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Galleries By Edith Newhall

Into the light

Charles Ritchie has lightened up since his last show with Gallery Joe.

Rather than concentrating solely on nocturnal scenes of his domestic interior and immediate neighborhood on a cul-de-sac in Silver Springs, Md., as he has for much of his career, he occasionally turns his eye to sunlit subjects, and the results are dazzling.

Never mind that *May*, a graphite and charcoal drawing Ritchie began in 1996 and finished this year (he has been known to work on a drawing off and on for years) is composed largely of shades of gray. It captures the essence of a warm spring day when every plant and tree has burst to life in the kind of celebratory harmony that Charles Burchfield captured so memorably in color.

A modest neocolonial house that stands across the street from Ritchie's, a nocturnal subject of many years' standing, has emerged from the shadows and appears almost shockingly white in the snow in his watercolor and graphite *House: 29 January 2011, 10:30 a.m.* (2011). The real shock, I suddenly understand, is that my eye has learned to expect his enveloping, mysterious darkness.

There are also a few new works in dark color — a tree framed by a gray-blue evening sky in *November*,



"House, 29 January 2011, 10:30 a.m." emerges from the dark in Charlie Ritchie's show at Gallery Joe, through Oct. 22.

1999-2011 (2011), is one — and black-and-white graphite drawings in mid-tones that avoid sharp contrasts of dark and light, such as *Graphite Night II* (2010-2011).

I'm not won over by color in Ritchie's work — he's made a noteworthy contemporary contribution to the enduring appeal of black and white — but it's fun to see him branching out.

Gallery Joe, 302 Arch St., noon to 5:30 Wednesday through Saturdays. 215-592-7752 or www.galleryjoe.com. Through Oct. 22.