

ART AND BOOKS

A painter's painter exhibits works at Hill Gallery

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

Many of the subjects in John Walker's high-energy paintings at the Hill Gallery are based on natural landscapes. But waterfalls, rock formations and idyllic rolling fields are only a point of reference for the British-born painter. Walker transcends literal representations into a visual lexicon of abstract forms resembling cells, ribbons and bulbs. The results are canvases of

awesome texture, color and mystery.

"He's a painter's painter," said Pam Hill, who directs the Hill Gallery along with her husband, Tim. The Walker exhibit, "Feeling, Form, Beauty," opens this Friday and runs through April 19. On Wednesday, Walker, who is one of the most sought-after teachers in the country, will jury the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association Fine Arts Competition.

Perhaps Walker's rather low-key local appearance indicates the general unfamiliarity with the magnitude of his influence in the painting world. "In New York this would be a major event," said Tim Hill, who places Walker alongside Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Anselm Kiefer and Philip Guston as some of the most inventive and intriguing painters of the last 50 years. "Walker has given us a new way of looking at

landscapes," he said. "He deserves a lot of credit for renewing the interest in contemporary painting."

Many of Walker's paintings appear in the most prestigious museums in the world, including the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Tate Gallery and the Art Institute of Chicago.

For Walker, a painting not only represents a drama on canvas, but should also reflect an artist's desire to continually search for new ways to reinvent the art form. In writing about Walker's early 1980s paintings, Dore Ashton from the Arts Council of Great Britain observed: "Walker asks if a modern painter can reintegrate all the traditional ways of making a canvas into one."

It's no wonder that Walker's paintings are labyrinths laden with metaphors, symbols and allegories. And equally, it's hardly a surprise, said Tim Hill, that Walker's varied brush strokes are being studied by today's artists, from art school students to the legendary abstract painter, Frank Stella, who recently purchased a Walker painting.

"He builds up paint in unusual



METAPHORS AND SYMBOLS: John Walker creates a canvases of awesome texture, color and mystery in "Feeling, Form, Beauty."

places and moves your eye around the painting with an incredible sense of construction," said Tim Hill. Walker's mastery of movement and space reflects the type of command found in seminal painters such as Picasso, Matisse and Pollock.

The explosively colored landscapes also resonant with primi-

Exhibit
What: Feeling, Form, Beauty: Paintings by John Walker
Where: Hill Gallery, 407 W. Brown Street, Birmingham
When: March 21-April 19; Opening Reception for the Artist, 7:30-9:30 p.m. Friday, March 21. For information, call (810) 540-9288

tive imagery that Walker borrows from Australian aborigines. Before emerging as one of the elite contemporary painters in the early 1980s, Walker spent time in the South Pacific where he became immersed in aborigine culture.

In his exhaustive yearnings to push the boundaries of the medium, Walker has distilled the painter's quest to a few basics. "Painting begins with the recognition of paint as inert mud," he noted at a New York exhibit two years ago. "You take this mud, change it, give it light and air, form and expression." A painter who can reduce his art to basic artistic gestures usually finds his way alongside the most memorable artists of his time.

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Dr. Judy McKeen will continue her popular series on children's literature by presenting a special selection of books for 3-6 years, 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 18; author and science professor Arthur Wiggins will discuss his new book "The Five Biggest Ideas in Science," 7 p.m. Wednesday,

March 19; storyteller Laura Kamienny will share the story Frederick by Leo Lionni, Saturday, March 22; Rita Golden will read and sign stories and songs for children 1 p.m. Sunday, March 23; Border's monthly "second look at the classics" will discuss Graham Greene's "Brighton Rock," 3 p.m. Sunday, March 23; Border's monthly contemporary lit discussion group will discuss "Smilla's Sense of Snow," 7 p.m. Monday, March 24; popular British mystery writer Anne Perry will discuss and sign copies of her new book "Ashworth Hall," 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 25. 31150 Southfield Road, Birmingham, call (810) 644-1515 for information.

BARNES AND NOBLE BOOK-SELLERS (WEST BLOOMFIELD)
"The Role of Satan in Classical

Jewish Literature" is discussed and explained by Rabbi Aaron Bergman, Congregation Beth Abraham Hillel Moses, 7 p.m. Monday, March 17; The Greater Detroit Chapter of the Romance Writers of America meet 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 18; Michael Best, president of the Astronomical Society of Michigan, visits with a slide-illustrated presentation about Comet Hale-Bopp, which will be visible in the next few weeks, 7 p.m. Thursday, March 20; Madeline visits storytime, 10 a.m. Monday, March 24, and 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 25; the Barnes and Noble Mystery Club meets to discuss "The Intruder," by Peter Blauner, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 26, at the store, 6800 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield, (810) 629-8804.

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