In a hubbub age where the large scale canvas becomes synonymous with raucous sightsounds representative of a restless on-the-move culture, the paintings of the quiet artists are seemingly a rarity.

Joseph Konopka is one of these quiet artists. Konopka’s world is everyone’s world of city street scenes, highways, ferryboats, playgrounds, seaside boardwalk resorts, airports, amusement parks, railroad depots, places and sites that one ordinarily associates with a frenetic pace and ear-shattering sound decibels. In his paintings the multiple impact of motion is removed, the blaring noise drone stilled as if for a moment everything and all things have paused and are time suspended for a brief interval. A lone female figure appears in most, if not all of these paintings; standing, sitting, waiting. Through a pictorial gesture, a stance, the figure keynotes the mystical transition from what should be a commotion-dinned locale to one of serenity. The quiet artist improves upon reality, creating a personal illusion that coincides with his inner thoughts and philosophy.

Busy congested byways are isolated, redefined, becalmed into large size canvases that are a balanced mixture of sad-joy emotions, almost dreamlike reminiscences of something now and something then. This time warp quality in Konopka’s paintings is achieved by integrating the elements of scale, unerring draftsmanship, close valued color and most important of all, an innate sensitive disciplined organization of compositional structure.

The blond young lady seen in many of his paintings is Konopka’s favorite model, his wife Casimere, or Casey as she is known to their friends. And with this introduction to Casey, a few words are appropriate regarding the artist-spouse teamwork in relationship to the world of art. The spouse of any artist, whether husband or wife, serves a multitude of art functions: model when a model is required; confidant-advisor; delivery agent of the artist’s work to galleries and exhibitions when the artist is working, teaching or elsewhere occupied with other art work pursuits; at outdoor shows a companion sitter; a clerical helper in the sorting and filing of paperwork; filling out forms, entry labels and other sundry chores associated with the exhibition field; and of course that special someone with whom to share all the highs and also all the lows that are part and parcel of the art endeavor. This spirit of teamwork decidedly enhances the closeness of...
the artist-spouse relationship and is certainly a necessary factor in the furthering of a successful art career.

It is clearly evident the Konopkas are such a team, and a very wonderful working team they are in the all complete meaning of the word. Watching Casey deliver one of Joe's six-foot canvases on a windy, blustery day is quite a sight and a definite testimonial to spousely dedication!

Six-foot canvases on a windy, blustery day is quite a sight at Konopka's paintings completely dispels this photo-realism of photo-realism might come to mind. Our contemporary society insists art must be identified and labeled with some form of immediate descriptive word classification. We are a world burdened with pigeonholing processes. Further looking at Konopka's paintings completely dispels this photo-realism label. The coldly obsessive, detail for detail's sake of photo-realism never intrudes into or upon his paintings, or to be more correct, he totally eliminates these excesses of the photo-realism school of thinking. His art concerns are not committed in portraying the total number of drapery wrinkles and folds per square inch of cloth. His prime motivation as an artist is with the human content and mood of the particular subject in and of the painting. If a label is required for his work by the aforementioned "pigeonholing processors association", then perhaps quiet-realism would be a more apt form of terminology.

The sun-drenched intensity of his acrylic color palette suggests a multi-windowed studio bathed in strong, glimmering direct sunlight, but Joe's 9:00 to 5:00 schedule as a scenic artist for NBC-TV precludes this solar drenched daytime studio luxury. Painting mostly in the evenings and on weekends, he works with and under a combination of overhead white and pink flourescent lights. The mixture of both white and pink light tubes creates a brightness of almost total whiteness which allows his completed paintings to view under the artificial light of the indoor gallery or outdoors in natural sunlight.

Through the years this vantage of consistent color purity in all and every lighting condition at both indoor and outdoor art competitions, has garnered a remarkable host of important awards and invitational honors for the 46 year old New Jersey painter.

And, of course, to this innate sense of color selection another contributing factor to the success of a Konopka painting is his particular choice of subject matter. His selection of themes is based on his personality and manner of looking at life. He abhors depressing or ugly motifs, his preference is decidedly in favor of the upbeat, the pleasant scene. "I enjoy painting subjects that make me happy, that make me feel good." is his quick response to questions on how he decides if a subject is meant for him or not.

His paintings reflect this inborn attitude of changing a world to fit his needs and aspirations. If from time to time there is a slight touch of loneliness in his themes, one immediately recognizes that this solitary glimpse of underlying sadness is only a fleeting one.

An interesting subject once selected and studied, Konopka then proceeds to take a copious amount of color slides. These slides are a mixture of different angles, views, closeups for details and long shots for the entirety of the subject. With these color slides acting as a guide, he then begins to make numerous drawings to determine exactly the area and mood he wishes to paint.

