

# Cole exhibit goes to London's Kensington Gardens for 3 weeks

By KIMBERLY LINK

Look out, London. Here comes Grace Cole.

Cole has received a big break in the world of art — a European show — and, for the next three weeks, the former south suburban resident's work will be exhibited at the Clementine House gallery in London's Kensington Gardens.

Before leaving for Europe, Cole explained that she met the London gallery director at Galleria Renata in Chicago, where she has a continuing exhibit. The two soon worked out an agreement for her to send 20 pieces across the Atlantic.

"The gallery director said (the British) will love this work. It's a continuing series that I have worked on over the last five years," Cole said, pointing out that the London gallery takes a rather conservative approach, and she was asked not to take along any of her nude portraits.

The Prairie State college art instructor and Chicago resident also plans to visit friends in Paris and study the Old Masters' pieces at European museums.

"I got a Eurorail pass. It's going to be a totally art-related trip. I'm just going to wing it," Cole said.

"Basically, I'm a portrait artist. That's how I make my living. It takes five to six months to do a portrait. I work in oils. It's becoming more and more of a rare medium to work with. It's the Old World mode of painting.

"I've had some strange clients (for portraits). Usually, they want to be made more beautiful. I have been told that I have a knack, the ability to capture the soul of a person. I have been criticized for being too realistic."

Cole admitted her abilities sometimes work against her. She related a story about a wealthy woman who commissioned her to paint a portrait. Cole did. The artist naturally painted the woman as she saw her. The woman's friends thought the painting was quite accurate. The woman did not and forced Cole to redo it.

## Portraits

"Portraits traditionally cost more. They have got to pay for the headaches," Cole laughed, explaining that when she does a portrait, she first uses eight to 15 rolls of film to photograph the client, then begins drawing on paper, then sketches on canvas and, finally, paints.

After looking at Cole's work, it is quite surprising to learn she has not been painting and drawing all of her life. Only in the last decade has Cole studied and begun a show and sell her paintings and drawings.

"I always liked art. But I never thought I could do it myself. I had no art training during my formal school years," said Cole, adding that she does not come from an artistic family.

"I never questioned where (the talent) came from. It may be a gift, but you have to work very hard to develop it."

Eventually, Cole realized her potential.

"I was a mother. I painted at night and took care of my family during the day. I did have to cut out a lot of things. I was a mother, a student, a (community) volunteer.

"My three daughters have been absolutely wonderful, very encouraging. My daughters have felt somewhat proud. There have been some tough moments, some trying periods. But this has been a wonderful year; 1988 has been very rewarding."

Cole now teaches figure painting and general painting at Prairie State college.

"When I first started teaching, I would come home with a major headache, Excedrin Number 8. But then I realized that everyone gets something from a class. It elevates the interest, promotes a better understanding of art. Teaching is a way to put back into the world what you've been given," Cole related.

Cole also teaches privately and has pushed several budding artists on to meaningful careers.

"It has been one of the most rewarding parts of my career. You can reach them and touch them through art."

## Evanston center

She hopes to reach even more students this fall, when she begins teaching at the Evanston Art center.

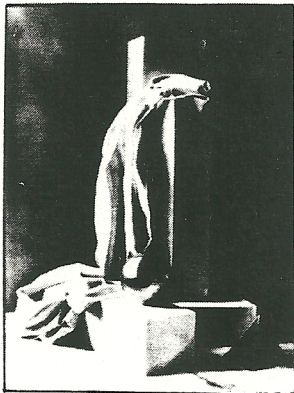
Cole, who studied at Prairie State, the Portrait Institute in New York, in a private studio and at the Art Institute and University of Illinois-Chicago, has exhibited her works locally at Prairie State and South Suburban college and at galleries throughout the country.

Somehow she still finds time to paint.

"I try to keep regular hours at my studio. I look at it as a regular job. If I don't feel creative, I'll do paperwork. It's unbelievable how much paperwork there is. It sometimes becomes difficult to get the painting in," she laughed.

"Every class you take — and I still take classes — you try to do your best, better than the ordinary. I think there is a lot of mediocre work out there, and I want to rise above it. There will always be artists who are better than me. There will always be artists who are worse than me."

Cole said she enjoys walking through the galleries during her



A Cole study



Grace Cole

shows and listening to the visitors' comments.

"I sneak up behind them and listen. I think it is important to get the feedback. You want to move someone, for someone to say, 'Wow, that really moves me.' If you can bring a tear to one person's eyes ..."

Cole granted that everyone might not enjoy her work.

"I have entered work that will be rejected and will enter the same piece in another show or at the same gallery a year later, and it will be accepted. It's just personal taste. In the beginning, I was a little more sensitive."

## Traditionalist

Cole considers herself a traditional painter but noted that her still lifes have been praised for their unusual compositions. "That may be true. I think my still lifes are quite contemporary."

"Ideas just come from living your life. I may see an ad in a magazine that has a texture I like. There may be a scene with a mood I can relate to. Ideas are just there. Sometimes they're just not there. Sometimes they are very fruitful.

"I'm an upbeat, very positive person. Yet, most of my paintings are very reflective, very dark color tones. My friends say I'm an extremely animated person. I enjoy life. I have a very good time. But I don't think my work reflects that," Cole continued.

"I like to read about artists. Sometimes it's better to read their words than see their work. Sometimes their philosophies don't match their works. Those that match are da Vinci and Rembrandt," she said, explaining that her greatest influence was Rembrandt and his play on light and dark.

"It is the ultimate compliment to have someone buy your work," said Cole, pointing out that her pieces sell for between \$1,000 and \$10,000. One of those paintings is now in a private home in Paris, a stop she hopes to make on her tour.

"There are favorites you don't want to sell. There are a few I'm holding on to for myself. But for your own personal growth, you have to let go and do it all over again.

"I do have goals. I do have a goal to make a living through my work. I know I've done the best I could do. I don't know if I'd like to be a check-out girl. I just want to survive as a practicing artist.

"My goal was to have a show in New York. I did in January of '87. I had a rhinestone pin that said 'New York City.' I had it before the show. I lost the pin ... and thought I should replace it with a 'Paris' pin," Cole said, joking about hanging up a drawing in the bathroom of the Louvre museum in Paris.

Even if her drawings don't make it to the Louvre, Cole is more than pleased about the opportunity for a show in London.

"What can be better than this?"