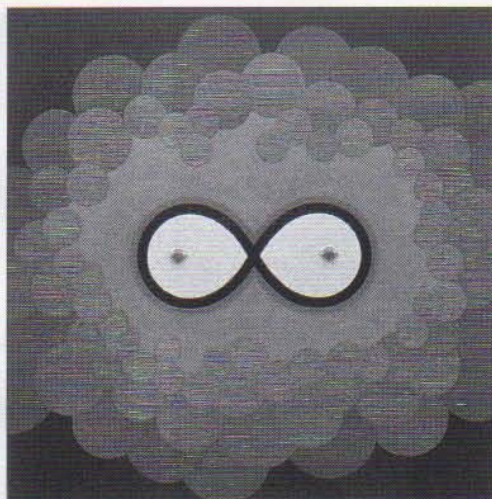


## LINDA STARK

ANGLES GALLERY

With four of her largest paintings to date (each measuring roughly two by two feet and all from 1999), Linda Stark continues building up surfaces with puddles, drips, and layered coats of fluid oil paint—a process she augments with more traditional rendering.

*Black Widow Portrait III* falls somewhere between Color Field painting, naturalist illustration, fashion design, and international signage, its hourglass-shaped red figure on a black ground simultaneously conjuring the poisonous female spider, the outline of a head-turning red dress, and the femme fatale. In *Curtains*, she turns layer after layer of dripping black paint into curtains indeed, perhaps closing, perhaps opening theatrically on a planet or orb with a rainbow aura—genesis or Armageddon uncertain. In *Jesus!* Stark's painstaking process comes across most viscerally, with the many layers of flesh-colored paint recessing glowing red cursive letters to make JESUS! (exclamation point essential) seem a mark carved into the



Linda Stark, *Ophelia Forever*, 1999,  
oil on canvas on panel, 24 x 24".

flesh—a stigma for the era of designer jeans and pinstriped cars. In *Ophelia Forever*, 3-D nipples are erected out of paint to accent a pair of breasts formed from an infinity symbol within a Pop-inspired design of bubbly water—a reference to the brook in which Shakespeare's personification of innocence drowned after descending into madness; at the same time, the isolated breasts on a flat surface call to mind the breasts on a platter attributed to Saint Agatha, whose threatened innocence launched cataclysmic events.

Hold on a minute. Woman as black widow? Cosmic curtains? Jesus? A character from *Hamlet*? As with much of her work of the last few years, the more Stark moves away from abstraction, the more it seems she is deliberately flirting with subject matter and imagery that one might consider trite, sentimental, or clichéd. After all, one doesn't run into much of this stuff in the art world unless it's accompanied by a smothering dollop of irony or romantic posturing about the grand old themes. But there are no indications here of either a trashing of the material or an indulgence in heroics. Instead, the precision and labor-intensiveness of Stark's pictures suggest a sincere interest in working with and through these subjects. The paintings' richness and odd beauty invite the viewer to enjoy the works flat out, but there is something more in Stark's handling. In a practice that has a history laden with celebrations and denials of its illusionistic artifice counterbalanced by denials and celebrations of its material actuality, Stark manages to bridge the two—making pictures that almost become what they depict. Her curtains seem ready

to move, her JESUS! wound ready to bleed, and in the presence of these almost living paintings it is hard to maintain the distance necessary for easy irony or a canned critique, or even bad heroics. Instead, one is more likely to feel something like a pang of angst or a stir of joy—a weird thing in art these days. Like Stark's palpable paintings, it seems unfamiliarly real.

—Christopher Miles