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Linda Stark
Hearts
Enigmatic Imagery
Kordansky Gallery
September 19 - October 24, 2020

by Jody Zellen



Linda Stark paints slowly and precisely. Her oil paintings on canvas and panel have a subtle dimensionality and the raised and often textured surfaces give the works a uniqueness and allure. While hearts, the subject of her current exhibition might be a heavily used motif, she imbues each work with significance and meaning. Stark lost her beloved husband Don Suggs last year making her choice of iconography resonate. These intimate paintings combine the personal and the universal. In the center of the skin-toned canvas *Bleeding Hearts* (2020), two small red hearts resemble crying eyes, dripping long red tears beyond the bottom of the panel.

Suffragette (2019) depicts a medal in honor of women's suffrage where five deep maroon hearts comprise a flower-like center. *Perylene Heart Weave* and *Valentine* (both 2020) are paintings that emulate heart-shaped candy boxes, yet in Stark's renderings the light red box is covered with darker translucent thick red stripes in a plaid pattern, connoting something sinister and dangerous rather than the traditional delight of a box of chocolates. *Purple Heart* (2018) replicates the honored military decoration, while *Telltale Heart* (2016) references the Edgar Allan Poe short story. When viewed together, Stark's plethora of hearts not only resurrect long forgotten imagery, but offer new ways to interpret this popular symbol.

Though modest in scale, Stark's paintings demand attention and close viewing. She carefully melds together different textures of paint, drawing attention to her love of the materiality of this medium. In her painted works, the imagery often rises off the surface and extends beyond the edges, enticing the viewer to not only look at the piece straight-on but also from the sides.

Stark's works on paper, installed as a single line in another room in Kordansky's new space, are as rich and purposeful as her paintings. Stark combines ink, graphite, watercolor, acrylic or collage to create delicate and intimate works. *Ruins Study #1* (2012) juxtaposes a line drawing of the ruins of Stonehenge with a more geometric pink-toned structure that resembles a pendant of vaguely Meso-American origins. In *Painting (stigmata)*, 2013 the word 'Painting' drawn in cursive with graphite sits in the center of the page. Each letter is pierced in one or two places and each small hole is outlined in thick red paint. Each 'i' is dotted with a large tear-shape also filled with red. *Two Eyes* (2016) has an elegance and simplicity. Centered in the composition are two eyes, one brown and the other blue, each set within a multi-sided polygon. A single blue tear extends from a line hanging down from the blue eye while three long rectangles (one red,

one blue the other yellow) shoot down from the brown eye's center. Though no face is depicted, the work evokes a range of emotions.

Stark's imagery is enigmatic. Though not confrontational, these edgy pieces have subject matter that extends beyond their formal qualities. Be it feminism, religion, history, the military, love or loss, Stark pares down her compositions to their essential elements and represents them with finesse, giving her paintings and works on paper both a preciousness and stoicism. Her seemingly simple pieces are anything but that.

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