



**CONSTELLATIONS,
MOONS, AND WATER**

Karen Gunderson

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Constellations, Moons, and Water
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With an essay by Mark Daniel Cohen

Cratering the Light

The Luminous Lifting of the Soul in the Art of Karen Gunderson

by Mark Daniel Cohen

It would be well, after so long a departure from the considerations of maturity in our cultures, to give witness to the mark of the fully matured artist — for there is no other issue so pertinent to and revealing of the indispensable virtues of the art of Karen Gunderson.

The impress of the maturation of the artist's work is the ability to make the foundational component of the artist's medium as distinctively and indelibly as a fingerprint. That base component, that essential aspect of the artist's art, is the root of the principle upon which the work is conceived, it is the brick out of which the edifice of the artwork is constructed, and its laws are the laws of the work as a whole. Its nature is the nature of the art itself; it is the work in small. Or rather, the artwork is the single phrase, the individual gesture, writ large. For the writer, it is the sentence and the clause; for the sculptor, it is the surface texture; for the composer, it is the musical phrase; for the painter, it is the brush stroke.

However, it would be far more to the purpose to observe that the foundational component is not so much the most rudimentary physical element of the material work as it is the core principle of manipulation of the medium. For the writer, it is the manipulation of verbal thought; for the sculptor, the orchestration of tangible form; for the composer, the choreography of sound and with it, automatically, directly, emotion; and for the painter, the dispensation of light.

These are more the means by which the artist manipulates the responses of the witnesses of the work. These are the letters and terms, the inflections and colorations, the inclinations and configurations, by which the artist speaks, by which the artist is able to speak at all. They are the language of the art, for they are fractal. The variety of ways they can configure the field of the artwork are the sum total of its aspect. They compound and orchestrate the language of the work for they are — in the most literal sense of the nature of the artwork — all that it is. A work of art can say only what its component gestures do.

For the marks that compose, for all the gestures that make up and animate the anatomy of the work to be meaningful, they must be individual, they must be a language of the artist's own making, a language, a style, that is unique in its totality, distinctive in its overall outline, for in art as in all forms of thought and expression, in all manners of human exchange, it is profoundly difficult to mean anything at all. One of the primary laws of thought, one of the first truths of it that becomes evident to one devoting it serious attention, is that thought is continuously subject to suggestibility.

We are all given to it. Much of what we convey in all the ways in which we convey to each other is not truly rooted and is without serious intent. Our signal gestures are rarely signal. We contribute to each other a nearly continuous flow of expressions — verbal and otherwise — that are largely viral. We catch them like the symptoms of a disease and hardly are aware of what we spread. Our intentions are largely a function of inattention, our words repetitions of things we barely heard and hardly hear ourselves saying again. On the whole, expression is not communication — it is epidemic.

And that is why the tools of art — and of all forms of serious-minded reflection, communication, and feeling and thought — are only secondarily and as a by-product tools of expression. They are primarily the intellectual implements for digging. They are the mechanisms of the imagination, by which the artist explores the plummet deeps of the artist's own nature, to discover what can be said, what needs to be said, what is truly intended — what must be given its voice, and its voice is the language that is the

artist's very art. The tools of art are among the few means we have for eluding superficiality, for achieving the profundity that otherwise evades us, and for being ourselves individually, when we otherwise are only blended victims of the contagion of apparent meaning, paleness of purpose, and mere existence. Their primary work is committed and fully accomplished before the work is finalized and given to the world. That is why what they convey to others is only aftermath, side effect, the mere remains of a project whose truer purpose was the desperately imperative drive to discover, in the center of the artist's most essential self, what can be known in no other way.

Meaning is hard, almost unachievable, as we so often press down on a thought only to feel it slip out from under our mental fingers, and we discover that there was nothing supporting it other than something impossibly vague or merely overheard — the movement of the empty sleeve of a ghost. Meaning is hard; it must be probed in the foundations of the mind. And so it is the personality, the individual nature of the individual mind, that is its root. For meaning is also indispensable. One must be capable of meaning something — deliberate, clear, and precise in its intention — in order to have a meaning, personally and for oneself, in order to be meaningful. To be at all, one must be an individual. To exist is thus a function of determination, of deliberateness, of possessing the clarity of thought to know one's mind, distinct and apart from all others — to live is necessarily to live deliberately.