"Sometimes I combine two or three slide views in a composite for one actual painting. Often I will enlarge some images and equally reduce others to achieve an overall visual unity."

These balances of scale, near foreground, middle and far distances are essential aspects to the inner realization of all his paintings. Preliminary drawings finished to his satisfaction, he then selects a stretched canvas of appropriate size. His canvas is unprimed duck, to which he adds two coats of white acrylic gesso. Each gesso application is finely sanded to obtain the desired smooth painting surface.

"Although I paint in predominantly flat color fields and patterns, I do not premix large quantities of acrylic paint. My usual procedure is to begin with the darkest value and then gradually work up or down the tonal scale. I mix a sufficient amount of paint in each color (on disposable paper palettes) to allow for completion of given areas of the painting. This paint is stored in a specially constructed plastic box that is the exact size of my palette. To keep the acrylic moist, from time to time I sprinkle it with drops of plain water.

"If the key portion of a painting is a figure, then that is where I begin, painting the figure first and then systematically proceeding on to the other pictorial elements of the design."

This procedural approach holds also for paintings that are without figures - the important focal point is painted first. Or as Konopka so aptly phrases it, "The Thing that initially turns me on to do the painting is what I usually paint first."

His brushes consist of rounds and flats, red and white sables in a variety of sizes from small to quite large. The smoothly sanded white canvas, the gentle soft sables and the fluid consistency of acrylics all contribute to achieving the desired illusion of stillness and quiet atmosphere.

As New York Times Critic David L. Shirey wrote in a review of Konopka's solo exhibition at the Newark Museum's Mini Gallery, "The drama of Mr. Konopka's pictures is intensified by his rigorous compositions and his veiled, gauzy colors."

His range of muted colors is arrived at by the judicious mixing of a grouping of favorite and often used acrylics in
tubes and jars such as: titanium white, cobalt blue, raw sienna, rawumber, burnt umber, cerulean blue, ind orange red, cadmium red light, acra violet, dionazine purple, yellow medium, permanent green light, mars black, hooker's green.

For example, in mixing flesh tones he usually starts with titanium white as a base, adding ind orange red, a bit of raw sienna and just a touch of cobalt blue. He then proceeds to paint light and dark, adding white for light planes and more cobalt blue for shadow areas. Working mostly in flat tones, he gradually builds subtle passages from pale lights to velvety darks.

Earlier mention was made of the Konopka world as everyman's world. This is true to a point, but it is the way he conveys his feelings, the manner in which he interprets this shared world that results in his personal restructuring of realism.

Glen Ridge, his home, is a small town with the usual amount of low-key placid suburban activity. But Joe is a daily commuter along bustling highways crammed with cars, buses, trucks, motorcycles. Moving along these jam-packed byways on to the Hudson River tunnels connecting New Jersey with New York City is ever more compounded traffic noise and eye-blurring motion.

In his paintings, Konopka stills the raucous highways soothesthe tunnel congestion into urban portraits of absolute tranquility — the dream of every harried commuter! Only the artist can realize these utopian visions, if not in actuality, then in the realm of the mind and the painted canvas.

Recently he has embarked on a series of paintings featuring the panorama of New York City, as seen from atop the World Trade Center twin towers. Even from this lofty viewpoint the constant move and thrust of the city is evident in streams upon streams of traffic both on the streets below and on the criss-crossing lanes of the river and harbor.

In these Konopka depictions, clamorous, eyestraining intrusions are completely eliminated. Silent rippled waterways receive only the glimmering rays of sunflecked textures and the giant shadows of closeby buildings. Silhouetted against these windwaved backgrounds are the imposing pinnacles of skyline structures.

Yes, Joseph Konopka is a quiet painter. Anyone who can totally and successfully transpose busy Baghdad on the Hudson into a city of calmness personified, has an alchemist's magic.

The quiet paintings of Konopka have graced the walls of the nation's leading museums, art centers and universities in traveling exhibitions of the American Federation of Art and at Silvermine Guild of Artists, Conn.; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; University of Delaware; National Arts Club; The Kosciusko Foundation, NYC and others. His paintings are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City; Newark Museum; New Jersey State Museum; Butler Institute of American Art, Ohio and The Vatican.

A graduate of New York City's Cooper Union School of Art, he has worked at NBC-TV for over 20 years. As a scenic designer he has been associated with a variety of interesting and diverse projects such as "Miss America Pageant", "Saturday Night Live", "The Today Show", and continuing dramatic serials such as "The Doctors", "Another World" and NBC News Specials.

He is a member of the Painters and Sculptors Society of N.J. and Associated Artists of New Jersey.

William D. Gorman, New Jersey born painter and graphic artist, is an Associate of the National Academy of Design, President of Allied Artists of America, member of American Watercolor Society, New Jersey Water Color Society (past president), Associated Artists of New Jersey.