

Philosophically speaking, there's plenty to see locally

By Doug Hanson

In 1952, Aribert Munzner made a commitment to express one thing only in his art — the idea of origins. He has stuck with it. Now 68 and professor emeritus at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Munzner continues to explore his theme.

Through Oct. 2, a large selection of his work will be on display at Dolly Fiterman Fine Arts (100 University Av. SE., Mpls). It is one of several art exhibits with philosophical themes now on view in the Twin Cities.

Every piece in Munzner's show is titled "Genesis," followed by the date of its creation. Munzner works mostly in acrylic but also in colored pencil, casein and computer graphics. At first glance, his pictures seem like big action-painting abstractions in the manner of Jackson Pollock. But Munzner is more fine-tuned and controls his designs to depict a creativity larger or more universal than his own.

His countless little strokes with narrow brushes look like colored metal shavings pulled into formations by magnetic fields and organized chromatically as well as physically. Forms emerge that suggest galaxies, suns, atoms, flower blossoms or tornadic funnels that appear to channel energy between opposing masses.

These kinetic disturbances leave behind various shapes, mostly ovals but also spirals and

In the galleries

the kind of round, rough-edged images left by explosions. Munzner somehow conveys gaseous and organic effects along with those of light and energy.

The artist wants to provide "new visual metaphors for our modern mythologies." These mythologies are inspired by science, he says, and imply harmonies between microscopic and macroscopic worlds.

It's not easy to straddle what C.P. Snow called the "two cultures" of science and the humanities, and at times Munzner's images seem intended for a narrow public of individuals with degrees in physics, astronomy and art. But his rapture before great and small worlds is convincingly conveyed in pictures that radiate energy and, frequently, beauty. If art should express the dominant beliefs of its time, maybe this is a modern equivalent to Michelangelo's "Primal Act of Creation" in the Sistine Chapel.

Another philosophical painter is showing at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (2400 3rd Av. S.) through Sept. 27. **Barbara Kreft's** pictures were inspired partly by her interest in Zen and two visits to India. Her style, which she calls "romantic minimalism," involves big canvases of frequently faded or obscure images.

"Winter" contains what appear

to be a snowflake, a snail shell and an atom, perhaps suggestive of a nuclear winter? "Labor of Bees" shows faint honeycombs in glowing yellow expanses, as if a flash bulb had gone off in a beehive.

Kreft is interested in repetition and pattern. She also includes images suggestive of star-filled skies and abstract, checkered landscapes. Her work is serene but very remote.

A new show of watercolors by **Karen Gustafson** runs through Sept. 6 at Winchester Gallery (3011 W. 50th St., Minneapolis). Her small, oval daubs function like biological cells that multiply and overlap to build her fanciful depictions of organic life.

A rich mosaic quality infuses her mysterious pods, bulbs and fungi. Her translucent images, which could belong under a microscope or in a Lava Lamp, achieve a charming blend of fantasy and nature.

St. Paul's Unique Images gallery is showing the monoprints of **William G. Capel Slack** through Sept. 12 at 613 Grand Av. Slack cuts his own hardboard forms with a jigsaw, then inks them and runs them through the press. Trained as a painter, he applies colored inks with mastery.

