



LINDA STARK

FRIEZE VIEWING ROOM

Spanning the last decade, this selection of Stark’s works on paper incorporates actions such as piercing, kissing, and collage, and exemplifies her tendency to utilize the full physical potential of her materials. Each drawing or painting on paper, like her paintings on canvas, is the result of highly virtuosic techniques that often require extended periods of time (and patience) to execute. The works arise from personal experiences, visions, and sensations that lead to iconic images and embodied reflections on feminist symbology; each is like an amulet charged with devotional fervor. As Stark describes, “They are spare and precise fantasies, driven by inner necessity, and involve inquiries into paradoxical subjects, both alluring and disturbing. They might be playful, wounded, melodramatic, or understated.”



Linda Stark, *Spectacled Cobra Emoji*, 2018, graphite and acrylic on paper, 11 1/4 x 11 inches (28.6 x 27.9 cm), framed: 11 1/2 x 11 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (29.2 x 28.6 x 3.2 cm)

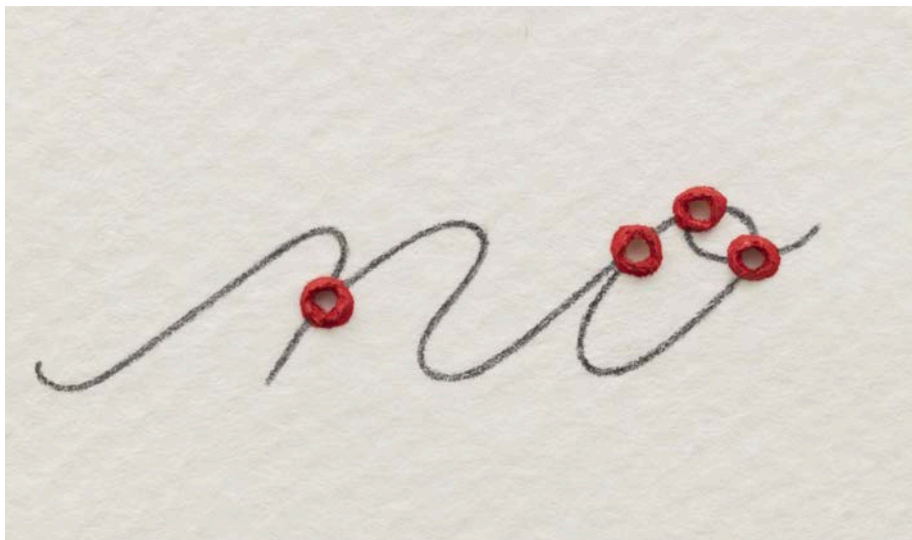
The intense material focus required to produce her paintings and drawings alike means that Stark does not work on canvas and paper at the same time. If she is working on paper, the entire studio will be set up to pursue that direction. This allows her to achieve the utmost intimacy with both the physical demands and the intellectual and emotional reckonings prompted by each image, which in turn becomes a lived event in every sense of the word. *no cigarette (flame)* (2013) exemplifies Stark's total approach and is part of a family of works, including a painting, that she has been elaborating since 1998, when she was quitting smoking.

“To this day, there is nothing quite like staring at a painting in my studio behind a cloud of smoke. ‘no cigarette (flame)’ functions like a no-smoking sign made by someone who has quit but dreams of smoking.”



Linda Stark, *no cigarette (flame)*, 2013, graphite, colored pencil, and gouache on pierced paper, 11 x 13 7/8 inches (27.9 x 35.2 cm), framed: 11 1/4 x 14 1/8 x 1 1/4 inches, (28.6 x 35.9 x 3.2 cm)

This drawing includes several materials and mark-making techniques. Where the lines of the script that make up the words intersect, Stark has perforated the paper from the back using a small nail and then accentuated the ridge of each opening with intense red gouache. Every move and medium has metaphorical as well as visual ramifications; the flame dotting the “i” indicates the ardor of desire and the agent of combustion needed to light up.



Detail of Linda Stark, *no cigarette (flame)*, 2013, graphite, colored pencil, and gouache on pierced paper, 11 x 13 7/8 inches (27.9 x 35.2 cm), framed: 11 1/4 x 14 1/8 x 1 1/4 inches, (28.6 x 35.9 x 3.2 cm)

Stark often turns to the mysteries of the elements as subjects, harnessing their potential for transformation in surprising ways. Feather Drop (2013) and Ether Drop (2014), for instance, are two in a series of five elemental works on paper, and meditations on air and emptiness, respectively.

