

New Art, Old City - Snyderman-Works and Gallery Joe

10/13/2011



There's a lot of art to see in Old City Philadelphia, but currently there are two shows that stand out. In medium and execution they're at opposite ends of the spectrum, but if you're interested in thoughtful, careful work by sophisticated professional artists, you should see them both. *Dust and Shade, Drawings by Charles Ritchie*, at Gallery Joe, brings you into a quiet, small-scale world of finely observed detail. Ritchie has 4 sketchbooks in the show - see them

first, and you'll understand a lot about his approach. His rich delicate watercolors and tiny spidery handwriting bring to mind 19th century Victorian sketchbooks, but when you examine the framed drawings on the wall you see that he brings the same detailed awareness of the possibilities of the ordinary to his finished work.

A dark night, a suburban house under a streetlight, a scrim of bare branches - this is Ritchie's touchstone. The same quiet neighborhood (his own, in Maryland) figures in many of the works. There is a suggestion of eternal fall, but then comes a scene with snow - the white mounds feel inevitable, as if they're guarding the house through the winter. Subtle tricks with the light and shadows give a slightly surreal feeling and bring to mind Magritte's painting, *Empire of Light*.

