

# ARTFORUM



Linda Stojak *Untitled (Figure 90)*, 1993  
Oil and Mixed Mediums on Canvas  
72h x 74w inches

## CRITICS' PICK

New York

**Linda Stojak**

STEPHEN HALLER GALLERY  
542 W 26th St.

May 1 — June 2, 1993

For her second solo show, Linda Stojak relied heavily on the redoubtable image of the crucifix to embody a haunted and private martyrology. At a distance, her somber, dangling, androgynous torsos, bobbing "heads," and helpless limbs look as if they were

burned not their scuffed, bone-colored grounds with a brand just beginning to cool; up close, they communicate an arresting sense-memory of a deep personal loss that just won't let go.

Stojak channels this melancholia into a blessedly simple, if not entirely welcome, cathartic ritual of repetition. Her waxy layered surfaces, some with small papier-mache constructions, seek a life beyond grief and invoke a primal vitality equal to the emotive qualities of her silhouetted body parts. However, because Stojak makes her esthetic bed with figurative choices that replicate Kiki Smith's more powerful physical imagery, albeit with a more metaphysical slant, much of the work here felt slightly familiar, even secondhand.

Still, the concentrated austerity of a few of these shrine like paintings suggests unsettling sacrificial privations, particularly a pair of rough edged works from 1992 in which crude bench-bed forms occupy one edge of the picture. One bed is a stark, lunar white, framed in the blackest of cave-like spaces extended by pieces of painted wood; the other, in scabby black, bone, and deepest red, traverses the picture plane beneath doll-like effigies that rise behind it like multiple wounds. Closer inspection of sister images in some of the other paintings reveal the penitent "legs" to be these same bench forms laid back to back and driven, upside down, through the top of the field.

The sad, life-draining effects Stojak achieves by reshaping her bed and torso images with black spidery drips, which fall down like torn netting over a pock-marked crucifix perversely enrich a larger 1993 painting whose two panels are joined by an altarpiece worth wooden beam. The crucifix theme might place these works at the center of current fashion if they didn't create an atmosphere of genuine devotion. Though bodies float and surfaces seethe as if entire insect colonies were crawling under their skins, Stojak's distinct asceticism envelops her vigil in a kind of cloistered quiet that almost soothes one's sense of unrelieved anxiety. This is moody work, but it is centered in an illuminated consciousness that draws strength from its curious visual tensions.

— Linda Yablonsky