

# Guide to the Rackstraw Downes Papers

GEN MSS 2142



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September 2024

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** GEN MSS 2142

**CREATOR:** Downes, Rackstraw (1939-), author

**TITLE:** Rackstraw Downes papers

**DATES:** 1957-2017

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 11.67 linear feet (27 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English (Latin script)

**SUMMARY:** The collection contains correspondence, writings, notebooks, articles, essays, reviews, and talks, printed material, interviews, and exhibition catalogues, and other materials related to Rackstraw Downes life and work.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.downes>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.downes>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Rackstraw Downes, 2024.

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### Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research

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## Conditions Governing Use

The Rackstraw Downes Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information consult the appropriate curraor.

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## Preferred Citation

Rackstraw Downes Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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## Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

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## Biographical / Historical

Rodney Harry Rackstraw Downes--realist painter and writer--was born in Pembury, Kent, England in 1939. Downes studied at the Hotchkiss School in Connecticut from 1957-1958, received a Bachelor of Arts in English literature from Cambridge University, as well as a Bachelor of Fine Arts (1963) and a Master in Fine Arts in painting (1964) from Yale University. After finishing his studies, Downes remained in the United States and became a citizen in 1980.

Downes is most well-known for his artworks created in the plein-air style, particularly his painted landscapes and cityscapes of Maine, far West Texas, and New York City.

Downes's writings have been published in numerous publications including the New York Times, Art News, Art in America, and others. Over the course of his career, Downes has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, and is a member of both the Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Academy of Design.

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## Scope and Contents

The collection contains correspondence, writings, notebooks, articles, essays, reviews, and talks, printed material, interviews, and exhibition catalogues, and other materials related to Rackstraw Downes life and work.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged in five series: Series I. Correspondence. Series II. Writings. Series III. Printed material. Series IV. Degrees and certificates. Series V. Travel.

Much of the of the donor's arrangement has been retained. Labeled page protectors from Downes' original binders have been copied and retained when possible.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1954–2023

2.75 linear feet (7 boxes)

Materials in this series are grouped in two subseries: Incoming Correspondence and Outgoing Correspondence.

	Incoming correspondence	1954–2023
	Arranged alphabetically by last name of author.	
b.1	Adams, Ann Jensen	1972–1999
b.1	Adams, Henry	1982–1995
b.1	Albright, Peggy D.	1980–1992, undated
b.1	Alsop, Joseph	1973 August 2
b.1	Ashbery, John	1966, 2000
b.1	Berkson, Bill	1988, 1994
b.1	Berlind, Robert	1991–2011
b.1	Bishop, Isabel	1975 October 8
b.1	Brooks, Bob	1987, undated
b.1	Brown, Susan	1985–1993
b.1	Burkhardt, Rudy	1971–1996, undated
b.1	Burkhardt, Rudy, Jacqueline, Yvonne	1974
b.1	Button, John	undated
b.1	Chappus, Adrien	1973–1974
b.1	Clark, Marcia	1967–1988
b.1	Close, Chuck	undated
b.1	Crews, Alicia	1989, undated
b.1	Cunningham, Betty	1998, 2006, undated
b.1	Davie, Donald	1960, 1962
b.1	Dennis, Donna	2019, 2023
b.1	Denby, Edwin	circa 1965 Winter
b.1	Donadio, Emmie	1991

## Incoming correspondence (continued)

b.1	Epler, Barbara	2006
b.1	Evans, Jane	1973, 1977
b.1	Fiore, Joe	1966 August 31
b.1	Fish, Janet	1987 October 8
b.1	Furman, Hester and Laura	1975, 1990, undated
b.2	Galassi, Peter	2000 May 25
b.2	Glendinning, Victoria	2007 January 23
b.2	Gottesfield, Linda <i>4 Folders</i>	1993-1995, undated
b.2	Greene, Alison de Lima	2002
b.2	Greenberg, Clement	1977 March 13
b.2	Grubb, Nancy	2000-2007
b.2	Hamlin, Louise	1973-2015
b.2	Herbie & Marie	1972, undated
b.2	Holman, Bob; Murray Elizabeth	2000 July 17
b.2	Irish, Jane	1990-1991, undated
b.2	Jacquette, Yvonne	1983
b.3	Jacquette, Yvonne <i>3 Folders</i>	1983-2020
b.3	Jacquette, Yvonne: notebook letters <i>5 Folders</i>	circa 1982-1983
b.3	Jellinek, Roger	1969-2022
b.4	Johnson, Dolores DeBower <i>13 Folders</i>	1996-2010
b.4	Katz, Alex	1965-2000
b.4	Kooning, Elaine de	1976-1977
b.4	Kramer, Hilton	1973 May 5
b.5	Larkin, Joan	1969 March 23
b.5	Leites, Edmund	1974-1988, undated
b.5	Lenhart, Gary	1981-2016

