Rob von Trier, a painter from Holland, practices his art in the garden of Magnolia Ridge Plantation at Washington, La.

**Dutch painter captures van Gogh in La. landscapes**

*By BOBBY ARDON*

WASHINGTON, La. — Vincent van Gogh never visited Magnolia Ridge Plantation. However, 100 years after van Gogh's suicide, Rob von Trier, a contemporary Dutch painter, has applied painting techniques from van Gogh's distinctive style at the historic Washington landmark.

Influenced by van Gogh's dramatic oil coloring and sometimes volatile style, von Trier recently painted landscape and indoor scenes at the 190-year-old mansion in post-impressionistic fashion.

After applications from von Trier's rapid brush, a 250-year-old oak tree with ponderous limbs and clinging moss became a skeleton, with branches curled upward in spidery fashion and pointing toward a hostile azure sky.

Wandering into a cypress-shrouded swamp in the rear of the slave-built home on Bayou Courtableau, von Trier, who has now left the Acadiana area, vividly captured a late afternoon scene, with the sun's rays casting harsh red shadows on the water-enveloped tree stumps.

Were von Trier's canvases of the plantation's landscape a van Gogh illusion or von Trier's own reality?

"There is a spirit and a beauty here," von Trier, 32, said of the antebellum mansion, located a mile west of this St. Landry Parish town, which was a prosperous inland steamboat port in the pre-railroad era.

Rob von Trier's art techniques closely resemble those of Vincent van Gogh, as in this painting called The French Chair.
I know not much of van Gogh," said von Trier, who began sketching at age 10. "Van Gogh is not directly in me. I have just always painted this way."

As a guest of Magnolia Ridge owners Tipton and Ann Golias, a Beaumont couple who completed the home’s restoration in 1990, von Trier, a resident of Tilburg in the Netherlands, frantically painted several oil canvases of the home in five days. His paintings were created not so much by design as by necessity, he said.

Von Trier, who saved money to fly to the United States to exhibit 14 of his van Gogh style paintings at the Golias plantation after the owners’ invitation, had his works delayed by the U.S. trade embargo during the Persian Gulf war. "I ship my paintings by boat from the Netherlands because it is cheaper," said von Trier. "But the shipment of them is delayed because the ships had to be filled to capacity before leaving from Rotterdam, because of the embargo."

With an exhibit at Magnolia Ridge imminent in five days and no paintings for display, von Trier said he was a prisoner of artistic desperation. "Tipton gave me money for some paints, and I buy eight canvases and go to work in case my paintings do not arrive in time for the showing. I did not want to disappoint Ann," von Trier said. "I prepare for what Ann called my ‘ Panic Exhibition,’ I work in my socks all night getting four hours sleep in order to have some paintings ready."

Using charcoal from the home’s fireplace, von Trier said, he frantically sketched and then painted with oils 16 hours a day to produce eight outside and indoor scenes from the home and its grounds. Included among the paintings were one of the oak tree after a sketch done from the home’s second-floor balcony, a self-portrait of von Trier looking in the mirror inside a second-floor bathroom and a scene of the upstairs bedroom where he painted.

Also included were the “red” cypress scene and a flower arrangement that included Dutch tulips and traditional Southern flowers. In each painting the colors were harsh, the lines placed angrily with more than just a trace of van Gogh’s influence.

Just 16 hours before the exhibition was to begin, von Trier learned that his paintings had arrived in Houston, cleared customs and that Tipton Golias had sent a truck to pick them up and deliver them to the plantation.

On a cool, windy and cloudless Saturday in a Magnolia Ridge courtyard, von Trier hung his 14 paintings of scenes painted near Arles, France, the town where van Gogh, then 37, shot himself in 1890. The approximately 50 guests invited other colors. disgusting. People sold T-shirts and van Gogh trinkets. I drove to southern France, where van Gogh worked, and I then produced the 14 paintings.”

All of the works von Trier exhibited had the bold colors and volatility which helped set apart van Gogh’s estimated 750 paintings and 1,600 drawings. "The paintings are excellent," said Opelousas artist Mary Allbritton, who was a guest at von Trier’s exhibit. "If you can’t afford a van Gogh, I guess this is the next best thing."

"This is just the way I paint," said von Trier of his style similar to that of van Gogh. "When I sit and sketch a scene, I see other colors. When you see pink, I may see orange and colors that are hidden. I extract colors that are stronger, so my work has strength."

Here in America and on this land (Magnolia Ridge) the trees have shadows that give you a restlessness. "This house breathes and has much to say about itself. Many say what I paint is ugly, that colors are not what they should be."

"Van Gogh did not listen to that criticism and those who said he was a madman. I admired that thing in him, and I try to do the same.”