

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ERIN CLULEY GALLERY

Everything the Light Touches: Sixty Years of Karen Gunderson

March 30 – May 4, 2024

Opening Reception: Friday, April 5, 2024, 6 – 9pm

Artist Talk with Maggie Adler: April 4, 2024, 3pm

Nasher Sculpture Center

2001 Flora St., Dallas, TX 75201

In Partnership with the Dallas Art Fair



Karen Gunderson in her studio. Image courtesy of the artist.

Erin Cluley Gallery is pleased to announce *Everything the Light Touches: Sixty Years of Karen Gunderson*, a retrospective of work by New York based painter Karen Gunderson. Bringing together six decades of paintings, *Everything the Light Touches* tracks Gunderson's oeuvre from earlier work with skyscapes towards her now signature black monochromatic palette. Celebrating her 80th birthday, this exhibition touts Gunderson's

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enigmatic aesthetic and conceptual innovations, confirming her unmistakable place in the trajectory of contemporary painting and post-minimalism.

Gunderson's preoccupation with natural subjects began in the late 1960s, during her time as a student at The University of Iowa. Her work at that time magnifies subjects explored by 19th-century French Impressionists, notably Claude Monet and his *Water Lilies* series (c. 1897-1926), into a contemporary, intermedia framework: plexiglass, polyresin, and super-8 film are just some of the unconventional materials the artist used in the 1960s. Though not of clouds, *Everything the Light Touches* features one of Gunderson's earliest works from this period: *Brain Box Study*, a small, colorfully rendered anatomical diagram utilizes techniques instrumental to her later work. Sections of the work rendered in grayscale and rainbow coloring contour the neurological shapes to emphasize the movement of light. Thus, *Brain Box Study* draws similarities to Gunderson's later use of contour and light in her cloudscapes and water paintings. Moving to New York in 1973, Gunderson dedicated her practice to large-scale cloudscapes.

Everything the Light Touches traces the development of Gunderson's cloud paintings from the early 1970s through the late 1980s, when she began to create her monochromatic black paintings. Works like *Sky Journey* (1985), emblemize the artist's work during this time: filling all but a small patch of blue sky, the magnified section of a Cumulus cloud structure speaks to the grandeur of Gunderson's ostensibly simple natural subjects. As critic Michael Brenson writes in *The New York Times*,

Karen Gunderson's paintings of clouds are as far as they can be from the dreamy reveries one might expect of the subject. These are rigorous, ambitious and, at best, [...] monumental works.

Memory (1987)—a later-cloud work—showcases the hinging point in the late 1980s just before Gunderson renounced color all together. Bookending a deep Sirius red with tones of grey and black, *Memory* trades the light, airy qualities of paintings like *Sky Journey*, for a dark and heavy mood.

During this period, Gunderson's cloud paintings were devised with a monochromatic black underpainting which was then covered with color to intensify their saturation and the clouds' voluminous forms. Upon seeing her black underpaintings, the artist's friend, American sculptor Jonathon Silver, suggested she leave them in this state as finished works. Intrigued by this new direction for her work Gunderson committed to her new single hued palette – since 1988 she has worked in this way. Her black-on-black paintings have featured historical figures and the natural environment—the latter of which is explored in *Everything the Light Touches*.

In the tradition of post-minimalism and all-over painting, Gunderson's black paintings position her work among that of Ad Reinhardt, Pierre Soulages, and Sol LeWitt. Her more recent works have been specifically related to Vija Celmins' hyper-realist seascape drawings. *Everything the Light Touches* collects new and old black paintings of seascapes

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and moons: Gunderson, utilizing her characteristic dark and highly textured brushstrokes, showcases the movement of light across these natural subjects. As the viewer moves, the painter's work changes shape, tone, and texture. In this way, Gunderson's black paintings replicate the unending mystery of nature in real time.

Commemorating her 80th birthday, *Everything the Light Touches* surveys Karen Gunderson's long and accomplished career in painting. At Erin Cluley Gallery, the New York based painter presents new moon and water paintings alongside earlier work. This new presentation of sixty years of work asserts the continuing influence and legacy of Gunderson in contemporary painting.

Everything the Light Touches will be Gunderson's second solo exhibition with Erin Cluley Gallery. Her first solo exhibition with the gallery was in 2022.

Karen Gunderson (b. 1943) was born in Racine, Wisconsin. She earned a BS in art education from the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, an MA in painting and MFA in Intermedia from The University of Iowa in Iowa City. Graduating in 1968, Gunderson became the first student to receive an MFA in Intermedia from The University of Iowa. Gunderson is known for her large-scale cloud paintings and move, starting in 1988, to an all-black, monochromatic color palette. Her work depicts the natural environment and historical figures.

American art critic Donald Kuspit wrote in the catalogue for her 1998 solo exhibition at Donahue/Sosinski Art in New York:

Gunderson's achievement—her brilliance—is to reconcile the old master use of chiaroscuro to shape figures with [Ad] Reinhardt's conception of black as the ultimate medium of art. Her work has the richness and complexity of old master painting and the purist ambition of modernist painting [...] Gunderson shows that black can be an ideal medium of representation [...] to represent objects that exist in the negative space of memory.

Gunderson has shown her work in the United States and internationally including solo and group exhibitions at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN; Fischbach Gallery, New York, NY; The Bronx Museum, Bronx, NY; Donahue/Sosinski Art, New York, NY; Racine Art Museum, Racine, WI; The Holocaust Museum, Houston, TX; Clamp Art, New York, NY; *Biennale Internazionale Dell'Arte Contemporanea*, Florence, Italy; The Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain; National Museum of Gdansk, Poland; The National Museum of Bahrain, Manama, Bahrain and Waterhouse & Dodd, New York, NY & London, England. Gunderson's work has been featured in top art fairs globally including Art Basel, Art Miami, the Armory Show, and the Dallas Art Fair alongside the private collections of The Four Seasons Hotel, 21 C Art Hotel, and other prominent collectors. The artist's paintings have been utilized in projects by notable interior designers including Nate Berkus.

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Gunderson has received many honors and awards, most notably a Lorenzo Magnifico Prize in Painting at the 2001 Florence Biennale. In 2020, Gunderson was honored with the prestigious *Anonymous Was a Woman* prize. She was named by noted critic Donald Kuspit as one of the “New Old Masters.”

Since the late-1960s, Gunderson’s work has appeared in major publications such as The New York Times, Arts Magazine, ARTnews, Art in America, The Brooklyn Rail, BOMB Magazine, and The Village Voice. She was the subject of a recent monograph, *Karen Gunderson: The Dark World of Light*, written by Pulitzer-prize winning biographer, Elizabeth Frank, published by Abbeville Press in 2016. Gunderson currently lives and works in Coxsackie, NY

Erin Cluley Gallery is a contemporary art gallery representing emerging, mid-career, and established artists from Dallas and the United States. The gallery presents a provocative program of artists working in both traditional and alternative forms including painting, sculpture, new media, photography, sculptural installation, and public intervention.

In 2014, Erin Cluley Gallery ignited a creative movement in West Dallas acting as a hub for visual arts and community engagement. After nearly five years on Fabrication Street, the gallery has moved its operation to Riverbend – a development in Dallas’ Design District celebrating the intersection between culture and commerce.

In April 2021, Cluley opened Cluley Projects – a satellite location in West Dallas acting as an incubator space focusing on regional artists and providing a platform for discovery and mentorship.

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