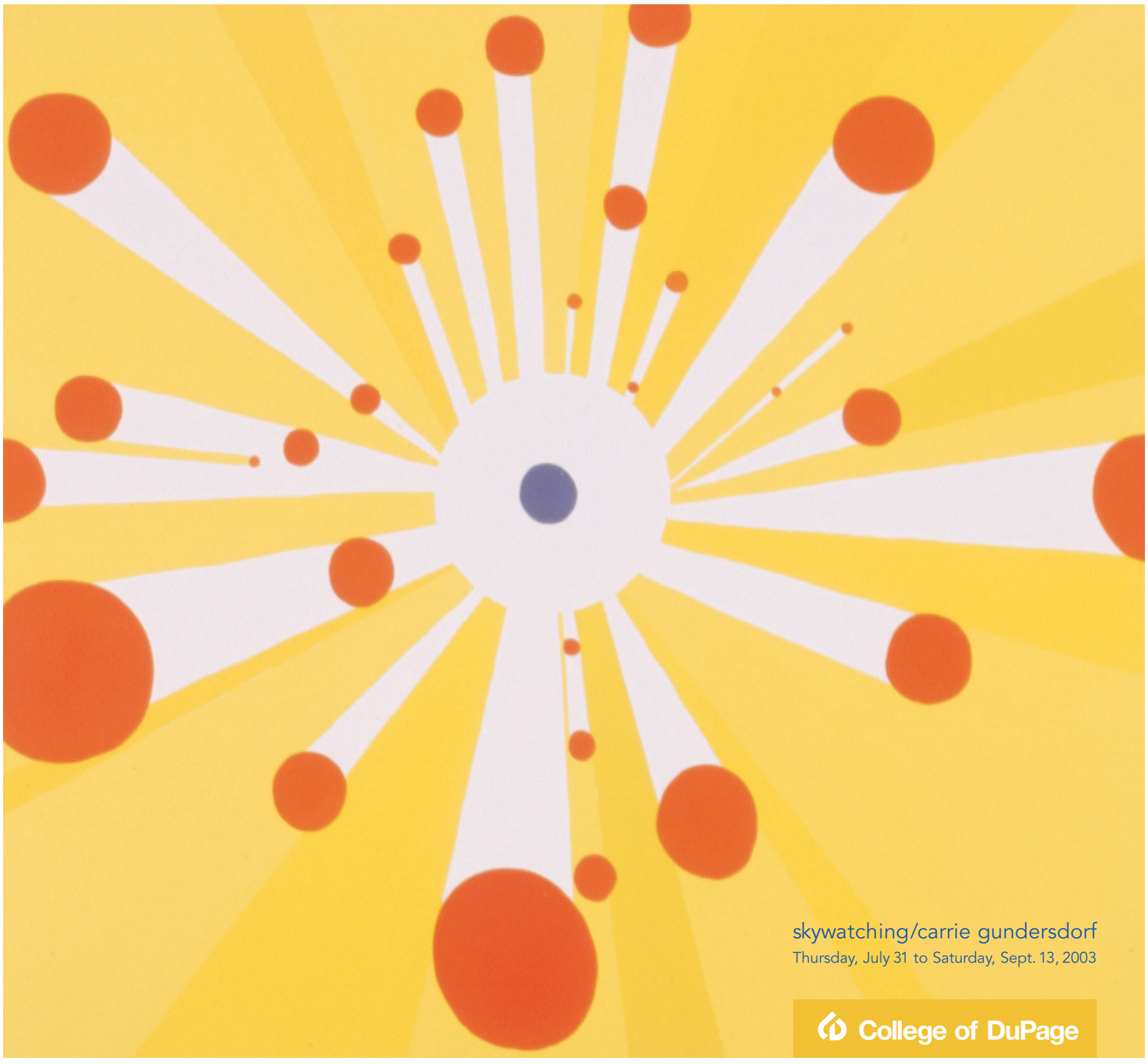
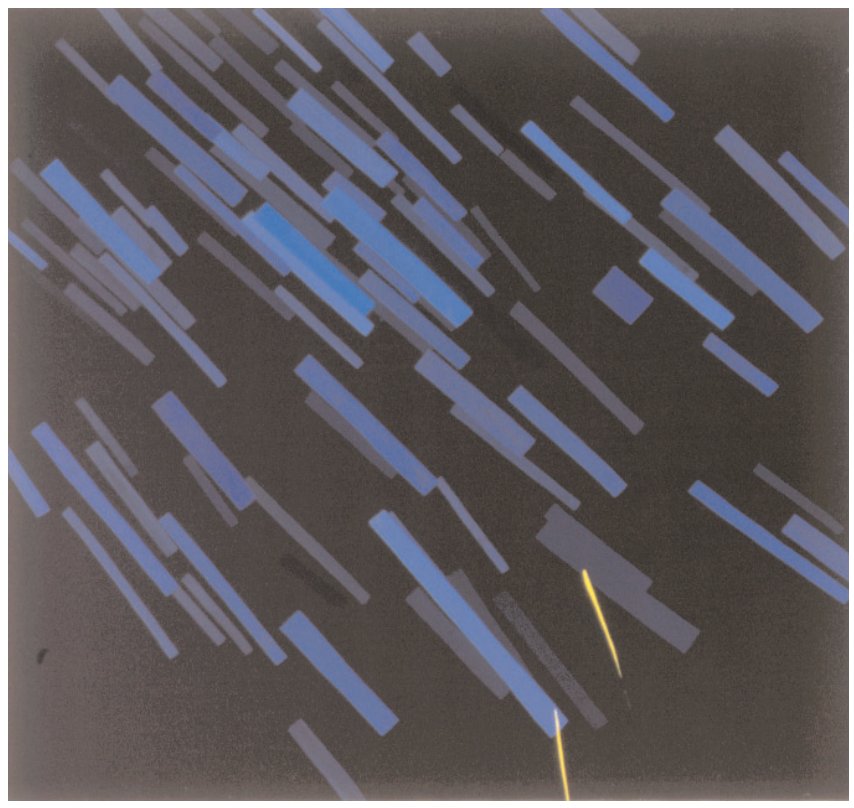

