

GALLERIES

Downtown

A Language of Symbols: In a statement for her first Los Angeles solo show, **Linda Stark** says her oil paintings are "a way of translating my life experience into an abstract symbolic language." The symbols, sparingly meted out to each painting, are spirals, ovals, curving triangles and hybrid forms vaguely suggestive of such things as anatomical organs and botanical imagery. Among the more idiosyncratic images are a pair of sperm-like creatures ("Angel"), an eye surrounded by rippling water ("In Memory") and a flaring form attached to a reductive penis-like shape ("Blonde").

Trying to create personalized abstract forms is a daunting business, even with the help of art history, psychology and the rich field of pop culture. The seriousness of Stark's effort is evident, yet the images are asked to deliver more meaning than their sweet little shapes can bear. Contrasting matte and glossy areas of paint and using postmodern color combos of gray, black, peach and turquoise, she sets up such a self-conscious absorption in the design aspect of her work that the content begins to seem secondary. The very small, square paintings seem the best format for her imagery. Each one becomes one "letter" in an alphabet of forms, an opaque little riddle that needn't pretend to unlock the doors of perception. (Cirrus Gallery, 542 S. Alameda St., to March 13.)

—C.C.