

Scraps of paper impose order on forces of nature

By Fredric Koeppel

Special to The Commercial Appeal

What holds nature and the universe together? What makes human beings part of it all? Where in the scheme of things physical and metaphysical do art and imagination find a place? Does anybody know what time it is, for real?

Seeking the answers to those questions has kept philosophers, composers, artists, choreographers, playwrights, poets and fiction writers busy for thousands of years, with definitive answers coming due in at least a few thousand more years, if luck holds out. Meanwhile, we are kept beguiled, intrigued, perplexed and moved by the myriad emotional and psychological insights such artistic strivings provide, however provisional. Surely the karma that includes Keats and Kafka, Klee and Kaufman offers comfort for us all.

These thoughts somewhat improbably come to mind while looking at 14 mixed-media works on paper by Dianna Frid, through Oct. 14 at Rhodes College's Clough-Hanson Gallery. Frid's work, which occurs in two sizes, 10 small and 4 large, is composed of countless scraps of paper arranged either in tight optical patterns or with the seeming randomness of atomic particles in Brownian motion and highlighted with passages of thin pigment. The artist has B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is assistant professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

There's an art to being artless, a challenge to being child-like, especially when dealing on a mostly small scale with very large themes. On the evidence of this selection of work, Frid seems to be interpreting and

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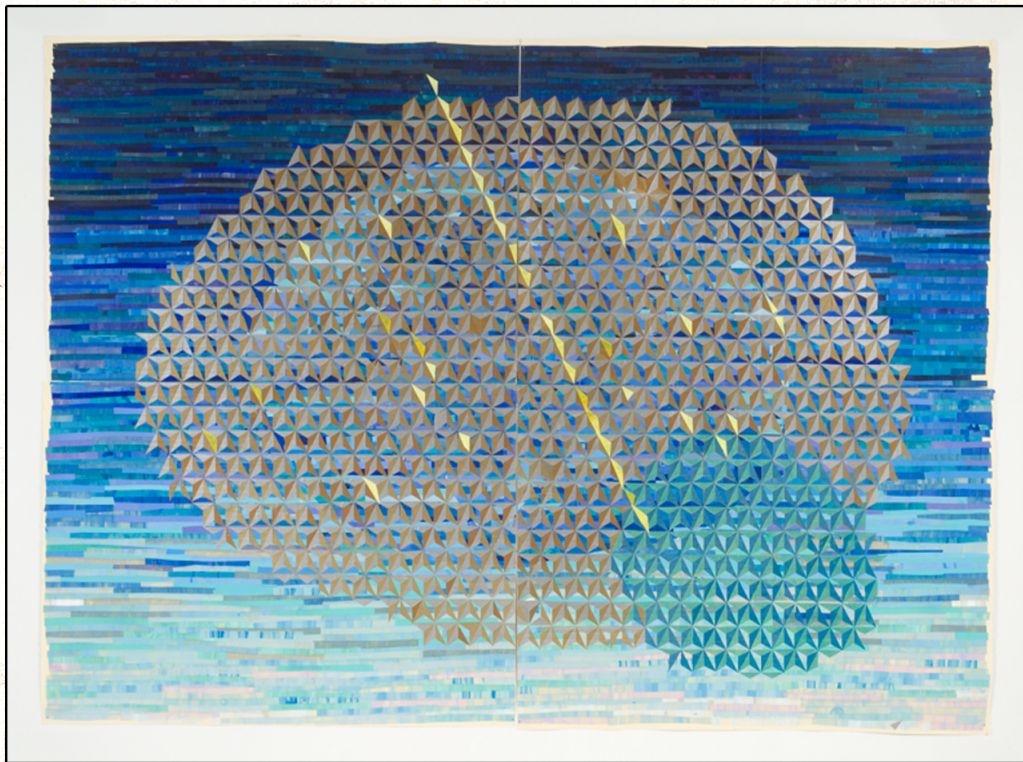
Dianna Frid, 'Works on Paper 2008-2010'

At Clough-Hanson Gallery, Rhodes College, through Oct. 14. Call 843-3000.

illustrating, through a kind of abstract geometry, the mechanisms of natural phenomena as they verge on the mystical and symbolic.

Or perhaps the artist is just having fun, though one intuitively feels that the work actually toes a deft line between play and purpose. After all, a title like "Starsieve Leak," from Frid's "Engines of Weather" series, sounds like the name of a sci-fi novel, while "Paralipomena" places her squarely in the territory of the Church Fathers; Paralipomena is the Greek name of the Old Testament Books of Chronicles and by extension means something that has been left out or matters added to the supplement of a work. Perhaps it's the artist's way of saying that what she has created has now been annexed to its rightful place where something was omitted before.

Part of the attraction of the pieces in this exhibition lies in the paradox of approaching mighty motifs through the medium of flimsy scraps of paper. Another mind-boggling factor is the sheer obsessive effort it must take to assemble such large pieces as "What We Often Simply Call Air," a shimmering creation of transcendent, hypnotic beauty that must involve thousands of bits of paper, meticulously cut and arranged. (And who knew there were so many shades of blue?) The fact is that besides luring our eyes with their quirkiness, errant charm and suggestion, many of these pieces, particularly the larger ones like "What We



"What We Often Simply Call Air" by Dianna Frid, bits of paper cut and arranged.



"Where the Rays Begin to Lose Their Force by Dispersion."

Often Simply Call Air," "The Breaking of a Bubble Is Itself a Worthy Study" and "The Jet Faithfully Reproduced the Musical Notes," are transfixing in elegance and refinement.

The smaller works feel more spontaneous, obviously because they require less in the way of material logistics, and they seem to fulfill the function of quick shots of energy, though they also sustain a curious air of stasis and permanence. Weather, for example, you could say is always changing, but it's always there. As the evocative titles of two pieces from the "Engines of Weather" series proclaim — "Where the Rays Begin to Lose Their Force by Dispersion" and "Sometimes Gather, Sometimes Disperse, and Sometimes Remain Motionless" — nature and the universe are much like human beings; we do gather, we do remain motionless, and surely we will lose our force by dispersion.