

ARTFORUM

Muenzer, David. "The Ocular Bowl." Critic's Pick, *Artforum.com*, April 22

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"The Ocular Bowl"

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1201 South La Brea Avenue

April 2–May 28

"When you're ready, you can open your eyes." Guided meditations suspend vision in the name of presence, only bringing back sight to close each session. Phenomenological strains of modern painting, by contrast, offer vision as the primary vehicle for experience. With works by Agnes Pelton, Linda Stark, and Alex Olson, "The Ocular Bowl" presents three generations of practitioners whose paintings invoke spiritual consciousness.

In Pelton's 1929 oil-on-canvas work, *Star Gazer*, the roughly symmetrical composition and rich color give it the force of an icon. A flower in the lower third of the canvas seems to look up at, or perhaps receive the light of, a single star in the gradient sky. Stark's work also engages the iconography of spirituality, but with an ironic distance. See, for instance, the square painting *Ruins*, 2008, a part of her torso series picturing cropped figures, which depicts a graphic shirt featuring Stonehenge overhung by a massive full moon in a hot-pink sky. An arrowhead pendant necklace, modeled in painted wood as a shallow relief, cuts into the image. These New Age tropes are complicated by Stark's seemingly sincere pleasure in material experimentation and exacting application.

Olson, the youngest artist here, is most overtly in dialogue with modernism. In her oil-and-modeling-paste painting *Circuit*, 2016, three squares appear immersed in horizontal bands of color. The middle of the composition is a single pigment, but the top and bottom shapes comprise multiple rectangles of different colors keyed to optically interact, producing the effect of individual floating squares. While evoking classic Bauhaus exercises as well as the palette of Anni Albers's textiles, form does not wholly stand in for content here: This image is also a kind of sunset, a dusky echo of Pelton's work for a hazy, present-day Los Angeles.



Linda Stark, *Ruins*, 2008, oil and wood on canvas over panel, 36 x 36 x 3".

— David Muenzer