

MOUSSE

Linda Stark “Hearts” at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles



Linda Stark, *Burr Heart II*, 2020. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Lee Thompson

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to open its new exhibition space with the gallery’s first show of new paintings and works on paper by Linda Stark. Titled *Hearts*, this inaugural exhibition will be on view September 19 through October 24, 2020. David Kordansky Gallery is currently open by appointment. Timed reservations and virtual visits are available [here](#).

David Kordansky Gallery’s new exhibition space forms part of its expanded Edgewood Place location in Mid-City, Los Angeles. Designed by the architecture practice wHY, the 12,800- square-foot expansion adds an intimate, skylit 2,000 square feet of indoor exhibition space, as well as areas for storage and operations, all located around a landscaped courtyard built for a range of programming, including performance, film, and outdoor sculpture.

Over the course of three decades, Los Angeles-based Linda Stark has produced a body of painting in which material experimentation and concentrated symbolic energy go hand in hand. The work is visionary, open, and suffused with an unlikely combination of humor and pathos; at the same time, it represents one of the most sustained investigations of the mutable potential of paint—as both a physical medium and a site of rich cultural discourse—in contemporary art.

As the exhibition’s title suggests, the paintings in *Hearts* frequently address varied iconographies associated with this most resonant of forms. Hearts occupy the literal and figurative centers of human and animal life, but they also appear in a wide range of social and narrative contexts. Emphasizing the sculptural qualities of paint as much as its visual or color-based ones, Stark creates objects that reflect the multivalent potential of the heart as vessel and beacon, biological organ and mystical source. In so doing, she reveals a broad array of interests, notable for their historical depth and up-to-the-minute urgency alike.



Linda Stark, “Hearts” at David Kordansky Gallery, 2020. Photo: Elon Schoenholz

The suffragette movement and the fight for women’s right to vote; the use of hearts in medals for military purposes; the transformational power of religious imagery; and the ability of a heart to transform another image, like a watering eye, into something richly metaphorical are a few of the thematic areas Stark explores in the show. But these are also highly personal paintings that arise as responses to inner experiences of mind and body. Often years in the making, they are meticulously planned and executed so that they engender intimacy, wonder, and surprise.

A work like *Telltale Heart* (2016), for instance, exemplifies Stark’s pitch-perfect ability to balance the “making” and “finding” tendencies that define divergent strands of contemporary artistic practice. By using a section of an Army surplus jacket as a support—the seller promised that it “had been to war and back”—she imports a pre-established camouflage pattern and a readymade history of use that expand the physical and conceptual fields upon and in which painting itself then occurs. The small, intricately rendered, upside-down heart at the center of the composition thereby gains in visual weight and poetic intensity, becoming a pulsing reminder of the vulnerability at stake in any conflict, armed or otherwise.

Another, related composition that also makes use of non-traditional materials nonetheless results in a very different kind of painting. In *Burr Heart II* (2020), Stark employs the painted upside-down heart as a receptacle for burrs—the pricking parts of river reeds collected in her own backyard—dropped in random arrangements and affixed to the canvas using red paint. The dark background that surrounds the heart, reminiscent of a night sky or oceanic expanse, is also notable for its distinct, dimpled texture. Throughout a work like this, paint does more than merely depict, represent, or serve aesthetic functions. It is enlisted here as an adhesive, and takes on an alchemical role as a substance that joins unlike things in a unified field of embodied meaning, coaxing order out of chaos and unexpected harmonies out of even the more dissonant or foreboding aspects of the natural world.

Like her paintings, Stark’s drawings are the products of intense focus and a constant renewal of her relationship to her materials. To this end, she organizes her studio so that she can dedicate herself to one of these modes of production at a time, allowing either drawing or painting to fully occupy her attention. Nonetheless, subjects and formal experiments carry over from one medium to the other, and the works on paper included in *Hearts* provide a sense of the scope of Stark’s interests and passions. They also demonstrate how she gives her motifs the space to come into focus at their own pace. As she returns to them over the years, they reveal their emotional complexities and reverberations, gaining in mystery and becoming only more elusive as she hones them and explores their intricacies. Knowledge and familiarity are never taken for granted; rather, Stark keeps the unknown squarely at the center of her gaze.