



Joellyn Duesberry | In An Instant New York—Before and After 9/11

Curated by Simon Zalkind

September 11, – November 13, 2014

Opening Reception – September 11, 2014, 5–7 PM

The Art Gallery

Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus
13080 East 19th Avenue, Aurora, Colorado 80045
303.724.3994
Map and directions at: www.coloradobioethics.org

Gallery Hours

9:00am - 5:00pm, Monday - Friday, free and open to the public

Driving Directions: Visitors are advised to enter the Anschutz Medical Campus via Montview Boulevard to access easily visitor parking sites. The Fulginiti Pavilion is located on East 19th Avenue between Uvalda Court (east) and Racine Street (west). From the west, enter campus from Peoria Street on Montview, and turn south on Uvalda Court. From the east, enter campus from Fitzsimons Parkway on Montview, and turn south on Uvalda Court. The Georgetown Visitor Parking Lot is on the southeastern corner of Uvalda Court and East 19th Avenue.

cover image: *Memory Time Lapse, Ground Zero*, 2002-2003, oil on linen, 60" x 72", courtesy of the artist

inside flap: *Morning on the East River (detail)*, 1998, oil on linen, 40" x 30", courtesy of Amy Harmon



Center for Bioethics and Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS



Joellyn Duesberry | In An Instant
New York—Before and After 9/11

*Life changes in the instant,
The ordinary instant.*

- Joan Didion

My alarm clock woke me this morning at 7:30. I went downstairs to the kitchen and coffee, freshly made, was waiting for me. I attempted to rouse my daughter – it's the first day of summer camp. Seeing her asleep I'm astonished – as always – by how beautiful she is. I reminded myself that we are having dinner with friends this evening. I must not forget to wear my hearing aids tonight. Getting older is irksome but, as they say, it sure beats the alternative. My husband is on a business trip. I hope his meetings are going well. I also remember that I need to begin this short essay for Joly's exhibition. Homemade enchiladas for dinner last night – enough leftovers for lunch. I'm looking forward to the Matt Barton opening at the Museum of Contemporary Art on Friday. My life is built around these experiences. They define its contours, and I live with the secure expectation that they are predictable and reliable. From entirely prosaic moments – the dishwasher needs loading, the cat needs to be fed – to the most exalted moments of gratitude, beauty, insight and blessedness, my life unfolds within a context of "normalcy" and continuity that I and most everyone I know tacitly agrees is "how things are." I'm aware that mayhem reigns in Israel and Gaza right now. I know that the delicate ecosystems and the very atmosphere that makes life on earth possible have



Ground Zero IV, 2003, monotype, 23" x 31", courtesy of the artist

been irrevocably corrupted. But right now I need to choose a restaurant for tonight's dinner. My life has narrative order, sequence, coherence.

Chaos and death refute the busy pretense of my experience. The apparent solidity that my quotidian existence depends on is a thin, illusory membrane that chaos easily tears apart. The bulwarks of remedy, progress, and happy endings can vanish in an instant. As I write this, yesterday, July 20th was the 2nd anniversary of an unthinkable nightmare – a horrific mass murder at a nearby movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. Twelve people were killed. Many of the survivors suffer irrevocable damage and trauma. Prior to the instant when the inconceivable occurred, the victims' days were probably variations of my own. The continuity upon which we depend in order

to project a future – a night's sleep, a good meal, the company of friends, a thrilling movie to cap the ordinary day – is a luxurious, illusory, cocoon that can dissolve – vaporize – in an instant. That instant might be a mass killing, a tsunami, a routine visit to the doctor that ends with a stomach-churning diagnosis, a child's suicide, the discovery of a spouse's infidelity, torture or terrorism. How can art respond to that which cannot be represented? – to that which must remain unspeakable, ineffable, and unknowable?

For many years, Joellyn Duesberry has been a consummate painter of the natural world and has achieved a stature commensurate with her remarkable accomplishments. In an art world that increasingly enfranchises 21st century malaise, fragmentation and dysfunction, Duesberry is gifted with the capacity to render in paint and print the intertwining of intimate experience – memories of a particular space – with a universality that encompasses all of our deepest, inchoate longings for the edenic beauty, the vitality and plenitude of the natural world. It is not difficult to admire her landscape paintings – their virtuoso technique, their scrupulous observation, the underlying rhythms and patterns, and the hushed and effulgent color gradients that they offer us. But if you simply admire them, you're unavailable for the deep and soulful nourishment that they provide. The paradoxical tension between their refinement and the unruly exuberance of the natural world speaks deeply to our own condition. With subtle effects of texture and captured light, her landscapes register as fragments of the real world even as they convey a sense of wholeness that simultaneously includes and transcends the

specificity of location and site. This is the miracle of a successful painting – a whole world at a glance.

In the late 1990's, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council began granting studio space in empty buildings in lower downtown to deserving artists. Duesberry applied for and was granted – auspiciously in light of the events that would transpire in a few short years – a studio space for six months (1998-1999) on the East River side of the North Tower of the World Trade Center on the 91st floor. The cityscapes in this exhibition derive from that fruitful time. Though their subject matter is far away from the landscapes for which she is primarily known, they are suffused with a similar Whitmanesque embrace of the dynamism, the marvelous surfeit of the life force of the city as a living organism. I especially like the nighttime views. The city below is incandescent, "lit-up" both literally and figuratively. Although no people are present in the work, human presence percolates just under the surface of these abstract but unmistakably real and familiar images. With hindsight, one can't help but wonder "Where are those people now?"

On September 11, 2001 at 8:45 AM – in an instant – the unthinkable happened. The lethal plane (American Airlines Flight 11) hurtled into the 91st-94th floors of the North Tower. That moment and the hours and days that followed are difficult to bring to mind nakedly – without the buffer and balm that time provides. Scenes of unspeakable carnage and destruction – the instant annihilation of thousands of lives. Of people who got up in the morning, had their coffee and embarked on an ordinary day fully expecting to return to an ordinary

evening, the comfort and safety of home, the intact and familiar dwelling places of the body. How can art intervene in these catastrophic erasures of existence?



Night from the World Trade Center, NYC, V, 2004, monotype, 48" x 28", courtesy of the artist

Joellyn Duesberry's painting *Memory Time Lapse*, *Ground Zero* is a masterpiece that aspires to keep company with Goya's *Disasters of War*, Leon Golub's chilling paintings of state-sponsored torture and Picasso's *Guernica* as an extraordinary leap beyond that which the imagination cannot contain. I can see the technical virtuosity, the assured brush-strokes, the compositional coherence of the work, but it is the work's capacity to penetrate the agility of my imagination, to palpably render – without a cry or a groan – the desolation and horror that is far beyond the harsh contingencies of the natural world that makes the painting great.

How does art intervene in the erasures of history and humanity that occurred on 9/11? What cannot or should not be represented? What is the role of art in testimony, memorial, mourning and healing? Duesberry's paintings make us feel the primitive shock of a terrifying instant – shredding our cocoons, dispelling our virtual fog and blocking our desperate need to return to our patterns of normalcy. This work has a contemporary urgency. It seeks not only to testify and commemorate but also to assist us in recovering our own deep capacity for empathic responsiveness. Calamity has a way of restoring us to kindness. Prior to the events of 9/11, I never felt any affection for the twin towers of the World Trade Center, but in their destruction they seem – like everything that lives and wishes only to go on living – fragile and precious.

– Simon Zalkind, *Curator*