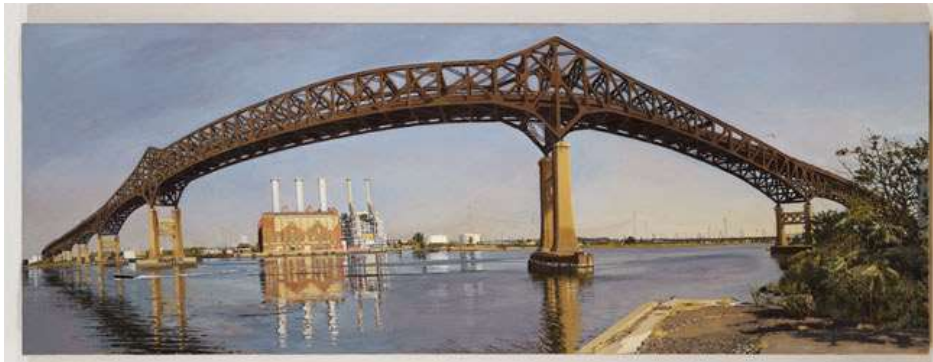


BETTY CUNINGHAM GALLERY

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Rackstraw Downes

Exhibition Dates: January 24 – March 1, 2008
Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am to 6 pm
Opening: Thursday, January 24, 2008, 6 – 8 PM

On Thursday, January 24, 2008, Betty Cuninghams Gallery will open an exhibition of paintings by Rackstraw Downes comprised of approximately 20 works completed by Downes from 2004 to 2007.

Included is an important series of four paintings titled: *Presidio Horse Racing Association Track, Presidio, Texas*, painted on site during the last three winters. Downes, who moves with the seasons in order to paint on site year round, has been traveling to Texas since the early 1990's. Concerning the locations that he chooses, Downes has said:

“It’s my job to find places that answer to some internal need—I think there is one before you even get to the place, and the place answers the need.”

In this case the site selected is of vast flat expanses of scrub desert and sky stretching out to hills and distant mountains that lie low on the horizon. The Race Track makes its presence felt with small shaded spectator shelters and judges’ towers, thin railed fences and the swirling motion of the track in the desert floor. The four paintings describe four separate points of view, each painted at a different time of day, to record the changes of light across the almost hundred miles of distance in each direction. The physical rigors of such an exacting practice are part and parcel of the artist’s engagement with his work. A wide ranging view brought to an intense focus of observation, each touch of the brush recording in intricate detail the precise experience of the eye. As Downes would say, “exactly as it is.”

Downes’ intensely observed study of light and space continues in other Texas paintings as well as works painted in the New York area where Downes resides during the warmer months. The most recent painting in the show is *The Pulaski Skyway Crossing the Hackensack River* painted in 2007. Here the broad span of a bridge traverses deep reflections of urban New Jersey. Smoke stacks line up along the horizon and the curve of the bridge, arches across the painting creating a weightless presence.

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In *Under the J Line at Alabama Avenue* and *Under Riverside Drive at 136th Street*, Downes has selected two sites that are dominated by elevated railway bridges. The massive overhead structures enclose the streets below and the light funnels through and around, illuminating the facades of the buildings nearby. In *Henry Hudson Bridge Substructure, P.M.* and *Henry Hudson Bridge Substructure A.M.*, Downes documents the sharp differences in the light, at two different times of day, as it filters through the complex network of metal supports. For two large cavernous interior spaces; *Daphne Cumming's Brooklyn Studio* and *Bull Barn Interior, Marfa, Texas*, Downes has chosen a small square format. Vaulted ceilings, containing skylights, arch and circle to the boundaries of the canvasses and the space wraps around the viewer.

Downes' recent exhibition at the Texas Gallery, Houston, Texas in 2007 showcased the *Presidio Horse Racing Association Track* paintings which are included in the current show. In 2004, Downes exhibited his drawings at the New York Studio School and six of his paintings at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. His work can be seen in the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and elsewhere throughout the country, notably in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cincinnati Art Museum, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine, the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Modern Art, Fort Worth, Texas.

Downes has published two books of his own writings: *In Relation to the Whole: Three Essays from Three Decades*, 1973, 1981, and 1996. (New York: Edgewise Press, 2000) and *Under the Gowanus and Razor-Wire Journal: The Making of Two Paintings*, 5.9.99 - 11.15.99 (New York: Turning the Head Press, 2000). In the spring of 2005, a monograph on Rackstraw Downes was released by Princeton University Press with essays by Robert Storr, Sanford Schwartz and Rackstraw Downes.

The current exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with a commentary from the artist. For further information, and/or catalogue, please contact the gallery via phone at 212.242.2772 or via email: info@bettycuninghamgallery.com

NEXT EXHIBITION: *John Lees: March 6 – April 5, 2008*