

Arts & Films

Transforming the visual idea in art

The exhibition by Sharon artist John Baker in the lounge of Watson Center at Wheaton College, Norton, through Oct. 3, is designed to show how a visual idea goes through a process of transformation.

Evidently Baker is the sort of artist whose work has its source in the problems of the human condition, problems often extrinsic to the formalities of picture-making. And so, when he saw a figure on the back of a bank-teller's form (to be filled out in the event of a stick-up), a diagrammatic human outline, divided in half with the left side dif-

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fering markedly from the right, it occurred to him that the figure symbolized many aspects of existence. The divided self. Conflicting impulses. Black and white. Yin and yang. Jekyll and Hyde.

In general the small display presents the evolution of a concept dependent on psychological, symbolic and literary references into a figurative image where these have been removed. The canvases are tall, vertical, narrow; each is dated.

Sometime in June, 1974, after Baker had become intrigued by the bank-teller's slip and had adapted the efigy as illustration for the cover of the Journal of the American Institute of Planners, he did the initial painting. The divided figures loom through a khaki smog indicative of an "oppressive environment and shattered personalities."

The next painting, a

month later, stresses the bleak uniformity of the schizophrenic atmosphere, the contrasts of a stark background of cold whites and thickly-contoured black outlines. By Thanksgiving, the artist is becoming less sociological, his images more private and fantastic. The fourth picture, 4 March 1975, "uses the vertical discontinuities as a basis for constructing an image that would resemble a mirage," and the space is appropriately ambiguous.

May, 1975, however, revives the symbolic, although the personal element remains strong: the twin images represent, particularly in passive blues and strident reds, two sides of the artist's temperament, the melancholic and the sanguine. In June this has turned into an actual image of a zookeeper combining a strong sense of the imaginary and a specific personality. Finally we encounter the divided image with a diamond of kitchen flooring imposed upon the face and the previous references to

non-pictorial ideas firmly cancelled.

Since most shows intend to create a finished esthetic effect, it is refreshing to come across one which traces the process of creation. While Baker is best-known

as a sculptor, his paintings demonstrate that the human figure as a source of fresh ideas still endures.

JOHN BAKER, seven paintings, Watson Center, Wheaton College, Norton, through Oct. 3.