

Artists in the country

Corné returns to the farmlands

If you sit down in a chair in Corné Eksteen's studio, and look out into the slightly pitched slope that runs in front of it, you'll instantly understand just why this enormously talented young artist has chosen to remain in the countryside, rather than in the big city. The view from Corné's studio is nothing less than wonderful: as far as the eye can see are the gentle rolling hills of the Free State, a lush-looking vegetable garden spreads out before the building and a sense of tranquillity pervades the atmosphere in the most understated way. "I do love it here," Corné says with a small, shy laugh. "It enables me to work in a way that is directed and without distraction and you can never have that in the busy day-to-day life people lead in big cities."

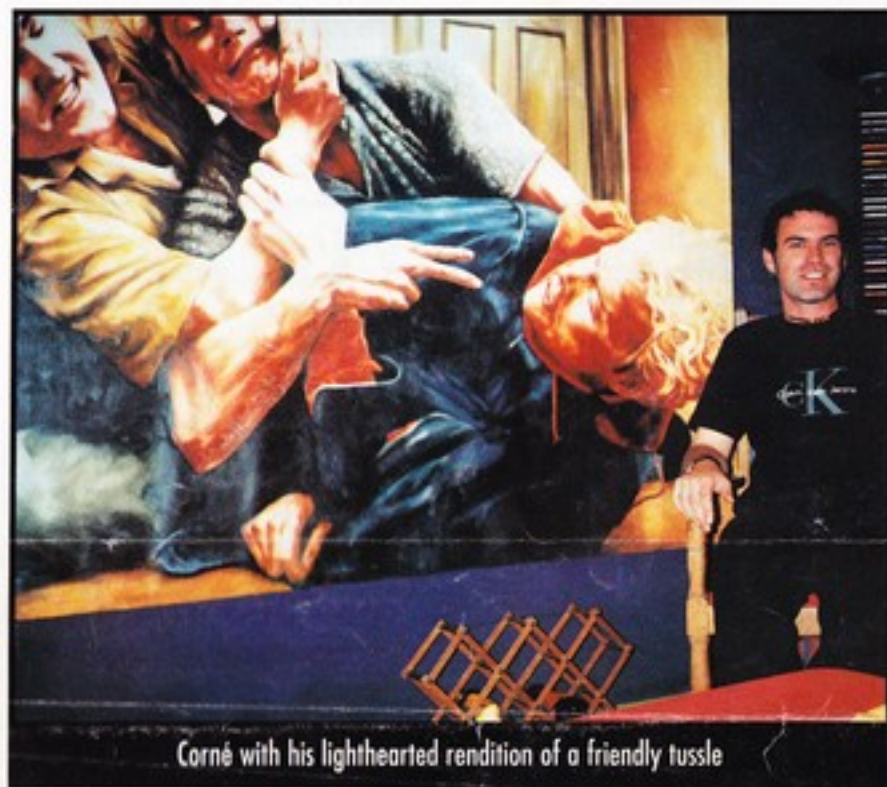
The studio itself

is nothing grand – less a studio in the traditional sense than a working space. But the painting that dominated it on the day *Shell Farmer* visited the Eksteens' farm was large and startlingly good.

"It's a commission," Corné explained. "A mother has asked me to paint her daughter in a historical setting." Working with a photograph, the artist has placed the young woman reclining on a chaise lounge, looking dreamily romantic as in paintings of old. "It's probably not what I would choose to do myself," Corné added. "However, I really value commissions, as they provide an opportunity for me to fine-tune my craft, and to work in challenging or perhaps new styles."

Corné's personal stamp

is expressed in the bedroom he has in his parents' farmhouse. Painted bright colours and filled with masses of contemporary music, the room is dominated by two enormous paintings, both revealing the artist's humorous side. "These paintings are not for sale because they are too intimately connected with my life," Corné said. The most intriguing is a self-portrait, showing an older Corné holding himself as a baby. The other is energetic, focusing on the artist and two of his



Corné with his lighthearted rendition of a friendly tussle

friends in a light-hearted wrestling tussle. What's most compelling about both, is the detail that Corné places in his work.

It hasn't been easy

for Corné to become a full-time artist. "Growing up on a farm, well, most people who do become farmers themselves. I studied science and maths at school and not art, so when it came to choosing my degree at university, I was very unsure of being accepted or even if I was that good. As much as I loved growing up in the Ladybrand area, it was hard to access information about the art-

world, or even get a sense of how I might fit in or how well I might do." Still, Corné persevered. For a while after completing his degree, he worked in areas related to art: "I worked for a clothing company that was based in Messina and then in an interior design shop in Ladybrand. But I realised that if I wanted to be an artist, that is what I must do."

Judging by Corné's work and the response he has had to it, an artist is what he will be.

Corné can be contacted on 083 305 2044.