skywatching/carrie gundersdorf
Thursday, July 31 to Saturday, Sept. 13, 2003
College of DuPage

skywatching



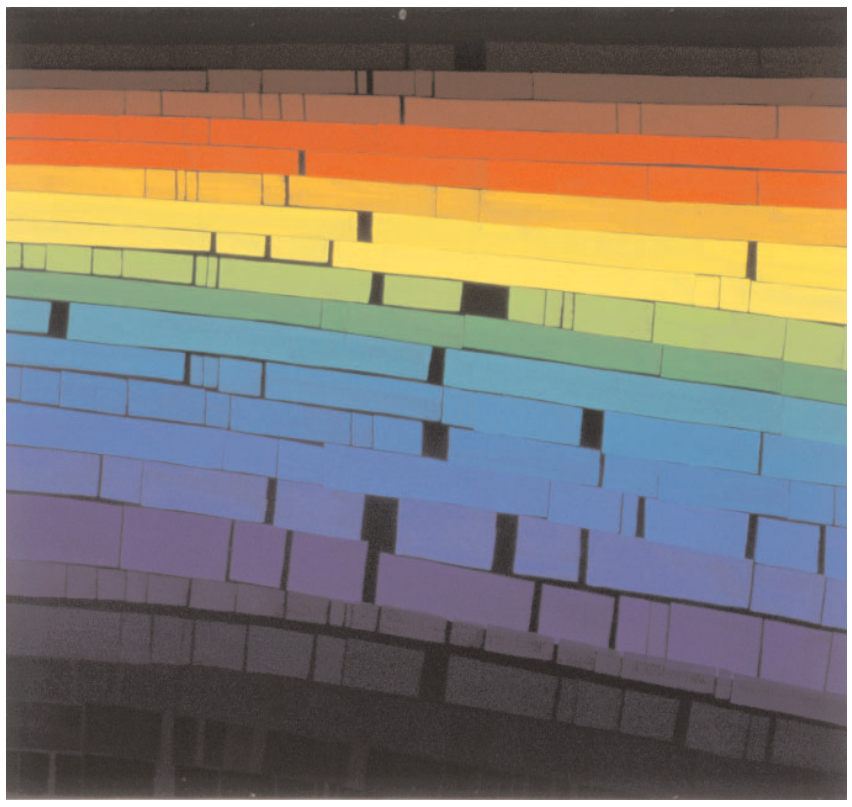
Blue Trails, oil and acrylic on canvas, 65" x 70", 2003

