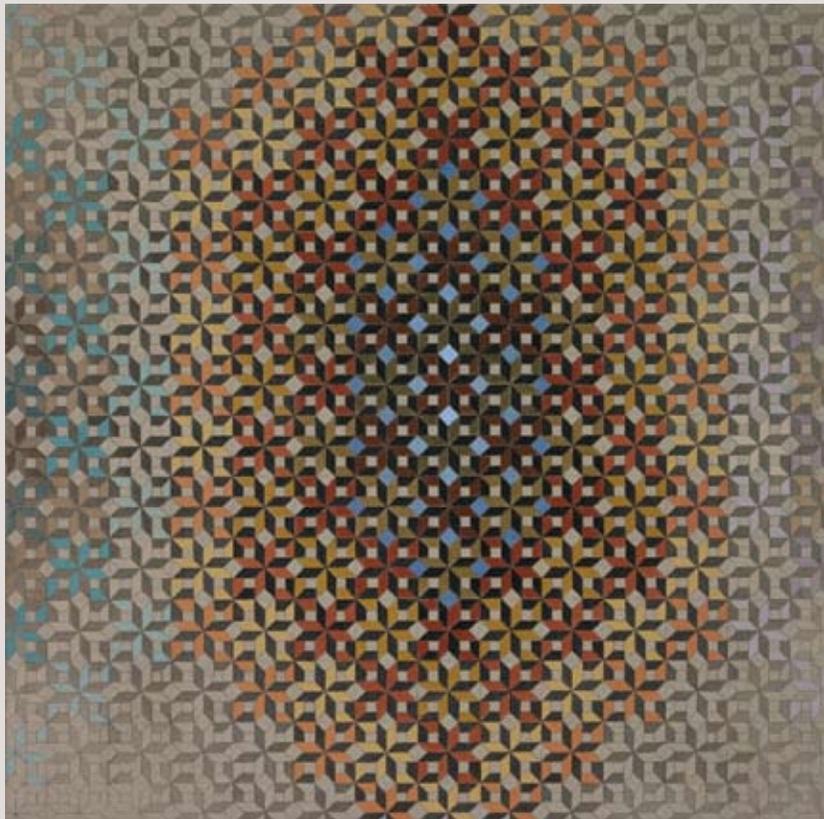


# SURVIVING OURSELVES



150 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE ARTS

An Exhibition of the Contemporary Masters of the Philadelphia Sketch Club  
in the Permanent Collection of the Woodmere Art Museum

August 21–October 17, 2010

CURATED BY Donald Meyer, Director of Exhibitions

Woodmere**ArtMuseum**

## THE PHILADELPHIA SKETCH CLUB

### THE OLDEST, CONTINUING CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' CLUB IN AMERICA

The Philadelphia Sketch Club was founded in 1860 by George F. Bensell and his brother, Edmund B. Bensell, Edward J. McIlhenny, Henry C. Bispham, John L. Gihon, and Robert Wylie—all students at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts who felt that they lacked design opportunities. The oldest continuing, contemporary artists' club in America, the all-volunteer organization offers affordable life drawing classes and mounts exhibitions to display work by locally, nationally, and internationally known artists.

### WORLD FAMOUS MEMBERS, ARTISTS, COLLECTORS, FRIENDS, AND GUESTS

Among the Club's more famous members was Thomas Eakins, who taught life drawing and anatomy for several years before leaving in 1876 to become an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Thomas Anshutz, Howard Chandler Christy, A. B. Frost, Daniel Garber, Thomas Moran, Joseph Pennell, and Edward Redfield were among the members over the ensuing years. Modernism saw support in hugely significant members who were engaged not only as artists but also as early collectors, including Hugh Breckenridge, Lyman Sayen, and Earl Horter, and Samuel S. White 3rd and

his wife, Vera. Their collections included work by friends and associates like Auguste Rodin, Marcel Duchamp, Charles Demuth, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Constantin Brancusi. Distinguished figures in arts and letters, such as Oscar Wilde and James McNeill Whistler, have graced the Club's monthly dinner meetings, which continue to this day.

