

LISTINGS

Movies
Readings & Lectures
Galleries & Museums
Performing Arts
Restaurants

PLUS

36
Matches personal ads

39
Night Spies

2
SECTION TWO

2
MOVIES

2
Critic's Choice: Rosenbaum
Alone on the Pacific

8
Showtimes

13
READINGS & LECTURES

15
GALLERIES & MUSEUMS



20
PERFORMING ARTS

20
Theater

22
Critic's Choice: Hayford
Richard Maxwell's
Boxing 2000

24
Critic's Choice: Nemtusak
Clay Continent

28
Theater Directory

29
Sketch Fest

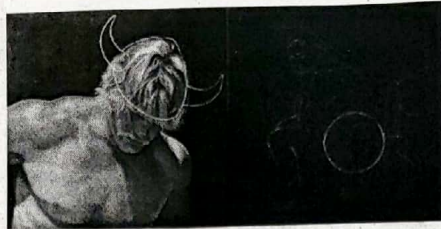
30
Performance

30
Dance
Critic's Choice: Molzahn
Grigorovich Ballet of Moscow

31
Critic's Choice: Molzahn
SoloWorks:
In the Company of Courage

32
RESTAURANTS

32
German, Polish, Russian



T H E

Culture Club

page 19

Changes of Scenery

Six years ago, painter Didier Nolet's wife, Nona, sat down in their Lakeview home for a good read. The book in hand was Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*. When she was done, she looked up and said, "OK. Let's sell the house and move to France." Nolet, a French native who'd lived in the U.S. since 1979, agreed on the spot. What's a change of surroundings to an artist who only paints the landscape in his head? Faster than you can flip a crepe, "without knowing anything," he says, they hatched a business plan, shipped all their possessions (including a car) to Provence, and were on their way. The plan? Nona would sell clothing from the American southwest to tourists and locals. They rented a house and shop for that purpose but—*zut!*—failed to take into account the difficulty of dealing with French authorities. There might have been a demand for cowboy boots and belt buckles the size of hubcaps in the south of France, but they never got to find out: import regulations were a nightmare, Nolet says, and the neighbors said he was speaking French with an American accent. Seven months after they arrived, they bid France adieu. They had made a mistake, but it wasn't too late to correct it. Next destination: Phoenix.

Nona opened a shop in Scottsdale, then moved it to a mall in Chandler, another Phoenix suburb. Mall rules required her to be open seven days a week. That meant she was in the store five days, Nolet the other two. "It was difficult," he says. "You're spending your life there." They stuck it out for five and a half years, battling outfits with big-spread advertising budgets that sold "southwestern" goods made in China. The worst part was that Nolet couldn't sell his paintings. "I was at Suzanne Brown Gallery, one of the most established in the area," he says.



PHOTO/ROBERT DREA

Painter Didier Nolet's been around the world and back again, but his landscapes are the ones he sees when he closes his eyes.

"But in the southwest, everything has to be local flavor—food, clothes, art." He cranked out the obligatory saguaro and mountain once or twice, but after a few months of blistering sun he hung blankets over the windows of his home and began to produce cool green canvases with lush vegetation that had no market. "My work doesn't reflect local scenery," he says. "I never painted a cornfield in Chicago. It's about my emotions." In November the Nolets came home to Chicago for good. His nearly mural-sized oil paintings of rolling countrysides (a little warmer now that Phoenix is only a memory) are on view in the back room at Lydon Fine Art and in the one-man show "Full Circle" at Oakton Community College's William A. Koehnline Gallery through next week.

Swag Gag

The headline on the E-mail from the League of Chicago Theatres said, "Welcome Tribune Theater Critic Michael Phillips [*sic*] With a Gift From Your Theater." The text advised member theaters to bring an unwrapped gift worth no more than \$25 to the January 7 party in honor of the former *LA Times* staffer. It suggested mugs, T-shirts, posters—"something that introduces and identifies your theater or promotes an upcoming production."

That got the attention of Bailiwick artistic director David Zak, who responded, "I think the gift idea is tawdry. And hearing people discuss the lengths [to] which they are going to try to make an impression is discouraging. I hope we can make an impression on him with our work, not our merchandise." Bailiwick will host another welcoming party for Phillips January 28, sponsored by *Performink*. No gifts, please.

Stars (and Stripes) in His Eyes

Brian Russell announced this week that he'll leave American Theater Company at the end of August. Russell's been ATC's artistic director for five years, during which the theater's annual budget has grown from \$70,000 to \$385,000 and the audience from 2,200 to 11,000. "I'm planning next year's season and will direct the first play," he says, "but I've largely done what I came here to do." ATC sent out a brink-of-death letter in October that brought in \$57,500 in donations plus a \$10,000 grant from Chicago Community Trust; Russell insists it's now as healthy as most small companies. A search will be conducted

for his replacement. As for him, gigs with the Breakthrough Group (which works for corporate clients) and the Lyric Opera's Center for American Artists will pay the rent while he works on a novel and some other writing projects and thinks about his dream goal: running for public office. "I was living in Minneapolis when Paul Wellstone ran for the Senate," he says. "He's sort of a hero of mine." A Democrat and a novice, Russell says he'd start with a run for Congress. "I at least want to think about it. I'm probably looking at 2006; certainly not before 2004."

