

arts

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ROLAND GINZEL Dart
GROUP SHOW Van Straaten
WILLIAM CONGER Zaks

William Conger, *That August Day*,
1982. Oil on canvas, 60 x 72".
Courtesy Zaks Gallery.



WILLIAM CONGER

William Conger's recent exhibition reveals the painter in a phase of mature mastery. This small show, virtually his entire 1982 production, comprises only eleven oil paintings, four of them quite tiny (c. 16" square) and even the largest of modest dimensions (60 x 72") by contemporary standards. But Conger's newest paintings convey an almost frightening power which belies their small size, revealing an overt aggressivity seldom present in his earlier work. This aggressivity infects his palette, infusing his brilliant, almost neon-like colors with hot intensities and acidic contrasts, the latter often provided by the delicate glazes so characteristic of this artist.

A few of the smaller canvases recapitulate aspects of Conger's earlier architectonic periods. However, all but one of the larger paintings contain increasingly overt references to nature. The exception, *For November*, primarily an experiment in color balances, contrasts icy blue biomorphic forms, which seem frozen in their field, with a hot, glowing red background. The remaining canvases seem to represent highly abstracted landscapes, allusions emphasized by their strong sense of movement, as well as by the predominant saw-tooth leaf forms, stylized wave patterns, and zigzag shapes suggestive of lightning flashes.

The latter play an important role in *That August Day*, a painting memorializing the experience of driving through a thunderstorm in the Virginia mountains. This composition, the most complex in the show, is capped by a taut golden yellow spiral which acts almost like a clamp, holding back the compacted organic shapes which seem to press against it. Like Monet, Conger seems increasingly inclined to brutality in his representations of nature, and one anticipates further experiments merging the artist's exquisite technique with his new ferocity. (Zaks, February 19-March 22)

By MARY MATHEWS GEDO