## Incoming correspondence (continued)

b. 5	Long, Jim	2001-2023
b. 5	Lopate, Phillip	1999 December 13
b. 5	Lenharte, Gary	1981-2016
b. 5	Ludman, Joan	1990-1999
b. 5	Maier Museum of Art	1993 September 9
b. 5	Malcolm, Janet	2005 January 20
b. 5	Marx, Leo	1996-1997
b. 5	Mayer, Bernadette	1985-1987
b. 5	Nagy, Tibor de	1983 April 6
b. 5	North, Charles	1983-2016
b. 5	Oklahoma Art Center	1987 October 22
b. 5	Pearlstein, Phillip	2009 July 30
b. 5	Peck, Richard	1986, 1990
b. 5	Penn Prints	1990
b. 5	Peter	1980 December 9
b. 5	Portnow, Marjorie	1996
b. 5	Puryear, Marta	2009, 2014
b. 5	Rhodeside, Jane	1973
b. 5	Russell, John	1982-1983
b. 5	Sandler, Irving	undated
b. 5	Schall, Jan	2012 April 16
b. 5	Schloss, Edith <i>4 Folders</i>	1976-2011
b. 6	Schorr, Mira	1986-1987
b. 6	Schuyler, James	1988, undated
b. 6	Shorr, Harriet	1972-2006, undated
b. 6	Speier, Bob	1997-2004, undated
b. 6	Stack, Gael	1984-1997

## Incoming correspondence (continued)

b. 6	Stevens, Andrea	1996-2000
b. 6	Storr, Robert	undated
b. 6	Stovall, Luanne <i>3 Folders</i>	1988-1998
b. 6	Sultan, Alton	1989-2001, undated
b. 6	Talese, Pamela	2004-2010
b. 6	Themelson, Stefan	1961 March 4
b. 6	Wall, Jeff	1992
b. 6	Ward, John	1976, 1988
b. 6	Warsh, Lewis	1981-1984
b. 6	Wilson, Helen	1985-1991
b. 6	Wilson, Jim	1979, 1990
b. 6	Yang, Jeffrey	2014
b. 6	Correspondence related to shows	2005, 2007
b. 6	Miscellaneous <i>2 Folders</i>	1954-2020
b. 6	Unidentified senders	2003, 2014
	Outgoing correspondence Arranged alphabetically by name of recipient.	1973 June 6– 2005 July 3
b. 7	Alexander, Clytie	2005 February 3
b. 7	Art in America	1988
b. 7	Hirschl and Adler Galleries	1987 September 24
b. 7	Kramer, Hilton	1988 May 5
b. 7	Larkin, Corina	2005-07-03
b. 7	Moynihan, Daniel Patrick	1988 February 2
b. 7	Myers, John Bernard	1983, undated
b. 7	New York Review	1973 June 6
b. 7	Unidentified recipients	1980-2003



**Series II: Writings, 1900–2017***5.08 linear feet (13 boxes)*

Materials in this series arranged chronologically.

Contains notebooks, speeches, reviews, criticism, and other writings by Rackstraw Downes.

	Notebooks	1953 June–2012
b. 8	Bryanston School commonplace book, poetry transcriptions <i>3 Folders</i>	1953 June-1953 July, undated
b. 8	Notebook	1957-1958, 1966
b. 8	Pedagogical notebook draft of holism daybook	circa 1960s
b. 8	Daybook	circa 1960s
b. 8	Notebook	1960 March-1961 August, 1966
b. 9	Notebook <i>4 Folders</i>	1966-1974
b. 9	Italy book I	undated
b. 9	Rome Villa d'este Lucca Urbino Arezzo Florence Pisa	undated
b. 9	Venice Bergamo Rome Parma Sicily	1974
b. 9	England Holland Belgium with Rosemarie Beck	undated
b. 10	Naples Rome	1974 December 2-1975
b. 10	Rome London	1975
b. 10	Meaning of landscape	1975
b. 10	Notebook	1975
b. 10	Notebook	1975 Winter- Spring
b. 10	Notebook	1975 April 5
b. 10	Notes	undated
b. 10	Notebook	1975 March 23-1975 June 3
b. 10	Notebook	1976 Winter
b. 10	"Naifs"	1978-1979
b. 11	Notebook <i>4 Folders</i>	1977-1980
b. 11	On naive painting Fairfield Porter talk	early 1980s

