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ARTS & CULTURE

A show of shimmering charcoals by John Moore at Locks Gallery

A stalwart of the Philadelphia art scene, Moore's latest show is 'Charcoals.'

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John Moore's "Bridge Over Brandywine." The exhibit "Charcoals" is at Locks Gallery through March 28.

Can charcoal shimmer?

In the virtuosic hand of American realist artist John Moore, it can. Especially if you begin with a close-up view, engage with the rough pointillistic texture of his charcoal drawings, then move away and glance back at the work to see something totally different: a shimmering that seems impossible.

Moore, 84, is a stalwart of the Philadelphia art scene, spending decades teaching at Temple and Penn, and focusing much of the time on painting images of industrial



John Moore's "The Train." Courtesy of the artist and Locks Gallery

Coatesville. He now lives in Maine and his work continues to surprise, reward, and charm even the casual viewer. So go ahead Philly and pop into Locks Gallery on Washington Square South at Sixth Street for the latest exhibition of his work, "Charcoals." It's free.

Working on rolls of paper he bought from a student, Moore's images of crumbling industrial structures, occasionally with the rare human or bird, are set in three places: his muse of Coatesville, coastal Maine, and Calatayud, Spain. The buildings, in varying stages of erosion or ruin, are the centerpieces; humans placed into a melancholic or maybe hopeful periphery. You decide.

There's just a hint of us humans in this landscape, but maybe that's enough. What is that girl doing at the edge of the water under the bridge, leaning over in the grass in *The Train*? Not even Moore really knows. (I thought she might be picking up after an unseen dog!)

In a recent interview with Kathleen Foster, senior curator of American art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Moore said the layering on, and layering off, of the charcoal process — he actually used a leaf blower to blow off excess charcoal — was a satisfying medium.

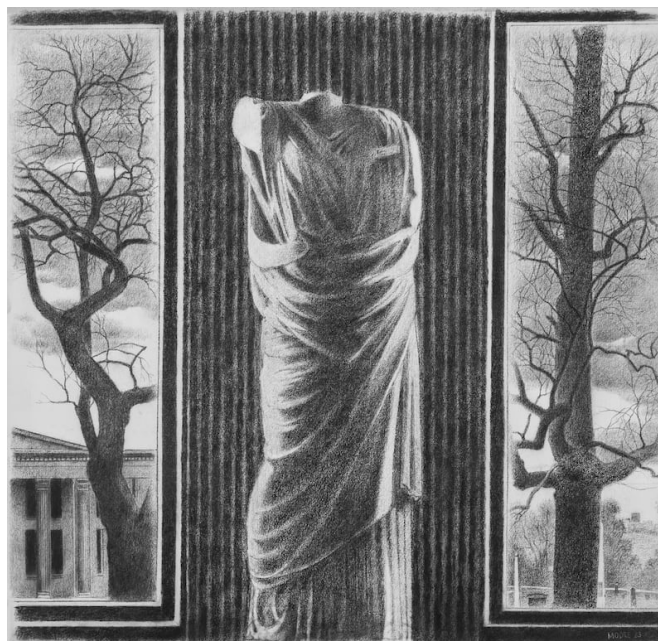
"It's not that I'm not interested in color," Moore said. "Charcoal drawings, they're layered. You begin with a hard piece of charcoal. After everything gets settled, you go to more compressed charcoal. Each layer it gets darker and darker. Charcoal, it's not unforgiving, but it's a little bit hard to erase.

"The leaf blower in the studio blasted the charcoal drawing," he said. "It worked perfectly. You put another layer on and blow it off. That's how they got so dusty. Of course I could have used a hair dryer."



The leaf blower technique created vacant space, like a white box, around the little girl, he noted. And it resulted in the shimmering effect of the water behind her.

Other works feature bare trees, headless statues, crumbling stone buildings, and the result is an exploration of endings and beginnings, light and ruin, erosion, and persistence.



John Moore, "Athena Minerva," 2023, charcoal on paper, 42 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Locks Gallery

The Moore exhibit runs through March 28 at Locks Gallery.

On April 3, the gallery will make a hard pivot to an exhibit of work by American abstract artist Mary Corse, whose work explores "light and perception." The exhibition will feature a selection of Corse's *White Light* paintings made from 2022 to 2023.