And thus art must be continuously remade in the artist's image. For the nullity is anonymity. Regardless of the subject at issue, regardless of the matter to which the attention of the artist is turned, the artist's identity must never be in doubt. The statement that could be made by anyone has been made by no one, and is the assertion of nothing whatever, for it is merely the trading in acquired phrasings, in information exchanged as commodity, whose significance grows fainter with every passage. The voice must be distinctive, unmistakable, thoroughly personal, for it to be a voice, and a principle of articulation. For it to be meaningful, the voice must be the origin of meaning — unique, unmistakable from that of anyone else, yet strangely, immediately, humanly understandable.

In the visual arts, there are few artists working today who forged so distinct an individual voice, few who have generated a style and a language of aesthetic conception and transformation of such innovation and renewal, as Karen Gunderson. It is a rare thing to see the work of an artist who creates as if everything about her medium were known to her — so well versed is she in the history of her craft — and at the same time as if everything about her medium new and previously unknown to her — so much is she unencumbered by it, uncaged by it, so far has she gone to rethink the very nature and practice of painting.

Gunderson paints as if she were reformulating the art form of painting from the ground up. Her style, her manner of execution and thus her imagination — her capability of dreaming, discovery, and inner sight — is thoroughly new, completely her own, literally something not seen before. Her work is not the next step in a line of innovation that constitutes one thread in a modern tradition. It is not a pastiche of influences arranged in a pattern and through a computation of proportions that are moderately different from all other contemporary compounds. Her work is *sui generis*. She has conjured a technical innovation entirely of her own making and she has welded it into a style that resembles no one else. She creates as if her work were its own tradition, and she does so even as she practices a craft so carefully executed, she pays homage with every brush stroke to the great work that has preceded her.

It is a rare thing to discover, and it should be missed by no one interested in the nature not just of painting or of visual art, but of art itself. Gunderson has shown her work internationally, on four continents, in numerous solo and group exhibitions, but one can never see her art enough, and her exhibition of nine new works at ClampArt, “Karen Gunderson: Constellations, Moons, and Water,” is an opportunity to see her extending her technical innovations into new ranges of effect and aesthetic insight.

However, what is primarily evident in this exhibition is what is always evident in Gunderson’s work, what is evident only when authentic and fully mature works of art are present: the very essence of the human spirit, vivified and renewed, as the very na-

ture of art is vivified and renewed by the discovery and practice of the unique, individual voice, by the renewal of meaning and intention that can be obtained only through access to the center of the human soul.

Art is the molten fusion of the hand and the soul. The impulse to create is something more than just the self-appointed engaging in invention — it is a hurtle at the hinge-point of an impossibility: to render as real and palpable the inward realm of an aromatic and shimmering existence, to build as hard fact the fleeting reflection of another region in which we also have our lives, and in which we all live a more lilting experience. To make art is to fashion the delicately braiding fire, it is to ignite a universally familiar light out of the dull materials of the duller earth — it is to call down to the soil a quiet and entrancing flame and to see that, as the Renaissance poet John Nashe wrote, “brightness falls from the air.” The accomplishment of true art is to bind the material of the body to the essential and immaterial matter of the spirit, to match the outer life to the inner, to make with the hand what only the inward senses can grasp. And the transparent, intangible, incarnadine blush of aesthetic bliss — which, for those with the necessary inflection of personal nature to know it, travels through the veins and filaments of the spirit with something like a religious ardor, something like an aimless and drifting moment of love — is always triggered by some artist making some aspect of the inner life somehow incarnate, by some artist breaking the laws of physics and fate, breaking the laws of the physics of the soul and merging across the chasm that splits our essence the facts of material existence and the energy of inspired life, to bring to the inertness of the mass that we are the brilliant swiftness of the thought that we are as well — the true meaning of achieving meaning, the reason it is precious, the purpose of knowing, of thinking, which ultimately is to feel — to achieve the experience of being fully alive.

At the heart of Gunderson’s unique artistic spirit is a technical innovation, a redefinition of painting that is entirely her own — the route by which, under her hand, the creativity of art itself has been re-created, as it must be, always, by any true artist. Gunderson’s innovation involves the painting of figurative works executed completely

in black paint. The artist has been developing her technique for the black paintings since the late 1980s. She employs a variety of black hues to obtain a range of differing values, of distinguishing darkensses — ranging from the soft and subtle, almost succulent suffusion of lamp black to the midnight absence and light-absorbing eclipse of peach black. Yet, their differences of value do not account for the visual evidence of the figures, for the sheer fact that — painted in black set against backgrounds of virtually identical black — they are clear to the eye, as clearly visible as if they had been illustrated with a full palette.