The Waiting Game

"We began our odyssey with the city a year ago," says Raven Theatre artistic director Michael Menendian, explaining the company's long dark wait for its new digs at 6157 N. Clark. At that time Menendian was expecting Raven to open its first show in the former grocery store in May 2001. "It's been a more arduous task than I foresaw," he says. "It required a zoning variance I was not made aware of at the time of the purchase. That took six months. Now we're in the final stages of the permit process." Bringing the 50-year-old building up to code is also proving more expensive than originally thought. The project's estimated cost has gone from \$1.2 million to nearly \$2 million; the theater's hoping to get \$550,000 in TIF funds from the city to cover part of that gap. Now Menendian expects to open *Marvin's Room*, Raven's first main-stage production in two years, in April, "but I've been wrong every single time," he says, "so let's just say that's the target." A city consumer services investigator for home repairs in his day job, Menendian's finding it "very hard to get anything built in Chicago."

By Deanna Isaacs

Art

The dreams of Nolet

Lack of fashion becomes a style for a poetically realistic painter

By Alan Artner

Art critic

Didier Nolet is one of Chicago's more pleasing anomalies, an artist who has achieved success with a kind of painting that owes nothing to fad or fashion.

When he moved here 11 years ago from France, his poetic realism was alien to local taste and remote from the national mainstream. But with the waning of Neo-Expressionist painting in the late 1980s came a return to more classical values, and suddenly Nolet was not alone.

"Didier Nolet: Dreams of a Man Awake," a 10-year review of paintings and pastels at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, is an important step in gaining understanding, insofar as the work's seductive power often distracts from one's comprehension of all that has gone into it.

Nolet, 37, is a highly rigorous painter, mindful of education and tradition. This is clear in the way he approached his task, and part of it, at least, is owing to European training.

"I studied five years for diplomas in architectural and civil-engineering drawing," Nolet said, "but always wanted to be a painter. After a few months at an architectural firm in a suburb of Paris, I quit and went to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

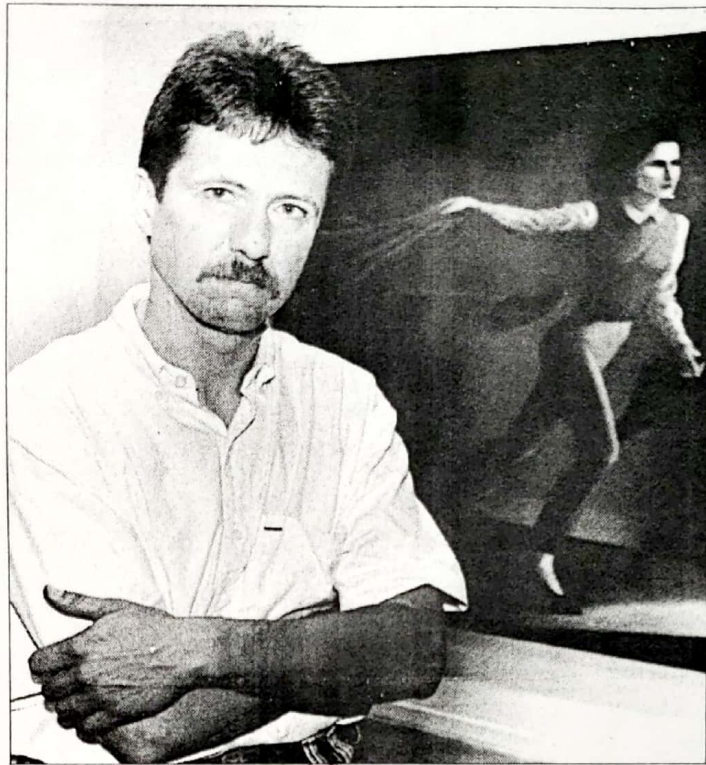
"One instructor, Pierre Carron, did very sharp work with a lot of play of light. He was interested in Poussin, Ingres, Piero della Francesca and Balthus. Every morning we went to the Louvre, studying Old Masters, making drawings from Greek vases and sculptures. Then in the afternoon we worked in the studio with models or still lifes. This taught me to do something that would go beyond the style of the moment.

"Carron had an assistant, Pierre Faure, who was completely different. Faure liked Francis Bacon and took us not to the Louvre but to the modern art museum and to the Beaubourg [Georges Pompidou Center]. So there were two complementary directions. They led me to know where I was: not in the past, in the present. But in a present with a strong notion of the past. That, I felt, was the right spot."

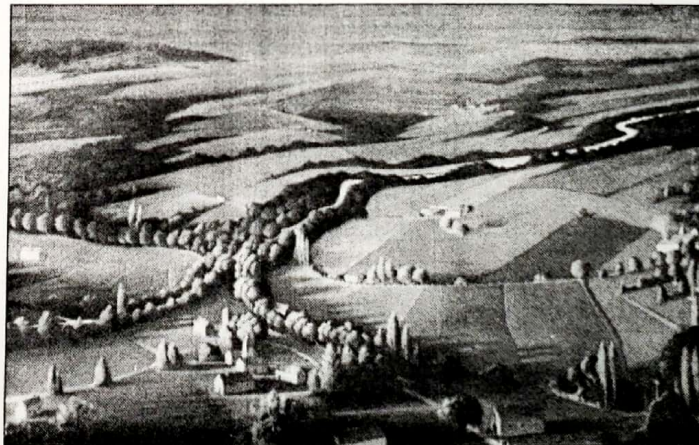
Nolet stayed at the school four years, then worked on his own for three before coming to Chicago to join an American he had met in Paris, the woman who became his wife. He began by painting still lifes much like the ones he had done in France, strict and a little cool, with delicate plays of light.

The birth of a daughter in 1980 led Nolet to a series of portraits of the child in his studio. Still-life elements occupied much of these paintings as well. But soon a flood of other sensations led to a change in subject that had lasting ramifications.

"I remember when I was 16 I said to my parents, 'I'm getting tired of France. This is a country with old stones, and it's a pain in the neck to live with them.' Well, until I moved to Chicago, I didn't realize those stones were so valuable to me. When something is gone, it's gone. Only later you find that the past is a really deep part of you. So why reject it?



