



Tomatoes, Lady, watercolor, 1961
Collection of Harold H. Burns

1 The Early Journey

“Tell about the South. What’s it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all.”

—William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

The South and its ethereal landscape, decayed remnants of a long-past way of life, misty mornings, steamy summer storms, romantic notions of history, hard poverty, race, and religious fundamentalism have captured the imaginations of writers, musicians, evangelists, and artists for more than a century. Each generation has given new expression and interpretation to an almost mythical land and its stories.

The South is an emotion as much as it is a place. It lies deep in the national psyche and it can evoke extreme passions. Real or imagined, to some the South is a nostalgic memory of the Lost Cause. To others, the South stirs harsh images of racial injustices and violence. The landmark 1989 *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, produced by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, describes the South “as a state of mind both within and beyond its geographical boundaries.” Southern musicians, writers, actors, and storytellers have been a major force in American culture since World War II. For almost five decades Southern culture has greatly influenced almost every aspect of American life and world culture. It has permeated, and not so quietly, almost every aspect of the national identity and consciousness. The South, wrote *New York Times* journalist Peter Applebome in his 1996 *Dixie Rising*, has offered “a sense of history, roots, place and community when the nation desperately is seeking all four. It has a bedrock of belief—religious, cultural, political and racial—that has enormous power and appeal at a time of national drift and confusion.”

Understanding Southern Artists

“To understand America,” Applebome wrote, “you have to understand the South.” Defining Southern consciousness, however, can be tricky, said John Szarkowski, director emeritus of the New York Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Photography, in a 1992 interview with the author. “If one is so confident that it exists, then the thing to do is to define it. Then probably the next thing one begins to talk about is death, magnolias, alligators and Bourbon whisky. It’s valuable, but it’s not about that. It’s not about clichés; it’s something deeper down, more serious and harder to explicate.” To borrow words from former National Endowment for the Humanities chair William Ferris, the South is about the “heartbeat of place.”

Even with the South’s defining influences in American culture, the visual arts produced by Southern artists in the South remained virtually ignored by the rest of the nation until the 1980s. Southern artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Benny Andrews, and Keith Sonnier, had to go North for recognition. Since the 1980s, however, Southern art and artists, both formal and self-taught, have been featured in major publications and exhibitions from New York and Washington, D.C., to Atlanta and New Orleans. New museums, such as the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, Georgia (1992), and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans (2003), were established solely to explore the contributions and place of Southern artists and the Southern visual arts in a national context. That recognition has been slow in coming, wrote Randolph Delehanty in his 1996 *Art in the American South*: “Today there is an awareness among art collectors of the vitality of the modern folk, or self-taught, art created by black and white southerners in both the countryside and the cities. Less well known is the fact that today’s flourishing Sunbelt, like the rest of the nation, has experienced a remarkable flowering of visual art of all kinds. But the South’s artistic legacy in its full historical sweep is only beginning to be explored.”

Southern Artists and the Land

Perhaps the most enduring and pervasive subject in Southern art is the land. Although the South has a number of major cities and considerable manufacturing, the region, until quite recently, was chiefly an agrarian society with an almost genetic connection to the land and all the forces that affected it. Who can forget that scene in *Gone with the Wind*, when Scarlett O’Hara’s impassioned father gave her one of the great lessons of early Southern life: “Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything.” The genetic memory persists in much of Southern art. “The importance of land, both real and mythic, is a dominant theme in Southern art, music and literature,” noted David Houston in *The Art of the South, 1890-2003*. “Not only has Southern landscape painting persisted, but it has flourished when landscape was largely overlooked as



Detail of Harbor Master Building at Honfleur, oil, 1995

an important subject in other regions. . . . However, most Southern landscapes move beyond the topographical and explore an almost metaphysical approach to place and meaning. Drawing from Romantic tradition, Southern landscape painters often approach their subject with reverence and awe, using a variety of techniques and approaches to color to evoke this same metaphysical sense in the viewer.” He went on to write: “Whether in search of the sublime vistas of the mountains, the exoticism of the bayous and marshes, or the majesty of the sea, the need to render place and time in an emotionally engaging way has persisted through the many stylistic changes that redefined the art of the South.”

