

ArtReview

April

Reviews

Carrie Gundersdorf

5 Feb-19 March
Shane Campbell, Oak Park,
Illinois (+1 630 697 0609,
www.shanecampbell.net)

Review by Terry R Myers

Obviously Carrie Gundersdorf isn't the first artist who has used abstraction in its most anonymous, geometric form in order to turn the tables and infuse it with a distinctive personality and tangible sense of pure joy. Just mentioning two of her heroes – Piet Mondrian and Mary Heilmann – not only puts her in very esteemed company, but also indicates the staying power of her core concerns over the span of modernism to post-modernism to whatever we want to call the period we are in today. (One thing is for sure: we're in a time during which abstraction means something again, above all for younger artists.)

Nevertheless, Gundersdorf's particular version of a well-travelled transformation deserves to be seen as a tremendous achievement in its own right, especially given the simple physical makeup of the work itself: straightforward oil and/or acrylic on canvas paintings (none of which were in this exhibition), and absolutely gem-like yet understated watercolour and coloured pencil drawings (six of which were shown here).

The humble nature of her work in both process and image heightens the magical effect of its grounding in labour-intensive depictions of reaching-for-the-stars. Like all her work from the past few years, the drawings in this exhibition (all 2005) are inspired by natural phenomena that have occurred light-years away – stars, meteor showers, etc – yet are eternally capable of affecting us deeply in our time and place, not to mention space.



All of the drawings take full advantage of Gundersdorf's meticulous procedure: deliberate yet relaxed strokes of coloured pencil are blended into luminous layers of watercolour until they appear inextricable. The pencil strokes are relatively abbreviated; just enough, it seems, to slow down the celestial event that is taking place on (or across) the paper. In *How far away are they? (the pleiades)*, arching rectangles of various shades of grey read as tails of 10 or so bright red square-shaped shooting stars. Moving from left to right, they seem literally anchored to the paper not only by their counterbalancing tails, but also by the calming, steady rhythm of the pencil marks. In the end, the all-over quality of Gundersdorf's beautiful draftsmanship is what gives her drawings their own power of gravity, holding everything in place against other considerable forces of nature (not to mention composition) while making it all look effortless.

Sometimes Gundersdorf's titles may be dangerously close to a too-romantic point of no return – *One day I want to live in the country and have a telescope (north pole)*, for example – but for the most part they are refreshingly nerdy: *Spectra can tell astronomers what stars are made of and how hot they are*. In the end, they reinforce the level of Gundersdorf's commitment to her work while keeping it, her and us all safely on the ground.

Above: Carrie Gundersdorf, *Looking for a meteor – citron version*, 2005, colour pencil and watercolour on paper, 48.3 x 61cm