

Urbanature – Linda Stark and Nancy Evans

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New Representations of the Natural

A six part serial essay and online exhibition focused on the contemporary depiction of landscape in the painting, photographic and sculptural arts.

LINDA STARK

Large urban parks are where most city dwellers go to “experience nature”, but [Linda Stark’s](#) series of *Black Widow* paintings inspired by the presence of black widows around her urban studio, reveal a more intimate, near erotic, encounter with the natural world. The spider’s trademark red hourglass shape has been enlarged, centrally placed, and rendered in red paint as though embossed, then surrounded with a textured skin-like black background. The shape has multiple references, she explains, “ from a shapely woman in a red dress to the ancient pagan symbol of balance and the equinox” but an identification of the feminine with nature is axiomatic. Stark’s painting method is laborious, as she drips, builds up and layers paint incrementally over an extended time, very much like natural geological processes. That simulation of natural processes using paint and the tiny flora and fauna collected from her immediate vicinity was the impetus for her *Amber Rotations*. The resinous varnishes in painting mediums seemed much like the tree sap that when fossilized, creates amber. Mixing various hued oil paints with medium, pouring layer after layer while embedding tiny plant forms and insects in the layers, eventually produced a painted equivalent of actual amber. Here, thick ribbons of paint radiate from a central “nipple” created from twisting and heaping the ends of the paint strips which at the other ends, congeal into fine points extending over several edges of the canvas. A sense of the both the micro and macro cosmic prevails, with references to sunrays and celestial formations as well as a spider’s perfectly designed web for ensnaring prey. Nature as substance is fully present so that rather than mere images of nature, subject and object are mutually constitutive undermining entrenched nature/culture dualities. Recalling John Fowles’ statement that “*Art and nature are siblings*”, hers is a celebration and alignment of the very human act of making objects—that which comprises a civilization—with the smallest creatures around us. Eschewing the sort of labeling, naming and scientific classification that has always determined the use potential of every being in the natural environment , discarding that deemed worthless to the human scheme, Stark recognizes the most minute forms of life in our ecosystem. Her refusal to see nature as disconnected and alienated from our existence transgresses the grand progressive narratives of modernism and advocates a more inclusive path.