An Artist’s Journey South

To Louisiana artist Rolland Harve Golden, the South, its land, and its history have long been the metaphysical “heartbeat” of inspiration and a life-long inner journey—one that has taken him on the back roads of Louisiana, the Mississippi Delta, Alabama, Georgia, the Florida panhandle, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and eventually into New York, New England, and France. Along the way, he has let the back roads, the land, ancient battlefields, the scars, and the beauty of the past and present speak to his imagination, his art, his poetry. During his long career, Golden has developed an almost spiritual reverence for the land, especially the Southern landscape, and the stories of its people. That journey has defined who Golden is as an artist and his place among Southern artists. His paintings, though silent and often melancholy, tell stories and evoke memories of shared experiences in those who connect to his imagery.

Golden, who resides with wife Stella in rural Louisiana about fifty miles north of New Orleans, never fails to grasp the essence and rhythm of place, whether he is painting rain-soaked cotton fields in the Mississippi Delta, a brilliant New England autumn, the hazy afterglow of an Appalachian mountain sunset, the warm autumn light and colors in a south Louisiana meadow, the frenetic streets of New York, a twisting blacktop Southern road, or languid fields of red poppies in the French countryside. He captures the subtleties of a bright golden banana leaf hanging lazily over an old wooden fence in the French Quarter or cows grazing in a flowering French meadow in full autumn brilliance. In another painting, members of a marching band and mourners stand about talking, waiting for the funeral procession to begin. People are rarely seen in his work. Yet, they always seem just beyond the canvas. Stone steps lead up from the River Seine to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. It’s quiet, lonely. No one is there but the artist. In a sense, his paintings call to mind what Andrew Wyeth once said about his own work: “I am an instrument, trying to tune in on the thing that’s already done there. I wish I could be nothing, just float over the woods and fields.”

Golden Reconstructs Reality and the “Faintly Familiar”

Golden is sensitive to what he sees around him. He reacts to his subjects with a mixture of intellectualism and aesthetics by separating the scene into visual elements and then reconstructing it with a hard-edged intensity reminiscent of the early Cubists and Precisionist painters. Louisiana writer Don Lee Keith in his 1970 *The World of Rolland Golden* described Golden's paintings as an “evasive melody” that touches on the “faintly familiar . . . With his insight, coupled with a sensitive paintbrush, a mediocre tobacco advertisement on a tired barn door can evoke memories of the best summers of country life. The splintered steps to a shack's back stoop can seem more real than yesterday's matinee. What Golden does is negate the nonchalant objectivity of the individual, and replace it with feeling—emotional response—be it nostalgia, pleasant recognition, melancholia, or simple gladness.”

Interpreting his own work, Golden says he is an “abstract realist, a combination of the intellectualism of abstraction and the emotionalism of realism. At first I became very realistic and then abstraction began working in. I didn't want to copy a photograph but to show a mind at work. I blended those two together and, hopefully, my paintings convey emotionalism and intellectual content that often border on surrealism. My art deals with specific aspects of life and very human circumstances.” His paintings, especially those that layer and juxtapose visually similar but substantively unrelated objects to create tension, often suggest the work of the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte (1898-1967).

Golden says those images of “life” and “human circumstances” are created in three stages. First comes an intellectual concept, then an emotional involvement with the subject, and, finally, the technical skill to create the image. “Of the three, I personally feel the intellectual contribution is the most important, although it usually feeds on emotional stimuli. An emotional reaction to the sight of something usually triggers my painting; yet it is the intellectual development and control of the expression that shapes it into something especially mine. And, of course, without the technical skills the first two would never reach fruition. Spontaneity may occur, but it will be within the framework of the original concept which has been carefully worked out.” That aside, Golden's paintings are about subjects “that stimulate deep, emotional excitement within” him. “There may be times when I can't explain those emotions,” he said in Don Lee Keith's biography, “but they are there, and very real.”

