



IMPLICATIONS: The landscape makes its presence felt in Kathleen Robbins' abstract 'Untitled.'

Take trip 'Beyond the Landscape'

Against a white ground, great swipes of black define the reedy stream of Suzanne Hodes' "River Reflections." An image of forking branches emerges from the blur of printed gauze in Kathy Halamka's "Night Vision." Where land meets ocean, a moist sky threatens to dissolve even the rocky shore, turning boulders to mere circles in the

Visual Arts

JOANNE SILVER

foreground of Mary Hughes' "Sea." Somewhere between the actual landscape and the version that many artists construct, a transformation takes place. Visible scenes recede and memories take over. Land formations assume the proportions of geometric shapes. Colors shift. Perspective fades. What began as solid ground splinters into snapshots or flows as easily as paint drizzling down a canvas.

"Between Solace and Awe: Beyond the Landscape," at the Starr Gallery of the Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center through Aug. 30, showcases landscapes that flesh out interior thoughts along with external places. From Beth Balliro's woodland scene painted in an otherworldly green to Richard Fox's surrealist vision of a ladder and a flock of birds hovering over a river, the strongest works here use the visible environment as a launching point for further exploration.

In fact, although Balliro and sev-

eral others create in the midst of nature, in the "plein air" tradition of the impressionists, a number of the 11 artists do not even start outdoors. David Faust's cinematic paintings have their roots in the photographs he takes in such unremarkable locations as a street corner in Arlington.

The charged oil-on-canvas that resulted retains the basic physical features of the spot: an empty road, sidewalks flanked by neatly trimmed grass, leafy trees thrust half into nighttime darkness and half into the glare of unseen street lamps. The overriding effect of "Arlington" is psychological, however. Something has just happened or is about to happen, and the tension ripples through every shadowy leaf and spotlighted blade of grass.

Beverly Barber's vision of the landscape draws upon art as well as emotion. "The Cavalier," for example, refers back to paintings of a bygone era, and therefore incorporates cultural memory into her scenic rendering. Her "Evening Landscape" swirls with the force of an epic drama. This land of mossy trees, jagged hills and turbulent sky could be the setting for a science fiction film or it could be a real slice of countryside, recalled through the filter of personal experience.

Only the barest outlines of Kathleen Robbins' New England subjects make it into her final paintings, and yet these works resonate with the look and feel of these low-lying locales. Marshy views of Rye and Ipswich veer toward abstraction, as individual trees melt into regions of paint, and shadows

take on the weight of three-dimensional matter.

For artists looking "Beyond the Landscape," neither time nor space remains fixed. Henry S. Altmann suggests as much in his rather tame watercolors of a tree seen at different times of day. More successful is Altmann's "Twilight over the Marsh," a rust-colored pastel panorama pierced by watery reflections of sky. Atmospheric effects also transport Susan Nichter's oil-on-plywood "Quansoo" out of the realm of mere description or prettiness.

Halamka and Esther Pullman, the two artists who stray farthest from traditional landscape, have crafted startling images investigating not only what is seen, but also how it is seen. In Halamka's monochrome print and etching "Night Vision," the hazy calligraphy created by layered prints on gauze hints at invisible forces shaping the remembered appearance of things.

At greenhouses in America and Europe, Pullman has gazed from the inside out, producing multipanel photographs of vivid foliage, windows and the outdoor world beyond. "Wellesley College Greenhouse (Backlit plants with snow on ground)" highlights the contrasts of this environment built on nature and artifice.

From the verdant foreground of potted plants, the eye wanders past rusty window frames and cloudy glass to the "real" vista of leafless wintertime. By inverting the usual structure of a landscape and focusing on the interior first, Pullman suggests any record of nature depends on the human imagination.