

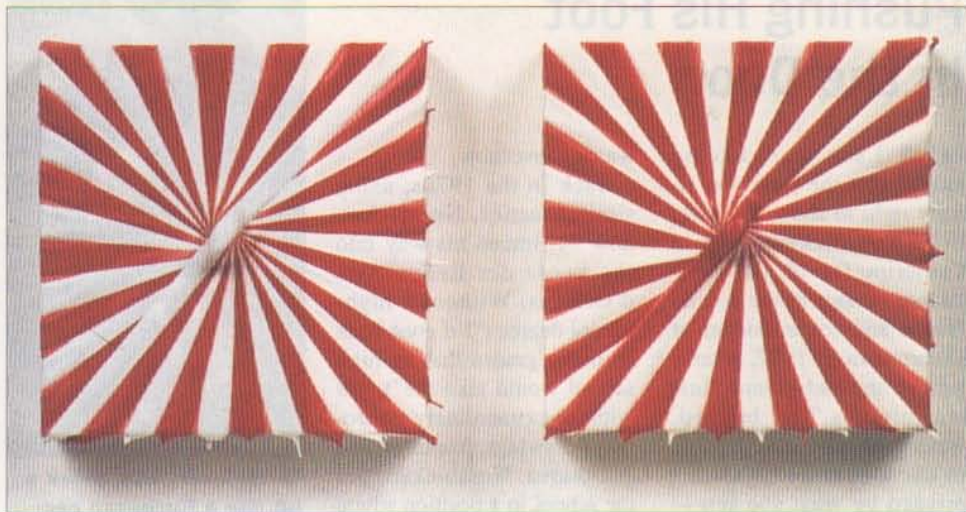
Linda Stark Visual Gymnastics

ATWATER, CA Linda Stark is delighted with her recent move from the bleak wastes of downtown Los Angeles to a tiny house and garage-studio on a quiet back street in suburban Atwater. It suits her meditative temperament. A competitive gymnast for ten years, Stark remains lithe and agile at 38, and her art reflects her early passion. Disciplined, spare, and perfectly in balance, her paintings come in high-energy, economical packages, which for the most part do not exceed twelve inches square.

"They're anti-scale," explains Stark. "The risk is that you'll end up doing small, precious paintings, so I work hard to avoid that." Of her slow rise to recent success—she had a sellout solo exhibition earlier this year at Jack Shainman in New York—she says simply that she is "grateful to have been allowed to develop in obscurity. My whole life has been about delayed gratification."

At first sight, her paintings have the appearance of patterned abstractions—spirals, weaves, and candy-striped rotations. Stark works with thick blobs of oil paint that she controls by a patient tipping and rotating of the canvas, sometimes for hours on end. "Like gymnastics," she says, "it's a mind-over-body process."

But her quasi-geometric surfaces are countered by the paint's less predictable behavior at the edges, where it tapers off into jagged spurs or congeals into "skirts" of pure, sensuous color. And her palette often has female asso-



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ciations—from flesh pinks that gather into erect and gently humorous "nipples" to flowing menstrual reds. "If it's not literal," Stark says, "it's symbolic." She points to a rich purple rotation that, she says, "is about a love that goes over the top. But then," she adds laughing, "when other people look at it, they see grape."

Influential to her work has been the sensuous texture and "flavors" of Wayne Thiebaud, a presence at the University of California, Davis, where she studied in the late 1970s, though she never took a class with him. Stark also cites the conceptual severity of Tony DeLap at the University of California, Irvine, where she completed an MFA in 1985, and the reductive intensity of John McLaughlin, whose work she saw day and night

Disciplined, spare, and perfectly in balance, Linda Stark's patterned abstractions, such as *Peppermint Rotation* (above) and *Variegated Green Weave*, both 1993, come in high-energy, economical packages. Most do not exceed 12 inches square.



COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN, NY (2)

when she worked as a security guard at Newport Harbor Art Museum. She is frank, as well, about the more mundane influences: the drip paintings were inspired by observing storm drains along the Los Angeles river; the weaves by the wooden herringbone floor at a law firm where she was the troubleshooter for the computerized telephone system.

Perhaps the deepest influence is her birthright. As a twin—her brother is a Tokyo-based musician and composer—Stark is keenly aware of the dualities in her paintings. Even in work habits, she reverses day and night: "If it were possible," she says, regretting the intrusions of business, "I'd go to bed at dawn and wake at sunset."

PETER CLOTHIER