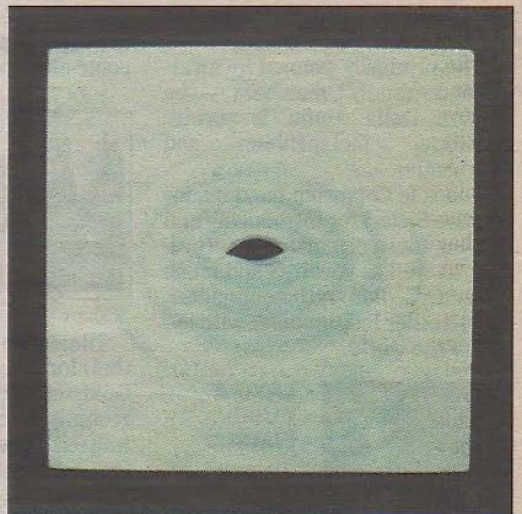


Silver That Girl, 1998. Oil on panel.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Blue Ribbon, 1995. Oil on canvas on panel.

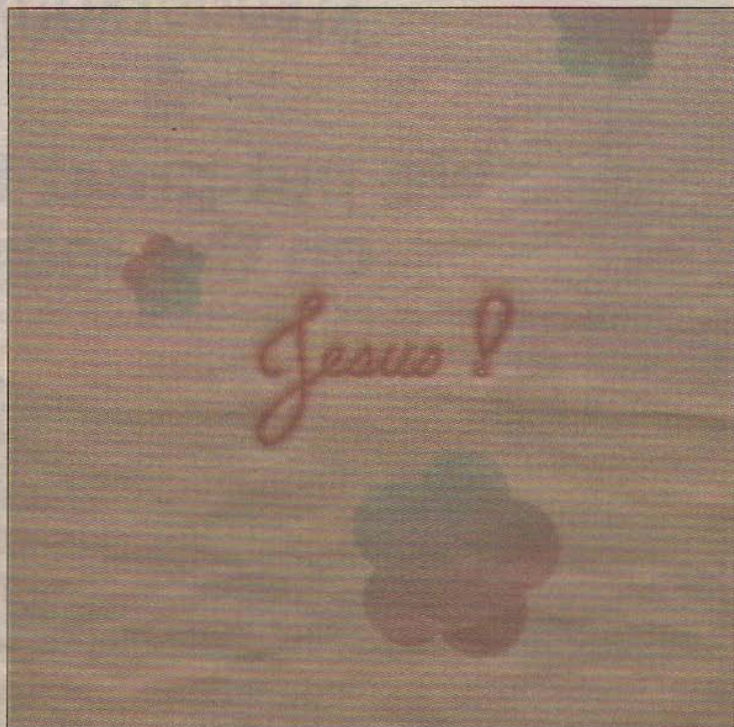


In Memory, 1998. Oil on canvas.

ART REVIEW

Darkly sexy abstraction

LOS ANGELES ARTIST PROVIDES MINIMALISM FOR THE REST OF US



Jesus!, 1999. Oil on canvas on panel.

By Josef Woodard
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Minimalist art can be dry business, intent as it is on bashing the old order, the old narrative and expressive tactics and stripping back to some bare essentials. It can be ascetic and resistant to sensuality, but not always. Los Angeles-based artist Linda Stark's highly personalized mode of Minimalist

arrives with a wink and a tickle, and works on many levels at once.

As we find in her exhibition currently filling the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum galleries, Stark can be both true to her surname, spiritually curious, and also sensuous on first impression—clever on the surface, deeper as you look. Look, there's a reference to Marlo Thomas' hairdo. There are recurring canvases with ruby

lipstick red paint and stereotypical Caucasian flesh tone slathered up to over-flowing on the canvas. Paint is forced to behave in unusual, almost sculptural ways, made to imitate woven fabric and tarry build-up.

Her paintings are luscious yet somehow highly disciplined, restrained in palette and form. She's like a bad apple of Minimalism, eyeballing the dark side of painting. And there is also the plainly abstract level posing the time-honored question, "Is all painting inherently abstract?"

As suggested in a statement, Stark's work deals with thematic elements of "love, death, and desire," in ways both explicit and imaginatively submerged into the act of painting. Surface effects are

LINDA STARK: RUNAWAY LOVE

When: Through Oct. 27

Where: Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, upstairs in the Paseo Nuevo mall

Gallery hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

Information: 966-5373

ART / Page 14 ►

◀ ART / Page 12

important in her small, condensed paintings covering a period between 1988 and 2000, 37 of which are threaded throughout all the galleries in the space.

In her "Weave" series, woven bands of paint fastidiously imitate textile art, except for the goopy excess of paint which extends off the bottom, a touch of self-acknowledgment by the painter.

The "Rotation" series suggests bunched-up fabric with a mound of tension in the direct center. Spirals and circular effects and allusions to mandalas and moebius strips pop up in several works. "In Memory" is centered by a black eye-shaped void, with ripples radiating in circles around it, as if in some blue fluid representing the life force

swirling around life and death.

In the comic relief department, Marlo Thomas has her day in "Silver That Girl," a silver shaped canvas mimicking the actress' famous flip coiffure in TV's "That Girl." A different kind of kitsch is addressed in "Jesus!," with the familiar written in bright red against a textured flesh-colored sky and candy-colored clouds, a wry twist on the balance of mortality and divinity in Christian ideology.

A piece called "Black Cross" consist of thick, tarry black swipes of pigment, a startling contrast to the warm, mock-cheery colors filling other paintings in the exhibition. But we're forced to realize that it's all part of Stark's aesthetic scheme. She is feeding us subversive little pellets of sensual delight, which begin to immediately induce

queasy suspicion even as we gaze.

In the back gallery is another disarming little number, not nearly as jolly as one first suspects. "Blue Ribbon" finds more of that ultra-black goop intruding upon and gushing from the center of a "pretty" blue clover form. The neatnik design and pale beauty of the blue portion of the painting has its purity spoiled by the black sludge oozing out of the center and congealing into unseemly icicles hanging off the bottom of the canvas.

A wonderful, probing artist with a quiet demeanor, Stark is as much interested in ugly stuff—decay, corruption of the senses, gender stereotypes—as she is in the coyly deployed, warm fuzzy stuff on the surface of her paintings. One is reliant on the other, by her beguiling, circular logic. ■