Feather Drop began with the observation of a black widow spider's web that had trapped fallen bird feathers. Having already made paintings inspired both by the black widow's formal attributes and the delicate, artful geometry of its webs—not to mention the complex female archetypes constellated in this femme fatale who eats her mates—Stark patiently taught herself how to render the wispy feathers that newly captured her attention on this occasion. Each was drawn with colored pencil on an individual piece of paper; to produce the finished composition, the rendered feathers were dropped onto the web she had drawn from observation, introducing the sort of chance operation employed by the Surrealists to circumvent their own intentionality.



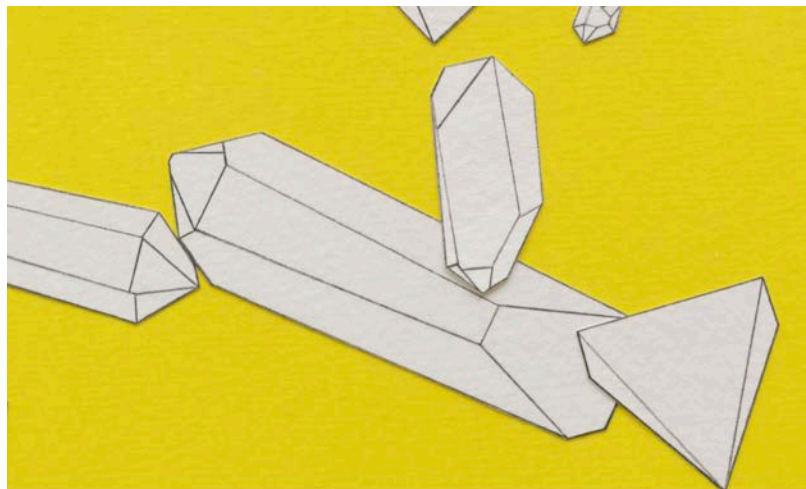
Linda Stark, *Feather Drop*, 2013, graphite and colored pencil on paper collage, 15 x 15 inches (38.1 x 38.1 cm), framed: 15 1/4 x 15 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (38.7 x 38.7 x 3.2 cm)



Linda Stark, *Ether Drop*, 2014, graphite and acrylic on paper collage, 12 x 12 inches (30.5 x 30.5 cm), framed: 12 1/4 x 12 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (31.1 x 31.1 x 3.2 cm)

With regards to Ether Drop, Stark notes that:

“According to ancient and medieval science, ether is one of the five great elements, with an essence of emptiness. It's described as the space the other elements fill. Later, scientists disregarded ether because they couldn't prove its existence. Today, physicists postulate that ether permeates space, providing a medium through which light can travel in a vacuum....I thought, they don't know what it looks like...maybe it's crystalline?”



Detail of Linda Stark, *Ether Drop*, 2014, graphite and acrylic on paper collage, 12 x 12 inches (30.5 x 30.5 cm), framed: 12 1/4 x 12 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (31.1 x 31.1 x 3.2 cm)

Again working from life, she drew “essentialized” versions of specimens from her own collection of minerals and crystals. She then cut these images out, and allowed the faceted pieces of paper to fall randomly onto the paper support—covered with an intensely saturated yellow acrylic paint—where Stark affixed them, honoring the action of gravity while denying its presence in the image, where up and down are unfixed concepts.

Eyes (2016) evolved from a related drawing in which Stark drew eye forms, cut them out, and dropped them. While not originally intended for a finished work, the templates she employed to produce the eyes captured her interest and suggested another use, serving here as structuring devices for free-form elaboration. She left the empty eyes in the upper left-hand and lower right-hand corners as she found them, but in the intervening space a variety of stylized eyes, alluding to a variety of contexts and situations, unite in a field of gazes.



Linda Stark, *Eyes*, 2016, graphite and acrylic on paper, 9 7/8 x 14 5/8 inches (25.1 x 37.1 cm), framed: 10 1/8 x 14 7/8 x 1 1/4 inches (25.7 x 37.8 x 3.2 cm)



Linda Stark, *Bearded Lady*, 2014, graphite, watercolor, gouache, and acrylic on paper, 11 x 15 inches (27.9 x 38.1 cm), framed: 11 1/4 x 15 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches, (28.6 x 38.7 x 3.2 cm)

In contrast, other works result from pointed historical research, such as *Suffragette Study* (2018), a tribute to the women who fought for the right to vote—often by putting their own bodies on the line—at the beginning of the 20th century. A medal awarded to the suffragette Elizabeth Ann Anderson for undergoing a hunger strike becomes the subject for a detailed, tender study highlighting shapes and textures: the red hearts that make up the central flower, the frayed blue ribbon suggesting both the passage of time and the continued necessity of the fight for equal rights.



