

IMPULSE

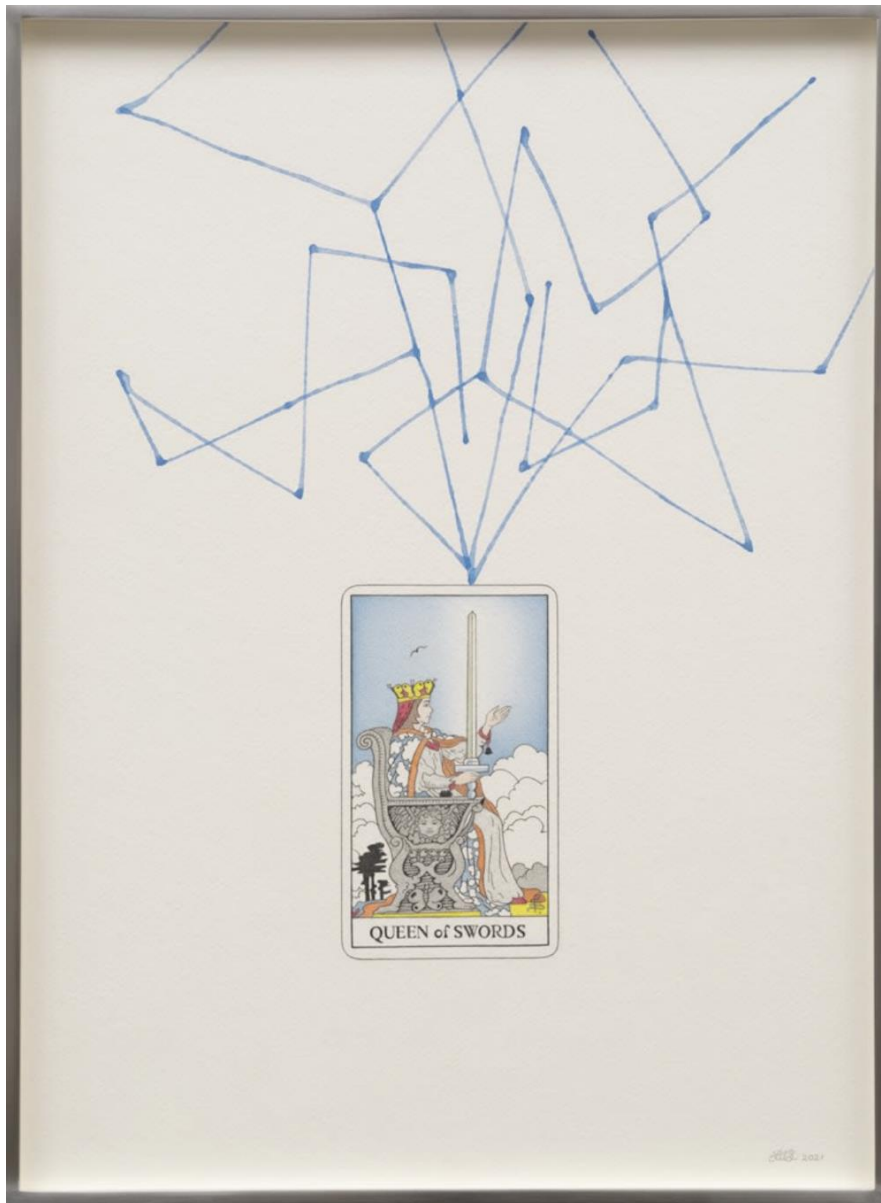
REVIEW DEC 21 - WRITTEN BY CORINNE WORTHINGTON

Tactile Oppositions in Linda Stark's "Ethereal Material"