Nolet, 37, a highly rigorous painter, with "Silent Movement," 1985, among his works in "Didier Nolet: Dreams of a Man Awake."



Didier Nolet's oil, "Above the Land," 1982, on display at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center.

"My landscapes are mixtures of emotional and visual memories. They come from a little bit of everything. Each corner of the painting is maybe a place seen a thousand times. But you forget where you see what. The paintings are not of real places, that's for sure. A lot of things have come together. The past stretches from when you were a kid up 'til yesterday. My landscapes mix all of it."

Though the artist continues to do still lifes and figure paintings, he long has preferred landscape, which seemed to hold the greatest number of possi-

bilities. Nolet uses its elements—hills, fields, houses, trees—as abstract building blocks he can manipulate freely.

Still, he never has created a completely abstract work, thinking it would be too conservative, as abstraction "is the accepted, almost the official art of our period." Instead, he prefers compositions that are tightly and, at times, geometrically constructed but still retain representational associations.

"I feel it is a bit easy to be abstract," Nolet said. "You have to go beyond it. You have to use ideas that

already have been used for centuries and make them new.

"I like to hear that people who don't know anything about art feel comfortable with my work. There's no reason art should be for a minority.

"I'm trying to push further and further in my work to reach a point where people feel everything is in balance and want to stay to look at it forever. Once a lady wrote me: 'If I would have one of your paintings and would wake up every morning to see it, my life would be much better.' To read that made me feel very good."

As the exhibition indicates, Nolet's art has evolved without any great stylistic upheaval. Not resistant to change, neither did he force it, allowing work to grow naturally, as when pastels emerged from preparatory drawings and influenced, in turn, the stroke and color of his paintings.

On occasion, particular works appeared to the artist in dreams, as was true of "Two Individuals," the 1981 painting of an angel/puppet/child leading a cow in a highly ambiguous setting. It was the first of only two works in which Nolet put figures into his landscapes, as he generally banished them, the better to maintain silence.

When he did paint figures, it usually was in everyday settings without narrative interest. Here he suspended time by "freezing" subjects in transitory gestures or actions. Stillness again seems to have tremendous weight, becoming almost palpable.

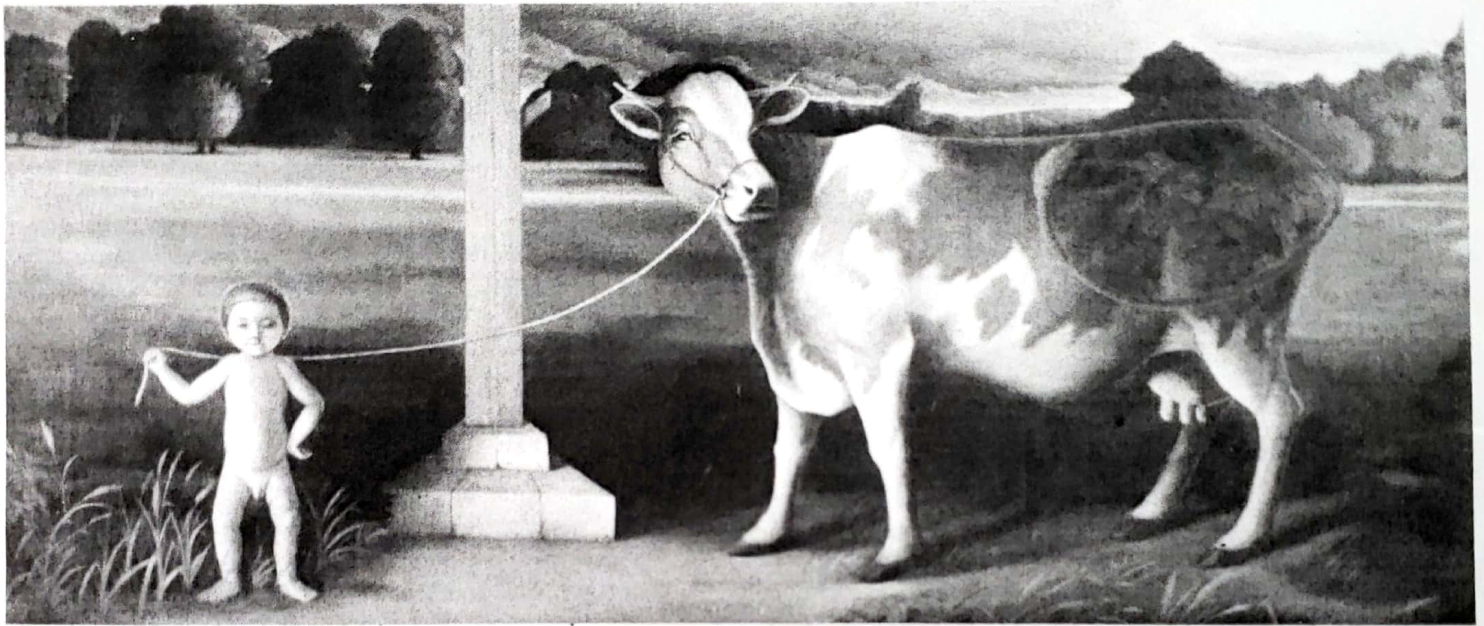
"For me, light is most important," Nolet said. "It is what you see before you know anything, and it acts powerfully on memory. Some places you remember by sounds and some by smells. Others you know only through a feeling given by light, and this I try to accentuate, pressing until it is not what you would see in nature."

Such light is in Nolet's art without a spiritual component. However, it so contributes to physical beauty that some viewers have disparaged the pieces as "pretty pictures."

