

# Broad Street Review Wednesday, September 2 2009

> **Sweeney and Martenson at Gross McCleaf**



## All art is local

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"Paintings of Maine," by Douglas Martenson, and "New Pastels" by Joseph Sweeney, two new shows now on display at Gross McCleaf Gallery, demonstrate the ways in which a particular locality can inspire artists.

Martenson's show is a mixed presentation of pure landscape paintings, homey sunlit interiors and a pair of studies of the exterior of a wooden Victorian house (which I assume contains the interiors depicted). Poetry of place is an evanescent thing. Some artists, like Andrew Wyeth, have a way with emptiness, so that in the absence of people, emptiness itself becomes the character. Martenson possesses this knack to a degree, although his work is more earthbound than Wyeth's and reminds me more of Edward Hopper's interiors, minus Hopper's hollow-eyed people. Martenson certainly seems fond of this house and its interiors, whereas he seems a bit divorced from the landscapes, which are professionally rendered views.

Despite its nondescript title, Sweeney's "New Pastels" is a real capital-p Philadelphia show. All of his pieces are studies of sculling. This sport, so greatly loved by a certain sector of Philadelphians, and enjoying a place in our civic art going back to Thomas Eakins, is here given its due by Sweeney. His large pastels are suffused with sunlight and a sense of open air.

Unlike Martenson's more academic work, Sweeney's pastels are very much in the Impressionist tradition, and *Two Single Shells*, with its bravura display of sunlight playing upon the water, is an especially lovely work.