In prowling around for subject matter, first comes the mental image. He then takes photographs to use as references back in the studio. Once in the studio, he examines the photographs and then does a series of drawings and, finally, a “value drawing” to solidify the image in his imagination. “I



Detail of Sunday's Children

love to draw and I love to paint," he said in a 2001 interview. "Drawing is where the creative energy comes, where I move things around and get my concept more fully realized. Since I work from realistic imagery and work within the boundaries of the imagery, composition is very important. In my little value drawings, I establish where I'm going to put things in my paintings. By thinking things out this way, I can become more creative. I always start with a drawing or small color study." From the drawing comes the painting, but even then, new ideas drift in and out as he works his way through the final stages of the painting. Sometime the initial image comes entirely from his imagination and life experiences.

A View of the World

Ultimately, his paintings are about controlling space, form, and light. In notes he prepared for a 1980 address to the Mississippi Art Association, Golden said he attempts "to obtain complete order within my compositions, allowing the realism to dominate but with a strong design and geometric structure. Therefore, in developing subject matter, I first seek to express feelings about things that are important to me. Once selected, I try to present my choice as creatively as possible within the confines of my abilities."

Whether working in watercolor or oil, Golden is a successful artist with an impressive resume of national and international credits, including a one-artist show that toured the Soviet Union in 1976 and 1977. He is a three-time recipient of the National Arts Club First Place Award, a two-time winner of the Thomas Hart Benton Purchase Award, the Winslow Homer Memorial Award and numerous others. Golden is also a past vice president of the Watercolor U.S.A. Honor Society.

Golden views the world as if looking from inside out through the panes of a window or the windshield of an automobile. People are rarely seen in his work, yet his paintings of plowed cotton fields, abandoned sharecropper shacks, or tenement buildings crumbling under a wrecker's ball have an immediate sense of humanity and life. In 1977 the art critic for the *New Orleans States-Item* placed Golden's work in a historical context. "With the current emphasis on sharp-focus and photo-realism, it would seem that the art world has somehow caught up with him. But this is not so. Golden's work is rooted in firmer stuff than photographs. It is rooted in the dynamics of regional life. In this sense he must be regarded as one of the few local painters holding aloft the banners of regional painting which flourished during the 1930s and '40s and then foundered on the shoals of the 'international style' which abstract expressionism finally became." In 1985 a writer for *American Artist* magazine took that description a step further. He described Golden's art as regionalist "trying to remind his fellow southerners, and through them others, of what is positive and distinct about the South." The writer went on to say Golden "like other regionalists . . . is concerned about conserving—not only in the narrow



Detail of *The Lord is My Shepherd*

sense of the conservation of nature, but also in the conservation of human history. In this respect, his paintings can be said to have a double function in that some of them not only record what is significant from the past and what should be significant in the present, but also become statements—a political stance—against the destruction of both the past and the present.”

Golden and Regionalist Traditions

Golden acknowledges the “Southern” painter association. “I won’t fight being called a Southern painter, although it’s hard to identify what a Southern painter is. I think it’s a different point of view, a real strong feeling for the land, the people and the traditions.” To classify his work as a holdover from the Regionalist painters of the 1930s would be to miss the great influence modernism and abstraction, prevalent in the Northeast, had on Southern artists, including Golden, in the 1960s. Though often subtle and perhaps overpowered by realist imagery, those elements are there. Yet, Golden and other Southern narrative painters during the late 1960s and 1970s often found themselves at odds, and often on the outside, in an art world absorbed by abstract art and dominated by what was new and avant-garde in New York. Realism and storytelling have always been and continue to be strong in some Southern art. With the renewed popularity of realism on the national scene, Southern art is finding its rightful place.

