

AROUND THE GALLERIES

By DAVID PAGEL
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Taking viewers out on a limb

Linda Stark's new works are a little less Pop — and a little more folk — than anything she has made since she started exhibiting in 1990. The change makes sense for the L.A. artist's craft-inspired, labor-intensive work. Even better, it takes viewers out on a limb, where all ambitious contemporary art gets us in spite of our better judgment.

At Angles Gallery, "Potion Paintings and Drawings" consists of eight exquisite diptychs. Each pairs a 9-inch-square canvas with a page-size sheet of paper.

The canvases are abstract icons. Each is covered with Stark's trademark: diagonally interwoven rivulets of oil paint that she pours — neatly, methodically, patiently — to make variously translucent veils of color. Stark sometimes turns the canvas as the paint runs across it, causing the stream to change direction. This creates a knobby, bellybutton-style protrusion in the center of the panel.

That's not all that interrupts the smooth surfaces of her works. Embedded in the paint are flowers, herbs and seeds, crystals, gems, trinkets, leaves, feathers and spices, not to mention bugs, roots and seashells.

These ingredients have the presence of ancient organisms trapped and preserved in resin. Stark has arranged them to complement the visual spin set up by her pinwheel compositions, suggesting abstract whirlpools or stylized tornadoes.

The drawings consist of precise maps of the paintings, with keys that identify and locate — in elegant, razor-sharp script and gracefully curved lines — the 13



Angles Gallery

EXOTIC: "Egyptian Love Spell" is paint over a moth.

to 15 ingredients in each piece. Under the title "Passion Potion," Stark has listed its elements: Tibetan quartz crystal, red rose, patchouli, myrtle, Madagascar ruby, chile pod, bloodroot, two cloves entwined, four-leaf clover, dragon's blood resin, three red flowers, quartz crystal and nine drops of seduction oil.

"Egyptian Love Spell" is the most exotic, its mix of red, yellow and blue paint flowing over a sphinx moth, a scarab, some myrrh and 10 other things. Along with an emerald, a mint bloom and chunk of peridot, "Leprechaun Gold Formula" includes several souvenir gold nuggets to match its green and gold palette.

Stark's painted and drawn diptychs take image-and-text Conceptualism away from its roots in strict rationality and toward more permissive poetry — a realm shot through with belief, hope and yearning along with the desire for life-changing transformations. That has been art's province for a lot longer than Stark has been making it, and it's just the remedy for troubled times.

Angles Gallery, 2230 Main St., Santa Monica, (310) 396-5019, through Nov. 24. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.anglesgallery.com.

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