Rather than illuminate her subject matter through the use of a full spectrum of hues, Gunderson engraves her imagery in the air between the painted surface and the viewer. Rather than simulate the effects of light in full-color images whose tones are orchestrated to denote a shade of vicarious illumination striking a vicarious scene, she instead choreographs the projection of actual light off her monochrome works and focuses it, molds it into an image that coalesces in real space, not in the space that appears to recede behind the painting's surface, but in the literal space immediately before the viewer's eyes.

Having chosen black as the color that most effectively offsets the projection of pure white light, that most effectively clarifies the highlighted sheen of the painted veneer, Gunderson works as much like an engraver as a painter. She scores the black field of the painting using only her brush, covering it with patterns of lightly incised lines that determine the planes and surfaces of the image by their direction and apparent movement, by the way they reflect the light that strikes them. In essence, Gunderson directs the reflection of light, controlling the physics of illumination and transforming the painting's shimmer of glistening black into a visual ballet, creating the image out of pure light, carving the image out of the vibrations of pure illumination as if out of a vibrant block of living stone, as if out of the very substance of actuality itself, the raw material of the materially, and the immaterially, real.

For all the similarity of technique, the effect is entirely different from that of engraving. The engraver's line works upon the white of the paper; Gunderson's scoring of black paint opens only onto more black. The white one sees is of the light itself. The image arises from a background that seems to have the richness and density of black satin, a mysterious space of velvet texture. The image literally glows, lives as a white iridescence, and hovers in the atmosphere, existing literally as the brightness that falls from the air, as the inner illumination brought into the matter of the earth.

It can be argued that what Gunderson has done is to move the vanishing point — moving it so extremely, she has shifted it out of the painting. In normal perspective composition, the vanishing point is placed only seemingly in the volumetric, only apparently deep in the background — in fact, the vanishing point is positioned on the surface of the work, and all compositional lines are laid to point to it, to intersect where it lies, resulting in the visual conviction that space and all apparent objects in apparent space are receding. Instead, Gunderson's technique has the lines of reflected light intersect at a point in the air between the painting and the viewer — or rather, at a sweeping continuum of points, each one determined by where the viewer stands, and at each point, the image forms itself. Put differently, she has substituted a focal point for the vanishing point.

The effect of this technique — of “aiming” the intended image at the focal point of the reflected light, of positioning it in the air between the viewer and the surface of the work — the quality of the visual impression made on the viewer, is as different from that of the normally painted image as is her rendering technique itself from that of normative painting. Rather than accomplishing a flat visual display that simulates the appearance of a three-dimensional scene observed in realistic, volumetric space, Gunderson achieves an image that seems to function as fully three-dimensional, draped in the substancelessness of space, carved into the very air, and sculpted out of the light. It is rendered, for all intents and purposes, holographically. The image alters as you move around it, as you move around where are feel certain it exists. As one crosses back and forth before one of her paintings, or moves up and down, intensities of light



