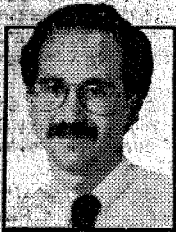


# Less than thrilling openings

It's hard to get too excited about the newest offerings in three of Raleigh's art galleries. While there's some good work in town, none of it is the type to make you stand up and cheer.



Art By Steven Litt

Perhaps the best new works to be seen are the tapestries of Chapel Hill weaver Sandra Milroy. Ten woven works by Ms. Milroy form the bulk of a small exhibition on view at Gilliam & Peden Inc., through Nov. 21.

The weaver builds images with grids or layers of brick-like shapes that give her compositions a complex, architectural flavor. And her palette of salmon, rust, cinnamon, ochre, gold, beige and blue-gray is appropriately autumnal. The show was well-timed to the season.

But this is not the most stirring work to be seen at Gilliam & Peden this year. Ms. Milroy has three large tapestries in the show, all fine works, but the rest of the exhibition is dominated by smaller works that fail to command the gallery space the way Sarah Blakeslee's paintings did in a recent exhibition, or the way McDonald Bane's paintings did last winter.

Along with Ms. Milroy's tapestries, Gilliam & Peden is showing four sculptures by Peggy Burke of Greensboro. Three of the pieces are swirling bands of bronze, polished to a bright, brassy finish. Each piece consists of one or two bands, which twist like variations on a Mobius strip.

About the best thing that could be said for these works is that they have the look of frozen motion. But it's hard to get beyond that initial impression. If anything, the hard, gaudy, flashy, slick surfaces of these pieces make them seem impenetrable and incapable of rewarding prolonged observation. They are sculptural one-liners. Once you get it, that's it.

In contrast, a larger bronze sculpture by Ms. Burke, with a rich, greenish black patina, is far more exciting. The work resembles a section of an arching tree trunk that tapers gracefully at the top. It's also possible to read this eloquent shape as a metaphor for the human torso. The only problem is that the shape, with its echoes of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Constantin Brancusi, could have easily been sculpted in the 1940s or '50s.

Still, this is an exquisite piece that has a shape and finish that are far more rewarding than Ms. Burke's louder and brassier bronze works.

Across town at Sherry Gernon's Nightingale's Gallery, Raleigh artist David Early Larson is showing 15 new paintings and drawings. His work hasn't changed much during the past year; he's still working with the same angry pets, the same ghoulish men and women with blood-shot eyes and vampire teeth. What's new here is that some of the drawings are larger and a bit more ambitious than the work he has shown at The Paper Plant, a bookstore at 129 S. Salisbury Street in Raleigh.

As always, Larson's control of his materials is excellent. He rubs, scratches, scrapes and smudges rich textures into his pastel and charcoal drawings.

The problem is that these skills are in service of a vision that needs to grow. Larson has achieved high popularity with



'Cafe,' charcoal by David Early Larson

Raleigh's young contemporary art and new music crowd, and he seems to be an authentic artistic spokesman for that group. But his interest might fade unless he can find ways to expand on the morbid spookiness and histrionic rage in his work.

Also on view at Nightingale's are 18 sculptures by Richard Hallier of Boone. Most of the works are stone carvings that resuscitate the biomorphic surrealist forms explored earlier in the century by Jean Arp and other artists. Biomorphicism was a type of abstraction in which the artist conjured up amoeba-like shapes from the subconscious. It was revolutionary at the time, but that was 50 years ago.

This is not to suggest that the shapes of biomorphism were exhausted forever by the early modernists. The problem is that Hallier has achieved less mastery over this type of sculpture than other artists in the region, such as Horace Farlowe, an instructor at the University of Georgia at Athens. Compared with Farlowe's work, Hallier's shapes seem a bit coarse. His work needs refining.

The opening exhibition at Raleigh Contemporary Galleries on East Morgan Street, which ends in two weeks, has a split personality. Leatha Koeffler and Rory Parnell, the new gallery's directors, have assembled works by 15 artists in a debut that says little about what direction the gallery might eventually take. The show is a jarring juxtaposition of good and bad, strong and bland.

The best work in the gallery is by glass artist Christine Baukus of Raleigh, ceramic sculptor Alice Ballard Munn of Pineville, landscape painter Wolf Kahn of New York, sculptor Thomas Sayre of Morganton and political cartoon-

ist Dwane Powell of Raleigh. That's not a bad lineup to open a gallery with, and the gallery might have concentrated more fully on these artists.

But unfortunately, the gallery is crowded with visual Muzak by painter Heshi Yu of New York, printmaker J.B. Thompson of Los Angeles, handmade paper artist Marjorie Tomchuk of Connecticut and painter Charles Quest of St. Louis. This work — technically

accomplished but innocuous — fills the most prominent wall space.

Such prominent placement leads to the conclusion that the gallery might focus primarily on this kind of work. This would be unfortunate for the region's better artists, who need the kind of exposure the gallery can offer. It would also be unfortunate for the city's art audience, which deserves better.