

DEREK BUCKNER

# Notions of Progress



Growing up in Brooklyn in the 1970s and '80s, artist Derek Buckner spent a lot of time exploring the urban industrial areas in his backyard, including the Gowanus Canal. For a young boy, it was an exciting place, rife with adventure, discovery (it wouldn't be unusual to see a vehicle floating by) and just enough danger.

His affinity for such environments often shows up in his highly atmospheric paintings, including the body of work on display through June 11 at George Billis Gallery in New York City.

"In the industrial areas you see boats and equipment and very odd objects," says Buckner, who returned to Brooklyn after studying at the Art Institute of Chicago. "They provide something very different and out of the ordinary, visually. It becomes almost abstract."

The Gowanus area is currently undergoing a transformation toward gentrification. In some ways the artist is sad to witness his





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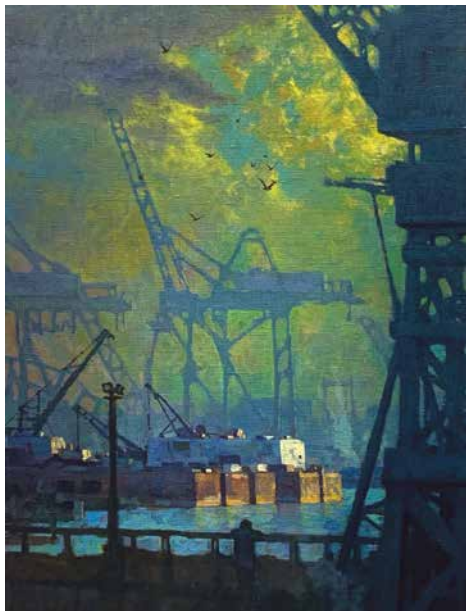
subject changing and possibly disappearing altogether but, for now, he is still finding inspiration in its dismantling.

*Construction Site, Cement Blocks*, featuring a haphazard heap of concrete and other detritus in a powerful interplay of shadow and light is one example. “It’s this in-between moment,” Buckner says. “They’ve torn down a lot but have left behind these huge piles of tires and other debris.” It may not be what it once was but in its current state, he still finds it appealing and interesting to his aesthetic eye.

Not all of the works in the exhibit are focused on Gowanus. He also selected eerily lit pieces from a series of shipping cranes that were visible across the harbor. There is an apocalyptic tone to these works, especially *Harbor Cranes*, in which the towering structures in the distance provoke the discomfort of considering the hubris of mankind.

“There’s always a tension between the sublime and the terrifying,” Buckner says. “At the same time, there’s often something beautiful.” ●

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**1**  
*Gowanus Canal, Barge and Crane*, oil on linen, 36 x 48"

**2**  
*Construction Site*, oil on linen, 30 x 40"

**3**  
*Construction Site, Cement Blocks*, oil on linen, 50 x 60"

**4**  
*Harbor Cranes*, oil on canvas, 40 x 30"