Churning Grace - Out to Sea, 2010, oil on linen, 73 x 73 inches



The Baltic Revisited, 2010, oil on linen, 73 x 73 inches



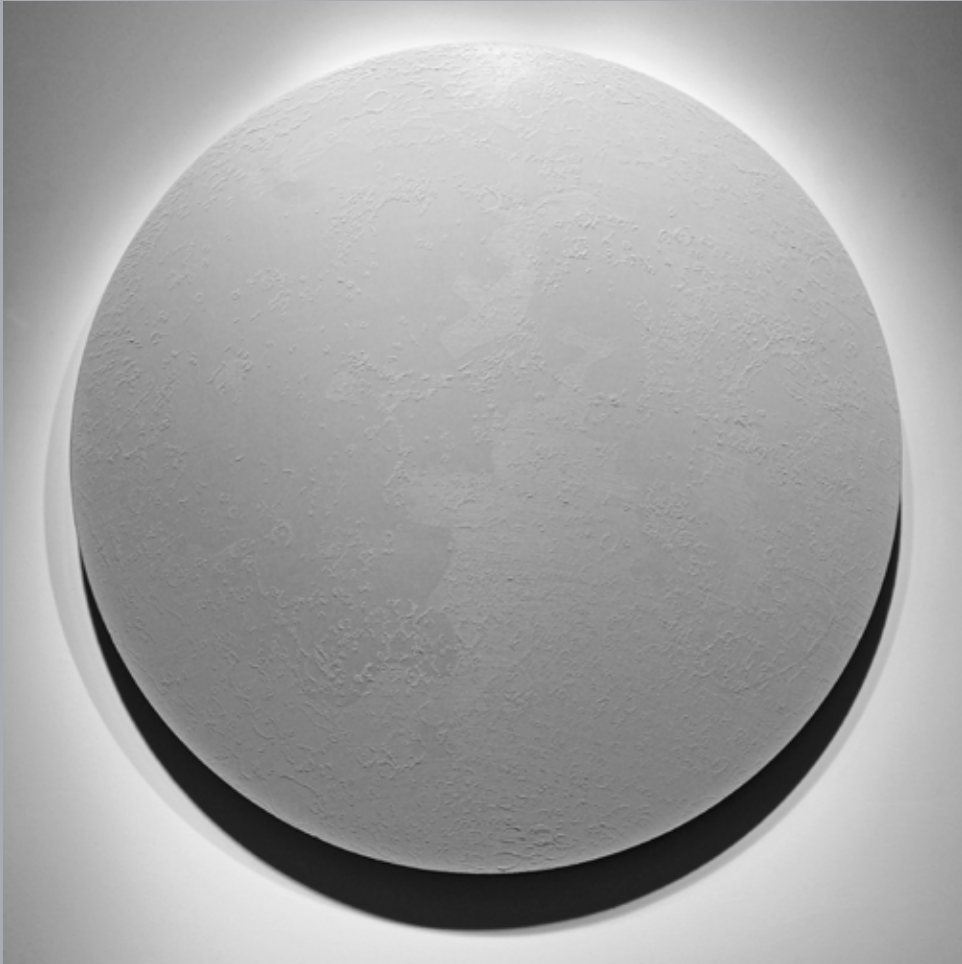
Bridge Into the Night, 2010, oil on linen, 80 x 80 inches