“Those who pursued abstraction often never completely abandoned a perceptual basis as the starting point for their work,” wrote David Houston, chief curator at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, in his 2004 *The Art of the South, 1890-2003*. “Not only did Southern narrative painting survive the challenge of modern abstraction but it reasserted its primacy in an unbroken line of evolution, when realist painting once again returned to prominence on the national scene.”

Southern novelist Walker Percy, who once lived near Golden’s home in south Louisiana, tackled that same question. He said Southern writers—perhaps painters fall into this same category—see the American scene from the inside and outside. “He can see the American proposition from a tragic historical perspective.” He knows to the marrow of his bones that things “can come to grief and probably will.” The Southern writer, Percy wrote, has a natural mission to probe, challenge, attack, and satirize.

A Southern Family

Like most Southern writers and many artists, the rural South, with its intense sense of place, tradition, and history, has had a profound effect in Golden’s life, and most importantly, his art. As a sidebar to history, Golden’s original family name was Edwards. As the family story goes, his grandfather, Harve Edwards, ran away from his home and stepfather in east Tennessee’s Cumberland Gap to live with the Golden family in Joplin, Missouri. Apparently, the Golden family were old friends

and neighbors of his father, who had died a few years earlier. Like many families after the Civil War, the Golden family moved west in search of a fresh start. Treated well by his new family, young Harve changed his name from Edwards to Golden.

Rolland was born in New Orleans in 1931 to John and Ione. The young Golden spent his early childhood moving from one Southern town to another. In the 1920s, his father, John, worked in north Louisiana and Arkansas for the Missouri and Pacific Railroad. Then in 1928 he hopped a train for New Orleans to apply for a job with American Telephone & Telegraph. He got the job and later married a New Orleans girl, Ione Rolland. While in New Orleans, the elder Golden explored his interest in art with art lessons at the New Orleans Art League, but the Great Depression was in full swing and times were hard. He quit the league to spend more time at work. In 1933, his job at AT&T took him and the family to the northern Mississippi town of Grenada. Over the next thirteen years, they would live in Jackson, Montgomery, and Birmingham. These northern Mississippi and Alabama cities were like railroad stops in his life. "I didn't realize it at the time," Rolland told *Southwest Art* magazine in 1978, "but the beauty of the rural South was making quite an impact on my young mind." Some of his earliest memories were of drives through the Delta country with his mother and father and long car trips from Grenada to visit his grandmother in New Orleans. He recalled those early years for Keith's *World of Rolland Golden*: "When I would visit my grandmother in New Orleans, I would hear the morning sounds of horse-drawn wagons and the songs of the scissors grinders and the vegetable man. Later in the day, the rag man would come around, and my grandmother would threaten to give me to him if I didn't behave."

In January 1946, when Rolland was fourteen, John Golden, tired of the nomadic life, secured a permanent assignment with AT&T back home in New Orleans. By that time, the family had expanded to four with the arrival of Rolland's brother, Donald, in early 1941. Rolland, a sickly child with asthma and anemia, spent much of his early life at home, drawing from art books given to him by his father and grandmother or from the comic pages in the Sunday newspaper. The frail child found expression and connection to the world around him through art. By the time he started school he could draw quite well. Upon returning to New Orleans, he took art classes in high school. After graduation, he entered the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he majored for a year in art and architecture. Ironically, he failed both classes. He hated his graphic design courses but was doing well in freehand drawing. Then came the Korean War. In December 1950, Golden told his drawing professor that he was dropping out of school to join the Navy. Upon hearing the news, the professor told Golden he would fail him in the course because "he had to fail someone."