"They feel the work is superficial," Nolet said. "I feel it has its place in the progression of history. I wouldn't have been able to do it without Cézanne, the Cubists, the Abstract Expressionists or the Photorealists. But, for me, continuity has to extend a little bit further, to do something that's very sturdy, more like cutting a block of marble than painting.

"Creating such a piece, you have to know exactly where you want to go and what you want to do with it. You have to be tough with yourself and not have self pity. So, no, I don't feel I make only pretty pictures; I don't think people say, 'Oh, it's beautiful.' When I'm happy, I think people find something in it for themselves, feeling that nothing needs to be changed. In that case, it would be timeless, and I know I will have reached my goal."

Organized by the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Chicago, "Didier Nolet: Dreams of a Man Awake" continues through Nov. 3 at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St. The exhibition also will appear at the Rockford Art Museum next February and March.



Detail from Didier Nolet's "The Two Individuals": Hallucinatory incident evokes great Dutch cattle paintings from the 17th Century.

Art galleries

Nolet brings dreams to bear in realist paintings

By Alan G. Artner

Art critic

DIDIER NOLET came here from Paris in 1980, more than a year before Americans developed an interest in contemporary European art. He was not preceded by a wave of publicity like the new young Italians. Nor did he provoke controversy like the Germans. He simply arrived and started to work, in a style of painting neither sensational nor "bad."

Three years ago at the Art Institute's Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition he was surrounded by Neo-Expressionists, which was a help; it certainly didn't take long to see who was the more personal. His interior with bicycle, "Un Moment de Silence," so lingered in the memory that when the Renaissance Society asked for recommendations of "unknown" local painters, Nolet was this writer's choice. As it turned out, he also was noticed by the Contemporary Art Workshop, 542 W. Grant Pl., where several paintings and studies are now on view.

The 14 pieces are by no means uniform in quality, but these days rare is the exhibition in which quality plays *any* part. At least here one sees what the artist is after even when he doesn't attain it, and the rigor of his effort is never in doubt. Clearly, Nolet is an artist of refined sensibility and high technical accomplishment.

BUT IN several works he proves himself more. These are paintings in which the realist enterprise is heightened or brought into proximity with dreams. Two interiors that depict a stroller holding Nolet's infant daughter, Laure, are the best

examples of the former. Each representation is bathed in an atmosphere of enchantment and awe not unlike that of Balthus, yet more humble, everyday. The agent is Nolet's transforming play of light.

His large-scale landscapes are equally still, glowing and mysterious. However, here we sense greater ambition. In "The Two Individuals," hallucinatory incident nonetheless evokes great Dutch cattle paintings from the 17th Century. And the imaginary panorama "Above the Land" recalls many monumental French landscape paintings, rather like filtering the legacy of Pissarro and Vuillard through Grant Wood.

Nolet's other works—exempting his marvelous cartoons—do not attain this level. But there is no reason why all of them should. The artist is only 30 and still growing. How far he already has come makes for more than enough reward. [Through May 10.]

ART

Visiting landscapes of the mind

By MYRNA PETLICKI

The landscapes that play across the large canvases on display at Oakton Community College's William A. Koehnline Gallery in Des Plaines seem to invite the viewer to walk right in. Depending on your mood, you can visit a verdant sun-drenched area, rest by a gently flowing stream or watch storm clouds roll in. But that's the only way you can get to the places in Didier Nolet's oil paintings. They exist only in the artist's mind.

Nolet noted that if you visit his mind, you will find "sometimes it's peaceful, sometimes it's romantic, depending on a lot of things that are happening to me. The artist, who is as charming as he is talented, related that, among the pieces in the Koehnline show, "there are some peaceful ones and some dark ones."

In creating each piece, Nolet said, "I'm not trying to analyze anything. It's more about state of mind, moods." Each painting starts on a page in a very small sketchbook. "I'm struggling to go deeper inside my mind, and trying to get to the deepest feelings," he said. "The weather can affect me. Anything can affect me."

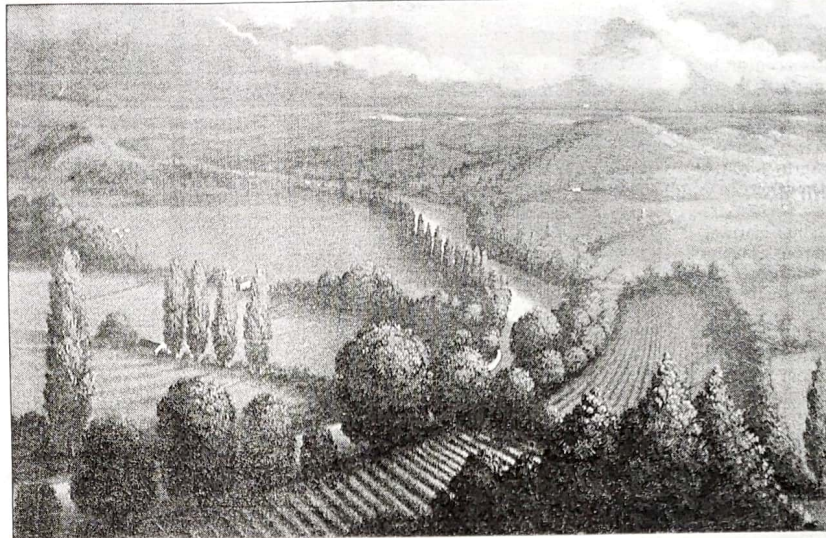
Koehnline gallery manager and curator Nathan Harpaz said that he is attracted to the work because unlike typical landscape paintings which are "always connected to a special site," Nolet's are done from "emotion, fantasy and memory." Harpaz noted that the college has had a relationship with the artist since 1992, when they commissioned a large painting from him. He said that the artist's recent return to the Chicago area, after living in Arizona, made this seem a good time to offer Nolet a one-man show.