Linda Stark, *Suffragette Study*, 2018, graphite and watercolor on paper, 9 3/8 x 9 1/4 inches, (23.8 x 23.5 cm), framed: 9 5/8 x 9 3/8 x 1 1/4 inches (24.4 x 23.8 x 3.2 cm)

In *Fixed Wave Study #3* (2016), Stark returns to a composition that anchors a key painting and several earlier drawings, all of which revolve around the image and mythology of mermaids specifically and nature goddesses generally, and which feature a closeup view of a woman's green-blue midsection.



Linda Stark, *Fixed Wave Study #3*, 2016, graphite, ink, and pastel on paper, 11 x 11 inches (27.9 x 27.9 cm), framed: 11 1/4 x 11 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (28.6 x 28.6 x 3.2 cm)

“A fixed wave is a cresting wave arrested in motion. It’s a popular Southern California reference, and a platitude in scenic painting. I grew up with the nurturing seascapes my mother painted, translucent cresting waves reflecting full moons. I wanted to create my own version of a fixed wave and tie it to something other than the landscape.”

With the wave transposed as her tuft of pubic hair, the pictured mermaid’s body is constructed from a symbol for the primary element of the realm she inhabits: water. In this drawing however, Stark zooms out, revealing a human woman hovering behind the myth, and composing a visual metanarrative about her own processes, thinking, and sense of discovery.

A torso closeup also provides the compositional framework for *Ruins Study #3* (2012), in which ersatz versions of important ancient monuments, based on a trinket-style necklace of a pre-Columbian ruin and a shirt printed with the image of Stonehenge, suggest corporeal spaces beyond the paper's edges. The mystical or ritual practices implied by these architectural forms also evoke the presence of something beyond what can be seen by the eyes.



Linda Stark, *Ruins Study #3*, 2012, graphite and watercolor on paper, 11 1/8 x 11 inches (28.3 x 27.9 cm) framed: 11 3/8 x 11 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches (28.9 x 28.6 x 3.2 cm)



Linda Stark, *I Heart NY*, 2012, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper, 10 x 13 1/4 inches (25.4 x 33.7 cm), framed: 10 1/4 x 13 1/2 x 1 1/4 inches (26 x 34.3 x 3.2 cm)



Linda Stark, *Painting #3*, 2013, graphite, colored pencil, oil stick, and watercolor on paper, 10 7/8 x 14 3/8 inches (27.6 x 36.5 cm) framed: 11 1/8 x 14 5/8 x 1 1/4 inches (28.3 x 37.1 x 3.2 cm)

Painting #3 (2013), meanwhile, can be read as an *ars poetica*, one in which Stark directly addresses the psychological high-wire acts required to produce her work. Given the work's title, it is interesting to note that this is not an image that she has used previously to make a painting on canvas. She opts instead to examine the specificity of her relationship to painting by exploring the possibilities of pencil, watercolor, and paper. This counterintuitive challenge speaks to the intensity of her drive to locate and express the living, breathing, vital core of her chosen mediums and practices.

“With every painting I do, I have to grapple with the entire history of painting, which is deep. Painting is difficult, yet the activity produces joy. I live to paint.”

Equally aware of the seriousness and absurdity of the exercise, Stark transforms the word “painting” itself into a kind of body, highlighting its potential for causing pain by tracing the first four letters with pink colored pencil and using blood-red watercolor to accentuate each “i.” Delicately shaded bruises, also created in colored pencil, seem to rise up through the surface of the support as they would through skin. As a telling flourish, the traces of two kisses stand as intimate records of devotion. Stark made these by applying oil stick paint to her own lips and pressing them against the paper. This make-or-break act—each time she only has one chance to get it right, and because she can't erase the marks, she risks the success of the entire work—encapsulates the fervor of her commitment to artmaking, and her ongoing willingness to confront the unknown every time she enters the studio.



Photo by Elon Schoenholz

In 2020, Linda Stark (b. 1956, San Diego; lives and works in Los Angeles) will be the subject of a solo exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery's new exhibition space in Los Angeles. Stark was previously the subject of a MATRIX series solo show at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), Berkeley, California (2013). Recent and forthcoming group exhibitions include New Time: Art and Feminism in the 21st Century, BAMPFA (2020); Made in L.A. 2018, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; 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 institutions that include the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.

*David Kordansky Gallery, 2020. Text by Stuart Krimko.
Photography of Linda Stark works by Jeff McLane
Linda Stark quotations from unpublished artist notes, May 1, 2020*