Detail of *The All American*

John McCrady's Art School

Two years later, while home on leave, he met Stella Doussan, the proverbial girl across the street, who later became his wife and business manager. After four years in the Navy, Rolland, somewhat perplexed about what to do in life, heard a sermon in church that would shape the rest of his life: "To waste a God-given talent was the same as committing a sin." With the G.I. Bill payment of \$110 a month in hand, Rolland signed up for art classes at John McCrady's art school in the New Orleans French Quarter. "John was an outstanding painter," Golden recalled in a 2001 interview. "He was a regionalist of the Thomas Hart Benton School. But as far as I'm concerned, McCrady was every bit as good as Benton. He just didn't get the recognition. He didn't strive for it." Golden believed McCrady's emphasis on composition, technique, design, and control of space was exactly the kind of training he wanted and needed. "McCrady looked upon drawing and composition as the foundation upon which you built your painting. He was a great promoter of line, which has been beneficial to me because line may be the best thing I do. He was a master teacher."

To better understand Golden's work, one has to look a bit closer at the teacher. Like other successful graduates of the McCrady Art School, including Henry Casselli and Alan Flattmann, McCrady—the teacher and artist—had a profound influence on Golden's work and career. Today, McCrady is perhaps better known for his successful students than for his art. But in the 1930s and 1940s, McCrady enjoyed considerable national acclaim, with one-man shows in New York's prestigious galleries and critical reviews in the nation's top magazines. His work was unique in the Regionalist movement because he was one of the few to paint Southern themes. McCrady's most successful paintings depicted rural African-American spirituals to develop grand, Biblical allegories reminiscent of Rubens' sweeping seventeenth-century canvases. Perhaps his most famous paintings were *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* and his 1939 *Shooting of Huey Long* that depicted a wounded Huey Long walking briskly through a hallway as his bodyguards executed the alleged shooter Dr. Carl Weiss. After World War II, the Regionalist school fell out of favor with a war-weary generation that was looking for something, everything, new and fresh. The nation no longer wanted to look inward but outward to new worlds in art, especially the action paintings that were exciting the New York art world. McCrady returned to New Orleans where he continued to paint in his familiar style and, even more important, to teach new generations of artists in traditional methods while many university art schools looked to new trends and techniques for inspiration. He died in 1968.

Golden's Art Career Begins

After two years and graduation from McCrady's, Golden set about searching for a job, first with a local government agency

then an architect, who told Golden not to do anything else but pursue his art. In 1958 he rented a small studio in the rear patio behind what is Preservation Hall on St. Peter Street. “I was selling so little. Stella was pregnant and we were staying with my folks in Gentilly [an eastern New Orleans suburb]. I was working constantly. At the end of the day, I’d go home and sometimes I’d walk around the block at night, trying to figure out what I was going to do. I didn’t want to give up. One night my father came out and said, ‘Son, do you want to talk? Obviously something is bothering you.’ We sat on the little step on his porch for about an hour. He kept reassuring me. He hadn’t wanted me to be an artist and get married. He figured I’d have a hard time raising a family. Once he saw that’s what I wanted to do, he supported me. That night I started thinking not about how bad things were, I needed to think about what I was going to do to change this situation.” With little money and plenty of faith, he opened a small gallery and studio at 624 Royal Street in the French Quarter. Stella and his mother often worked up front in the gallery, while Rolland painted in the rear studio, turning out “potboiler” scenes of the French Quarter for tourists. “I learned the cold, hard facts about the art business quickly,” he said twenty years later. “At that time I had to paint just to sell. The ‘potboilers’ I turned out for the tourist trade depicted jazz musicians, marching bands and other typical French Quarter scenes.” While turning out paintings for tourists at the gallery, Golden continued to work on his serious art at home. “I made a vow during those hard times,” he later recalled. “If I ever could, I would paint only what I wanted to paint.” A year later the Louisiana Department of Highways commissioned him to paint “typical” Louisiana highway scenes. Over the next two years, he completed fifty paintings. Fortunately, highway officials did not dictate what they wanted painted. They gave him complete artistic freedom. Thinking back years later for a 1978 article in *Southwest Art* magazine, he recalled: “I couldn’t have done it if they had told me what to paint. I hate commissions with a passion.”