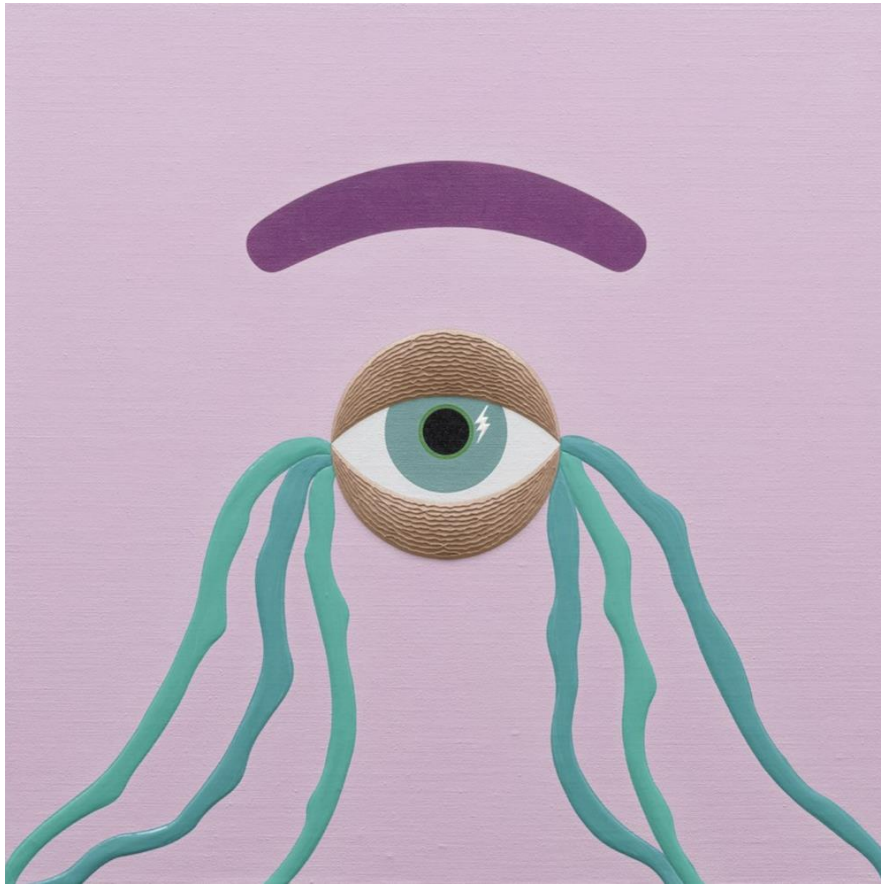


Linda Stark's *Ethereal Material* promises a phantasmagoric voyage through the artist's inner world. In contrast to the sterile white room of Ortuzar Projects in Tribeca, Stark's paintings and works on paper are sensuous and intimate. What seems flat from a distance builds into a crescendo of texture in *Goodbye (a door opens)* (1997), its spiraling form pulling the eye towards a hypnotic climax. Sumptuous layers of oil paint invite viewers closer, almost begging them to run their fingers over the ridges and into the grooves of the impasto. The interplay between paint and dimensionality is striking.

In *Peppermint Rotation Diptych* (1993), Stark asks the viewer to "celebrate the notion of female ecstasy," creating a peculiar tension as she overlays sensuality over tokens of affection doled out from our grandmothers' pockets. What begins as a tactile exploration of form disintegrates into nostalgic reverie. Through her talismanic mementos and effigies, Stark takes varying archetypes of scorned femininity and juxtaposes them with tenderness and sensuality. *Self Portrait as Bitch Queen Widow Queen #2* (2021) engages the complexity of tarot, imagining the artist as the Queen of Swords. In her upright form, the Queen of Swords is a parable of self-reliance—a woman who knows what she wants and acts on her needs. She acts with a clarity of mind and purpose that is not selfish or sentimental. But were she to be reversed, the Queen of Swords would instead conjure a woman who is at the mercy of her desires: ruled by emotion without the ability to discern the truth of situations at hand, a shadow self that serves only the heart.



The Widow/Bitch duality of the Queen of Swords is contrasted with Stark's second self-portrait, *Self Portrait as Cyclops* (2023). Here, Stark imagines herself as a single eye streaming with tears, embodying what she terms the "Eternal Cryer": one who is constantly mourning but for whom tears are restorative. Unlike the Queen of Swords, whose emotion is feast or famine, an absent notion or an all-consuming experience, the Eternal Cryer is able to strike the perfect balance and finds emotional release as a remediation. In considering these appositions, we begin to participate in the conversations Stark is having with herself about the construction of her very being.



Where Stark falls flat on the canvas is in her attempts to align her work with that of the [Transcendental Painting Group](#). In their introductory 1940 brochure, the group identified their mission as “to carry painting beyond the appearance of the physical world, through new concepts of space, color, light, and design, to imaginative realms that are idealistic and spiritual. The work does not concern itself with political, economic or other social problems.” While a few of Stark’s paintings, such as *Guardian of the Night Rainbow* or *Samantha*, may seek to emulate the whimsy and psychedelia of Agnes Pelton or Florence Miller Pierce, she plays largely in familiar forms and cultural motifs. For this particular exhibition, an alliance with the Transcendentalists does Stark’s work a disservice. A sleek silver coif, a golden uterus superimposed on a fleshy, dripping blood-red backdrop—the “caricature-istic,” rather than characteristic, emblems of femininity Stark employs make it difficult to imagine the work divorced from its political intonations.

What might initially invoke the predictable tropes of pop feminism reveals a deeper, fraught consideration of its subjects, lending an altogether richer understanding of Stark’s work that escapes notice at face value. The dichotomies between the saccharine, the suggestive, and the sentimental leave lookers asking: How do we mythologize ourselves?



Linda Stark: *Ethereal Material* was on view at Ortuzar Projects from October 25th to December 14th, 2024.