

Linda Stojak's remarkable Redux

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On first view, from a distance, in a glimpse of these paintings by Linda Stojak, we may be struck by the bold gestural line that we might have seen before in Motherwell or other abstract expressionists, but then we are also very aware of the female figure that resides within the gestural line, emerging from it, or fading into it. Entering the Stephen Haller Gallery, we are surrounded by this remarkable series of haunting paintings of costumed female figures. On closer examination, these remarkable paintings deploy a gamut of expressionist vocabulary and techniques: layered surfaces of both paint and accretions, layers of paper and tape, along with palette knife applied paint strokes and drips that give the painterly and textural aspects a cascading interest, so that the geography of each painting provides a journey for the viewer, but within this realm of the expressionist, remarkably, there is also the emergence of portrait, but it is portrait unfinished, evolving, transforming. However, each of the paintings also has a specificity, with suggestions of a particular fashion statement or costume, but rendered as a floating image that hovers from a specific time or fashion accoutrement that is a gesture itself.

In the emergent figurative depictions of this series here, we are confronted by a grand formal gown of another era, a trendy fashion creation from recent decades, a provincial dress of perhaps repressive containment, and an ultra chic salon creation for formal appearance, but despite all the speculation these costumes might inspire, the artist will not be pinned down, and the magnificent painterly expression signals to us that we must explore the essence of the human being within, as meticulously as we might the



gestural elements so diligently and thoughtfully applied. Some of these fashions suggest a defining or even constraining structure, an investiture that conveys with it cultural and psychological dimensions and impositions that a certain style or era might betoken, but as the figures themselves float in the field of the paintings, the human presence is ineffable, but still luminously present, as if to suggest that the essence exists in a resonant inner realm that is not contained or constrained.

Reportedly, the paintings reference the artist and her daughter, and as such they may represent a range of imposed, assumed or suggested identity that might be the realm today of Cindy Sherman, but these painterly explorations thrive in the full palette of the painterly and the endless expressionistic techniques that convey thematically as well as technically a personal expression that is both studied and forthright at

the same time, so that a thoughtful and deeply felt emergence gives abundant life to what we see. The paintings arrive with us in this very moment, immediate, some still wet from the most recent application and accretion. The color combinations, both bold and subtle, are pleasing, dynamic and provocative. Although in style and technique we might be in the realm of abstract expression, the reinsertion of the human, and here the female in the expression, has a timeless quality that is haunting and compelling and elusive. These are paintings that live with the viewer. Why? Because they are so alive and clearly created within the great expanse of the time of the process of their creation: they live with us over and through time, they constantly reveal, sometimes defined by line, and sometimes by layered paint or through the associations or connotations of the fashion style that dresses the experience.

The variations in layering and textures are endlessly fascinating, adding dimensions of revelation and experience beyond the flat plane. Here abstract expression meets the decorative or pictorial with ultimately illuminating and revealing results. Work like this entertains multiple varying responses from a viewer on an individual, personal level. Therefore, it is highly possible and highly likely that a wide variety of viewers would have specific responses that may or may not correspond to the specific responses of others, but that would attest to the power and richness of the creations set before us. Linda Stojak's work, although extensively collected privately, is not yet on view in the major museums, as it should be, so this show is a special opportunity that should not be missed.

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