

artillery

Gallery Rounds: Linda Stark - David Kordansky Gallery

By Eve Wood | September 30, 2020



Installation view, Linda Stark, "Hearts," David Kordansky Gallery. Photograph by Elon Schoenholz.

In grad school at Cal Arts, I remember a renowned professor telling me there were certain symbols one should always avoid because they were "too loaded" oversaturated with other cultural referents to be read clearly. One of these symbols was the heart, not the anatomical human one, but the kind of hearts you find on candy boxes on Valentine's Day, impossibly plump, curvaceous hearts, deep red and vibrant, an unmistakable signpost for "love." It's almost impossible to reclaim imagery like this, let alone to make it your own. Linda Stark, in her inaugural exhibition, aptly titled "Hearts" at David Kordansky Gallery, investigates this fraught little symbol on her own terms.

Stark's Hearts are fierce and unapologetic, luminous and darkly brooding, emphatic, yet also graceful and transformative; Stark even goes so far as to anthropomorphize the heart, as in the painting "Bleeding Hearts," (2020) where two hearts bleed perfect vertical lines down the centerline of the canvas, becoming duck's feet at the bottom and "bleeding off" the margins of the picture plane. Both the tangible, tactile quality of the paint, lush and enigmatic as it is, in combination with the more metaphoric content, allow the symbol of the heart to constantly shift and open out.

Stark also combines physical materials into her work, as with "Burr Heart II," (2020), where she has inserted literal burrs, the kind that have plagued canines for centuries, into the painterly space of an upside-down heart. I can only imagine that the person who lays claim to a heart like this, is profoundly and permanently disfigured by grief, the kind of betrayal that marks your life forever. Yet, still, other hearts like "Sacred Heart," (2020) celebrate the impulse toward life, specifically the fallopian tube, the literal conduit by which a woman's egg passes from the ovaries to the uterus, where it awaits fertilization, yet one has the sense that for Stark the fallopian tubes are the unsung heroes, or heroines of the reproductive world, and deserve more recognition, overshadowed as they are by the undaunted little sperm.

Finally, these are beautifully crafted paintings that command the viewer's attention subtly and with great care. Stark knows her stuff, and though these paintings be small, they certainly are mighty.