

ARTnews

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PRESS RELEASE

Charles Burchfield

DC Moore

In later life, Charles Burchfield (1893–1967) revised a number of his earlier works to express his more mature vision of nature. This insightful exhibition was devoted to a small group of those “two-period pictures.”

These large watercolors evolved as Burchfield expanded them by pasting strips of paper onto their edges, sometimes nearly doubling their size. *Blue Dome of June*, for example, started out as a horizontal landscape in 1955 and ended as a vertical picture in 1963, after Burchfield added a dome of the heavens outlined in incandescent sunlight. He wrote in his journal, quoted in Nancy Weekly’s indispensable catalogue, that as a child he had imagined the dome as a tangible thing behind which lived God and his angels.

The painting *Easter Morning in the Woods* (1947–66) was cut in half, with each half mounted separately—an effort, perhaps, as Weekly suggests, to provide a visual equivalent for the enigma of man’s dual nature. Burchfield wanted the two trees in the painting—a sunlit, arrow-straight sapling and a spiny dead trunk—to symbolize good and evil. But he didn’t finish either composition.

Burchfield wrote in 1923 of “the agonizing mystery of Infinity” that nagged at his consciousness. It suffused his paintings. While there is nothing in the journal entries quoted to suggest that

Burchfield thought of nature as anything but benign, his paintings are nonetheless disquieting. The effulgence gets out of control. There’s a sinister quality to the spiky plants and Day-Glo flowers, the vibrating cadmium sunlight, the eye shapes in dark tree branches, the hairy-legged spider chewing up the wings of a grasshopper.

There is nothing local in Burchfield’s landscapes. Despite signs of human presence, the natural world seems prehistoric, still heaving and humming, pulsating with evolving life forms. It’s what makes the paintings so interesting.

—Sylvia Hochfield

The show is at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center at Buffalo State College in New York from July 13 through September 23.



Charles Burchfield, *Blue Dome of June*, 1955–63, watercolor, charcoal, and white chalk on joined paper mounted on board, 60" x 50". DC Moore.