

From the ordinary, pure poetry

BY CeCe BULLARD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Suburbia — banal, boring and an unlikely object of an artist's fascination. Yet, in his "Interior Landscapes" now at UR's Marsh Gallery, Charles Ritchie transforms the trivia of suburban life into poetry.

Intense observation and superlative draftsmanship translate the artist's home and neighborhood into complex, almost surreal, images that make us look again, and look closely, at the familiar

— a rocking chair on a porch, the view from the kitchen window. Ritchie's watercolor and graphite renderings (some as small as 3-by-3 inches) force one to dispense with the visual shorthand that shrouds much daily reality.

While Ritchie's meticulously developed graphite renderings astonish

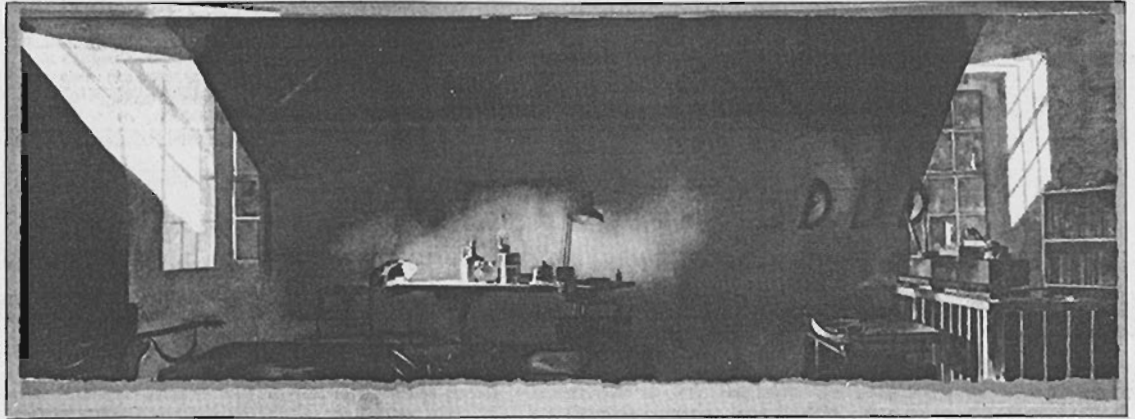


PHOTO BY DEAN BEASOM

INTERIOR LANDSCAPE. Charles Ritchie's "Interior with Still Life" is on exhibit at the Marsh Gallery.

with their detailed record of the ordinary and familiar, the fluid and expressive watercolor washes capture the poetry and mystery of what Richard Wilbur has called "the buried strangeness which nourishes the known." In "Burning," two very ordinary houses across the street, painted on a foggy night, explode in mysterious flares of light echoed by a glassy patch of wet pavement.

"Interior Landscapes"? It seems a contradiction in terms, yet in Ritchie's work it is both a literal and metaphorical truth. Sometimes, it refers simply to those small epiphanies

that suddenly make one look anew at the familiar. Often, the agent of change is the time of day or the time of year; light, and the lack of light, reveal and obscure and render the old new again.

In this show's most ambitious and intriguing works, however, the interior and exterior literally merge, often on the reflective and distorting surface of a window. Sometimes the point of view is ambiguous as the two worlds coalesce — are we on the outside looking in or on the inside looking out? Ironically, this very ambiguity clarifies Ritchie's sense that

experience is neither pure object or subject, but a complex interaction of both.

As Ritchie's journals and sketches demonstrate, his work is the product of intense scrutiny and thought, and for the viewer who approaches his work in the same spirit, this show may offer more than one moment of simultaneous recognition and surprise. If we look closely enough, things are not always as we assume them to be.

"The Interior Landscape" continues at the University of Richmond's Marsh Gallery through March 7.

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Entertainment, 2 February 1993
 CeCe Bullard, Review of The Interior Landscape exhibition
 January 15 to March 7, 1993, Marsh Art Gallery
 University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia