

# An artist, peeling the onion one layer at a time

Kansas City scenes revisited reveal own aesthetic depths

By ALICE THORSON  
The Kansas City Star

Wilbur Niewald's exhibit of recent paintings and watercolors on view at Morgan Gallery, 412 Delaware St., fairly glows on the walls.

Where the average person might see a scenic view of downtown Kansas City or a motley collection of apples and onions against a drapery background, Niewald, professor emeritus of painting at Kansas City Art Institute, sees color and structure.

The artist has spent the better part of a lifetime trying to capture that color and structure with paint and canvas, revisiting the same vistas and still-life groupings over and over, determined to divine their aesthetic truths.

Niewald has never been one for flashy paint-handling or thick impasto. Rather he endows his work with life and presence by establishing a push-pull between loose brushy areas of color and shorter, more controlled strokes that perform the task of description.

This is most apparent in some of his urbanscapes, where the salmon-colored cubic forms of the

---

## REVIEW

---

■ The exhibit of Wilbur Niewald's work continues at the Morgan Gallery through Dec. 23. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays; and by appointment; call 842-8755.

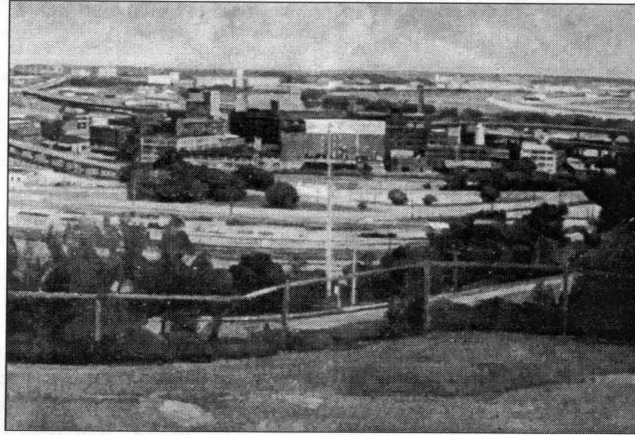
---

brick buildings — positioned, usually, in the upper third of these canvases — have a sense of compression. It is as if the artist had gathered up the energy of the foreground brush strokes as he worked his way up the canvas, or, conversely, released it as he worked his way down.

Nature is movement in these paintings, when it comes to both brushwork and composition. In "Kansas City View From Penn Valley Park" (1998), fingers of greenery swirl in from the right-hand side, as the architecture stands placidly by.

Niewald has been painting the same scenes for so many years that it is perhaps inevitable that some of them now serve as documents. Many of the buildings that appear in "Kansas City, View of the River" (1998) were consumed in the West Bottoms fire, and the view as Niewald painted it no longer exists.

One of the loveliest paintings in



Wilbur Niewald's oil painting 'Kansas City, View of the River'

this show offers only the merest glimpse of architecture. "Trees at Linda Hall Library" (1996) strikes an engaging balance between feeling and method, with the former almost getting the better of the latter in this seductive depiction of stately trees and inviting shaded lawn.

In the exhibit's many still lifes and several nudes, on the other hand, Niewald the structuralist is firmly in control. Planar slabs of color surround "Amy Seated" (1998), an ex-

remely formal treatment of the nude.

The surprise of this exhibit is a series of 1998 watercolors.

The freshness and transparency of "Onions" and "Bowl of Apples" disclose a different side of this artist from the more studiously worked oils, and one he should feel confident to indulge. They're little gems.

To reach Alice Thorson, art critic for *The Star*, call (816) 234-4763 or send

---

## OPENINGS

---

■ **Michael Cross Gallery**, 527 W. 39th St., opens "New Work," an exhibit of photographs by Michael Cross, paintings by Brent Powell and sculpture by Alex Kutchins, with a reception from 7 to 11 p.m. today.

■ **The Late Show**, 4222 Charlotte St., opens "Elfin Wankery," a group show of mixed-media artworks, with a reception and holiday party from 1 to 6 p.m. Saturday.

■ **Robyn Nichols**, 1818 McGee St., presents "An Exhibition of New Work: Jewelry, Tableware and Personal Works of Art" from 5 to 10 p.m. Saturday.

■ **Artie's — The On-Going Art Fair**, 7912 Floyd, Overland Park, will hold an artist trunk show of silk fashions by Valerie Cooper and pewter and brass animal pins by Debe Riley of The Jeweler's Saw, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

■ **The Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art**, 2818 Frederick Ave., St. Joseph, opens "Bold Improvisation: A Focus on African-American Quilts From the Collection of Scott Heffley" and "Harrison Hartley: A St. Joseph Original" with a reception from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

■ "The Crit Group Exhibition," a group show of local artists who show nationally, opens with a reception from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Tuesday at **Shiraz**, 320 Southwest Blvd.

■ **Morgan Gallery**, 412 Delaware St., will hold a presentation of new fine art print publications from Universal Limited Art Editions from 1 to 8 p.m. Wednesday. Bill Goldston, director of ULAE, will show and discuss recent work by Chuck Close, Carroll Dunham, Ellen Gallagher, Jasper Johns, Suzanne McClelland, Elizabeth Murray, Terry Winters and others. For more information, call 842-8755.

— Alice Thorson/*The Star*