

LINDA STARK at Jack Shainman Gallery through April 13th
Los Angeles artist Linda Stark creates small, intimate works — highly labor intensive and a bit misleading. At first glance, Stark's paintings seem sweet, delicate, "pretty to look at" due to their scale and beautiful colors. In this series, fleshy peaches and electric reds dominate, the combination of which is certainly breathtaking. A raised red Christmas tree, entitled *Marry Me at Xmas, 1995-96*, initially appears to sum this show up - obvious, nostalgic.

But subtlety is clearly Stark's strong suit, along with painstaking technical precision. The layering of these canvases can often

take an entire year, as Stark controls drips, allows drying, and builds up again.

Beneath the "surface" of these paintings lurk highly-charged psychological and sexual inferences. Often aligned with current women painters possessing a "feminine sensibility," Stark tip-toes her way into bold statements and declarations. This is feminine imagery with a bite.

The star of the exhibition, in this regard, is *South Wind, 1995-96*. Two hot pink nipples stand erect in the center of the canvas, with a five-pronged electric red flame burning at the bottom. Whether it signifies a hand, pubic hair, or simply the flame of female sexuality, the image elicits a laugh from the viewer while at the same time causes discomfort. *Angel Baby, 1995-96*, also in peach and red, works aesthetically and symbolically simultaneously. An homage to Nicole Brown Simpson, the red drips of paint become blood, and the mauvish areas become bruised flesh. In *Forget-Me-Not, 1995-96*, the peach canvas, full of crevices, hills and valleys, includes a simple bouquet of flowers on the lower right recalling the past, a loved one, a loss — it demands quiet contemplation.

However, in *Marry Me at Xmas, 1995-96* Stark's ironic power is at its peak. Not fond of either institution, Stark pokes fun through the creation of her icon. This show is like that — "pretty", packed with a punch.
(LMcC)

Lissa McClure

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Linda Stark calls her second exhibition at this Gallery *Runaway Love*. Constructed of a relatively small (e.g. 16" x 19") wooden panel covered with canvas, each piece is made by adding hundreds of coats of oil paint and varnish in succession, and often in a circular design. The result is bright, shiny and nearly sculptural, appearing at first glance to be ceramic. It is a use of oil paint, notorious for taking a long time to dry, for which the medium was not designed, but which turns out to be surprisingly successful and extremely unique. There is nothing pictorial here, but the objecthood of the works is secure. There are eleven objects in the show, all rather different, but sharing an emblematic character that distinguishes them from all other art in any medium.
by Frederick Ted Castle