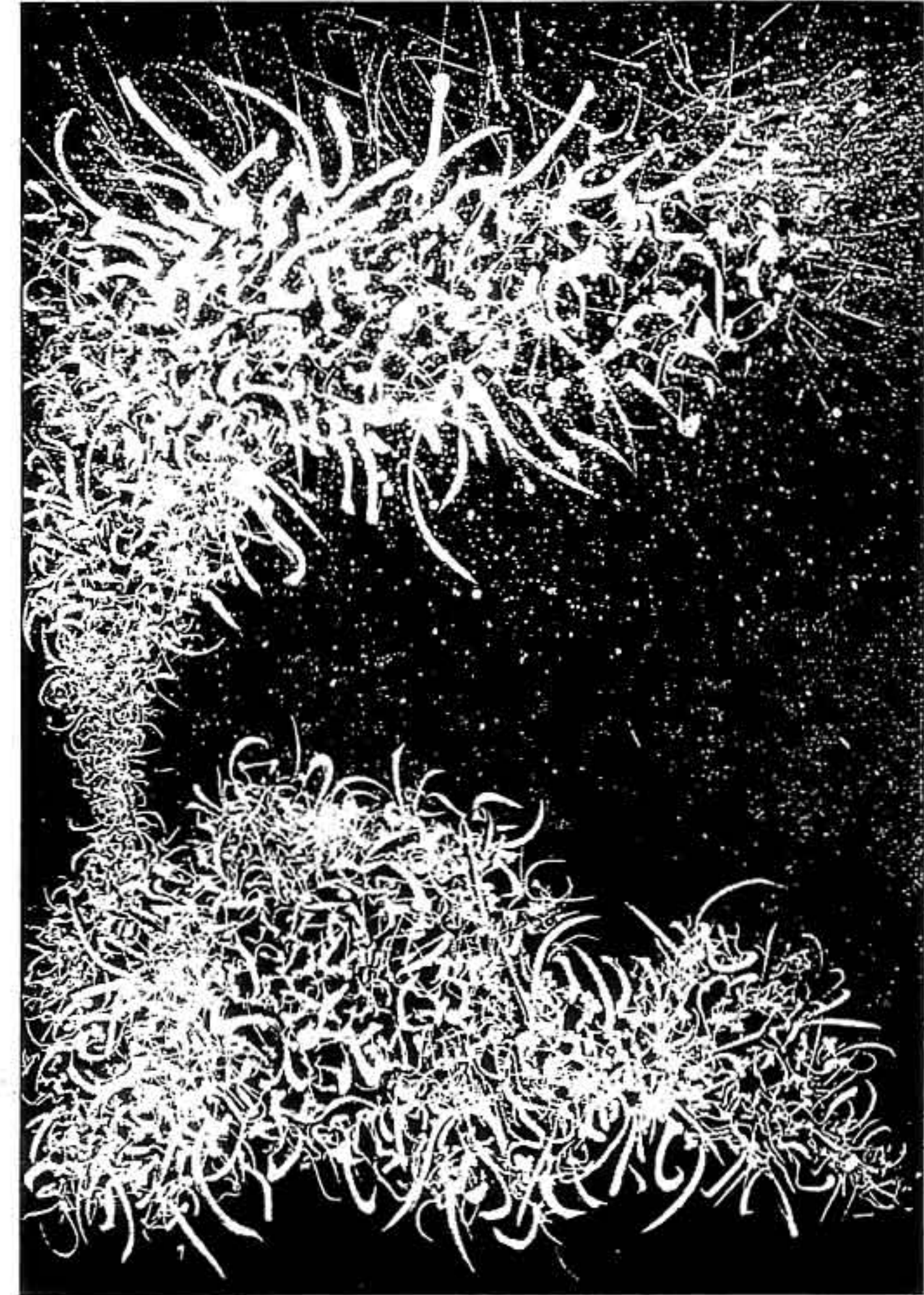
Slack makes symbolic use of hands, bug shapes and target forms. From African art, he borrows the sense of masks and images taking on a spiritual presence. Many of his prints have African titles.

Slack teaches elementary school and values his students' reactions to his work. This no doubt explains the approachability of these successful monoprints, and the sense of fun in many of them.

Two recent winners of McKnight fellowships are on view at the Northern Clay Center (2424 E. Franklin Av., Minneapolis) through Sept. 12. **Linda Christianson's** wood-fired stoneware whimsically expands upon rustic country-kitchen motifs. Her baskets, pitchers and vases often have the soft-sculpture look now popular among ceramicists, and she makes inventive use of white splotchmarks, probably left by support wadding during the firing process.

While Christianson creates cooking-oil cans that look as if they could hold motor oil, **Matthew Metz's** work is elegant and classical. His wood/salt-fired porcelain and stoneware objects are cleanly finished. Some designs feature humorous faces but most are dominated by vine and leaf designs applied with knowing restraint. His mugs, jars and boxes sometimes have smatterings of individual leaves that appear to be falling quietly. This stately, spare beauty is a perfect counterpart to Christianson's delightfully funky objects, making for another in a series of excellent shows at the Clay Center.

— Doug Hanson writes frequently about the visual arts.



Aribert Munzner's "Genesis 5-22-98"

Photo provided by Dolly Fiterman Fine Arts