In later years, Golden remembered fondly the heady bohemian life in the French Quarter with its cheap rent, available garrets, well-heeled tourists, and the old Bourbon House where local artists met. “The Bourbon House was the meeting place for everybody. There was good camaraderie there. About 1966 I decided I was losing more there than I was gaining, so I quit going. You would go in there and defend yourself for two hours and expend all that energy. You’d rather use it doing a painting. I was one of the few artists who was Catholic, married and having kids. So, I was really right for the attack, but I really like the old Bourbon House. It was very stimulating.”

Difficult Early Years

Like most young artists beginning a career, the early years, 1957 to 1963, were difficult as he developed a better

understanding of watercolor composition and painting. “Eventually,” he said in Keith’s 1970 *World of Rolland Golden*, “I stopped those long, dreary discussions with other artists, and I quit listening to those who were so quick to be critical and those so anxious to be complimentary. And do you know, I began to realize who I was. And what I wanted to be . . . once I had begun to relax and simply be myself.” In 1978 Golden recalled the struggles of his early career for *Southwest Art* magazine: “My wife Stella and I vividly remember the month in which I made only \$116, and she was pregnant at the time with our first child, Carrie. In those first years of my art career, I feel I was floundering around and trying to be someone else. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. . . . People would come in and say my work looked like a photograph.” By now he and Stella had three children—Carrie, Mark Damian, and Lucille.

Then in 1964 he found that new direction in the highly expressive work of Noel Rockmore (1928-1995), the famously eccentric but critically acclaimed New York-born artist who settled in the New Orleans French Quarter in 1960 and set about creating an extensive body of paintings of New Orleans jazz musicians. “I had heard about this incredibly talented artist from a friend and fellow artist Francisco McBride,” Golden said, “so I went over to see the show at the Downtown Gallery in the French Quarter and it just knocked me out. Up to that point, I had been going further and further into this real loose style with big brushes. I was getting better at it but something was missing. I didn’t feel like I was expressing myself the way I wanted to. Then I saw Rockmore who had all this incredible detail and this control that he brought into his work. I said this is the direction that I want to go. From that point on, I moved away from this painting with big brushes and doing a watercolor in an hour and a half. It eventually evolved to where I am now.” By the mid 1960s the content and style of his paintings began to change. “I then decided to bring more intellectualism into my realistic watercolors,” he said in the 1978 *Southwest Art* article. “I began to combine the warmth of emotion with the intellectualism of abstraction, never tipping too far to either side. If I ever tip, it tends to be toward realism. Pure abstraction for me has always seemed too cold.” Golden and Rockmore later became friends. “He was a genius but incredibly egotistical,” Golden once said of the artist who had inspired him.

These difficult years contributed to an even darker burden that haunted his early career. It was a demon that almost destroyed him. “I was clinically depressed through much of the early 1960s,” he said in later years. “I smoked three packs of cigarettes a day and drank lots of coffee. I don’t know what started it, but I think it was the pressure of raising a family and trying to make a living and get better as an artist. I would get dizzy and afraid I would pass out. After awhile, you begin to lose confidence in yourself. It was horrible. Beginning in 1964 I went to a psychiatrist for twenty months. It saved my life. Every day I wanted to kill myself. I would get these panic attacks. It lasted



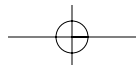
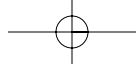
Detail of Start the Parade

for several years. I kept telling myself as I went through this that there has to be some good that's going to come out of this. I'd get in the bathtub and worry that I'd never get out. Once I started going to him, I started feeling better. For a few weeks I couldn't paint. I was on medication and I couldn't think. I knew I always wanted to be an artist and paint. This made me realize it even more. After I got back to painting, I poured everything I had into it."