### THIRTEEN LOCATIONS BEFORE SETTLING ON CAMAC STREET

The Club had thirteen locations before 1903, when it settled at its present address at 235 South Camac Street, once known as Philadelphia's "little street of clubs." It was the first of the several artists' clubs that followed, including the Plastic Club (women artists), the Poor Richard Club (newspaper writers), the Franklin Inn Club (authors), the Charlotte Cushing Club (actresses), as well as dining clubs, hotels, and cabarets, situated nearby as destinations for the seriously art-minded since that time. Its current clubhouse, assembled from three brick row houses from the 1820s, is listed in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and the National Register as a contributing property to the Washington Square West Historic District.

According to the Club minutes, the Sketch Club purchased two of these units in 1902 and the third in 1908. Shortly thereafter, the first two row houses were renovated extensively to form a

single building. The third property was connected internally to the other two in 1915. The three adjoining basements formed a large rathskeller (dining room) and kitchen. The first-floor rooms include a billiard room, library, archive, sitting room, and vestibules. The second-floor rooms and attics form a large, skylit exhibition gallery and classroom.

### ITS MISSION FROM THE BEGINNING AS NOW

From the beginning, the Club's mission has been "to support and nurture working visual artists, the appreciation of the visual arts, visual arts education, and the historical value of the visual arts to the community." Low-cost workshops, originally formed by Eakins in the 1870s, and long-running annual competitions are open to the public and all interested artists are invited to apply for membership. The Club's activities are sustained by gifts from members, friends, and nearly twenty major foundations, corporations, and historical organizations.

The Sketch Club has mounted shows and exhibitions since its founding. Medal winners from these include Violet Oakley, John Folinsbee, and Betty Bowes. In April 2010, the Club held its *147th Annual Exhibition of Small Oil Paintings*. Its extensive art collection includes 44 portraits of members painted in the 1890s by Thomas Anshutz, more than 125 etchings by members of the Philadelphia Society of Etchers, sculpture, stained glass, ceramics, bronze plaques, medals, and metalwork by members. The Club lends pieces to other organizations and exhibitors from time to time. Its archives contain information from artists associated with the Club.

### THE HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORARY MASTERS OF THE PHILADELPHIA SKETCH CLUB

*Surviving Ourselves* surveys the work of contemporary Sketch Club artists who are represented in the permanent collection of Woodmere Art Museum. The exhibition and these artists join the concurrent exhibition *Kindred Spirits: Woodmere and the Philadelphia Sketch Club* (January 2, 2010–January 2, 2011), which features historic members of the Club in the Woodmere permanent collection, such as Thomas Eakins; Thomas Anshutz; Daniel Garber; Peter, Edward, and Thomas Moran; Joseph Pennell; Edward Redfield; Walter Schofield; Joseph Pearson; Adolphe Borie; Earl Horter; N. C. Wyeth; Benton Spruance; Arthur Meltzer; Edna Andrade; Sidney Goodman; John Lear; and others.

—DONALD MEYER, DIRECTOR OF EXHIBITIONS, WOODMERE ART MUSEUM



The stained-glass kitchen door windows of the Sketch Club's Rathskeller, created by past members, commemorate the joys of dining with fellow artists and friends. Member Nicola D'Ascenzo created windows for Washington Memorial Chapel, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania; the Folger Shakespeare Library and the National Cathedral, Washington, DC; Riverside Church, New York; and several college and university chapels, including Yale and Princeton Universities. It is said he kept many Club artists and painters, not in his trade, in work during the dark days of the Great Depression.



Architectural gargoyles like these were the stock-in-trade of several Club members. Between 1885 and 1912, architects Walter Cope and John Stewardson (known as the "Masters of Collegiate Gothic") designed seven buildings at the University of Pennsylvania including the Law School and the Quadrangle Dormitories, six at Bryn Mawr College, and four at Princeton University, thereby virtually creating our visual image of the Ivy League. Hand-carved gargoyles, as well as portraits of past members by past members, make the Club feel profoundly personal to visitors.