## Notebooks (continued)

b. 11	Notebook <i>5 Folders</i>	1983-1997
b. 12	Notebook <i>2 Folders</i>	1998-1999
b. 12	Under the Gowanus the journal of the painting <i>5 Folders</i> This folder contains Books 1-5.	1999
b. 12	Under the Gowanus the journal of the painting, Books 6-7 <i>2 Folders</i>	1999-2000
b. 12	Notebook <i>5 Folders</i>	2000-2001
b. 13	Notebook <i>15 Folders</i>	2001-2009
b. 14	Notebook <i>2 Folders</i>	2009-2010
b. 14	Texas and New York	2009-2012
b. 14	RD's songbook	undated
b. 15	Pavannes and divagations by Ezra Pound	1961 October
b. 15	Jesus Christ, Ponce; Francis Picabia	1962 February
b. 15	Listening to Gabo	1962 May
b. 15	Johnson's theory of language	1962 October
b. 15	Letter to the Editor, The Carleton Miscellany	1962 Winter
b. 15	Culture and anarchy	1963 Spring
b. 15	Master of Fine Arts thesis, Yale University	1964 May 20
b. 15	Welliver's travels	1967 November
b. 15	Pictures of pictures	1968 December 1
b. 15	Hans Hokanson exhibition review	1968
b. 15	Richard Linder exhibition review	circa 1968
b. 15	John Koch exhibition review	circa 1968
b. 15	Barbara Hepworth exhibition review	1968
b. 15	Friedrich Hunterwasser retrospective review	1968-1969
b. 15	Joseph Fiore exhibition review	1969
b. 15	Studies in art architecture and design	1969 December 10

b. 15	Watercolorist for all seasons (on Charles Burchfield)	1970 May
b. 15	Rosemarie Beck exhibition review	circa 1970
b. 15	Hans Hartung exhibition review	1971
b. 15	More words and pictures	1971 December 5
b. 15	More words and pictures	1971 December
b. 15	Slide talk at Penn. for students, after visit to London, Amsterdam, Brussels	1972
b. 15	Talking to the driver: the documents of the 20th century art	1972 December 31
b. 15	Big, complete state: notes	circa 1972
b. 15	Four fallacies in modern art criticism	1973
b. 15	Letters of Roger Fry	1973 March 11
b. 15	Picasso's nature and art	1973 May 6
b. 15	Drawing of Paul Cezanne	1973 July 29
b. 15	Four fallacies in modern art criticism	1973 Autumn
b. 15	Art in context: a fresh perspective	1973 December 2
b. 15	What the Sixties meant to me <i>2 Folders</i>	1974-1975 Winter
b. 15	Meaning of landscape <i>2 Folders</i>	1975 Spring
b. 15	Talk given at Skowhegan	1975 Summer
b. 15	Maine	1976
b. 15	Post Modernist painting	1976 Fall
b. 15	Conceptualism of realism <i>2 Folders</i>	1978
b. 15	Landscape views <i>2 Folders</i>	1978
b. 15	Cezanne, the late work	1978 March
b. 15	Unidentified talk: notes	circa 1978
b. 15	Fairfield Porter	1979
b. 16	On Fairfield Porter <i>2 Folders</i>	circa 1979
b. 16	Cityscapes lecture: notes	circa 1979