Abstract painting in the first half of the 20th century occupied a critical role in the production and definition of Western culture. Deeply politicized, most abstract painting proposed new directions for culture through conflicting representations of where exactly culture should go. At mid-century, abstract painting in the United States was radically divested of its leftist affiliations because such sympathies were deemed un-American: "You are either with us or against us."

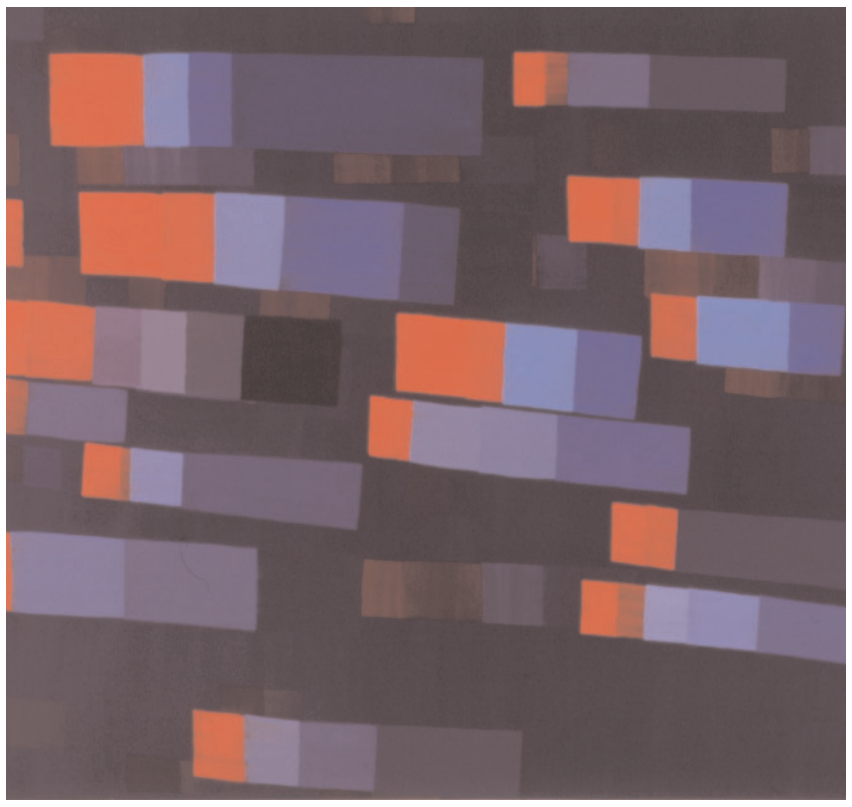
In the wake of Abstract Expressionism, painting took on formalism as an organizing principle under the leadership of Clement Greenberg and his heirs. Then, like many of the concepts associated with modernism, formalism was quickly ousted as post-modernism and its linguistic turn occupied the academy. Overt political agendas were back and iconoclasm was in as we learned that visual culture had cheated, deceived, misrepresented and exploited us all these years.

