

ENTERTAINMENT

Burchfield Center

Probing Landscapes Lack Communication

By ANTHONY BANNON

News Critic

The new landscapes by Buffalo artist Theodore Palermo — large, volatile cascades of color — succeed in as much as they render a unique interior landscape of the artist's mind, but in as much as they reveal a landscape of thought that is common or shared by others, the paintings fail.

This is the tightrope for the five huge paintings in the Burchfield Center through Sept. 9, and it is a balancing act that constricts all communication. Just how much of one's self should be revealed to make the message personal and singular; how much to hold back?

Palermo's paintings are unique; they do not fit tidily into a painterly category. For the opportunity they provide to discover new visual information and delight, the work should be valued.

Though apparently sincere, these paintings do seem soft, as if they represent only a beginning of the artist's exploration into the difficult territory. Yet, rather than hold a viewer tight, the paintings offer the release of previous experiences.

They are metaphoric landscapes, not optical transcriptions. But the references they suggest are often too easy. The painting "A Genesis" creates suggestions of "Star Wars" style vortex toward the great sun-egg shape; "Murmuring Rays," is a light-dazzled glow of epiphonic truth; "Interim Time" is a design-erly rhythm of dancing hues.

By contrast, the hard-won toughness at the heart of the Burchfield Center's recent acquisition of a 1983 Untitled charcoal and oil drawing

by Buffalo native Susan Rothenberg is a model for the difficult, rigorous truth-telling that one looks for in art.

There's mystery and the unspeakable passage of another person's hand across a paper to make a record of integrity unmediated by entropy of overworn categories and easily expected renditions.

To say that Rothenberg's drawing seems to depict the rough conjunction of two bone-like shapes positioned as in the joint of an elbow or knee, and to say that these shapes are positioned in a grounding of apparently quickly made horizontal gestures of charcoal occasionally accented with a white oil, is apparently to say little that is meaningful or serious.

That description appears trivial to the point of foolishness because there is not a category to say succinctly the Rothenberg drawing reveals an awful lot about the unqualified spirit and physical being, about the darkness and about the light, of the artist and the perceiver who cares to see something.

One assumes that Palermo and Rothenberg are equally sincere; one sees that Rothenberg has found more ability to make it manifest.

Rothenberg's drawing is among the works by 30 artists both living and dead, historic and contemporary, whose works in many media and styles comprise the Center's collection that carries out its mandate to create a forum for art having some direct connection to Western New York. This showing continues through Sept. 23 in the center, which is located on the campus of Buffalo State University College.