

## Rackstraw Downes

April 3 – May 3, 2014

**Book Signing and Reception: Thursday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 6 – 8 PM**



*Farm Buildings Near the Rio Grande: Under the Barn Roof. A.M.. 2008. Oil on canvas. 24 x 90 1/4 in.*

Betty Cuningham Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of select major paintings by Rackstraw Downes, dating from 1983 to the present. The exhibition, the artist's fifth show at the gallery, includes major examples of Downes work loaned by private collectors and by the artist to celebrate the publication of Rackstraw Downes' *Nature and Art are Physical: Writings on Art, 1967-2008*. Published by Edgewise Press, this volume contains twenty-nine essays by Downes accompanied by an introduction by John Elderfield. **Both Rackstraw Downes and John Elderfield will be present for a book signing and reception on April 24, 6-8pm.**

Since the early 1970's Downes has committed himself to painting from observation, on site from start to finish. As a consequence Downes moves with the seasons: April through October in New York and November through March in Texas. He chooses sites that challenge him as a painter – “as far as one can see” – grasping a full, comprehensive view of what is before and around him, preferring the ordinary to the extraordinary. Downes' urgency to put on canvas all that he can see is evident in the crowded painting, *Demolition and Excavation on the Site of the Equitable Life Assurance Society's New Tower at 7th Avenue and 52nd Street* as well as in the empty spaces of the World Trade Center (“four exposures”) or, most recently, in his vast sand hills paintings in Presidio, TX. Downes has completed several multiple panel paintings demonstrating his desire to comprehend the entire space in height, depth and even in time. Two such paintings hang in this exhibition: a cityscape, *Four Spots along a Razor-Wire Fence, August - November (ASOTSPRIE)* and an interior, *Snug Harbor Metal Duct Work in G Attic*.

As the title implies, *Nature and Art are Physical: Writings on Art, 1967-2008* includes writings by Rackstraw Downes which parallel his career as a painter. Downes states that he has written about art in two different ways: one simply “by narrating the circumstances under which one of my paintings got painted” and the other assesses the achievement of the writer or artist, “here, the physical character of finished works ... is the issue.”

Rackstraw Downes was born in Kent, England. He received a B.A. from the University of Cambridge in 1961, and a B.F.A. (1963) and a M.F.A. (1964) from Yale University. Since graduating he has lived and worked in America, taking citizenship in 1980. He has been the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions, most notably the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 2009 and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1998. In 1999 he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2010, The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY, originated the retrospective, “Rackstraw Downes: Onsite Paintings, 1972 – 2008” which travelled to the Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME, and the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC. In addition, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, hosted a process show, “Rackstraw Downes: Under the Westside Highway” which included paintings, drawings, sketches, and diaries for this one site. In 2012 he was a featured artist on the PBS program, ART 21.

His work is in the permanent collections of The Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the National Gallery of Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum among others. His essays have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *Art in America* and *Art Journal*. Downes delivered the Ninth Annual Raymond Lecture for the Archives of American Art in 2009, and in 2011, participated in a Wyeth Foundation for American Art conference at the National Gallery of Art, entitled *Landscape in American Art, 1940-2000*. Downes lives and works in New York City and Presidio, TX.

The exhibition will remain on view through May 3, 2014.

*For further information and/or images, please contact the gallery.*

**Listing Information:** Betty Cuningham Gallery is located at 541 W. 25<sup>th</sup> St, New York, New York 10001

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**Public Transportation:** C or E train to 23<sup>rd</sup> St.

**Gallery Hours:** Tues – Sat, 10am – 6pm.

**Next Exhibition:** Philip Pearlstein, *Philip Pearlstein at 90*, May 8- June 13, 2014