b. 16	Notes on landscape Alex Katz and Yvonne Jacquette	circa 1980
b. 16	Unidentified talk	circa 1980
b. 16	Unselfconsciousness as a desideratum	circa 1980
b. 16	Restraint	1981
b. 16	What realism means to me <i>4 Folders</i>	1981
b. 16	Brandeis University Fine Arts visiting committee	1981 February 5-1981 February 6
b. 16	Claude's sermons on the mount	1981 October
b. 16	Sermon on the mount	1981 October
b. 16	Talk for George Roeder's class	circa 1981-1982
b. 16	Real, really real, super real catalogue	1981-1982
b. 16	Presences of nature exhibition essay	1982
b. 16	Carnegie International Pittsburgh panel	1982
b. 16	Letter to the editor on Fairfield Porter and Lawrence Alloway	1982 February
b. 16	English landscapes	1982 December
b. 16	Skowhegan talk	circa 1982-1983
b. 16	Talk at Purchase	circa 1982-1983
b. 16	Fairfield Porter panel discussion	1983
b. 16	Response to Lawrence Alloway	1983
b. 16	Fairfield Porter's unrepeatable days	1983 April
b. 16	Letter to Editor Fairfield Porter on art and science: intellect or crank?	1983 May/June
b. 16	Fairfield Porter	1983 November
b. 16	Realism reel-to-reel	circa 1983
b. 16	Artist's statement	1984
b. 16	Talk on landscape	1984 Winter
b. 16	Introduction for Hilton Kramer	1985
b. 16	Henri Rosseau and the idea of the naïve	1985 May
b. 16	Introduction to Lawrence Gowing lecture	1986 Summer
b. 16	Coke works at Clairton, PA 1975	1987
b. 16	Meaning	1987

b. 16	On authenticity and meaning	1987 November
b. 16	New York Studio School fundraising appeal	circa 1988
b. 16	Notes for unidentified talk	circa 1988
b. 16	DeKooning's attitude	1989 Fall
b. 16	Fairfield Porter, the man and ideas <i>2 Folders</i>	1990
b. 17	Landscape with Pam and Syrinx <i>2 Folders</i>	1990
b. 17	Unidentified talk: notes	circa 1990
b. 17	Politics in literature <i>2 Folders</i>	1992
b. 17	What have we made of the landscape? <i>2 Folders</i>	1992 Summer
b. 17	P. H. Robinson generating station <i>2 Folders</i>	1992
b. 17	City views	1992 October- November
b. 17	Fairfield Porter, the man, and the ideas	1993
b. 17	Nature and art are physical <i>2 Folders</i>	1993 February
b. 17	Canal homes at Bayou Vista	1994
b. 17	On the picture plane: notes for panel	1994
b. 17	Picture plane	1994
b. 17	Two birches	1994
b. 17	Notes for the Fairfield Porter Night at the Poetry Project	1994 November
b. 17	Impressionists vs. the salon <i>2 Folders</i>	1996
b. 17	Reinterpreting the landscape (The tenses of landscape)	1996
b. 17	Tenses of landscape	1996 January 20
b. 17	Theatre for the free mind and the strong stomach	1996 July 28
b. 17	Samuel Beckett: theatre for the free mind and strong stomach	1996 July 28
b. 17	John Constable	1997
b. 17	Drawings <i>2 Folders</i>	1998

b. 17	Lightening field	1998
b. 17	Under the Gowanus/Razor Wire	1999
b. 18	Is technology a new form?	1999 March 8
b. 18	Turning the head in empirical space	1999 October 9
b. 18	Fairfield Porter the thought behind the painting	2000
b. 18	Charlie Choate's place	2001
b. 18	Dam at Fairfield	2001
b. 18	Garbage arriving at Fresh Kills in barges is hauled to the top of the landfill in athey wagons, 1990	2001
b. 18	Maynard Fenwick's farm pond 1973	2001
b. 18	Betty Cunningham gallery	2001 September
b. 18	Dragon cement plant	2002
b. 18	In the High Island oil field	2002
b. 18	Water-flow monitoring installations on the Rio Grande near Presidio, TX	2002-2003
b. 18	Dragon cement plant	2003
b. 18	Rudy Burckhardt	2005 Summer
b. 18	Al Held	2005 September
b. 18	My Skowhagan	circa 2005-2006
b. 18	I'm a painter	2006
b. 18	Jim Long exhibition catalog	2006
b. 18	Nature and art are physical	circa 2006
b. 18	Pratt Institute Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts	2007 May 11
b. 18	Henry Roseman	2007 September 11
b. 18	Presidio Horse Racing Association track	circa 2007
b. 18	Questions for Ellen Altfest	2008 May 31
b. 18	John Marin	2009
b. 18	New York Academy of Art commencement address	2009 March 15
b. 18	Marianne Stockbrand	2010 July
b. 18	Panel on Eco-poetics	2010 September 9

