

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Unique visions of Gowanus on canvas from Derek Buckner, Brooklyn native son

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Painter and Brooklyn native Derek Buckner, pictured with one of his paintings on display at the George Billis Gallery. Photos courtesy Derek Buckner

Gowanus is one of Brooklyn's most historically significant areas, where much of the Battle of Brooklyn took place. It also evokes an iconic industrial history. And today, amid 'mixed-bag' gentrification around one of the world's most noxious canals, it evolves as part of Brooklyn identity.

Derek Buckner, a noted painter and Brooklyn native, has spent a quarter of a century documenting Gowanus in vivid, unforgettable

paintings. This week, through Saturday, some of his latest works are on exhibit at the [George Billis Gallery](#) in Chelsea.

In a recent interview, Buckner cited his devotion to Brooklyn as the place to which he would always come home. He has exhibited in major U.S. cities, as well as Mexico, Italy and South Korea.



Artist Derek Buckner.

Eagle: Tell us about your Brooklyn roots.

The year before I was born, my parents moved to Clinton Street right on the edge of Brooklyn Heights and Cobble Hill (which, in the early 1970s, was remarkably considered pioneering). Once I learned how to ride a bike, my friends and I explored areas of the Brooklyn waterfront below the BQE, which was then just an industrial stretch, as well as the Red Hook piers and under the 9th Street elevated tracks.

These areas always seemed exotic and dangerous to me and I suppose those early impressions made a strong impact. The Gowanus canal is not the most sanitary of muses, but to me it provides endless opportunities as a painter. One intriguing aspect is the stillness of the water. It reflects everything: the buildings, the sky, the factories billowing smoke. It all lends itself to ever-changing compositions.



Eagle: Your father is a noted painter, of course, and we wonder when you suspected you would choose that path.

My father has had a strong influence on my painting in different ways. He is a fantastic artist. Growing up watching him work gave me a firsthand perspective of daily life of being a painter, with its ups and downs. In many ways this prepared me for life after art school and how to maintain a disciplined practice. I have great memories of waking up early and setting up our easels, working plein air side-by-side from our Brooklyn rooftop.



Eagle: Did you grow up in Brooklyn Heights environs and proceed through the famous Heights Casino juniors program?

Like many Brooklyn Heights kids I took tennis lessons at the Heights Casino during grade school and middle school, though I unfortunately wasn't particularly good and stopped going once I hit high school. Now I really regret it because all these years later my wife and I took up tennis and are fairly obsessed — though I'm still not very good!



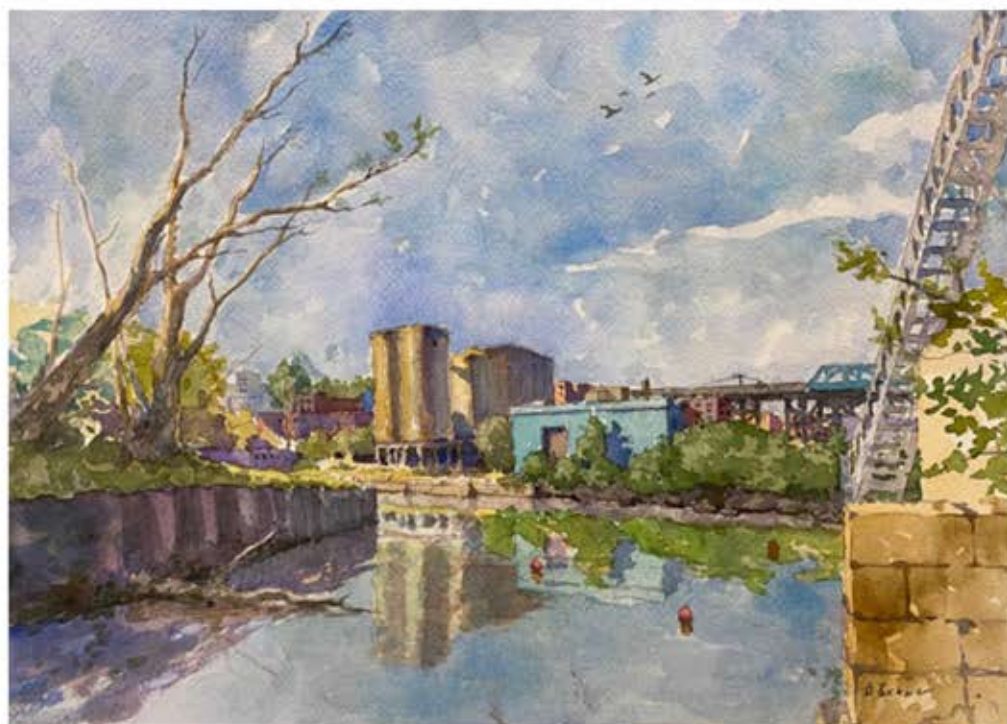
Eagle: Had you painted other environments in the past?

After studying painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago I spent two years living in Baja, Mexico where I focused on primarily landscape and figurative painting. The light in Baja is extraordinary and this period was very helpful for my understanding of painting and seeing light and atmosphere. I then returned to Brooklyn in 1998 after meeting my wife, Joanna Hershon, a wonderful novelist. It was then that I became drawn to the industrial cityscapes again. After living in Carroll Gardens for 17 years we moved to Park Slope near Flatbush and 5th aves.



My work space has changed many times over the years. I've had studios in Dumbo, Red Hook and Gowanus. Unfortunately, I recently had to move out of my Gowanus studio. When the Gowanus area became hot real estate, many artists were either priced out or forced out of their spaces.

I now have a studio in Sunset Park. In many ways I'm sad to no longer be working near the canal, which has been a favorite subject of mine, but at the same time, I'm excited to have discovered Sunset Park with an equally inspiring industrial landscape. Both my previous and current studios have expansive views. It's important to me to be able to look out my window and see what the sky is doing at any given moment.



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