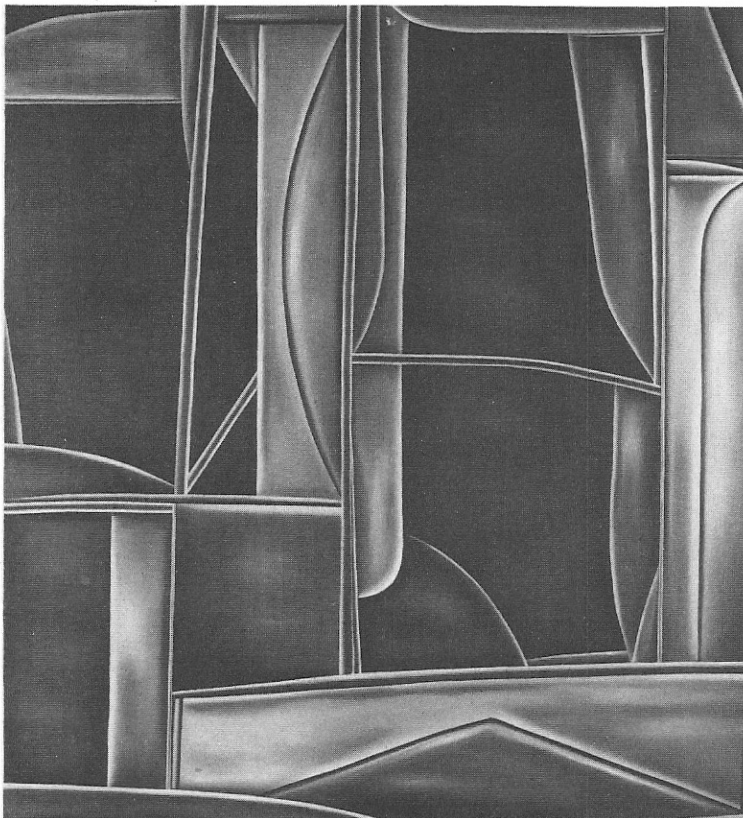


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William Conger, *Cahokia*, 1977, oil on linen, 66 x 60".

BILL CONGER's new paintings consist of architectural sorts of motifs. They divide into windows, hallways, bridges, vents, crossbars and the like, making up fairly quiet, stable containers for a variety of amorphic shapes.

These frameworks contribute to an overall equilibrium in which, despite obliquenesses, concavities and bulbosities, very little seems to agitate. Static frames complement ambiguous shapes and everything seems happy where it "grows." That's a surprising equilibrium because Conger's shapes often resemble functional coverings over some strange type of throbbing organ. Highlights on these weirdly colored bulbs give the surface a rubbery, bloated look.

A painting like *Thrush*, however, tends to fail because its architecture is so difficult to discern and the pinkish-yellowish-silverish shapes impinge upon one another with too little organization to make sense—a needed "sense" in his work, which without the architecture can look foolishly romantic.

In general, though, Conger is a master of color and composition; he "builds" so well that paintings which seem merely to exist as arrangements of shapes on canvas turn out both glib and facile. With greater and lesser success, he has worked away from certain early 1970s compositions in which his "idea" seemed merely to be to crowd the canvas with as many wiggly reeds as possible. His conceptions now seem to have grown. From the 1970 *Mondovi*, a Pop rendition of cells through a microscope with more plan than imagination; to the 1974 *Chicago Quixote*, fantasy-oriented reeds on a lofty sort of distant ground in a kind of silly pun; and finally arriving at the stark, straightforward, 1977 *Exile*, a huddled cluster of discs asymmetrically set off from peeping shapes that oddly don't approach too closely. The less successful works look haphazard; the best works have a cool assurance that makes his fantastic abstraction believable.

—C. L. MORRISON