## JOSEPH SWEENEY

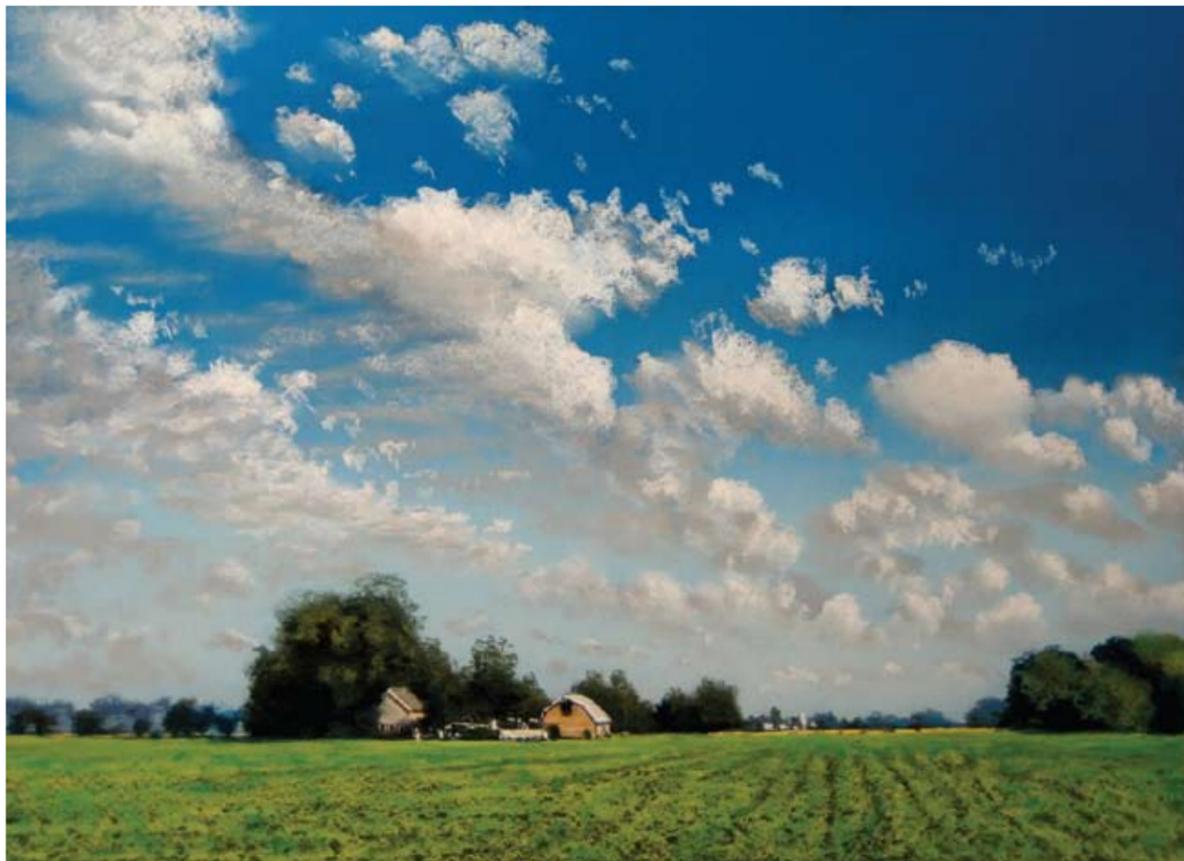
### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My friend Bill Scott said it best: "As an artist you paint what you love." I have always loved being outdoors. If I wasn't a painter, I would have been a farmer or fishing guide. Plein air (outdoor) painting has been a lifelong passion. The source of most of my work is small plein air paintings that at times have been converted to larger works. For me there is no greater pleasure than to set up early in the morning, in a totally new environment, and walk away after a few hours with a finished painting.

All landscape painting is about the environment. In this age of concern about the health of our land, sea, and sky, one would think it would be the focal point of the painting universe. Art can embody the exchange of ideas that can affect thinking and perception. The danger to the environment is not in the chainsaw, the oil spill, or global warming; it is in the minds of men.

—JOSEPH SWEENEY, JULY 2010

Farm on New Road, 2006



Leaving Port, 2010

- 1 **Farm on New Road, 2006**  
Pastel, 30 x 40 in.  
Courtesy of the artist
- 2 **Clouds off Lewes, Delaware, 2009**  
Oil on board, 16 x 19 in.  
Courtesy of the artist
- 3 **Leaving Port, 2010**  
Oil on board, 16 x 19 in.  
Courtesy of the artist
- 4 **First Aid Station O.C. #2, 2008**  
Oil on board, 13 1/2 x 15 1/2 in.  
Courtesy of the artist
- 5 **The Threshold, 2010**  
Oil on board, 17 x 17 in.  
Courtesy of the artist
- 6 **The Light through the Trees, 2010**  
Oil on board, 16 x 19 in.  
Courtesy of the artist



Clouds off Lewes, Delaware, 2009