

accompaniments attest, these 9-inch-square paintings actually contain substances and objects that in such combinations have supposed magical effects. Devised by herbalists, alchemists and necromancers of various civilizations to conjure passion, good fortune, love, access to a soul-mate, or perhaps darker circumstances, these occult formulations have been doggedly realized: their ingredients float in the paintings' waxy, translucent skins, determining the predominant color of each panel. A drawing, rendered *ex post facto*, accompanies each painting, charting the items embedded therein with the exactitude of a nautical map.

The irony, of course, is that, in such meticulous explication of their contents, these paintings, for all their overt reliance on the "mysterious," have been rendered Stark's least mysterious works. Stark is aware of this irony; indeed, she clearly prompts it in order to reveal other ironies—the traditional source of sorcery in such precise, even niggling recipes; the suspension and preservation of substances that are effective only in their volatility; even the idea of a "functional" abstraction, which gently parodies the historic pretensions of much abstract painting to mystic presupposition.

Compared to her old works, the new potion paintings, their ingredients encased in bursting cascades of pigmented medium like flies in amber, don't look like much. (Actually, they look like one another, their

colors differing but their overall compositions—and to various extents their witches' brews—very nearly the same.) In their exacting detail and fine line, the drawings finally provide more visual satisfaction than the paintings they annotate. But Stark knows what she's doing, guiding our attention away from how things look to what they mean—or how they work. This consummate painter may have gone conceptual, but in the end she remains a painter, reliant on the visual and the visceral to make her point and to realize her desired effect. These paintings are both more and less than paintings—and quite enchanting for that alone.

—PETER FRANK

LOS ANGELES

**Linda Stark:
"Potion Paintings and Drawings"
at Angles Gallery**

There has always been something intimate, sensual and secretive about Linda Stark's abstractions. Small in scale, rich in hue, copious in material (even though, or perhaps because, that material is as tough and glossy as nail polish), and cryptic in image, Stark's paintings have the intimacy, glamour and allure of jewel-encrusted book covers. In her latest series, Stark encodes incunabula quite literally. Indeed, as their notational