Murphy's Moon, 2010, oil on linen, 80 x 80 inches



Black Moon, 2011, oil on panel, 36 inch diameter



White Moon, 2011, oil on panel, 36 inch diameter

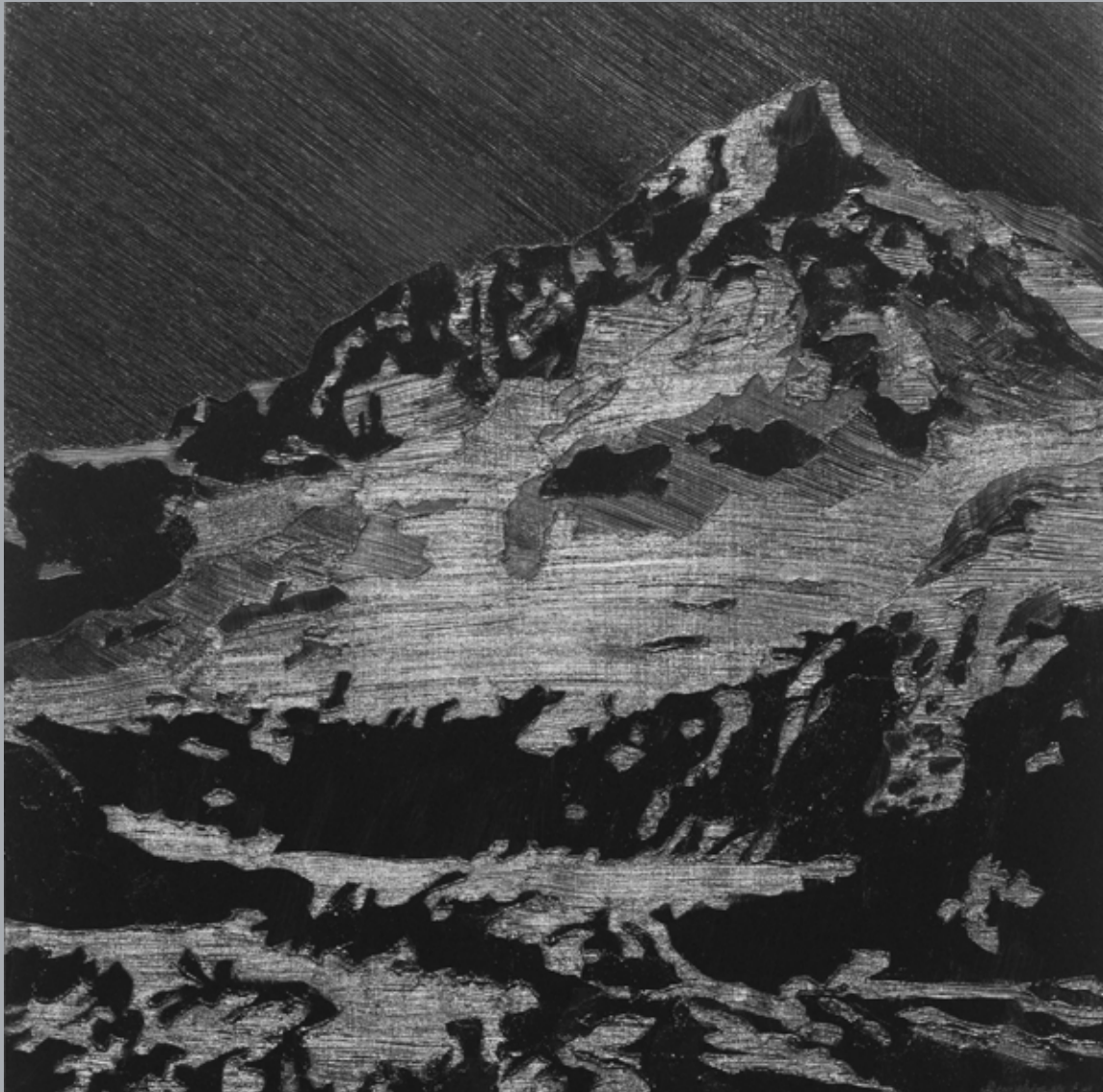




Apothis - Near Miss, 2009, triptych , oil on linen, 61 1/2 x 156 3/4 inches



Small White Matterhorn, 2011, oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches



Small Black Medial-Moraine, 2011, oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches



The Baltic Revisited
2010, oil on linen, 73 x 73 inches



Churning Grace - Out to Sea
2010, oil on linen, 73 x 73 inches

change — what was dim becomes brilliantly lit, what hotly glowed begins to fall into shadow. Continue moving and relationships between foreground and background start to shift, elements appear to rotate, contours rise and fall, the image in its entirety starts to change its position.

Gunderson's concentration in this exhibition on waterscapes and celestial images is in certain ways the most appropriate application of her visual manner, and one can see the nearly holographic effect in her work perhaps nowhere so forcefully and effectively as in the two purely water paintings here: *The Baltic Revisited*, 2011, and *Churning Grace Out to Sea*, 2010. There is something mountainous and rugged about them both, something craggy and angry, and something in-turned — self-contained, meditative, independent, majestic, and royal. At the same time, there is something of them that is of the very essence of what they depict, something that rolls, shifts, and crashes like an ocean, that pours layer upon layer like waves, that slides together and through, like liquid masses penetrating each other, always becoming each other. The two images are distinct, a careful eye cannot mistake one for the other — the *Baltic* is choppy and more active, more facile and possessing greater fluidity; the *Churning Grace* is more viscous, has greater depth to its troughs, encroaches more slowly. And yet, they are also the same, as if there beneath the waves of the ostensible subject, there were another subject, as if both images were equally of the essence of something they share, something they are both images of, particular instances of.

As one moves around these works, the light that reflects from the painting and composes the rolling waves begins to roll like waves. The waves rise, pour back from the direction you step into, and crash down upon the surface they attempted to depart, as others rise up in shock and dismay, mounting behind them. Everything rides laterally, like sand across the desert of the sea. And one can detect that each wave, each individual gesture committed in paint to the field of the work, each configuration in the general expanse, is a single



Bridge Into the Night
2010, oil on linen, 80 x 80 inches

gesture by the artist — each wave is a coherent and continuous movement of Gunderson's hand. And one senses the movement within the movement, the human articulation within the human conception — the tangible human presence in the thought that is the meaning of the painting, the intention to commit this painting, and this painting style, and language, and no other.

