

Flesh and Paint

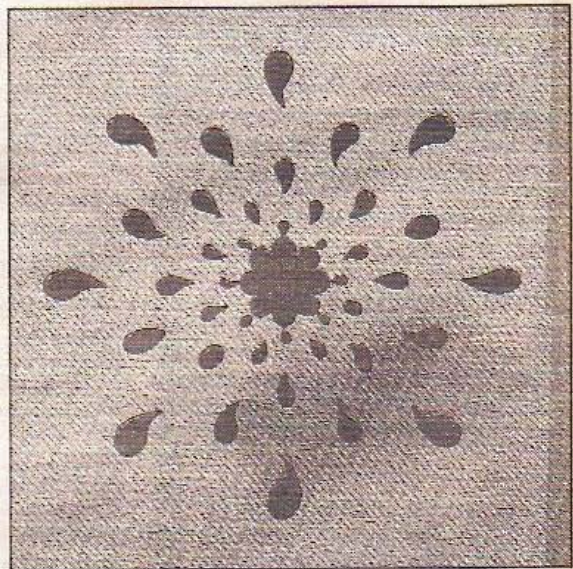
Runaway Love, paintings by Linda Stark. At the Contemporary Arts Forum, through October 27.

If it gives you a rush, do you need to qualify it intellectually? Linda Stark's paintings, labeled "minimalist," are a lot more fun than that sounds, and you should see them before they're gone.

Don't let the essay in the beautiful CAF catalogue by UCSB art studio professor and critic Colin Gardiner put you off. Much as I'm keen for his exquisite perceptions and learned citations—where else can you encounter the word "hapticity," or talk of oil paint qualities analogous to palpable flesh?—he makes too much of what Stark's methods reveal. "Stark's process . . . entails an incremental building and layering of drips and flows over an extended period . . . so that geological stratification of time is communicated in the material and formal layerings of the work itself." Pardon me, but this is exactly what is not being communicated, unless you are a most excellent psychic.

What *is* communicated is surface. And it's strictly pop. The quality of the paint is thick, three-dimensional—as Gardiner says in his otherwise excellent treatment of the topic—and Stark often uses the surfaces in funny ways to get below the surface. For instance, the brilliant "Coat of Arms," which initially appears to be a heraldic animal, is actually a glowing uterus. Like all great pop, the ironies are echoes of the initial pleasures. Skin is frequently Stark's subject, and "Fountain" presents a skin-like surface with a ring of bright blood droplets and a most troubling bruise layering color and emotion into the work. Is it a fountain of love or pain? Of course, it's both.

The whole show is transcendently pleasurable in design. Spirals, lattice-works, and waves move in colored rainbows, but also suggest something brooding behind. You needn't worry whether you "get" the complex temporal relationships of dripping paint. For me, though, Stark is making a princess cake rich with confection and hints of the morning after, fun tempered with distant regrets.



Linda Stark's "Fountain" offers skin tones, bruises, and blood in abstract but meaningful patterns.

Reviewed by D.J. Palladino