

Broad Street Review

Ruth Bernard and David Brewster at Gross McCleaf



BY: Andrew Mangravite
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Ruth Bernard's houses and trees tug at the canvas as if desperate to escape. David Brewster's visual fantasies aspire to the state of music.

Ruth Bernard, "Landscapes"; David Brewster, "Celebrating 20 Years: 1991-2011." Through October 29, 2011 at Gross McCleaf Gallery, 127 South 16th St. (215) 665-8138 or www.grossmccleaf.com.

*Brewster's 'Flooded Coalran':
Finding beauty in natural disasters.*

A pair of live wires

ANDREW MANGRAVITE

Two virtuoso display of painting in oils are on display at Gross McCleaf through October 29.

Ruth Bernard's paintings look heavy and substantial. Her houses and trees tug at the canvas and tilt from it, as if desperate to escape. Her vibrant colors add to this sense of urgency and make even simple images seem charged with hidden emotional meanings.

As for David Brewster, I feel as if I've grown up as a critic and grown old as a man reviewing his shows.

The first Brewster show I reviewed dealt with Philadelphia's industrial wasteland. What could have been an easy trip down Melancholy Lane in lesser hands became an emotional firestorm in Brewster's. His imagery flashed across the canvas and left the viewer a little bit dazed.

Later Brewster turned to more bucolic scenes in places like Ireland and New England. The emotional resonance may have been altered— at least for native Philadelphians— but that same restless go-for-broke technique, that sheer joy in the movement of color pigments across a canvas surface never varied. Even when Brewster ventured into more abstract realms, his physical joy in the job, the business of capturing something with oils on canvas, remained constant.

The new show is a small-scale retrospective of Brewster's work over a 20-year period, and I'm happy to report that his newest canvases are this most challenging yet. Now he works on the theme of natural disasters, or perhaps I should say the works of man interacting with natural forces, giving us a series of grand, almost operatic images: *Flooded Coalran*, *Blue Powerline South*, *Quick Rise in the River*, *Barn Flattened to the Ground*, *Osborne House* and the expansively titled *Vermont State Capital Fire of 1857: Temple in the Wilderness*. With these large visual fantasies, Brewster's images aspire to the state of music.