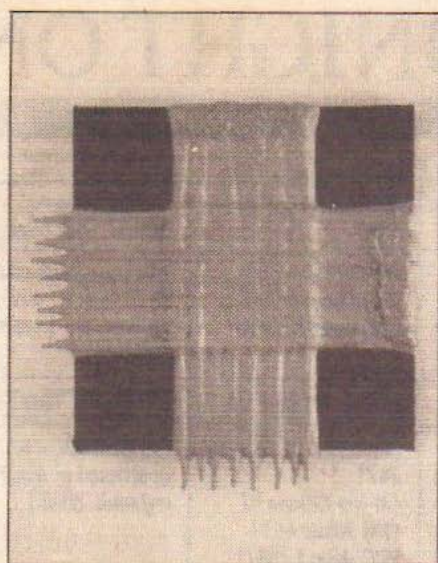


GALLERIES

ART REVIEWS

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES



Cirrus Gallery

Linda Stark: Slick abstractions, each with meticulously poured, accurately flowing rivulets of oil.

poured, three-dimensional drip angles diagonally across 10 of her tiny canvases, less than a millimeter away from the next, nearly indistinguishable band. Together, these obsessively repeated stripes form tightly interwoven patterns, jewel-like in their precision.

Each of these square paintings, at Cirrus Gallery, begins by mimicking the canvas's weave. Then it defies your eye's ability to follow the endless overs-and-unders that constitute its surface. Next, it boggles your mind's capacity to understand the incredibly obsessive effort required to make it. Finally, it quivers and jitters inside your eyeballs, momentarily becoming unmoored from the emphatic presence of its materials. Its thickly built-up surface generates an almost hallucinatory experience of disembodied weightlessness.

Stark's third solo show contains many of the best paintings she has

made. The young, L.A.-based artist has, for the most part, abandoned the quirky, feminine forms that interrupted the cool surfaces of her earlier works. Figure-ground relationships have almost completely dissolved into an exquisite, all-over evenness.

This strategy has been common to modernist abstraction throughout the century. In the '60s, one strand of formalist painting sought to eliminate the difference between the weave of the canvas and the paint that sat on top of it by staining and soaking thinned-down washes into the fabric of the canvas. Stark's art casts a knowing glance at that moment in history and then swallows it up. Her shiny, pristine paintings put a mod, Pop spin on the idea of transcendence.

In contrast to traditional abstraction, Stark refrains from pursuing any sort of idealized, spiritual immateriality. Her brightly colored and labor-intensive paintings prefer to work with more common experiences and more verifiable perceptions. Their insistent materialism gives them an undeniable physical presence, a no-nonsense, here-and-now quality that will have no truck with the ineffable.

Sometimes, this emphasis on pure materiality gives her paintings the presence of little sculptures, of objects that hang on the wall but repudiate the illusionism intrinsic to two-dimensional images. Stark's best works, however, hold her fascination with materiality together with its subtle dissolution in paintings that are as interesting for what has been done to them as for what they continue to do to your eyes.

■ Cirrus Gallery, 542 S. Alameda St., (213) 680-3473, through Feb. 20. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Messing With Minds: In half of Linda Stark's sexy, synthetic and slick abstractions, immaculate rivulets of oil paint flow with unnatural accuracy. Each meticulously