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Artists On Review

BERKELEY CENTER

A dark and somber world is pictured in the paintings of Steve Kuzma — a quiet sense of isolation in both country and urban settings. He has adopted a Rembrandtian use of highlighting and backlighting against deep blacks so that the figures emerge from the background with limited detail but in strong contrast to the two-dimensional plane. This plane is actually broken only once, in one of a series of paintings of a man in a black overcoat carrying a black umbrella as he walks through glistening streets. The first three paintings of the series are the best — the first being only the silhouette of the umbrella and figure against the light opening of the alley down which he moves. The second is a tapered canvas topped by a part of an open black umbrella which projects from the surface as do a dark arm, and a gloved hand holding the umbrella handle. No identity is possible in either painting. The figure is anyman and everyman . . . neither young nor old. His umbrella, overcoat and gloves indicate a degree of solvency but beyond that he is completely detached from a recognizable individual. In the third painting, this dark figure and another start down the stairs to the subway, giving an impression that the dark figure, his arm persuasively laid across the shoulders of the other, is luring the latter. In a later painting, a blurry face like a skull appears under the curve of the umbrella. There are several later versions of the umbrellaed man which are not nearly so successful as these four.

Most of the darkness in these paintings of Kuzma which are at the Berkeley Center on St. Ronan Street, is not the darkness of menace. It is the warmth of a city night made sparkling through the fuzzy brilliance of neon signs; it is the heavy clouds of a summer storm hanging over the horizon; it is a half seen figure climbing

dimly lighted stairs; or the soft grey of rain. Kuzma's people are alone and detached from other people. Several ride a train — collective only because they are within the confines of the same physical space. Each rides absorbed in his own thoughts. There is something of the separation and loneliness of Edward Hopper's work to be seen in these paintings. This is an excellent show by a very good painter . . . one who understands what the paint can do and who puts his media to work for him.

SHIRLEY GONZALES