Early Success

Golden also learned early in his career that talent and abilities were only part of the equation in success. If he wanted to sell paintings and do serious work, he had to be better known. He had to promote himself and his art. In 1965 he entered the American Watercolor Society competition and was accepted. Winning acceptance the first time out by one of the most prestigious art societies in the nation gave him the confidence he needed. He later became a member of the society. His big break came that same year when Vincent Price, the well-known actor and art connoisseur, bought a number of Rolland's paintings to sell through a Sears Roebuck exhibition that traveled the nation. "Price came to New Orleans and purchased just about everything I had. I told Stella we were going to put money into savings and I would not paint any more potboilers." Price returned a couple of years later and bought thirty more paintings. Golden now had the money and encouragement he needed to continue his work, his experiments with color, shapes, forms, and compositions.

Having a place to show paintings is almost as important to artists as composition. Over the years Golden has been involved with several major French Quarter galleries. In 1967 Golden signed up with Bryant Galleries in the French Quarter, which paid him a monthly stipend to paint what he wanted. With a steady income, he was now free to explore his art unfettered by the demands of the tourist trade. With encouragement from the gallery, he purchased an automobile and once again traveled countryside, looking for new material. He reconnected to his childhood days in the rural South. With good sales and reviews in New Orleans and in New York, Golden had become an established artist. "The first four years with Bryant were the happiest of my career," he later said. "Bryant gave me my first big break." In 1971 Golden signed with Bryant for another four years. During this period, Stella sometimes managed the gallery. But in 1975 Golden and Bryant fell out over contract disputes that eventually ended up in court. Without a gallery to represent him and needing a place to sell his work, Golden rented half of a double house on Governor Nicholls Street in the French Quarter. "We sold so much stuff," he said, looking back over those early years. "We had people standing in line to pay for them." Realizing that this pace would not continue, he joined the Vincent Mann Gallery on Chartres Street. That worked well until the gallery changed its emphasis from local



artists to nineteenth-century French Impressionists. In 1977, Golden pulled out and opened the Crescent Gallery on Chartres Street, which later moved to nearby Toulouse Street.

Golden Tours the Soviet Union

Several other major career events took place in mid 1970s. In 1976 Watercolor U.S.A. honored the nation's bicentennial birthday with a special exhibition, featuring America's top fifty watercolor painters. Golden was one of those fifty. That same year Golden experienced one of the great moments of his career. In 1976, the Institute of Soviet-American Relations in Moscow, through the International House in New Orleans, invited Golden to the Soviet Union for a two-week visit to launch a national tour of his work. Events leading up to the invitation began in 1973 when the Institute asked the International House to organize art exchanges between the two countries. Apparently, the institute's secretary-general had been in New Orleans several years earlier to discuss shipping business with officials of the port of New Orleans and International House when he met with several New Orleans artists. Golden's work impressed him. After two years of interviewing artists from across the nation, the Soviets chose Golden. In the catalog accompanying the show, Paul Fabry, managing director of the International House, described the depth and poetry in Golden's work: "The point Golden makes again and again in his work is far from the nostalgia of the Old South; it is rather a metaphor of the futility of war and the triumph of peace. The covert spiritual content of his compositions is bound to have a profound impact in the Soviet Union as it has had in the United States. His feeling for the underprivileged, his insistence on inner peace, as well as international understanding are qualities which transpire in his work and his everyday life." Fabry went on to say that the paintings in the exhibition "defines neither Golden's complete oeuvre nor the breadth of artistic expression in today's America, but certainly offers plenty to demonstrate the talents and involvement of one of the most important painters in the American South."

