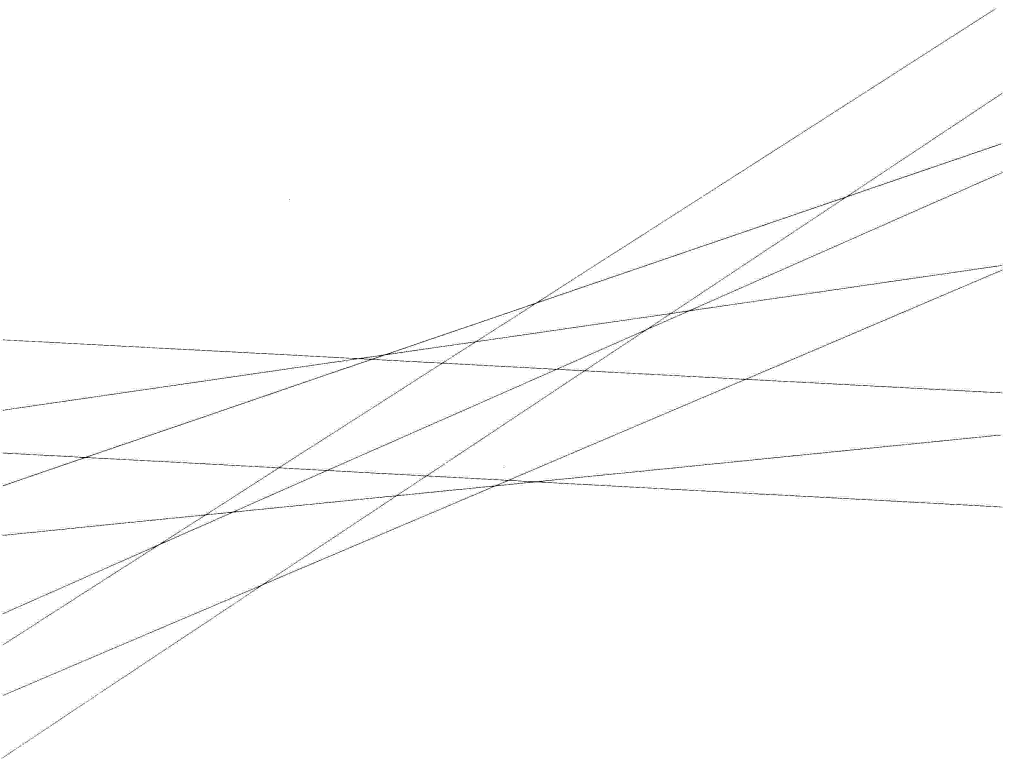


# RESPONSE

*Art and the Art of Criticism*



*Chicago Critics Respond to Chicago Artists*

**RESPONSE: ART AND THE ART OF CRITICISM**

*Chicago Critics respond to Chicago Artists*

April 24 - May 30, 2009

Fred Camper and Adelheid Mers

Janina Ciezadlo and Silvia Malagrino

Alicia Eler and Carrie Schneider

Jason Foumberg and Carol Jackson

Claire Wolf Krantz and Claire Prussian

Corey Postiglione and Duncan MacKenzie + Christian Kuras

Lane Relyea and Conrad Bakker

Polly Ullrich and Christopher Meerdo

Lori Waxman and Dianna Frid

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**GALLERY HOURS \_ Tuesday - Saturday 11 - 5 pm**

*I space is the Chicago gallery of the College of Fine and Applied  
Arts University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

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the School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at U-C.*



*For Want of Wonder\**

**DIANNA FRID**

/// BY Lori Waxman

*\*From a quote by genetical mathematician J.B.S. Haldane: "The world will not perish for want of wonders, but for want of wonder."*

The Ancient Greeks had a word for the sense of amazement that can be felt before the confusing puzzles of the universe: *aporia* (ἀπορία). It corresponds to the word wonder, but wonder in contemporary usage has two forms: the noun retains the meaning of the Ancient Greek, while the verb connotes curiosity, the desire to know how things function. In our era, brimming with rational explanations for everything (see Wikipedia for instantaneous answers) and stable maps of everywhere (GoogleMaps now charts the world's oceans), curiosity has triumphed over amazement.

What if, instead, a sense of *aporia* could be restored, even momentarily, for certain common natural occurrences—occurrences that once astonished their witnesses, but now wane under the dull patina of mechanistic scientific understanding. What if clouds and snow and thunder and the rays of the sun and the air we breathe could be made strange again? Children and philosophers may need little help here, having long been acknowledged as privileged marvelers; the rest of us can turn to poets and artists to arouse wonder—like Dianna Frid.

