

# Chicago Tribune

Originally published June 20, 1986

## Lerner's brush still quicker than the eye

Alan Artner  
Tribune Art Critic

Arthur Lerner has been so fine a painter for so long that it seems inconceivable his solo exhibition at the Jan Cicero Gallery, 221 W. Erie St., should be his first in a local showplace since 1963.

But, in a larger sense, that has been the story of realist painting in Chicago. It is practiced here but not ballyhooed. It is collected here but not in great amount. It lies outside the local "tradition," so Chicago realists continue to work quietly, hoping for recognition somewhere else.

The last time I saw a number of Lerner's pieces, they all were still-lifes: rocks and shells exquisitely arranged under natural illumination. The light was intense but even, bleaching color from objects and giving shadows almost palpable form. The power of the pictures was, in large measure, owing to their paleness. It conveyed the effects of a blazing sun.

Lerner's new paintings are "coastsapes" done in Maine. And, again, light is an agent of transformation, giving shadows the solidity of rock and rock the buoyancy of snow. In some works this deceives us about the height of the formations or the season in which they were observed. We think we see a mountain range piercing the cold, yet all canvases were painted in summer on terrain that, if imposing, is still relatively low.

The deception also extends to Lerner's compositions, which look so inevitable as to be dictated by nature. But, really, all they have in common is an absence of sentiment, for these canvases give a feeling of place and atmosphere by diverging from verifiable fact. They do not transcribe as much as reorder. They are the work of a highly accomplished abstract painter. [Through July 11.]