Although no figures are visible in Nolet's landscapes, there's a sense of great romance and adventure in the evocative visions of nature, with tiny rooftops at times reminding the viewer that man is part of the picture. Romance is also the central theme in Nolet's life.

The Paris-born artist was working in the city of his birth in 1979 when a young American tourist caught his eye and stole his heart. Three months after she returned to Chicago, he closed his studio and followed her.

Chicago was their home until 1995, when they decided to return to France, taking residence in Provence. It was a short-lived move. Within a year, they returned to the United States, settling in Phoenix. Although they lived in Arizona for five years, Nolet quickly realized it was not the place for him. They returned to Chicago this year.

Nolet created the majority of the works in the show during the years he lived in Arizona, although doing so



presented a challenge. Most of those paintings seem as different from the actual landscape surrounding him as one could imagine. "When you have a green one, it was (created) when I was really tired of the dryness of Arizona and the hot sun," Nolet laughed. An example of this is "Looking North," a panoramic view of vegetation as a storm approaches.

It was the sameness of the actual scenery that disturbed the sensitive artist. "We had this big house with huge windows, and every day you open the blinds and it's a pure blue sky. It's fine for a while. It's like chocolate cake. You like the first piece and if we serve you chocolate cake every day, you get really sick of that." So sick that, while creating "Looking North," the artist closed the blinds and covered the fluorescent lighting in the ceiling with sheets to dim the lights. Unfortunately, Nolet found it impossible to sell "anything that was green" in Arizona.

Aside from the sameness of the environment, Nolet and his family returned to this area because "we were missing Chicago a lot." He is inspired by living here because "it is a mixture of cultures. When you are in France, you have one culture. That was a little bit of my problem also in the Southwest because everything is one flavor."

Nolet reported that although he always wanted to paint landscapes, he never did any during his years in France. "When I moved to Chicago in '79, I wasn't speaking any English and my wife was still a student at the Art Institute," he said. After the birth of their baby daughter, he found himself staying in an apartment over the winter, not knowing anyone.

"Everything in front of me was blank and new, and everything in the



Didier Nolet

past was memories," Nolet said. He combined his memories with the thoughts in his mind, then, over time, added elements from life in his new country. "Some of the landscapes are very European or French. But some you can't really locate. They could be anywhere."

Although there are some small and medium-sized paintings in the exhibit the artist prefers to do large format work. "You can enjoy the piece from a distance, but you still can come close and see all the details," Nolet said. "When you have a large piece, you step back and the piece comes toward you almost."

Nolet has had one-man shows throughout the Chicago area (there is another show running concurrently at Lydon Fine Art at 309 W. Superior in Chicago), as well as in Arizona, New York, Minnesota and France. His work

Emotion, fantasy and memory. Didier Nolet's "Silence" is on display at Oakton Community College's William A. Koehnline Gallery.

I'm struggling to go deeper inside my mind, and trying to get to the deepest feelings.

Didier Nolet

has also been featured in dozens of group shows. Paintings by the multiple-prize-winning artist are in numerous public and private collections as well.

"My work is not controversial," Nolet said. "It's modern, but it has the modern look of an abstract painting."

He likes having his work displayed in a simple space like the Koehnline Gallery, with its white walls and wood floor.

Nolet explained: "You have nothing that can conflict with the piece."

"Didier Nolet: Full Circle" is on display at Oakton Community College's William A. Koehnline Gallery, 1600 E. Golf Road, Des Plaines, through Jan. 25. The gallery is open Monday, Tuesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Wednesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Call (847) 635-2633.

Art

Didier Nolet's works prompt a deep bow

By Alan G. Artner
Art critic

The exhibition of Didier Nolet's paintings and drawings, at the Struve Gallery, 309 W. Superior St., is not an event about which I can claim disinterest.

Ever since the young Frenchman first showed at the Art Institute's Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition in 1980, he has brought a poetry and civility to the local scene that has been more than welcome.

True, his still-lives, landscapes and figure studies often have been close to the work of Balthus, but simply to know that an artist is maintaining that tradition amid the puerilities of Chicago art can give a satisfaction beyond imagining.

Nolet's art, sweet and easy as it sometimes can seem, is nonetheless the real thing. Its drawing is firm, its handling of paint, secure. And never is there any pretense, dandyism or slumming.

The subject of Nolet's landscapes is memory—the memory of a certain kind of light that we know from the photographs of Eugene Atget. It is generally an early morning light that softens and acts as transforming agent. Nolet uses it to give the aura of verifiable fact to a countryside otherwise imagined.

Something like this light also suffuses his figure paintings, which of all Nolet's works are the most "difficult" because they are the most mysterious. Each has the feeling of life as it is actually lived. But the figures are



