

Galleries By Edith Newhall

Through his window, a distinctive view

If you missed Charles Ritchie's midcareer survey at the Gregg Museum of Art & Design at North Carolina State University in Raleigh this past summer, you now have a second chance. "From the Inside Looking Out: The Journals, Drawings and Prints of Charles Ritchie" has arrived in its entirety at Gallery Joe, catalog included.

During daylight hours, Ritchie is an associate curator of modern prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Art. At 4 a.m., however, he becomes the artist he trained to be, slipping in a couple of hours of work in his studio before leaving his Silver Spring, Md., home for Washington.

Ritchie's subjects are his house, himself, and his suburban neighborhood as seen by lamplight from his house, all frequently in one image and painted or drawn almost exclusively in black, gray and white. (He mixes colors into black, which gives it a slight sepia tone.) To date, he has filled about 130 journals with his pencil drawings, watercolors and diaristic writings, many of which have come to serve as studies for individual works of the same or a slightly larger scale.

Having seen Ritchie's first one-person show here in 2006, I was aware that he has been revisiting the same subjects over many years, but

this show's large number of works from the 1980s impressed upon me how early the artist, who is now 53, developed his circumscribed realist style. In the 1988 watercolor *Self-Portrait With Full Moon and Tree: Second Study*, for example, there is a portrait of Ritchie seated in the dining room of his house in the lower left corner, while the rest of the painting appears to depict the outdoors and indoors combined, with a tree and a full moon to his immediate left.

This exhibition also offers a substantial selection of Ritchie's journals. You realize, quickly, that this is much more than mere discipline.

Ritchie's most recent work includes paintings on small, journal-size pieces of paper that include his minuscule, deliberately unreadable musings (take your magnifying glass) and horizontal paintings that have side panels, although at least one watercolor from this year, *Streetlight and Porchlight*, has no embellishment. Much of the recent work makes me think of pinhole photography, of images captured through an aperture on paper over a period of time.

The most satisfying revelation of this exhibition is to see how Ritchie progressed from being the good realist painter he was several decades ago to the increasingly experimental artist he is today. It rarely happens that way.



Charles Ritchie's "Streetlight and Porchlight" is in a show of his journals, drawings and prints at Gallery Joe. His subjects are his house, himself and his suburban neighborhood as seen from his house. Ritchie's work is on display in the Kate Javens exhibit.

Gallery Joe, 302 Arch St., noon to 5:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. 215-592-7752 or www.galleryjoe.com. Through Dec. 20.