VISITING ARTIST LECTURE AT UCR ART DEPARTMENT
Tuesday, January 28, 2014, 4-7 PM, free admission
ARTS Bldg., Rm. 335 – UC Riverside Campus
As a part of the Art Department at UC Riverside’s Visiting Artist Lecture series, artist Joe Biel will present a lecture on his present work at the ARTSblock and future projects.

ARTIST WALKTHROUGH + RECEPTION
Saturday, February 8, 2014
Artist Walkthrough, 5-8 PM / Reception, 6-9 PM, free admission to both events

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Joe Biel received an MFA in Painting from the University of Michigan and is currently on the faculty as Associate Professor in Studio Art at California State University, Fullerton. His work has been exhibited in galleries nationally and internationally at LA Louver Gallery, Roberts and Tilton Gallery, Acorn-Hansen Gallery and Angles Gallery in Los Angeles, Goff + Rosenthal Gallery in New York, Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle, and Gallerie Kuckei/Kuckei in Berlin. Biel has been included in group exhibitions at the Otis College of Art and Design and the Torrance Museum of Art in Los Angeles, the De Young Museum in San Francisco, the Laguna Art Museum in Laguna, CA, and the Hedrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, CT and DiverseWorks in Houston, TX. He has been awarded residencies at the Remis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, NE, at the 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, CA and at the Ballinglen Foundation in Ballycastle, Ireland. He was the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation award in 2003 and 2008. He lives and works in Los Angeles.

Artist’s website: http://www.joebiel.com

SENTRY: Large Scale Drawings by Joe Biel were organized by UCR ARTSblock and curated by Jennifer Frias, Associate Curator, Sweeney Art Gallery, University of California, Riverside. Supported by UCR’s College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS), Gluck Fellows Program of the Arts at UC Riverside, and the City of Riverside. UCR ARTSblock would like to acknowledge the lenders to the exhibition: Blake Byrne Collection, Los Angeles, CA and L.A. Louver, Venice, CA. Special thanks to Joanna Roche, Brian Johnson, Patrick Mason, Devora Orantes and Kevin Stewart-Magee for their assistance in the project.

Joe Biel’s latest body of work sprawls along a stretch of walls in the North Atrium of the Culver Center of the Arts. His site-specific drawing, Sentry (2013), is an ode to humanity and its trial to reconcile the contradictions brought about by endless possibilities and constant changes in modern civilization.

Biel’s figures are often anti-protagonists who are placed in situations in which they function as guises for concepts or ideas. But, unlike most allegories, his ambiguous tales never conclude with a moral. The fragmented “anti-narrative” landscape of Sentry is centered around two unknown, chained figures. They face away from the viewer and stand stoically waist deep in an non-descript body of water.

According to Biel, these figures are titans who have been subdued by a more “civilized” race of younger gods. These titans represent an old world culture and ideals in art, music, literature and film, particularly. To illustrate the dispute, “Irony has only emergency use. Carried over time, it is the voice of the trapped who have come to enjoy their cage.”

They are in their own zone,” he says. “Their indifference comes from the strings in their lives that weaves their interest in what they are doing. They are in their own zone,” he says. “Their indifference comes from the strings in their lives that weaves their interest in what they are doing. They are in their own zone,” he says.

Irony is watching these [the works in Sentry] up and thinking about their relationship to their work, to which one may wonder how many related—or in fact unrelated—strands of attention the mind can simultaneously pursue. This clarity might include compressed moments of direct engagement—seeing and being seen—observed in the disjointed complexity that is the walker’s journey through the arena. These “contradictions” fall in categories of empathy, irony, neutrality, and vulnerability. The title of the exhibition attributes to the concept of a guard or “sentry” whose role is to prevent unauthorized entry to a place and keeps a watchful eye for threat. In Biel’s work, the “sentry” is the impetus for contradictions—protecting what might appear as precious that could materialize into something deterrent. He unfolds the challenges of his figures through latent tableaux tempered by an absence of sequence. Much like the human condition, Biel frames the scenes in his drawings to a riddle allowing the viewer to both relate and negotiate his or her own conclusion.

Sentry

“Irony has only emergency use. Carried over time, it is the voice of the trapped who have come to enjoy their cage.”

- Lewis Hyde

WORKS FROM 2005-2013

Spending time with the art of Joe Biel gives us an open space to think and breathe. Inside the frames of these large and small-scale drawings, we experience a clarity, where seeing edges towards understanding, parallel to those elusive instants where we glimpse our own lives from the outside in. This clarity might included compressed moments of direct engagement—seeing and being seen—observed in the disjointed complexity that is the walker’s journey through the arena. These “contradictions” fall in categories of empathy, irony, neutrality, and vulnerability. The title of the exhibition attributes to the concept of a guard or “sentry” whose role is to prevent unauthorized entry to a place and keeps a watchful eye for threat. In Biel’s work, the “sentry” is the impetus for contradictions—protecting what might appear as precious that could materialize into something deterrent. He unfolds the challenges of his figures through latent tableaux tempered by an absence of sequence. Much like the human condition, Biel frames the scenes in his drawings to a riddle allowing the viewer to both relate and negotiate his or her own conclusion.

The emptiness that the figure in Walker navigates is intriguing. “The negative space is aggressively blank, it’s loud, like a crowd. They are performing, but they are also alone,” the artist clarifies. Both Walker and Promenade reveal figures who are their own vanishing points, their chains the orthogonal lines that form the one-point perspective of their respective journeys.

Roger Shattuck comments in his introduction to Rene Daumal’s allegorical tale, Mount Analogue:

“...how many related—or in fact unrelated—strands of attention the mind can simultaneously pursue has provided a large area of innovation in the arts...techniques for packing the universe into an instant of intensified consciousness...without psychological explanation to us how we divide and co-ordinate our attention in such complex actions as looking at the stars, listening to a fugue, or reading an allegory.

This packing (and unpacking) of the universe is what we are doing when we engage Biel’s art. Shattuck wonders how we achieve such complex actions as star gazing or absorbing Bach. “I’d argue it’s deeply connected to the intensified consciousness required when we examine our own strings-of-being, when we glimpse ourselves from the outside in. It’s like unraveling an allegory. Biel brings us into the open space of self-examination, but never ties us down.

Joanna Reiche
Professor in Art History, California State University, Fullerton

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1 Biel stated in an interview of November 20, 2013 that the figures here are reminiscent of Old Master portraits, where “the person looks out at the viewer, they have a world that they can’t tell you they are on the other side, both literally and figuratively.” He situates us in the realm of the subject, but ever separated from the secret they possess.

2 Promenade bears a direct relationship to Biel’s current undertaking, which is centered primarily to be a “comment on and a “return” of the site of biel’s art project, “Mount Analogue in seeing those [irony in action being up] as an adding about their relationship to it.”

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4 ibid.