

Tempo

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Conger's works are full of power

By Alan G. Artner
TRIBUNE ART CRITIC

William Conger is a Chicago painter who seems to have been doing what he does so beautifully for so long that only a full-scale retrospective would reveal how often the work has changed to achieve new levels of richness.

His exhibition of recent paintings at the Roy Boyd Gallery does not, of course, afford that opportunity, but it does testify to the introduction of new elements that, in relation

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to the artist's earlier output, stand out with winning clarity.

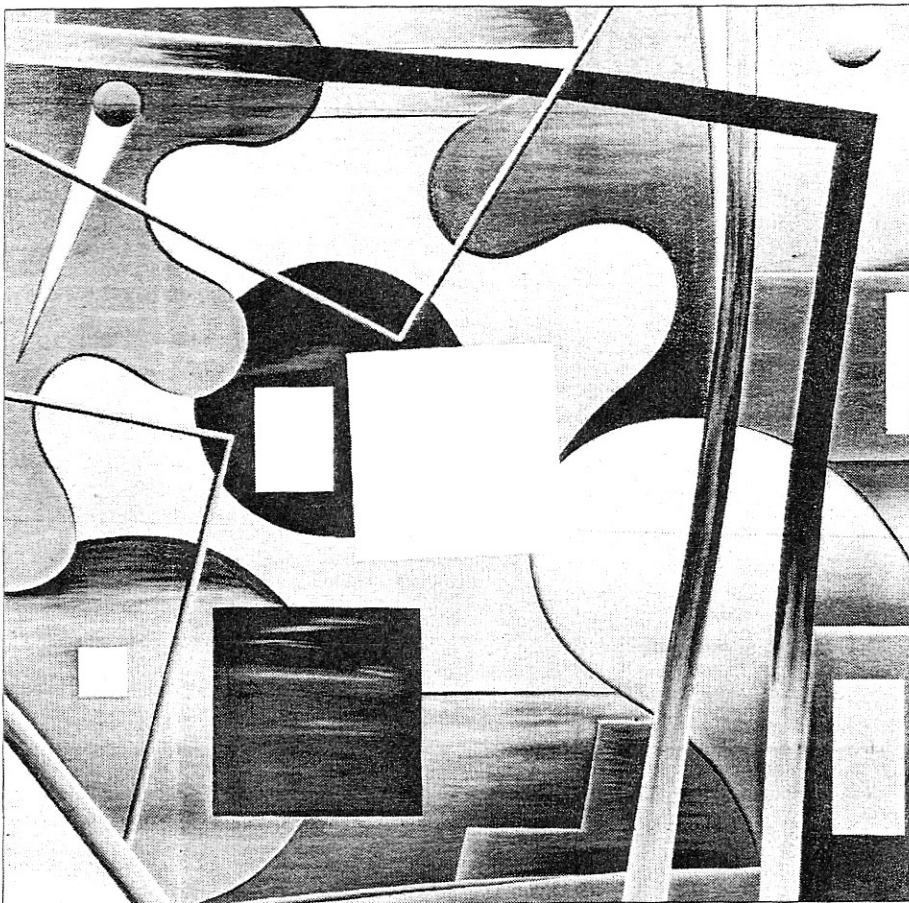
Because Conger is at base a geometric abstract painter, a mere citation of changes in his work makes them sound dry, as if devoid of expressive impact, which is not at all the case.

So the fact he has floated hard-edged rectangles into compositions that appear to open into deep space should be understood not only as affecting the structure of the paintings but also tuning their emotive power to a different pitch.

The way these rectangles interact with each other—the ones near the center of "Belmont," for example, are just askew enough to suggest a new freedom of play—is as telling as Conger's references to some of the tools of his trade, such as frames and a palette.

Light in his canvases some years ago took on a more naturalistic look, as if evoking various times of day at the Chicago locations named in Conger's titles.

But now that light, as well as the bits of earth and water it seems to illuminate, may



William Conger's "Belmont," part of the exhibition at the Roy Boyd Gallery.

vary from segment to segment of the canvas, thereby complicating how we read it.

Conger's color is also deceptive, as it looks hot but muted in all but the brightest light that really makes it sizzle and pop.

All this together gives an impression of

lightheartedness without emphasizing Conger's habitual rigor. Yet the rigor, of course, makes it all work while giving only an illusion of spirited, easeful improvisation.

The exhibition continues at 739 N. Wells St. through April 15.