

## REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

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### Linda Stojak at Stephen Haller

Continuing Linda Stojak's expressive depiction of isolated figures of women whose principal affect reads as sorrow, her recent oils and mixed mediums on canvas are as formally compelling as they are moving. (Those described here are dated 2005.) The faces of the figures are for the most part hidden from view as they kneel or squat, turned forward or in profile, their identities concealed. These solitary, centrally deployed figures activate a picture plane that in each instance is made up of monochromatic fields methodically laid down with a palette knife, stroke on stroke, a kind of burnishing activity that causes the surfaces to glow with a luminosity resembling that of encaustic. The women are sketched into that surface with the edge of the blade.

There is something hard-won about these anxiously drawn, oddly romantic figures that in their tense grace recall the drawings of Alberto Giacometti and Susan Rothenberg. The attenuated individual at the center of the 6-by-5-foot *Figure 23* kneels on a glowing pink ground. The curved arc of her knees is reiterated by that of elbows and shoulders, the face obscured by the hands. A cursory examination along the unpainted sides of the stretcher suggests the presence of substrata of yellow, red and pale blue that appear in the fields of a number of paintings in this series. Closely associated by subject, the pale blue 4-foot-square *Figure 30* echoes *Figure 23* in pose but is standing, her legs extending to the lower edge of the canvas. As though moving through a cycle of attitudes, the slightly more than 4-foot-square *Figure 20*, of a similar blue, presents its subject in profile, seated, leaning forward and facing right, floating just above the center of the picture plane. Her hair falls like rain or tears, obscuring her face completely. Stojak's 5-by-6-foot *Figure 22*, a vibrant yellow, depicts a similar model



Linda Stojak: *Figure 23*, 2005, oil and mixed mediums on canvas, 72 by 60 inches; at Stephen Haller

seated on what may be a chaise or bench, elbows on knees, hair cascading, torso pressed against thigh.

Three paintings deviate from this program of anonymous, sorrowing figures. The largest and boldest, *Figure 27*, is as reductive and significant as a heraldic emblem, a pale, expressive, even voluptuous figure the color of alabaster reclining on her side through a 6-by-5-foot field of blood red. The knees are bent at the painting's edge; one arm is out-

stretched, the other cradles her head. Two feet square, the diminutive canvas that contains *Figure 28* offers the disembodied head of a woman or child in repose or death. The emphatic verticality of *Figure 26* lightens its central feature, a child facing forward in a manner that suggests a quiet moment in a dance. Only a trace of pathos remains, as though Stojak has worked her way through to an unexpected redemption.

—Edward Leffingwell