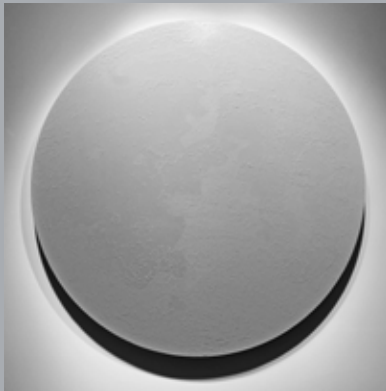
The waves on the surface of the seas are a particularly apt subject for Gunderson's technique, for they are suggestive of the wave nature of the true medium she manipulates — light. Yet, her technique is equally adept at rendering with conviction, and in the void of the space before the painting, the appearance of fixed material

objects. One can see the combined effect in *Bridge Into the Night*, 2010. The painting portrays the bridge that connects Bahrain with Saudi Arabia. (The painting was created for an exhibition that Gunderson mounted in Bahrain in 2010.) The solidity and stability of the bridge are as evident and tangibly present as are the movements of the water beneath it, movements that become almost tactilely real in the dance of light as one circles the painting — the dance that relays structure as well as fluidity.

The conviction of material substance arising out of the play of pure white light points to another effect of Gunderson's technical innovation, a further and extraordinary implication. As one moves before the painted surfaces and the images shift and transform themselves — like a sculpture, or a hologram carved in laser light — one begins to sense tactile qualities of the image; one begins to feel the image with the fingertip of the eye. This is what Gunderson calls "the haptic" — a scientific term for the quality of touch. With this effect, she achieves the synaesthetic bridge — the point at which one caliber of sensory stimulation transforms into another, the point at which vision creates



Black Moon
2011, oil on panel, 36 inch diameter



White Moon
2011, oil on panel, 36 inch diameter

the impression of tangibility, as if you were literally reaching out and grasping the image with your hand. It is a rare and extraordinary achievement, for synaesthesia — the transformation of one sense into another — was an artistic effect sought by many of the artists, as well as the writers, of the early days of Modernism. It engages all the senses together, moving the viewer into a state of altered sensation, and to a heightened degree it infuses the materials out of which art is made with the spirit of aesthetic perception, with the awareness of having been transported to a place beyond the ordinary experiences of life, with the feeling of the more lilting existence.

This integration of the sensations, this capability to feel the sculptural qualities of Gunderson's configurations of the intangible of pure light, can be felt in the movements of the waves, that palpably churn and collide, advance, hesitate, and retreat, crash, conference, and ruminate in her sea paintings. It can be felt hard and architectural in the streaking ramp and path of lamps of her bridge to Saudi Arabia. However, nowhere in the entire body of her work can it be sensed so well, so powerfully and with such authority, as in her moon paintings: *Black Moon*, 2011, *White Moon*, 2011, and the remarkable *Murphy's Moon*, 2010.

Just as waves are a particularly apt image for Gunderson's technique, so too is the moon — our iconic image for the very idea of reflected light, which is Gunderson's true medium. These works, and *Murphy's Moon* most especially, are also exceptionally potent demonstrations that Gunderson's art is more an evocation of a visually tactile awareness of configurations of light than it is, for all its apparent orientation on the figurative, a visually descriptive presentation of objective figures. This is to say that Gunderson's art is about the unbroken and undivided field of continuously shifting orchestrations of radiance — that it is a formulation of all-over painting. Of course, it can be said that any painting is a demonstration of all-over painting, that any painting is painted throughout its surface and that the representation of individual objects is only an effect of the allocation of a continuous spread of shifting pigment. But it is the very elements of painting that Gunder-

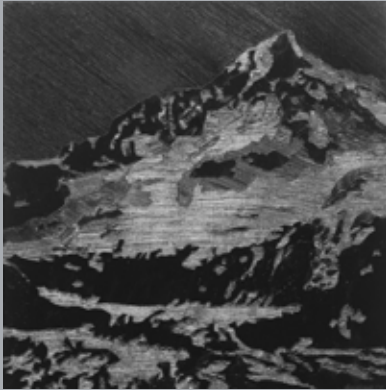


Murphy's Moon
2010, oil on linen, 80 x 80 inches

son has excised from her work — in particular, the use of color — that serves to define clearly outlined objects in nominal painting. In the normal mode, the edges of “things” are as distinct a set of particulars as are any other aspects of the depiction.