b. 18	From there to here <i>3 Folders</i>	2011
b. 18	Democratic vistas/shadows on the land	2012 March 23
b. 18	City as muse panel notes	2012 September
b. 18	Questions for Ron Milewicz	2012 October 2
b. 18	Philip Pearlstein questions	2012 November 20
b. 18	Jonas Mekas award for distinguished service to the arts	2012 December 12
b. 19	Joe Fiore	2013
b. 19	Questions to Donna Dennis	2013 July 11
b. 19	On Edith Scholss	2015
b. 19	Statement for Hotchkiss show	2016
b. 19	Academy of Arts and Letters	2017
b. 19	Letter to my niece	2017 March
b. 19	Introducing Wayne Thiebaud	2017 May 17
b. 19	Giorgio Morandi exhibition review	undated
b. 19	James Ensor exhibition review	undated
b. 19	Emile Antoine Bourdelle exhibition review	undated
b. 19	Neil Welliver exhibition review	undated
b. 19	José de Rivera exhibition review	undated
b. 19	Margaret Israel exhibition review	undated
b. 19	Notes Maine	undated
b. 19	Unidentified lecture	undated
b. 19	Al Held notes	undated
b. 19	Discuss meaning	undated
b. 19	Ethics of the picture plane, space & the unity of actions	undated
b. 18	'Ethics' of picture plane, Cézanne's space, and the unity of action in allegorical painting	undated
b. 19	Holistic & the puristic in modern art with a proposal for a new theory of genres	undated
b. 19	Hunter Collect on tenses in representations and landscape	undated
b. 19	Landscape notes	undated

b. 19	Meaning of landscape	undated
b. 19	Memorandum from Emil Antonucci on a new program for Parsons graphics	undated
b. 19	Nature & art are physical	undated
b. 19	Notes on Van Gogh	undated
b. 19	On art criticism	undated
b. 19	Slide list for unidentified talk	undated
b. 19	Status of landscape artist-one of respect or dismissal?	undated
b. 19	There is a difference between what art professes and what it expresses Contains two drafts.	undated
b. 19	Those trying to explain pictures are as a rule completely mistaken	undated
b. 19	Unidentified	undated
b. 20	Writings by others relating to art <i>8 Folders</i> Contain writings by others, or unidentified writings related to art collected by Rackstraw Downes.	1975, 1978, undated



**Series III: Printed material, 1969–2022***3.42 linear feet (6 boxes)*

Contains articles, clippings, catalogs, and other printed material, primarily related to Rackstraw Downes art.

Materials in this series arranged chronologically.

b. 21	Articles, reviews, interviews, catalogues, and books about Rackstraw Downes <i>12 Folders</i>	1969-1999
b. 22	Articles, reviews, interviews, catalogues, and books about Rackstraw Downes <i>8 Folders</i>	2000-2019
b. 23	Interviews, statements, and other writings about Rackstraw Downes' art <i>13 Folders</i>	1969-2005
b. 24	Announcements and articles <i>4 Folders</i>	1969-2009
b. 25	Exhibition announcements	1978-2008
b. 25	Catalogs <i>5 Folders</i>	1984-2022
b. 27	Catalogs <i>2 Folders</i>	2007-2010
b. 25	Clippings and periodicals <i>5 Folders</i>	1980-2015

**Series IV: Degrees and certificates, 1954–2017***2.08 linear feet (2 boxes)*

Contains awards and degrees given to Rackstraw Downes.

Materials are arranged chronologically.

b. 27	University of Cambridge	1954-1961
b. 26	Hotchkiss School	1958
b. 27	Yale	1963-1964
b. 26	Texas City Proclamation	1997
b. 26	Harvard course online	1997-1998
b. 26	Pratt Institute	2007 May 11
b. 27	Pratt Institute	2007
b. 26	New York Academy of Art <i>2 Folders</i>	2009
b. 26	National Academy	2014
b. 26	MacArthur Foundation	2017

**Series V: Travel, 1998–2010**

*0.42 linear feet (1 box)*

b. 26	India <i>2 Folders</i>	1998
b. 26	Peru	2010

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Art criticism -- United States  
Art critics -- United States -- Archives  
Artists, American -- 20th Century -- Archives  
Artists, American -- 21st century -- Archives  
Landscape painters  
Painters -- United States -- 20th Century -- Archives  
Writers, American -- 20th Century  
Yale University. Alumni

### **Occupations**

Painters -- United States -- 20th Century