

# BETTY CUNINGHAM GALLERY

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## **John Lees**

Dates: March 6 – April 5, 2008

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 6, 2008, 6 – 8 pm

New York, Tuesday, January 31, 2008, Betty Cuninghams Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings and drawings by John Lees at 541 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street, New York City from on March 6 through April 5, 2008. The exhibition includes 24 oil on canvas paintings, and 15 ink and gouache drawings, some in the making since 1972. The paintings range in size from 5 x 7 inches to 40 x 48 inches. A full color catalogue with an essay by writer and critic William Corbett accompanies the exhibition. The artist will be present for an opening reception on Thursday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, from 6-8 pm.

Lees works and reworks his drawings and paintings over many years, building up the surfaces and breaking them down, developing what he calls a “sense of presence”. He keeps a dated log on each piece (on the front or back) often spanning several years. The drawings in their inks and dry gouaches resemble ancient documents. Covered with notations, these drawings document Lee’s artistic journey. His paintings record a similar process: each layer of pigment is slowly built up over time, the sinopia peeking through the encrusted surfaces.

Every day objects are invested with extraordinary qualities. A stream, a pond, a head or a bath tub are, as Lees says, his monolithic single subjects. Each has its own monumental presence; each is a distillation in time. The bath tub appears in several paintings in this show. Its shape is reduced, almost circular; and fills the picture plane, looming large like an ancient sacred object that demands our attention.

Lees has a love of vaudeville and early animated film, also of jazz and Film Noir and these interests make their way into the drawings and paintings, sometimes with considerable humor. *Pompeiiian Porky* is an excellent example, in which the well-loved cartoon character is worked and reworked over many years and emerges encrusted and peeling like a fading fragment of a Roman fresco.

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There is an affinity with Asian scroll painters in Lees' handling of condensed space. In the drawings and paintings of the stream that runs behind his home, Lees has recorded its progression from the distant spring, where it is sourced, to the rushing water in the foreground. All of the landscapes in this series document a sense of place and record the experience of time.

John Lees (b.1943, Denville, NJ) received his B.F.A. (1964) and M.F.A. (1967) from the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, CA. Two years later, in 1969, Lees mounted his first one person exhibition. In 1977, Lees presented his first solo exhibition in New York City at the Edward Thorp Gallery, where he exhibited regularly for the next six years before embarking on a sixteen year relationship with Hirschl & Adler Modern. In 1981, Lees moved to New York City and in 1990, he moved his home and studio to upstate New York, where he currently resides. Since 1989, Lees has been an instructor at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture.

Lees is the recipient of three major awards and grants: most recently, the Francis J. Greenburger Award (2005); the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Grant (1993); and the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant (1989).

His work is part of numerous public institutions among which are the Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock; the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Kemper Collection, Kansas City Art Institute, MO, and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA, among others.

*For further information, catalogue and/or photographs, please contact the gallery at 212-242-2772 or [info@bettycunninghamgallery.com](mailto:info@bettycunninghamgallery.com). Next exhibition: **Jake Berthot. April 10 – May 10, 2008***