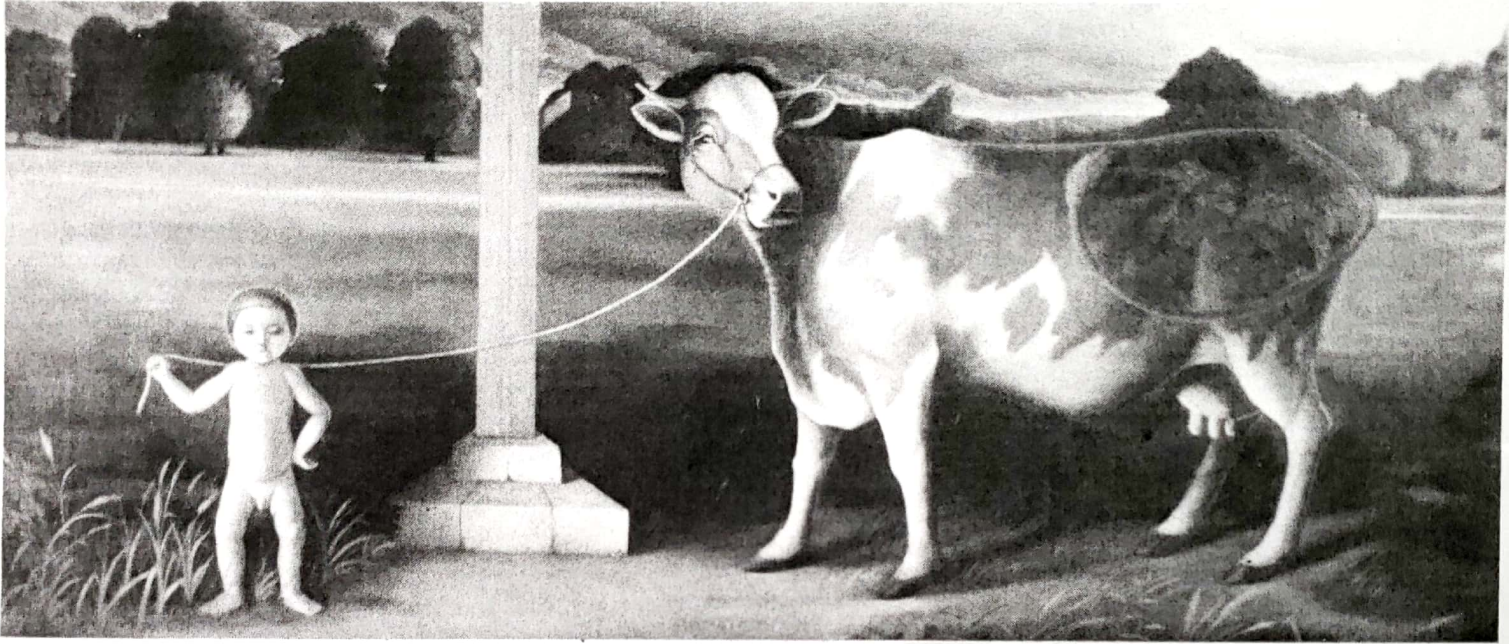
Nature Morte de Saison, 1987, oil on canvas by Didier Nolet.

caught by the light and frozen in particularly inward-looking moments. If they communicate to the viewer at all, it is through extreme silence.

The still lifes are, by comparison, full of charm and relatively straightforward. We know everything has been arranged for maximum effect in the artist's studio. Yet here, too, light bears a weight of silence that becomes

almost crushing. The fruits, chairs and other paraphernalia are as if viewed from a tremendous distance, in a vacuum.

It is no mean feat to create this atmosphere, and through the years Nolet has only become more cultivated. What he achieves in the present show can scarcely be bettered. (Through Oct. 13.)



Detail from Didier Nolet's "The Two Individuals": Hallucinatory incident evokes great Dutch cattle paintings from the 17th Century.

Art galleries

Nolet brings dreams to bear in realist paintings

By Alan G. Artner

Art critic

DIDIER NOLET came here from Paris in 1980, more than a year before Americans developed an interest in contemporary European art. He was not preceded by a wave of publicity like the new young Italians. Nor did he provoke controversy like the Germans. He simply arrived and started to work, in a style of painting neither sensational nor "bad."

Three years ago at the Art Institute's Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition he was surrounded by Neo-Expressionists, which was a help; it certainly didn't take long to see who was the more personal. His interior with bicycle, "Un Moment de Silence," so lingered in the memory that when the Renaissance Society asked for recommendations of "unknown" local painters, Nolet was this writer's choice. As it turned out, he also was noticed by the Contemporary Art Workshop, 542 W. Grant Pl., where several paintings and studies are now on view.

The 14 pieces are by no means uniform in quality, but these days rare is the exhibition in which quality plays *any* part. At least here one sees what the artist is after even when he doesn't attain it, and the rigor of his effort is never in doubt. Clearly, Nolet is an artist of refined sensibility and high technical accomplishment.

BUT IN several works he proves himself more. These are paintings in which the realist enterprise is heightened or brought into proximity with dreams. Two interiors that depict a stroller holding Nolet's infant daughter, Laure, are the best

examples of the former. Each representation is bathed in an atmosphere of enchantment and awe not unlike that of Balthus, yet more humble, everyday. The agent is Nolet's transforming play of light.

His large-scale landscapes are equally still, glowing and mysterious. However, here we sense greater ambition. In "The Two Individuals," hallucinatory incident nonetheless evokes great Dutch cattle paintings from the 17th Century. And the imaginary panorama "Above the Land" recalls many monumental French landscape paintings, rather like filtering the legacy of Pissarro and Vuillard through Grant Wood.

Nolet's other works—exempting his marvelous cartoons—do not attain this level. But there is no reason why all of them should. The artist is only 30 and still growing. How far he already has come makes for more than enough reward. [Through May 10.]

Neel's portraits look beyond faces

BY MARGARET HAWKINS
Galleries

The work of Alice Neel always has a curious effect on me — I find myself searching the faces in her paintings for people I know as if leafing, through an old yearbook or riffling the announcement pages of a hometown newspaper.

That may be because there is something recognizable in an Alice Neel portrait, even if you don't know the subject. It's not a quality that's found in most figure painting, which often universalizes a subject rather than zooms in on the particulars. Neel, though, manages to make her subjects familiar by making them real, if not realistic.

