

LINDA STARK: ETHEREAL MATERIAL

October 25–December 14, 2024

Ortuzar is pleased to present *ETHEREAL MATERIAL*, Los Angeles-based artist Linda Stark's (b. San Diego, California) first solo show in New York in over twenty years. This exhibition features a selection of new and historic paintings and works on paper that showcase the development of Stark's layering of oil paint into meticulously built compositions. Often small in scale and sometimes taking years to complete, her paintings involve the use of intimate hand-held processes. The paintings sculpturally become, rather than represent, the array of cultural symbols and personal mythologies (cats, hearts, feminism, the body) from which Stark culls.

As the title suggests, *ETHEREAL MATERIAL* emphasizes the artist's blending of the intangible with the tangible, a phenomenon she refers to as a "polarity of consciousness." With a deep interest in the mysterious and meditative, Stark has long aligned herself with the visionary practices of early-twentieth-century Transcendental women artists like Agnes Pelton and Florence Miller Pierce. Diverging from their models, however, she engages these mystical influences through investigations into the physical properties of oil paint itself—perhaps the most traditional of the two-dimensional mediums. Stark's subject matter displays a parallel engagement with paradox, where metaphysical or feminist themes are inflected with Pop, and fantastical archetypes are, in often equal measure, alluring and disturbing.

Three new paintings illustrate moments of an emotionally charged intersection between the personal and the universal in Stark's work. *Self Portrait as Cyclops* (2023) depicts a crying eyeball whose tears were formed by the chance operation of repeatedly tilting the canvas to drip paint down a desired trajectory. This "Eternal Cryer" is also an alchemical construct for Stark—a figure who laments all the world's woes but whose weeping is transformative and even curative. *Luna* (2024) is one of a handful of posthumous portraits depicting her feline companions, of which *Samantha* (2005), also on view, is the first. For Stark, painting what she calls "spirit portraits" arises out of inner necessity, where, in the artist's words, "the activity of painting functions like a portal to dialogue with their essence. The process is intimate and uplifting." In the artist's most complex painting to date, *Lion (Big Studio Cat)* (2023), she portrays the plaster lion who sits as a supernatural protector in her creative space. Layers of paint mixed with sand render the beloved object's details and moments of time-worn erosion.

Throughout her forty-year career, the artist has utilized her distinctive drip techniques. *Coat of Arms* (1991) features a sanguine surface with stalactite-like accretions extending beyond the edges of the canvases. Here, the increasingly dappled quality of the paint as it approaches the sides of each painting resembles congealed menstrual blood. This effect is amplified with the central image of a golden uterus, which stands for a woman's crest and derives from a diagram in the landmark feminist book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, first published in 1970.

During her undergraduate studies in the late 1970s at the University of California, Davis, Stark came in contact with Wayne Theibaud's work and admired his use of synthetic colors and impasto paint to reimagine commercial imagery. Stark ascribes the luscious red and white stripes in *Peppermint Rotation Diptych* (1993) to Theibaud's influence, as well as the idea of oil paint as a sweet confection. Coalescing in what Stark considers an "erotic knot or bump," her *Rotation* paintings celebrate the notion of feminine ecstasy as a set of erect-nippled candied breasts, or, when presented as single panels, an engorged clitoris. In the "Weaves" and "Rotations" from this period, each culminating drip was also a "mantra" for "keeping the artistic faith," as the artist painted into the early hours of morning before leaving for her temp job.

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The three-dimensionality of Stark's paintings renders them category-defying and has brought them to the attention of sculptors like Vincent Fecteau, who told *Artforum* that he was "unprepared for the impact" of encountering the artist's 2013 solo exhibition at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive. For Fecteau, her works "lodged themselves in the folds of my unconscious usually reserved for the weirdest of dreams." Stark's focus on surface and her ability to shape oil paint is most apparent in the warps of hair in *Silver That Girl* (1998) and the peaked spiral relief of *Goodbye* (1997). Her unique vision fuses with the materiality of oil paint, extending the dialogue of this medium and conjuring objects that are altogether new.

Linda Stark (b. San Diego, California) lives and works in Los Angeles. Stark has recently exhibited solo projects at David Kordansky, Los Angeles (2020); Jenny's, Los Angeles (2017); and UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley (2013). Recent group exhibitions include *New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century*, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2021–2022); *Made in L.A. 2018*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); *Painting: Now and Forever, Part III*, Matthew Marks Gallery and Greene Naftali, New York (2018); and *Forms of Identity: Women Artists in the 90s*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California (2017). Her work is in the public collections of the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Wadsworth Atheneum, Connecticut; and UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive.