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Robert Arneson's "The Palace at 9 a.m." depicts the late UC Davis art professor's childhood home in Davis.

Map of the mind

A new Manetti Shrem exhibit focuses on landscapes, real and imagined

BY RACHEL LEIBROCK / rachell@newsreview.com

Defined literally, "landscape" refers to a viewpoint of natural, often expansive scenery—think mountain ranges, beaches and rural valleys.

In a new exhibit opening July 14 at the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at UC Davis, the term encompasses much more.

Landscapes Without Boundaries: Selections from the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art Collection, uses paintings, drawings and sculpture to explore the concept of vistas. It largely maps post-World War II Northern California terrain and features works by Robert Arneson, Joan Brown, Bruce Conner, Martin Ramirez and Wayne Thiebaud, among others.

Curator Dan Nadel says the concept surfaced after he was called upon to sort through the museum's archives.

"So many of these artists who were from Northern California were doing something unexpected in the '60s and '70s," Nadel explained during a recent phone interview from his Brooklyn home.

That unexpected element, he says, largely centered on the concept of landscapes.

"It was surprising because if you look through the collection of art being made in New York or Chicago at the time, that would not emerge," he says. "They were painting what they were seeing and the way they were living and what their concerns were."

The term "landscape" is broadly defined, he adds.

"There's the internal psychological landscape and mapping of the mind, there's turning the landscape into a surreal or fantastic place and there's inventing landscapes to suit artistic needs," he says.

The concept is represented in myriad styles, including surrealism, Native American, outsider and post-modern.

There's Thiebaud's oil on canvas pieces "Reservoir and Orchard" and "Brown River," both of which present an aerial view of agricultural fields near Davis. Roy De Forest's looming "Every Trapper Should Have an Indian Dog" dominates its space with bright and busy details. In contrast, Joan Brown's "Buffalo in Golden State Park," a graphite on paper illustration, is almost primitive in its simplicity.

The exhibit's centerpiece is Robert Arneson's 1974 glazed earthenware sculpture, "The Palace at 9 a.m." The sprawling piece, presented to the viewer at a slightly tilted angle, is at once abstract and specific in its depiction of the late artist's childhood home on Alice Street in Davis. The celebrated sculptor, who died in 1992, taught at UC Davis just shy of 30 years.

Nadel, who says he wanted the exhibit to touch on the suburban landscape, calls it the exhibit's "ultimate object."

"It's a map of his mind and meditation on fatherhood and family, and a meditation on landscape art itself," Nadel says.

Arneson's widow, Sandra Shannonhouse, says "The Palace at 9 a.m." offers an autobiographical view of his childhood living in the so-called "Alice house."

"Bob did a lot of pieces about Alice Street," she says. "He was involved in it emotionally and psychologically."

The piece also serves as an unintentional link of sorts with *ColorForm*, an exhibit that runs concurrently at the museum and features sculptures and drawings by Kathy Butterly, one of Arneson's last MFA students. The two exhibits weren't initially intended to show together, Nadel says, but their relationship is nonetheless tangible.

"Kathy is making extremely intimate and human-scaled, psychologically incisive works," Nadel says of Butterly's compact ceramic pieces.

"In this sense, the show is about the humane approach to the idea of landscape and what it can offer as an idea," he says. □

Check out *Landscapes Without Boundaries: Selections from the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art Collection*. 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday, July 14-Dec. 15. Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, 254 Old Davis Road in Davis. Admission is free; manettishremmuseum.ucdavis.edu.