

In this new installation created for the MCA, Danielle Gustafson-Sundell explores ideas about the way art works "make-out" with and have crushes on each other, while referring to the emotional, sexual, and bodily relationships in her sculptures. She invited artist Carrie Gundersdorf to include one of her paintings in the exhibition in order to create a conversation between the colors, forms, and art-historical references in their work, but also because their relationship as friends has been a significant catalyst. The works speak with each other through similarities in the hand-crafted process—Gustafson-Sundell cuts and sews felt and patchwork pieces together, while Gundersdorf paints multi-layered shapes and colors. Gustafson-Sundell cites influences from art history such as minimalist sculpture, evident in *lovehole* with its geometric forms and placement on the floor, while Gundersdorf's large, colorful composition—based on scientific images of stars—recalls early twentieth-century abstract paintings.

The following conversation was conducted by e-mail in May 2002.

**Julie Rodrigues:** *Danielle and Carrie—what artists do you have crushes on and why?*

**Danielle Gustafson-Sundell:** I often have crushes on artists who do something I wish I had done or even thought of, or complicate the way I thought I knew something. (It's really nice when I can't figure out how the hell someone made a move.) It's a crush—a mixture of admiration and envy and it's all over the place in terms of time. It can be out of history and somewhat contradictory and convoluted, like loving the work of those sixties big boys—minimalist sculpture, early video, and conceptual projects (stubborn objects and language spaces)—while loving to look at some modernist paintings (color all over!), and holding closely the personal body politics of Hannah Wilkes, Lynda Benglis, etc. I really like artists who can make me believe a thing means something else while at the same time it just is what it is—folks who mess with object/metaphor. It's really difficult for me to be specific with names because crushes are fickle but right now I think Rachel Harrison is amazing.

**Carrie Gundersdorf:** I love Mary Heilman's paintings because of her attitude: every mark is direct, laid-back, and unwaveringly cool. Her paintings are casual and urgent at the same time, they are geometric abstract paintings that embody the everyday world. I am also very interested

in Joanne Greenbaum's paintings; the lines and shapes in her work look like she took a doodle and made a painting with it, very offhanded. Also, [I like] Arthur Dove's paintings and collages because they are intimate and experimental with materials, Eva Hesse's work because she worked with series and geometry but she made funky, raw, absurd things, and Laura Owens because her paintings take traditions and turn them inside out, in an all-or-nothing fashion, and she often paints what might seem cliché. I also think about the Magnetic Fields a lot and how their pop songs about love and loneliness reuse sounds, creating a low-tech feel, and their songs are sincere, funny, self-effacing, and very quirky.

**JR:** *Your works create a visual and conceptual nonlinear "connect the dots," from the smallest block of color to larger references to modernism, creating a constant back and forth dialogue between each work. How did you conceive of using the entire room as an installation for the make-out—comprising two sculptures, shag carpet, and one of Carrie's paintings—to foster these relationships?*

**Danielle Gustafson-Sundell:** One of the first things was the project room itself. It has a weird space feel to it. You have to step into it—it's as deep as it is wide and has this really ugly gray carpet that makes the ceiling feel lower than it is and the room darker. It felt like a lived-in space; the carpet made sense in terms of making a project room feel like another kind of room, and changing the color of the floor/ground would be better in terms of setting some sculptures on it. I knew I wanted to use the sculpture *lovehole*, which is a suggestively loaded piece and that and the shag carpet set me thinking about a make-out space. The phrase "make-out" worked as a layered up structure for me to think about the project. "Make-out" is a way to speak of work that I have crushes on, a reference to love/sex/body relationships I think about in my work, the amazing things that happen when you put your work next to someone else's and also a real physical space—the room with the carpet to roll around on. I had been in my friend Carrie Gundersdorf's studio and she had just made these paintings I thought were great. It was a little bit like self-curating—placing yourself where you want to be placed. I invited her to make a painting to hang in the room with my work. The last piece, the sculpture titled *the two of us and extra space*, is punningly right on.

