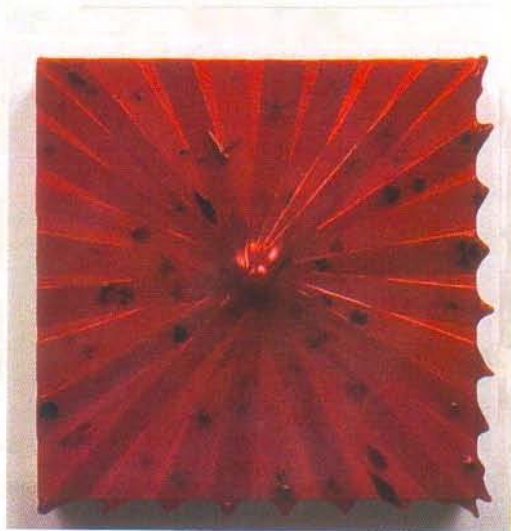


Art in America

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Linda Stark: *Cherry Amber Rotation*, 2005, oil, flora and fauna on canvas over panel, 13 inches square; at Angles.

SANTA MONICA

Linda Stark at Angles

In "Oracles, Pyramids and Rotations," Linda Stark continued to show the kind of highly iconic, small-scale relief paintings she has been known for since the late '90s. Now she's added tantric kitties, crones, snakes, tattoos, pyramids and flora and fauna to her repertoire (all works 2005). Given her tendency to materially simulate what's being depicted in meticulous, tiny, palette-knifed ridges of thick paint, obsessive layers of repetitive brushwork, and controlled ribbon upon ribbon of transparent pigment, the medium might

actually be the message.

Taking their colors and titles from semi-precious materials like lapis lazuli and amber, the four "Pyramids" are centralized triangular forms set within paint-sculpted gold squares. The paintings flip-flop between illusions of aerial views, complete with lightning bolts and clouds, and microscopic surface enlargements of veined minerals. A hypnotic energy created by wavy wrinkles of paint emanates from the mandala-like triangular forms.

Stark is fascinated by the way nature, life and culture appear to mimic each other. *Black Widow Society*, with its swirling spiral of varied red hourglass shapes embedded in glossy black paint, does a meditative riff on gender, seduction, erotics and pure visuality. The sublimely goofy *Spectacled Cobra* is a cartoonish replica of the funny face pattern on the back of a viper's head, which disarms and entrances its intended victim. This snake's brown speckles, actual indentations within a painstaking buildup of paint, force the image to ritually shift from surface to depth and from figure to abstraction, suggesting that painting, too, often relies on elaborate strategies of deception. Humorously, these pieces seem to assert that art, like these carnivorous creatures, must continuously, paradoxically, "kill off" its own traditions in order to be renewed.

The most affecting work in the exhibition was *Cherry Amber Rotation*, created by laboriously building up translucent stripes of red paint arranged like the spokes of a wheel. A mountainlike nipple rises at the center, while the paint trails off in a waterfall of congealed drips at the bottom and right edges.

Within this rosy, frozen bog lie minute leaves, insects, flowers and seedpods that, in tandem with the paint itself, offer a witty repartee about painting's eternal relationship to nature. In the face of perennial pronouncements about the death of painting, Stark, like Scheherazade, spins dazzling tales that seem to assure that its end will never come.

—Constance Mallinson