Neel was born in 1900, and for most of her 84 years she was a portrait artist who stuck to her quirky, straightforward approach with amazing focus. Her simple, sometimes crude style survived all the isms and eras of 20th century art, never wavering from a singular vision that allowed her to produce portraits like no one else's. She made portraits that go far deeper than mere likeness, portraits that get to the meat of her relationships and her observations of the world without bogging down in narrative or sentiment or even much detail.

Neel is better known for her paintings than her drawings, but the exhibit of 83 portrait and figure drawings currently at the Arts Club should establish her preeminence as a draftsman. The work spans almost 60 years, documenting the people she lived among during her early days as a young bride and mother in Cuba, through her years in Spanish Harlem and her later life among art world celebrities. And always there are her friends, lovers, neighbors and family.

Neel's drawings reveal her subjects to be singular, eccentric and sometimes grotesque. She goes for the telling detail, the telltale gesture. "Dorothy with Banana" shows an old woman with a stiff hairdo wearing a prim cardigan sweater. On a table nearby is an old-fashioned fruit bowl, and in her hand she holds a half-eaten banana. "Ruth" is a plump, content-looking woman with tiny feet and hands who is curled up on a sofa.

Neel does not present them as objects or as stories to be analyzed; they are distillations of lives to be understood in one intuitive instant. Some subjects merit several portraits, each showing a different facet of the person. "Bette Fischer" is variously pretty, tough intense, dreamy, worn out and a little desperate. Neel's subjects are always presented with dignity; they are



"Dorothy with Banana" by Alice Neel

never caricatures or emotional clichés.

There is a sense of earned attention and honesty in Neel's work. The drawings look effortful, as if she's working hard to get at some truth and doesn't mind us seeing the dirty work that it takes to do so. None of these are pretty drawings, some are scribbled, awkward, out of proportion, erased out and drawn over. It doesn't matter. If anything, this messiness intensifies the experience of seeing both the person as the artist sees him and the artist's struggle to capture that experience. Pretty people are never merely pretty in Neel's work; she finds something troubled or dark behind the smooth facade. Likewise those who might be considered ugly are her richest subjects, full of possibility and secrets.

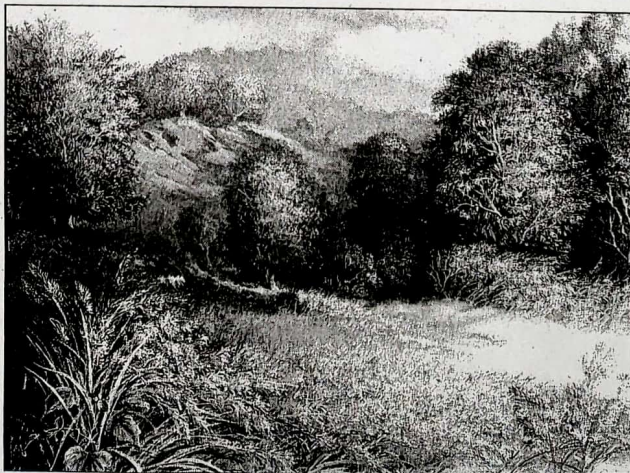
Some of Neel's most powerful drawings show cancer patients and were made around the time of her own mother's hospitalization and death. These are unrelenting but very beautiful and Neel is as well suited to this subject as an artist can be. The drawings are full of the same honest attention and unaffected curiosity that all her work possess and she affords exactly as much dignity to these subjects as she does to the rest.

There is a sometimes delicious and sometimes unappetizing sweetness in the work of Didier Nolet, in an exhibit of paintings at the Chicago Botanic Garden. His work has a quality that verges on the saccharine and wavers between decadence and primitivism. Nolet, who moved to Chicago from France 25 years ago, is a landscape painter who sees the world in soft shapes and colors. Big powder puff trees sit on rolling hillsides, sunny vistas spool out through fields and over rivers. The paintings are a Candyland of the mind, synthetic and dreamy.

There is a kind of abstraction going on here, in which the world gets reduced not to geometry or concept, but to sweet nothingness that may be an amalgam of Nolet's childhood memories of rural France and his more recent impressions of the lush Midwestern landscape at its best. His is a style that used to be called romanticism but now in our impossibly jaded age must be seen as a more willful way of seeing the world, not truly naive but determinedly and deliriously optimistic. Some of the best paintings push this style so far they almost look as if Grant Wood could have painted them.

I like best the work that is the weirdest, the ones in which Nolet has most clearly abstracted his idea of what nature should be. My favorite work in the show is a big painting of a tree at night. The whole thing appears brown at first. The big round shape of the tree fills up almost the whole canvas and behind it we see a glint of oddly pale water, perhaps reflecting the moon. Then as we look our eyes adjust to the dark and we see variations and color. This painting lacks the sweetness and sometimes overly vivid color that mark some of Nolet's other work, replacing these with a brooding abstraction that suits him well.

Margaret Hawkins is a local free-lance writer.



"Last Moment" and other lush Didier Nolet landscapes are on exhibit at the Chicago Botanic Garden.



Detail from

Art gallery Noel

By Alan C
Art critic

DIDIER NOLET more than a interest in c not preceded young Italian like the Geri to work, in a nor "bad."

Three year and Vicinity Neo-Express didn't take lo His interior ' lence," so li Renaissance of "unknown ter's choice. by the Conte Pl., where se on view.

The 14 piec quality, but t which quality sees what the attain it, and doubt. Clearl bility and hi

BUT IN se These are pa is heightened dreams. Two ing Nolet's ir

EXTR

Da Win
"CHICAGO'S I
DINNER THE



Your invited to jo
comedy revue fe
da ga

For Reservations

Call:



The Home Oak

9401 S. Oak
(1 block N of 95)

3 D

Fri-Oct
Sat-Oct
Sun-Oct

It's all yo
It's all under

Windows - Siding -
Roofing - Furnaces -
and pretty much c

FREE AD
FREE
Why pay



Neel's portraits look beyond faces

BY MARGARET HAWKINS
Galleries

The work of Alice Neel always has a curious effect on me — I find myself searching the faces in her paintings for people I know as if leafing, through an old yearbook or riffling the announcement pages of a hometown newspaper.

