

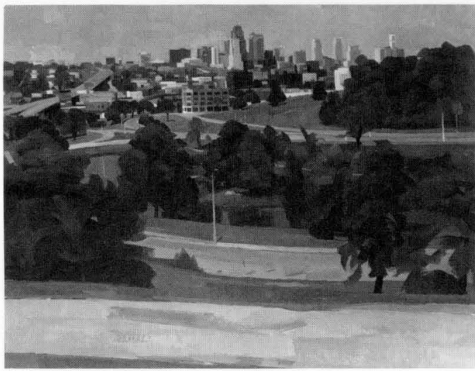
New at the Nelson

Niewald Landscapes

"Kansas City, Summer 1989," a suite of four outstanding paintings by Wilbur Niewald, and undoubtedly his finest work, has been acquired by the Department of 20th-Century Art through the Nelson Gallery Foundation. The four paintings, *Kansas City, View from Greystone Heights, IV*; *Kansas City, View from Penn Valley Park*; *Kansas City, View of the River*; and *Kansas City, View of the West Bottoms*, are cityscapes completed during the summer of 1989.

Born in Kansas City in 1925, Niewald has spent most of his life here. At age 9, he began his first art classes at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he began teaching in 1949 and continues today as Senior Professor of Painting. In 1988 he was honored with the prestigious College Art Association's distinguished teaching of art award.

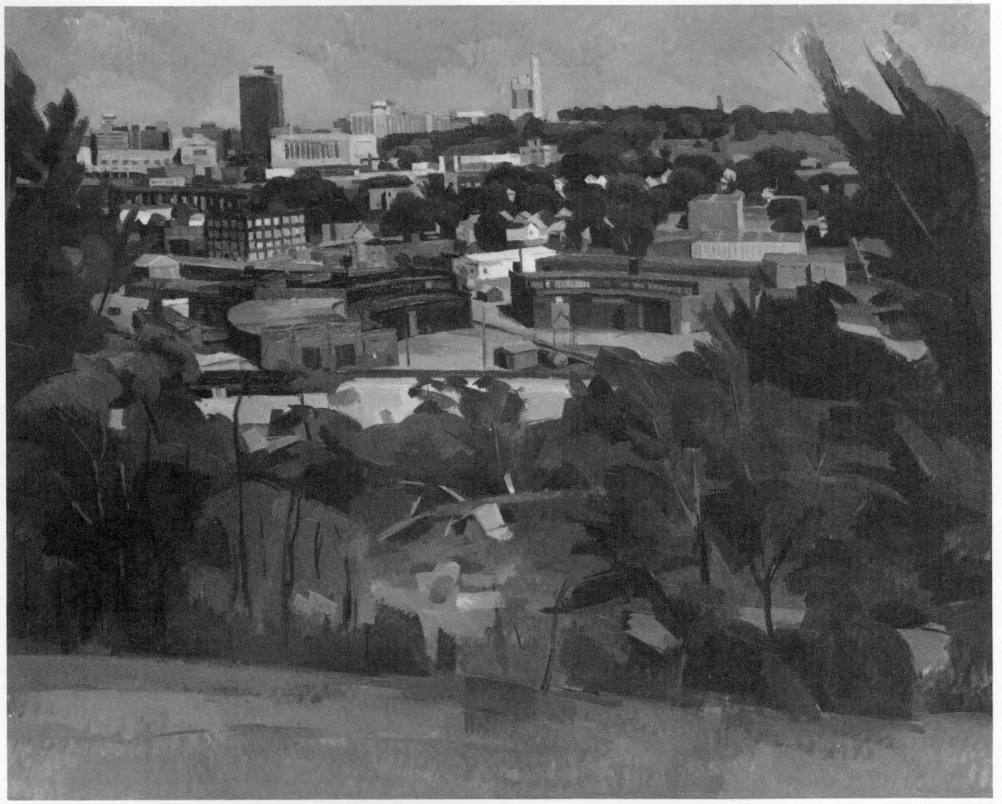
Not just a landscape painter, Niewald also masterfully paints portraits and still lifes and is an accomplished printmaker and watercolorist. The Museum already



Kansas City, View from Penn Valley Park, 1989. Wilbur Niewald (born 1925); American. Oil on canvas. From the series *Kansas City, Summer 1989*. Nelson Gallery Foundation Purchase.

proudly owns one watercolor, one painting and four etchings, also Kansas City views. The four new paintings strengthen our Niewald holdings significantly.

Some of Niewald's earliest paintings were abstract. Like other artists of his generation, such as William Bailey, Philip Pearlstein, Neil Welliver and Elmer Bischoff, Niewald came to figurative painting through abstraction. Along the way he discovered Cézanne, Mondrian and Matisse. Under the influence of these masters, Niewald made abstract drawings always related



Kansas City, View of the River, 1989. Wilbur Niewald (born 1925); American. Oil on canvas. From the series *Kansas City, Summer 1989*. Nelson Gallery Foundation Purchase.

to the landscape, while working outdoors. The vastness of the space was important to him. He had an encompassing idea of nature. Later, when he painted indoors, he would turn the drawings into paintings. By 1970, as his ideas developed, he began painting directly outdoors and the particular became more important. Specific qualities of outdoor experiences began intriguing him. Gradually, he began to paint landscapes, portraits and still lifes from direct observation.

Niewald approaches landscape painting as he approaches all of his painting: as a study. Beginning with a motif, in a still life he sets it up specifically, while in a landscape he paints what he sees; he creates a study of relationships. Niewald has said, "I am not seeking a mood or any psychological depth. My paintings are just studies where I connect relationships between color and space and what I see." During the 10 or so weeks he spends on each painting, Niewald adjusts color and spatial relationships daily, making constant corrections.

Niewald has studied the subjects of the Nelson paintings many times before completing the works; in fact, he has worked at these sites almost exclusively for the past 12 years. He continues repeating a subject because he is not yet satisfied, he says. "I know that I can learn more and get more from the motif."

In the four Nelson paintings, we see Niewald at his best. He paints tradi-

tional landscapes of the city he loves and knows so well. His is an art of perception. He paints directly from what he sees and evokes great feeling for humble subjects. In *Kansas City, View of the River*, for example, Niewald paints the city as if it were precious. He introduces the view with lush Cézannesque vegetation, and goes on to describe industrial buildings as delicately handled rectangles of color. The river is seen only above a red central building, which serves as the painting's formal focus and thus becomes the beacon guiding the viewer's eye to the curving river. A strong contrast between the loosely



Kansas City, View of the West Bottoms, 1989. Wilbur Niewald (born 1925); American. Oil on canvas. From the series *Kansas City, Summer 1989*. Nelson Gallery Foundation Purchase.

handled foreground and the more precisely treated middle ground and background produces a sense of tension. Unresolved, it keeps the viewer aware of the tensions that always exist between the natural and the man-made.

The paintings will be on view in the Museum's second-floor Parker-Grant Gallery after December 1.