

ARTFORUM



Linda Stark, *Valentine*, 2020, oil on panel, 7 x 7 x 1 3/8".

LOS ANGELES

Linda Stark

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY
5130 West Edgewood Place
September 19–October 24, 2020

Appearing on everything from erasers to emojis, the heart symbol is ubiquitous for good reason: The blood-pumping muscle's vital function is an ideal metaphor for life and love. Yet it can also beat as a locus of pain, a metronome to mortality. Indulging a tenor more heartsore than heartsome in her new body of work here, Linda Stark seeks to reclaim the popular icon from its feel-good connotations of feminine affection and treacly approval. Setting the mournful mood is *Burr Heart II* (all works cited, 2020), in which collaged seedpods lie trapped—like tiny arrows—in the viscid scarlet of the titular organ, rendered upside down. Indeed, sorrows are just as prickly as burs, but rarely so easily shed.

Stark treats her intimately scaled paintings less as images than as totemic objects devotionally built up over time. Her painstaking processes of dripping, embanking, and accreting oils seem driven by a desire to make her austere compositions physically embody the things they represent: flesh, blood, and tears. The weave pattern of *Valentine*, a heart-shaped object recalling a pasteboard candy box, was contrived by holding the panel at a diagonal and slowly trickling paint from the edge downward across the surface, causing the piece's latticework of assorted reds to coagulate at the bottom—a frozen moment that evokes leaking blood, or even a languid rosebud. The artist likens her laborious technique to traditional women's work, describing it as a tantric, time-intensive process meant to rid herself of doubt.

Momentously alone on the gallery's central wall hangs *Cyclops Fountain*, which depicts a mythological weeping eyeball à la Odilon Redon's 1914 oil *Le Cyclope*. Minutely textured with a razor-thin brush, its crepey eyelid, puffy from perpetual crying, stands out in relief against a field of electric yellow. Within its iris is a white reflection of a heart. Grief is love's inherent endgame, but perhaps this eye, buoyed by its own lacrimal ropes of periwinkle, hopes against hope for a loss to one day be recovered.

— Annabel Osberg