

PERSPECTIVES

sets College of Art through June 30. A big diptych, "Fragments of Time," gives the show its title. The work includes a wiggly, pastel version of Botticelli's "Three Graces," with the ladies amputated at the thigh. Fragments of a mask-like face float in an ambiguous, watery space in artificially bright colors. A doll-like figure with glowing orange eye sockets falls upside down. None of the figures seems quite real; there is a strong sense, in most of these works, that we are looking at art about art, whether it's the Graces or the frontal, hieratic African sculptures McFarlane also uses. The spaces don't seem real, either. McFarlane often organizes them via a loose grid system, with squares and stripes that suggest woven or quilted textiles. What is real are the snippets of actual African textiles that McFarlane collages into some of the works, letting their exuberant patterning and color set the tone for the paintings.

All these works pose questions and leave the viewer wondering about answers. In one particularly successful mixed media on paper piece, "A Startling Revelation," a statuesque nude black woman stands with arms spread out at her sides, as if she's just parted a curtain. She looks up, but at what? Helping to create the thick, torpid atmosphere of the work are a dark ground with vivid white and gold strokes that look almost like palm fronds lighting up the night.

A large untitled charcoal and acrylic on paper work is even more enigmatic. A trio of resting figures hovers weightlessly in a dark, drenched forest. Both figures and ground are a glowing turquoise combined with a muted black, with the quick jabs of paint suggesting dappled light. Scraps of bright geometric fabric seem real and immediate compared to the remote, dreamy, unexplained figures.

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

Bryan McFarlane quotes freely from primitive, renaissance and modern sources and ideas in a show of his recent work, at the North Hall Gallery of Massachu-