During a visit to museums and cultural institutions in Kiev, Golden told a Ukrainian newspaper reporter that the tour was "unquestionably one of the highest honors" of his career. "Having always been a strong admirer of the Soviet people," he said, "this is a chance to share with them some of my country through my intellect [and] is indeed a privilege." While visiting an artist's studio, Golden asked the head of a local artist union: "Is it true, Soviet artists can't paint what they want?" To which she replied: "No, artists can paint what they want but that's no guarantee it will be shown." A few months after his return, Golden told *Southwest Art* magazine: "I went to Russia to become the first Westerner to have a traveling one-man exhibition inside the U.S.S.R. Fifty-one of my paintings were viewed by over 100,000 Russians in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa." Apparently, the Soviets liked his work. They may

Opposite:

Russian Memories, watercolor, 1977

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Hurlbut



Inside the Kremlin, watercolor, 1977
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. David Skinner

have been attracted to his stark, honest, and unromantic depictions of the rural landscape, a theme common in Russian literature. They also understood he had the ability to give viewers a sense that the places he paints seem familiar, even though they had never been there. "In his work," wrote one Russian reviewer, "Golden feels alarm and apprehension at the approach of scientific and technological progress with all its costs to the traditional daily life of farmers in the American South." Whatever the reasons, his paintings went over well. The Soviets purchased an acrylic, *Louisiana No. 1*, to hang in the American collection at the Pushkin Museum along with a painting by Andrew Wyeth.

While in the Soviet Union, Golden sensed tension not with the Russians but with American officials in Moscow who ignored the Goldenes during the entire tour. "My dealings with the U.S. embassy and the Americans in Moscow were one of the most unpleasant experiences of my life," he told a *New Orleans Magazine* writer shortly after his return in the summer 1977. "The way we were treated by the Americans

there was a disappointment, a very big disappointment. We found we had more in common with the Russians, and we were treated better by them than by the Americans.” At the time, Golden believed his realistic style did not suit the avant-garde tastes of American embassy officials who wanted the Goldens to visit underground Russian artists during their visit to Moscow. They also believe local embassy officials were annoyed because they had not initiated the show or the exchange program. “We were angry and disgusted with their interference,” he said in the 1977 magazine interview. “This is the very reason several American artists who had wanted to visit Russia did not receive an invitation. You have to play by their [the American embassy’s] rules.”

Rural Life

Back home, Golden’s visit to the Soviet Union received little notice. The Goldens immersed themselves in their new Crescent Gallery. Rolland produced new paintings while Stella, for a while, managed the gallery, which then represented Rolland and seventeen other artists. By 1981 the Goldens saw life in the French Quarter changing. The Bohemia they loved was not the same. “I either wanted to live in the French Quarter or in the country,” Rolland once said. “But I didn’t want to live in the suburbs or any place that had a name like Chateau this or that.” That same year they purchased a country house north of Lake Pontchartrain at the end of a wooded land south of Folsom, Louisiana. In March 1983, they sold their house on Barracks Street in the lower Quarter and in September they closed the Crescent Gallery.

For the next few years, Rolland painted in a garret studio in their country home and Stella sold the paintings at periodic shows at the house. The arrangement went along well until late 1987, when they decided that business was better in the city. The plan was to sell the house in Folsom and buy a building in the French Quarter for their gallery and residence. While scouting out a location, by chance they met Ken Nahan in a French Quarter café. Asked why they were in the city, Rolland said they were looking for a new gallery. After a brief conversation, Nahan, who owned a major gallery in the Quarter, invited Golden to show his work at Nahan. In February 1988, Golden had a critically and financially successful one-artist show at Nahan’s. All went well. In late 1989, Nahan signed Golden to a contract. That lasted for about a year when Nahan’s interest turned more to avante-garde art and his new gallery in Manhattan. Not long after, Golden left Nahan and once again began showing and selling his work from his home in Folsom. “That was one of the saddest times for me when that fell apart,” Golden said. “I enjoyed working with Ken.” For the next ten years, Golden continued his shows in Folsom and every other year at the National Arts Club in New York. Then in 2000, the Goldens’ daughter, Lucille, reopened Crescent Gallery on Toulouse Street.