

Strength and boldness flow into Sutphin's art

By NATALIE HALPERN

The paintings and graphics of Donald Sutphin are on exhibition at Birmingham's W.F. Mullaly Galleries through March 31.

Sutphin, who describes himself as a figurative expressionist, brings oils, acrylics, woodcuts and etchings to his first one-man show in the metropolitan area.

Sutphin, now in his early 50s, is a New Englander who makes his home and produces art in Italy. He attended the Boston Museum School, the Art Students' League of New York, and taught in private schools in the East before transplanting himself in Florence in 1956.

At the Art Students' League, he studied under George Grosz, the social critic and painter who fled the Nazi regime.

SUTPHIN'S WORK ECHOES the influence of Grosz and others of the German expressionist school. This is characterized by the use of intense color, rough texture, absence of facial expression and emotionally laden themes.

Strong is an accurate word to describe Sutphin's work — strong color, strong strokes, strong mood. The bold use of color is a most distinctive element in his paintings.

According to Emil Nolde, one of the late German expressionists, "color is the painter's means, just as the word is the poet's and sound, the composer's. Color is energy. Energy is life."

He lives in the midst of the rural olive groves of Florence and paints his version of what he sees outside his studio window — a favorite fig tree.

A recurrent theme in this exhibition is that of a central ghostlike figure surrounded by currents of swirling, organic forms.

The expressionists were, on the whole, an anguished lot, torturing themselves and their families with their hang-ups. Sutphin, however, has been described by one interviewer as calm, cheerful and witty. The tone of his work is somber.

Sutphin's woodcuts feature sharp, bold strokes, minimal but strong in composition. Many of the woodcuts center on the theme of expectation, with titles such as "We Three By The Shore But Wait," "Among Those Wait" and "We Who Contemplate Our Future."

ALMOST HIDDEN in one of the nooks at the back of the gallery is a small but striking woodcut of a face entitled "Fear," which admirably captures the stark, moving anguish of the emo-



Woodcut in black and white by Donald Sutphin was done in 1978.

This exhibition of Donald Sutphin's works cannot be described as restful or comforting, but it certainly is arresting. It merits the attention of viewers who are curious and willing to explore expanding the boundaries of their thinking.

The Mullaly Galleries, 1025 Haynes, is presided

over by William and Dolores Mullaly, painter and weaver, respectively. Formerly the Birmingham Gallery, it is less than a year old.

This viewer's very subjective reaction to the gallery itself was one of extreme pleasure in the luxury of leisurely study of the exhibit.