

Art

Scenic Philadelphia on display at Steven Scott Gallery

By Mike Giuliano

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Philadelphia artist Joseph Sweeney frequents the most beautiful stretch of that city. Many of the pastels and oil paintings he's exhibiting at the Steven Scott Gallery (515 N. Charles St., 752-6218) through April 14 are set along the Schuylkill River in Fairmount Park.

This quiet, orderly landscape still looks essentially as it did in the late 19th century when painter Thomas Eakins spent so much time along boathouse row. Placing himself within that "urban pastoral" tradition, Sweeney fortunately is no mere copycat.

Working in horizontal formats that stress the boathouse-lined shore, Sweeney allows himself plenty of compositional space in which to arrange rowers who move through water that itself seems hardly to move at all. He often shows single rowers, but even if they're alone they don't seem lonely. This contemplative aspect is sometimes enhanced by a reliance on twilight and autumnal conditions.

Occasionally the artist leaves the river and goes to the beach. His pastels "Cool North Breeze" and "Jersey Shore," for instance, use the beach as a ground on which to plant human figures who firmly hold their place. There may be shifting sands plaguing the East Coast, but not under these feet.



Leaves On The Water, pastel, 33 x 60", ©Joseph Sweeney 1990
Photo Credit: Joe Painter, Phila., PA