Visual art inspires spiritual healing

By KELLI MUTCHLER
Reporter

Twenty-five years ago, Beth Neuer returned to college for a fine arts degree and began to paint. Ten years later, she experienced a time of tremendous grief, losing several close family members and companions.

From this experience grew a collection of works titled "A Journey with the Angels — Pathways Through Grief," which is currently on display in the Lied Education Center for the Arts.

Neuer hopes her work may help others who are suffering by placing them more in touch with their spiritual selves.

She seeks to inspire courage in the face of loss the same way she gained strength through her experiences.

"I have always had an insatiable passion for the spiritual, letting it play in my paintings as well as in my life," Neuer said. "When I was besieged with multiple losses of family and friends, it was my painting and poetry that helped me come to terms."

Neuer expresses herself through several different mediums: watercolor, oil on canvas, oil on paper and colored pencil. Using her art as a form of meditation, Neuer often begins a painting without clear direction, allowing it to develop with each stroke.

Each piece's story is told at the end. Viewers can begin to interpret these stories after understanding the spiritual background of the collection, but her paintings contain intentionally ambiguous aspects that will leave some viewers curious.

Neuer expects this curiosity and wants viewers to ask questions as they travel from one piece to the next: Does the artist paint the empty room of a house or the blank sacred space of a church? Do the reflecting bars of the window represent a cross or an X?

"Some people represent those lost in my life, some aren't specific, they represent all men and women in life, not only me, but they represent you," Neuer said.

Her faces form a comforting presence in each painting as a representation of humanity's common grief. Yet each figure also is painted with an intrinsic touch of Neuer's ambiguity.

Though few other objects clutter the canvases, Neuer manages to fill in empty space with vibrant contrasting colors and the slanting angles of ceilings, floors and walls.

Her artistic emphasis of each painting's empty space signifies the emptiness associated with loss and loneliness.

"My challenge was to portray the stark emptiness that I lived with daily," Neuer said. "I started out painting small empty spaces, but they became larger and larger."

"The way I was able to do this was to use the walls, carpets and even the floor tiles as borders to enclose the empty space. There is light, too. It comes through the windows and alters the space."

"The Good Shepherd," by Beth Neuer is part of a collection of Neuer's works now on display at the Lied Education Center for the Arts until Nov. 2.

It is this use of less which fills her work with more. For a glimpse of Neuer's collection, those seeking spiritual healing and strong visual art can visit her exhibit at the Lied Center from 1-4 p.m. daily until Nov. 2.