

Two painters of contemporary realism

The milieus: Landscapes and city views

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Inquirer Art Critic

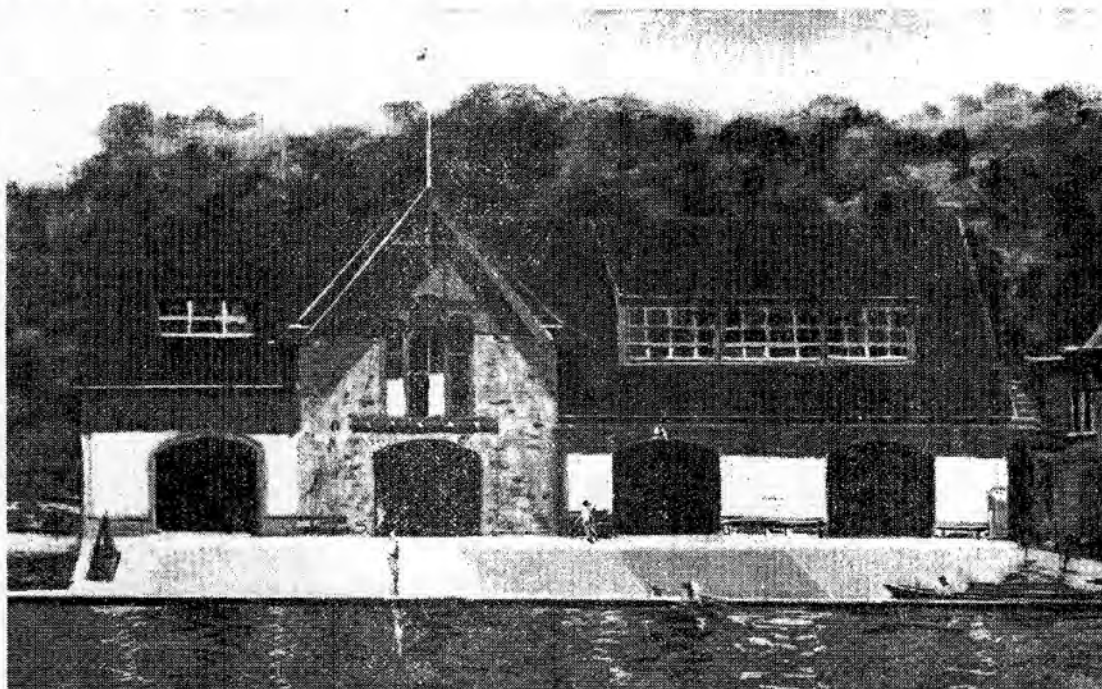
George Nick and Joe Sweeney, who are showing together through Nov. 10 at Gross McCleaf Gallery, both practice the soft-focus painterliness that has become one of the dominant forms of contemporary realism. Both stress such basic concerns as the play of light across surfaces and the use of color to define form and articulate space.

That is, both artists direct the viewer's attention to structure rather than to narrative fussiness. Each focuses on a different milieu, however. Nick is a painter of urban views, while Sweeney is more of a traditional landscapist; his studies of boathouses along the Schuylkill are played against the dense foliage of the park.

Nick's paintings employ the standard compositional device of the angled facade, which allows for maximum exploitation of the play of shadows. The viewer's eye is drawn to a dominant corner, whence it is allowed to roam left or right. Nick's landscapes are, for the most part, depopulated; his aim is to call attention to the visual complexity of these places and, through mild abstraction and spritely color, to enhance their attractiveness.

Sweeney's pastels of Boathouse Row, a subject with which he has become identified, are often frontal views that exaggerate the tonal contrasts between the sun-washed facades and the umbral darkness of the park behind. Like Nick, Sweeney takes a romantic view of his subject. *Light Into Shadow*, a picture of two shells gliding toward a shaded river bank, apotheosizes Sunday-in-the-park Philadelphia.

Gross McCleaf Gallery, 1713 Walnut St. 665-8138. Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Through Nov. 10.



'New Addition,' a pastel by Joe Sweeney in the Gross McCleaf show, depicts a house on Boathouse Row