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By MAUREEN MULLARKEY  
 Not to know Charles Burchfield (1893–1967) is to miss the originality and breadth that American artists brought to an imported modernism. Nothing else quite prepares you for him, not even the regionalists with whom he is often — erroneously — grouped. On show at DC Moore, a seminal collection of watercolors and drawings spans Burchfield's entire career. His work has not been so generously or thoughtfully displayed in New York since the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition in 1990.

**CHARLES BURCHFIELD:  
 PAINTINGS 1915–1964**  
 DC Moore Gallery

Biographers divide his career into three periods, each represented here. His first, dating from 1915 to 1919, produced exuberant views of his surroundings in Salem, Ohio. If sight were sound, "April Landscape" (1917) would become the opening movement of Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring." New growth, like white light, springs with lyrical abandon from the tender pinks and pastels of a warming earth. In "Landscape With Rain" (1916), a heavy black cloud sags under its own weight, dropping dark rain in the center of a melancholic landscape sketched in brooding tones excited by darkness.

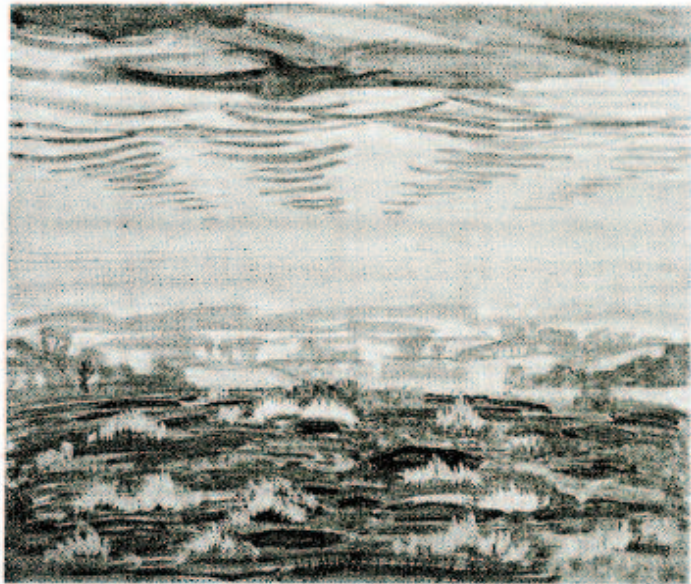
The second, so-called realist, phase was centered on the urban environs of Buffalo, N.Y. Working there as a wallpaper designer to support a family of five children, Burchfield sharpened his sympathies for the lives of ordinary people. Houses are surrogates for the

people who lived in them. He depicted them with an empathy directed toward the lives under their roofs. Expressive, slightly canted contours animate the worn architecture of "Little Italy in Spring" (1927). The organ grinder, the fishmonger and his cart, old women in their old country weeds, laundry on a line — all are depicted with a solicitude so gentle it takes on qualities of humor.

From 1943 until his death, he created jubilant landscapes and fantasias that flicker with realities that ought to be. The majestic gloom of "The Dark Ravine" (1946) alternated with creations like "The Butterfly Tree" (1960), its black-outlined butterflies hanging

like fruit from an incandescent tree. An undulant wave of rhyming contours, "North Otto-Thunderhead" (1964) shapes a gathering storm that rises like a rhapsody into endless skies. More keenly than any other painting here, it expresses Burchfield's stated awe before "the agonizing mystery of Infinity."

Burchfield distinguished his own abstract tendencies from the abstract movement: "It is as if there is a veil between me and the ultimate in painting and only bit by bit am I allowed to penetrate the mystery behind the veil." Man is a praying animal; Burchfield worshipped in watercolor.



Charles Burchfield, 'April Landscape' (1917).

DC MOORE