Frid's body of work takes as its subject the phenomena listed above, as well as the moon, asteroids, craters, the weather, and shadows. That these are the representational content

of her sculptures and drawings is evident because she often gives them deceptively clear series titles, including *To the Moon, Fortress & Asteroid and Crater & Transport*. Deceptive because names can be deceiving, by giving a false and often unfortunate sense of knowledge, ownership or comfort over the things they name. Naming is knowing. But what happens when the thing to which a name is attached rejects, supersedes, confuses or contradicts its name?

In her recent series *The Vertical Shadows and Engines of Weather*, 2008, various climatic and celestial happenings materialize in forms whose idiosyncratic and visionary nature belies their usual systematization and familiarity. A small taxonomy of meteorological events—fair weather cumulus, cumulonimbus, fog, lightning bolts—appears not as the stuff of the weather channel but of living dream. The ephemeral, remote matter of suspended water molecules and electricity becomes extraordinary again via its transmutation into human-size statues of riotous pattern, color and shape. That wonder can be manifested and retained at human scale and close proximity is no paradox: the rapid change of dimensions from the atmospheric to the anthropometric is breathtaking, the vast distance breached between there and here never domesticating. Wonder arises alternately in the associated

works on paper, where bits of colored paper and fabric, paint, and scraps of foil play into abstract designs whose resemblance to molecular diagrams and microscopic matter—stuff invisible to the naked eye—contradicts the ordinariness of their titular subjects: snow, air, thunder, clouds, rays, orbits. The commonplace might not be so common after all—a notion seconded by certain drawings' vague resemblance to the emblems of secret societies.

All this marvelous is made from banal, accessible means. Cardboard, metal, cloth, plastic, paper, aluminum foil, acrylic, ink, wax, Plasticine, rubber, and papier-mâché, put together via the techniques of drawing, measuring, cutting, stitching, pasting, plastering, sanding, painting, layering,

stacking, and so on—nothing but the basic materials and processes of art today. And yet, from them, Frid creates objects that arouse a sense of wonder in the viewer—not unlike the feat performed when water drops suspended in the air refract sunlight to make a rainbow. The rainbow effect has been understood since at least as early as the thirteenth century, and yet this phenomena continues to evoke amazement in observers, a situation attributed to the fact that rainbows transpire only on rare occasions. Conversely, most of the phenomena depicted by Dianna Frid occur on a quotidian basis, with no rarity of their own on which to depend. Hence the need for Frid's particular representational tactics, which—to borrow from the title of one of her drawings—return the power of dislocation to snow.

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#### WORKS CONSULTED

Fisher, Philip. *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.

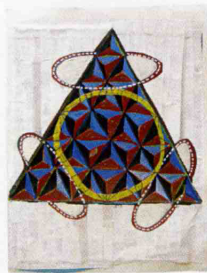
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Weschler, Lawrence. *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

*Lori Waxman writes for Artforum and teaches art history at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the recipient of a 2009 arts writers grant from the Warhol Foundation/Creative Capital for her performance project "60 Wrd/Min Art Critic".*



(left to right) UNTITLED #3 (FAIR WEATHER CUMULUS, FORT), 2008, cardboard, metal, cloth, plaster, plastic, paper, acrylic, wax, plasticine, rubber and papier-mâché, 9.5' x 18" x 24"; UNTITLED #4 (REFRACTION OF BOLTS), 2008, cardboard, wood, cloth, plaster, plastic paint and ink, paper, acrylic, wax, rubber and papier-mâché, 7' x 24" x 30"; UNTITLED #5 (STRATA AND HALO), 2008, cardboard, wood, metal, cloth, plaster, plastic, paint, ink, paper, acrylic, light bulb, cable, and papier-mâché, 7' x 26" x 24". (All works pictured are from the series, *The Vertical Shadows*.)



(left to right) SOMETIMES GATHER, SOMETIMES DISPERSE, AND SOMETIMES REMAIN MOTIONLESS, 2008, mixed media on paper, 12" x 9"; WHERE THE RAYS BEGIN TO LOSE THEIR FORCE BY DISPERSION, 2008, mixed media on paper, 12" x 9"; CYCLOPS, 2008, mixed media on paper, 12" x 9"; THE VISIBLE INTERVALS OF MESHED ORBITS, 2008, mixed media on paper, 12" x 9"; STARSIEVE LEAK, 2008, mixed media on paper, 12" x 9". (All works pictured are from the series, *Engines of Weather*.)