



Linda Stark: *Untitled*, 1992, oil on canvas, 20 by 10 inches; at Cirrus. (Review on p. 142.)

## Linda Stark at Cirrus

In her third solo exhibition, Linda Stark has mobilized a formally innovative painterly vocabulary and image bank. Her paintings, displaying an impeccable, against-the-grain facture, confront the viewer with quiet obstinacy. With their modest scale (none range much over one square foot) they appear as hermetic asides of private allusion, numinous and tantalizing.

Two untitled oils (both 1993) are composed of horizontal striations that grow denser from the

paintings' edges toward their centers; one is a magma-hued red, the other a penumbral gray. Their delicate furrows resemble lunar rills or the topography of the ocean floor. *Attraction Device* (1993) compels the eye, through a raised spiral on an entirely gray field, to locate the design in the circulation of the paint itself, while its ashen pallor works to thwart that inducement.

The majority of works in this exhibition—the “weave” paintings—show Stark impressively coalescing a number of formal and symbolic concerns. In *Crimson Weave* (1992), variegated tints of red appear to be woven in bands, in a witty inversion of the handicraft-fine-art hierarchy. *White Weave* (1992) is a lambent piece that whitens from a café au lait tone to snow. *Variegated Green Weave* (1992) has bands that vary from olive through viridian and form a dense verdure. With *Black Blood Weave* (1992) the gloves are off, so to speak: the sheer visual force of this coagulated tartan makes for a grisly beauty. At the bottom of all these works, overlapping waves of paint trail off the support, serving as evidence of working process.

Elsewhere Stark deploys oils to achieve near-sculptural effects. By dragging the paint away from the support, she creates jagged rows of stalactite forms, then she slathers it back into an emphatic froth. In an untitled vertical work of 1992, a lurid red tassel shape floats on a ground of curdled, peach-colored oil and then spills off its end. Though certainly abstract, it somehow brings to mind the decisive violence of Artemisia Gentileschi's *Death of Holofernes*. *Abstract* (1993) seems to take quite literally de Kooning's famous statement, “flesh was the reason why oil painting was invented”: on a peach ground, two roseate nipple forms jut out, twin protrusions on a landscape of “flesh.” This painting achieves the rather unusual state of humorous eroticism.

In all of these paintings Stark sets abstraction at the liminal moment when associations begin to tumble forth. The works attain a sort of hard-won sublime, as the labors that brought them into being give them a well-made, tensile enchantment. Just when painting seems tapped out, it is reassuring that

such an able handler of the medium has arrived on the scene. —Michael Anderson