**JR:** *There is difference between the idea of a crush vs. make-out. A crush is one-sided while making out necessitates reciprocation. Are you interested in artists working together and bouncing ideas off each other in verbal exchanges that then influence the work, or is it more of a one-sided crush that is not reciprocated? Or are you interested in an exchange of visual styles and/or ideas through the objects only?*

**Danielle Gustafson-Sundell:** I would have to say all of the above. Both of these ideas happen in *the make-out*. Carrie and I run a project space with two other artists (Adam Scott and Andy Moore) here in Chicago. Over the past two years I have seen the influence art conversations between the four of us have had on our individual practices. So there is an exchange happening, a back and forthness, but at the same time some of what makes us like each other's work and company is not necessarily exchangeable—you can't even borrow it or steal a little! Though it rubs off on you.....There is the way the objects relate to or bounce off of (a good riff!) the visual or conceptual style of historical work, which is a one-sided attraction but hopefully additive.

**Carrie Gundersdorf:** Both are important to me: crushes on other art and dialogue with artists. The dialogue that has developed with Danielle and the other members of Deluxe Projects, Adam Scott and Andrew Moore, over the last two years has been important and influential. We talk about our own art practices, and we also talk about other art, music, TV shows, etc. Often it is the banter about other stuff that is the most insightful. I think artists have always had dialogue amongst each other that influences one another; this doesn't really seem like a new model, but maybe the idea of an artist working by herself in her studio without that conversation now seems strange when there are so many ways to communicate today.

**JR:** *Didn't you both start out as formalist painters and how would you characterize your development from there? How does formalism still exist in your work and how do you insert content and meaning into formalism? Spatial organization and composition seem paramount in both of your works. Can you talk about that?*

**Carrie Gundersdorf:** I am still a painter, and I work with formalism and its history. Content and formalism are very much intertwined in the work. I am interested in creating movement and spatial tension in the paintings through the use of composition and color, and letting it remain in an abstract language. I am using images of outer space gained through technology; the space in the paintings fluctuates between illusion and flat, decorative space, looking back to early twentieth century abstraction. I am interested in tension created by the geometric imagery combined with hand-crafted, off-balanced mark making. I hope my paintings embody a sense of low-fi and the personal, while playing with themes from modernism.

**JR:** *Do you see your work as a direct challenge to the male aesthetic of minimalism and modernism? How are your choices of materials and colors challenging them (or not?) Felt especially references Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris, while oil on canvas is loaded with art-historical traditions.*

*It seems you both also insert elements of craft, sexual connotations, autobiography, and emotion which were traditionally taboo.*

**Danielle Gustafson-Sundell:** I don't want to be unable to use a language because of politics. It's healthier for me to figure out a way to use it but also to refill it if I can. I am always conscious of the contradictions in my position. It is confusing that I am wary of—often really pissed off at—the politics inherent in work I am attracted to and at the same time in awe of. How can I feel a kinship to something, a place or time, when there really would not be a place for me there? How can I locate myself in that language or conversation? For me, it has become about me taking what I like, (and I use the word take with full awareness of its usage), and using it. Emotions are still pretty taboo in art and especially in the ways we talk about the art . . . and I think about this a lot—why do we still privilege the detached, the removed, etc.? Hidden in that conversation I think some pretty nasty gender biases and arguments could be found. I make work from the self—myself—and it's an emotional self. I find it strategically wisest to make the work the toughest and smartest I can using an already in-place definition of those terms—tough and smart while at the same time challenging the definitions—by how a thing is made and what is said. Something funny and sad and pretty and ugly seems to me as tough as it gets . . .

**Carrie Gundersdorf:** I am interested in reworking and rethinking ideas from both those movements rather than directly challenging them. It seems impossible to work with this history today without a certain amount of doubt in the process, but this makes it interesting too. I would rather use what is traditionally thought of as male and own it, change it, open it up to new interpretations, and combine sensibilities in new ways.