Currently, an interest in globalism dominates the cultural landscape with the art world leaving no rock unturned in the hopes of providing a platform for all cultures as long as they're able to visually present themselves in such a way that we can understand them. As a result, art on the international stage becomes more about what it says than what it does. The flipside to the global is, of course, the local and the local usually responds to the problems and questions it encounters on a daily basis. A recent shift in the vast locale of the United States is an earnest return to abstract painting that reconstitutes formalist concerns. What is the function of abstract painting? How are painters engaging the history of abstraction? What does it mean to make abstract paintings emptied of any overt politics? Carrie Gundersdorf's paintings don't offer specific answers but rather immerse themselves in such questions.

Gundersdorf's paintings, in fact, are less about what they say and more about



Frequency, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60" x 65", 2003



Red Shift #2, oil on canvas, 65" x 75", 2002

what they do. Using scientific imagery as compositional devices, Gundersdorf records natural phenomena ranging from immaterial light to unattainable stars. Her relationship to such images, however, is about visual space and the elemental devices used in the construction and representation of space rather than the deep reaches of outer space. We can be more specific by saying that her work is preoccupied with light as most of the images used record the wavelengths of light emitted as color. In short, her paintings are about making paintings.

In *Blue Trails* (2003), the movement of stars, too slow for our eyes to register, is recorded as diagonal blue bands that are fused with the descent of meteors as yellow streaks, with trails that are too rapid to follow. Gundersdorf uses two separate images of movement to represent the dichotomy of slow and fast, which cause us to consider how we visually understand "slowness" and "fastness." By working with opposing terms, Gundersdorf underscores the notion that a thing is defined by what it is not. *Blue Trails* is also concerned with how we represent order and chaos; geometry and the handmade; and flatness and illusion.

As aesthetic objects, her work engages our expectations about structure, patterns, and color in the ordinary world. Our daily experience is an aesthetic one that often resists language as we unconsciously respond to our memory of how we negotiate our environment and gain knowledge through vision by processing such things as surface, volume, repetition, color and scale. It is usually only when the patterns of the everyday become disrupted that we realize the extent to which we rely on them in ordering the fluidity of experience. In "Air Guitar," Dave Hickey writes, "living as we do in the midst of so much ordered light and noise, we must unavoidably internalize certain expectations about their optimal patternings — and that these expectations must be perpetually and involuntarily satisfied, frustrated and subtly altered every day, all day long, in the midst of things, regardless of what those patterns of light and noise might otherwise signify." And, aside from the occurrences that détourne our day, it is art that provides the occasion to recognize our dependence on these patterns by waking us from our aesthetic slumber.

Gundersdorf counts Arthur Dove, Piet Mondrian, Mary Heilman, Joanne Greenbaum and Ruth Root among her intergenerational influences. With the exception of Dove and Mondrian, all of these artists, according to Gundersdorf, find ways to own the history of modernism and to retool it in order to create new meaning from its concepts and visual language. They infuse, subvert and play with the history of 20th century art to put forward viable options for painting, such as humor, open-endedness, emotionality and the anti-heroic; qualities that weren't permitted under the restricted institutional version of modernism. For example, the optical pulsing of Gundersdorf's work certainly relates to '60s op art, specifically the work of Bridget Riley. The optical aspect of Riley's work relies on patterning and a considerable distance between the author and the object, it appears machine made, a fragment of a fragment of a larger whole. Gundersdorf's work, on the other hand, is rife with oddities and mistakes and as a result its clunkiness draws attention to its making and its maker. It feels complete, bound by the limits of the frame and reminds us that it is a painting as much as it is a picture we are looking at. Her paintings exist in the world and refuse to define our experience of them, prompting us to realize that when viewing such works *we have a choice*.

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The Gahlberg Gallery/McAninch Arts Center would like to thank the artist, Carrie Gundersdorf, and the writer, Shane Campbell, for making this publication and exhibition possible.

Barbara Wiesen
Gahlberg Gallery Director
and Curator

Gallery Hours:
Monday through Thursday,
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Thursday, 6 to 8 p.m.;
Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
(630) 942-2321
www.cod.edu/ArtsCntr/gallery.htm

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(cover) *Atomic*, oil on canvas, 65" x 70", 2002