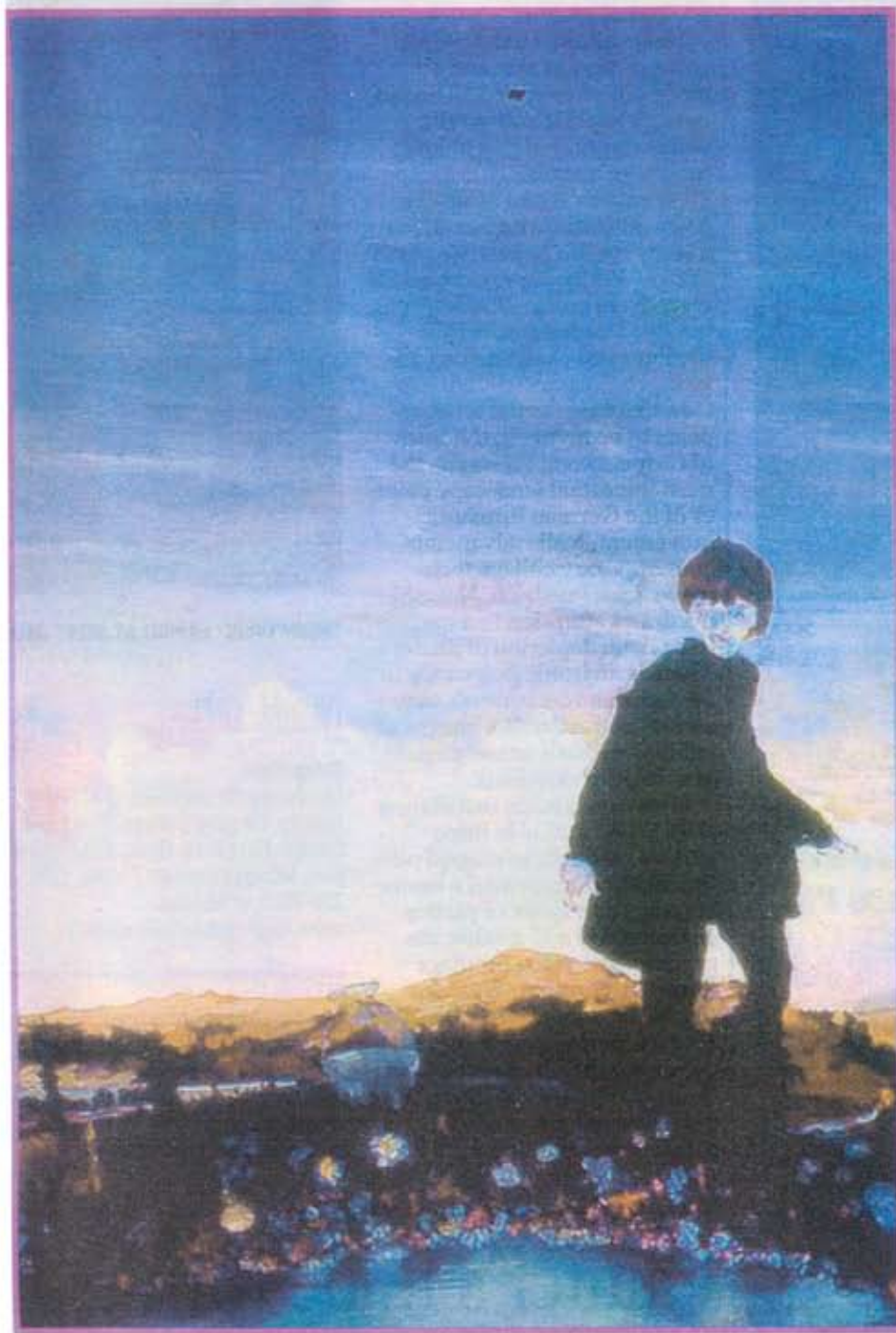


THE ARTS



Hope, alive in eclecticism

By KEVIN COSTELLO
CORRESPONDENT

The painter Leslie Lerner died at the age of 55 in September 2005. A survey of his work at Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art through Feb. 9 looks at this remarkable artist's life through a selection of his drawings, prints and paintings.

Arguably the most prominent Postmodernist artist in Sarasota with a national reputation, his work can be seen in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Corcoran and National galleries in Washington, D.C.

For many years, Lerner taught painting and drawing at the Ringling College of Art and Design. Today, many young artists making waves in the art world were his students and are indebted to him.

Lerner's unique vision as a painter was a consequence of an inspired eclecticism. Essentially a fabulist in paint, his landscapes emerged from a synthesis of idioms and palette appropriated from 18th-century Italian and French Baroque and Rococo painting and an absurdist, almost surreal view of the world. His signature style incorporates aristocratic figurines and garden topiary standing amid warm, earth-toned rocky landscapes of ambiguous scale.

The mood of his paintings owes something to

SEE LERNER ON 24

[VISUAL ARTS]

Leslie Lerner (1950-2005)

On view through Feb. 9 at Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art, 556 S. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Call 366-2093 or access www.miramararts.com.

Painter's hope thrives in eclecticism

LERNER FROM 23

the limpid atmospheric sadness of the 18th-century French master Antoine Watteau.

He once told me that the donkey (in part his alter ego) in some of his later paintings "was borrowed from Tiepolo." (Giambattista Tiepolo was the most brilliant Rococo painter of 18th-century Italy.)

Although Lerner's eclecticism involved a profusion of

styles and influences, he nevertheless subsumed all his information beneath a lyric of his own invention. Some of his scumbled cloud effects originated in Abstract Expressionism; at other times he would look to history, movies and popular culture to make icons representing emotions that maintained the immediacy of a dream on waking.

His psychological fables became darker towards the end

of his life. He saw the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as a philosophical defeat as much as a military blunder for the West. He believed his paintings reflected humor as well as sorrow, but most of all his art is about hope in spite of the ramifications of corporate greed and mismanagement of Earth's resources. He believed that painting has a role to play in this new dawn of atavistic humanism.