

Art review: Linda Stark 'Adorned Paintings' at Angles Gallery

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Linda Stark's paintings are not carved in stone. But they might as well be.

At Angles Gallery, the 10 paintings Stark has made over the last five years are as decisive as ancient icons that have been incrementally chipped, scratched and scraped into existence, every millimeter of their surfaces an anonymous record of total devotion and singular purpose. Likewise, each of Stark's intensely distilled oils on canvas has the presence of a talisman from a lost civilization, its mysteriousness all the more charged for being a rare remnant of a time and place that has vanished and is on the verge of being forgotten forever.

Even more haunting is the sense that the civilization Stark's paintings memorialize is ours. To look at her quietly harrowing works is to see the present from the future, long after our cherished ideals and humanistic impulses have died.

That's a fantasy. And a dark one. But its reality is embodied in Stark's one-of-a-kind works, which turn easy-to-read images (a belly button, a woman's crotch, the palm of a hand) and familiar symbols (a peace sign, a valentine, a swastika) into enigmatic emblems.

You do not read Stark's paintings, like signs or texts. The undulating contours of their slow-built surfaces transform abstract depictions into flesh-and-blood experiences — nothing more and nothing less than face-to-face confrontations between our best and worst selves.

-- David Pagel

Angles Gallery, 2754 La Cienega Blvd., (310) 396-5019, through Dec. 23. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.anglesgallery.com.

Image: Detail of Linda Stark's "Stigmata" Credit: Brian Forrest, courtesy of Angles Gallery