The quality of depiction is approached differently in Gunderson’s work. Examine the surface of *Murphy’s Moon* closely and see the degree to which the complex detailing of the surface is not precisely depictive, not precisely a representation, or duplication, of the appearance of the moon. The finely wrought detail — as finely executed as anything in Gunderson’s oeuvre — is arranged to control density of impression, lightness

and dark, the angles of the sheen. This is not the duplication of the physical object but the engine for creating a visually congealed and dense impression of the presence of the object in the power of the light that is sent out from the work — and not just the object but the apparent object within a field of dense impression, in this case against the backdrop of a dark space that is as deeply and extensively incised by Gunderson’s brush, that is as visually active, as the apparent moon. Examine the painting with increasing care and it becomes increasingly difficult to locate the precise edge of the apparent object, of the hovering moon. The field of the work is unified and indivisible in a sense that a fully hued painting is not, and the arrangement of paint is devoted not to depiction so much as to the maneuvering of the illumination, the carving and modeling of it, the building of the iridescence, the scattering of the glister, the cratering of the light.



Small Black Medial-Moraine
2011, oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches

(One can see the effect all the more clearly when comparing either of Gunderson's black moon paintings with her painting *White Moon*, or comparing *Small White Matterhorn*, 2011, with *Small Black Medial-Moraine*, 2011. These pairings provide the unusual opportunity to see the mechanics of the black-on-black work through comparison with a similar composition, or in the case of the moons an identical composition, done entirely in white. Gunderson's white paintings are similar in technique — as with the black paintings, what appears to be a single color is in fact a small variety of hues, primarily silver white and titanium white, yet the effect is entirely different. Here, the definition of the vista is composed of what appear as shadows rather than highlights. Here, the image seems to recede into the surface of the painting, much like the depiction in a realistic perspective painting appears to do, rather than rise out of the painted surface as do Gunderson's black paintings.)



Small White Matterhorn
2011, oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches

Gunderson's black paintings are more field oriented, far less clearly composed as figure/ground — even though they clearly convey an image/ground impression and with greater immediacy, with greater density and tactility, than does ordinary painting. Even so, they are more lateral, more a continuously changing configuration of carefully composed reflective shimmering.

What Gunderson is practicing in her black paintings — through the orientation on continuously shifting configurations of medium rather than the compounding of representations of individual objects — is the artistic equivalent of field theory in science: of reality as not made up of individual objects, rather as a continuous field in which apparent objects are really configurations that only appear individual but are not, comparable to, well, the waves in the water. In other, vastly over-simplified words, space is not empty, and there is nothing but “space” and its contortions, its waves.

What would be an object under the hand of any other artist — the moon is the primary example in these works — is something more like a field within a field in Gunderson's work. The moon appears here less like a hard object and more like a

closed field turned in upon itself, a field of positive curvature, made finite and local, set within the more extensive field of black space but still itself an energy field, still something vibrant and seeming to lift off its own apparent surface, seeming to radiate — something dynamic.

And this is to say that there is something of abstract thinking in these works, something like the abstraction of a scientific theory, which is what abstraction in art always should have meant, and in the best work always did mean, for there is not so wide a split in the divisions among the many forms of the most serious-minded thought. In theoretical abstract thinking, the point of abstraction is to move away from the specific details of individual instances and find a form that represents many examples of similar events in reality — to find the thread that runs through many things, despite their inevitable surface differences, and to find ultimately, if such an ultimate is achievable, the thread that is shared by everything. It is fair to say that abstract thinking is a form of essentialism — the attempt to stipulate what is of the essence of the ever changing real.

And this is what abstract painting was always to be — a move away from surface appearances and an attempt to render that which is more essential, that which the surface appearances only point to, a move to get behind the veneer. It would be a serious mistake to say that Gunderson cannot be considered, in any sense, an abstract painter because she comes so close, relatively, to rendering the appearances of observable objects. That is beside the point. Gunderson is getting at the very essence of the observable forms — her waves are the very idea of waves, they are what waves are when purified, in the mind, of superfluous detail — they not only appear to be waves, they move like waves, they shine like the rocking of the midnight ocean. Her moon is not just the look of the celestial object; it seems to condense with the massiveness of coagulated light, it seems to be creating itself out of its own aura. These works are thoroughly realistic, for they portray the dynamics by which the appearances of the real become what they are. What they are not is representational, for they do not merely attempt to duplicate the fixed objects as observed. In short, they are appearances idealized, and thus made pure. Realism but not representation is not a bad formula for the abstract.

