



Linda Stark

at CIRRUS, 11 May–15 June

The fulsomeness of Linda Stark's small paintings is not derived from the imagery she employs as much as from the plasticity of oil paint made repugnant. In many works, she drags the paint off the canvas, creating jagged rows of stalactite forms, and then slathers it back on until the surface is an emunctory froth. Her palette is not for the squeamish; there's a preference for lurid red and the sort of "flesh" color one associates with Barbie dolls.

Matched to this frenetic sadism of paint application is the depiction of precise, emblematic body parts, which raises the works from being mere curiosities to fetishistic placards. Thus the untitled black canvas with two peach colored spirals bear spermatazoic "tendrils" which whirl symmetrically inward at each other. They are the whorls of fingerprints—ineluctable markers of identity. Stark plays with such isomorphisms throughout her work. Another painting has two horrifically red streams of paint that fall like drapery from circular "wounds" that can be construed as stigmata or the tassels of a striptease performer. The same is true of *Coat of Arms*, which displays a golden silhouette of fe-

Linda Stark
Untitled, 1991
Oil on canvas
10" x 10"

issues.

Art

male ovaries on a red ground of coagulated, spiked paint. It is sweetly perverse that a woman's reproductive glands serve as a sign of armorial heraldry, underscoring the two-sided mechanism that operates everywhere in Stark's chosen iconography. While the result is not "feminist" per se, it reveals the ideological fissures that run through the representation of gender.

Stark well orchestrates the disembodied aspect of her imagery as multifarious allusions to myth and sexuality which leave the viewer to fret on a plane of ambiguity. For example, a pair of lips are painted in skin tone against a field of lipstick red in a neat color reversal, appearing like a hovering succubus. This oracular mouth's sole pronouncement is the sensuality of its own form. Likewise, a painting with silhouetted eye-forms gush blue paint down over a blue ground; a cartoon profusion of lachrymal excess, it pushes the tragicomic past mere reference to a blinded Oedipus and into an absurdist fountain of sorrow. The medial surface, with its crude identification of tears with the color blue, carries anatomy into narrative.

Where Stark pursues more formal encounters, such as in *Thought Form*, with its Gary Stephan-like flat template design, or in an untitled pea-soup green painting that looks like a prop left over from *The Exorcist*, the results are mixed. Generic monochrome squares with built-up facture are a commonplace of abstraction. These paintings fail to embody the humor and near-Pop sensibility of the others. Stark, however, is an able handler of the medium, and conveys without overt moralizing themes of defilement, abjection and their relation to the feminine.

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