That may be because there is something recognizable in an Alice Neel portrait, even if you don't know the subject. It's not a quality that's found in most figure painting, which often universalizes a subject rather than zooms in on the particulars. Neel, though, manages to make her subjects familiar by making them real, if not realistic.

Neel was born in 1900, and for most of her 84 years she was a portrait artist who stuck to her quirky, straightforward approach with amazing focus. Her simple, sometimes crude style survived all the isms and eras of 20th century art, never wavering from a singular vision that allowed her to produce portraits like no one else's. She made portraits that go far deeper than mere likeness, portraits that get to the meat of her relationships and her observations of the world without bogging down in narrative or sentiment or even much detail.

Neel is better known for her paintings than her drawings, but the exhibit of 83 portrait and figure drawings currently at the Arts Club should establish her preeminence as a draftsman. The work spans almost 60 years, documenting the people she lived among during her early days as a young bride and mother in Cuba, through her years in Spanish Harlem and her later life among art world celebrities. And always there are her friends, lovers, neighbors and family.

Neel's drawings reveal her subjects to be singular, eccentric and sometimes grotesque. She goes for the telling detail, the telltale gesture. "Dorothy with Banana" shows an old woman with a stiff hairdo wearing a prim cardigan sweater. On a table nearby is an old-fashioned fruit bowl, and in her hand she holds a half-eaten banana. "Ruth" is a plump, content-looking woman with tiny feet and hands who is curled up on a sofa.

Neel does not present them as objects or as stories to be analyzed; they are distillations of lives to be understood in one intuitive instant. Some subjects merit several portraits, each showing a different facet of the person. "Bette Fischer" is variously pretty, tough intense, dreamy, worn out and a little desperate. Neel's subjects are always presented with dignity; they are



"Dorothy with Banana" by Alice Neel

never caricatures or emotional clichés.

There is a sense of earned attention and honesty in Neel's work. The drawings look effortful, as if she's working hard to get at some truth and doesn't mind us seeing the dirty work that it takes to do so. None of these are pretty drawings, some are scribbled, awkward, out of proportion, erased out and drawn over. It doesn't matter. If anything, this messiness intensifies

the experience of seeing both the person as the artist sees him and the artist's struggle to capture that experience. Pretty people are never merely pretty in Neel's work; she finds something troubled or dark behind the smooth facade. Likewise those who might be considered ugly are her richest subjects, full of possibility and secrets.

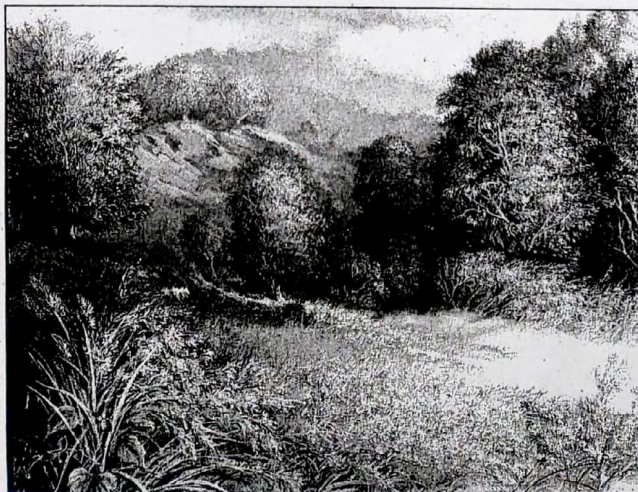
Some of Neel's most powerful drawings show cancer patients and were made around the time of her own mother's hospitalization and death. These are unrelenting but very beautiful and Neel is as well suited to this subject as an artist can be. The drawings are full of the same honest attention and unaffected curiosity that all her work possess and she affords exactly as much dignity to these subjects as she does to the rest.

There is a sometimes delicious and sometimes unappetizing sweetness in the work of Didier Nolet, in an exhibit of paintings at the Chicago Botanic Garden. His work has a quality that verges on the saccharine and wavers between decadence and primitivism. Nolet, who moved to Chicago from France 25 years ago, is a landscape painter who sees the world in soft shapes and colors. Big powder puff trees sit on rolling hillsides, sunny vistas spool out through fields and over rivers. The paintings are a Candyland of the mind, synthetic and dreamy.

There is a kind of abstraction going on here, in which the world gets reduced not to geometry or concept, but to sweet nothingness that may be an amalgam of Nolet's childhood memories of rural France and his more recent impressions of the lush Midwestern landscape at its best. His is a style that used to be called romanticism but now in our impossibly jaded age must be seen as a more willful way of seeing the world, not truly naive but determinedly and deliriously optimistic. Some of the best paintings push this style so far they almost look as if Grant Wood could have painted them.

I like best the work that is the weirdest, the ones in which Nolet has most clearly abstracted his idea of what nature should be. My favorite work in the show is a big painting of a tree at night. The whole thing appears brown at first. The big round shape of the tree fills up almost the whole canvas and behind it we see a glint of oddly pale water, perhaps reflecting the moon. Then as we look our eyes adjust to the dark and we see variations and color. This painting lacks the sweetness and sometimes overly vivid color that mark some of Nolet's other work, replacing these with a brooding abstraction that suits him well.

Margaret Hawkins is a local free-lance writer.



"Last Moment" and other lush Didier Nolet landscapes are on exhibit at the Chicago Botanic Garden.