curtains from the five-and-ten—preparing for two shows in June, at Books & Co. and the DeRempich Gallery. (Asked about her business acumen, she chortles, "With a name like McCrum? Are you crazy? I have a friend who calls me the Thrifty Scotsman.") She does have an apartment, but she admits to being "sort of halfway civilized. I'm very neat," she says. "It's just that there are still boxes." She has not yet been introduced to her kitchen. "I'm a domestic nightmare. In fact, I once blew up an electric oven."

McCrum greets the popular notion of the artist as a tortured soul with a very unladylike laugh. "That is what I affectionately refer to as the van Gogh myth. Chances are van Gogh, regardless of his profession, would have had a rough go of it." But with deadlines, commissions, and exhibitions pressing on her, she concedes, "By the end of the day I really am going barking mad, and I get into my Katy Gibbs moods, where I say, 'I have no talent, I stink, I'm going to Katy Gibbs to become a secretary.' My friends start howling and say, 'You'd just get fired,' which only makes me more despondent. With any creative person, the worst part of the package is the self-doubt. It *is* excruciating. But when it's going well, when you create something and it's all yours, it doesn't get any better than that." □