Even so, it would be a mistake to characterize Gunderson's art as lying at an extreme along a spectrum. It is truer to say that, just as her images hover in the air between the painting and the viewer, her art hovers somewhere between abstraction and representation. Her works are somewhere, one might say, between ideograms and pictographs, somewhere between what can be recognized by its surface (literal) fidelity to something observable in the world, and what bears a more intellectual (less literal-minded) fidelity or similarity to the observably real. In obvious ways, they resemble the real as a photograph does — her bridge is specifically and recognizably the bridge between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, her moon is undeniably our moon. In other, less obvious ways, they resemble the real as an equation does. But resemble it they do, with great fidelity, if not to appearances in every possible sense, then to a truth in the appearances.

As we have seen at other times, serious work in any field resembles serious work in other fields, as the split in the thought of the time becomes healed by the effort to be meaningful, to be enough of an individual in vision and practice to mean anything. What we also see in Gunderson's art is what we often see in the work of the strongest artists, and "strong" is a far greater compliment than "great," which has never had any meaning. We see the beginnings of the healing of the split not just in thought, but in the mind — the mind of the individual, the mind that the individual is.

We see it in what must be considered the showpiece work of the exhibition, *Apophis Near Miss*, 2009. The work is an enormous panorama of a night sky, measuring over five feet tall and more than 13 feet across. The black background has been worked in brush strokes that reach from the top to the bottom of the panel, to be, as Gunderson has said, inclusive of the viewer — enormous gestures of the hand that encapsulate the eye that is compelled to respond to the reach of their sheen. The knots in the field shimmer like stars, to portray what are intended to be a recognizable distribution of constellations and apparent star clusters. In fact, the vista is the night sky as seen from a specific spot in southern Russia. The

spot is the place at which, on the night of April 13, 2036, the asteroid Apophis will make its closest approach to earth. When discovered in 2004, Apophis was thought to be on an eventual collision course with earth. In the time since, the chances of a direct impact have been determined to be small. The asteroid will approach earth again in 2012 and 2029, and 2036 will be the closest near miss.

If Apophis does strike the planet, it is thought the impact will be approximately 10 times the size of the largest hydrogen bomb ever exploded.

Gunderson has characterized this work as one of “terror and relief.” To the eye alone, it is a vast rendition of Pascal’s most horrifying thought: “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.” Encountering the painting with its title, one waits for the destruction to come hurtling out of the darkness, and yet one also knows that, this time, it will not. And in the language of Gunderson’s art, we know that the viewer — whose position for receiving the reflected light from the work makes the focusing of the image possible at all — is intact because the image exists. The light condenses an image because it is being observed — if the image exists, the observer exists, and destruction has not arrived.



Apophis - Near Miss, 2009, triptych, oil on linen, 61 1/2 x 156 3/4 inches

Terror plus relief — it is the Aristotelian formula for tragedy: terror and catharsis. This is the integration of the opposites, not just of logical progression, but of thought at its depths, thought

that is human nature, according to one of the most august formulas for one of the high-

est art forms. This is the integration of the personality, of the imagining mind, its split healed, its opposing forces balanced and resolved, the foundation of meaning made whole.

For only through being capable of meaning something, something specific and precise, something deliberate and fully, knowingly intended, can one have a meaning oneself. Only by being an individual can one have a voice that is unborrowed, and a purpose, a voice, and a spirit, unlent. To meaningfully be at all, one must be oneself alone, with a purpose and manner of putting it to practice that is unlike that of anyone else. One can no more adopt someone else's language of thought and dreaming than one can acquire another's fingerprint, another's identity.

That is the highest achievement we discover in art, and in all forms of high-temperature endeavor, and we find it in the art of Karen Gunderson: the fashioning of the individual identity, the creation of the individual human soul. We have been taught that we are all endowed with the capacity to achieve an individual soul, but it is ours to accomplish it, for it comes in no other way. Each of us must achieve it through becoming that which no one else can become, for the soul is that which is unduplicable, which cannot be copied, which has no identicals. It is something learned but unlent, and it has a unique meaning, and a discrete voice.

This is what we see rising up in the art of Karen Gunderson — the essence not just of the subject of her thought, but of the human, for the human is always the subject of art. It is so not because the story must always be about us — no subject is foreign to the human mind — but because the human is present not as the object of thought but as the origin of thinking, not as the thing depicted but as the voice that speaks the words, the ear that composes the song, the hand that holds the brush. The human is our precondition for any vision arising, and is the soil for, the foundation of, the more lilting experience. And the human rises up in every work by Karen Gunderson, lifting up out of the darkness, to hover in the space before us, to float before our very eyes, breaking like a dawn, like clear light.

