



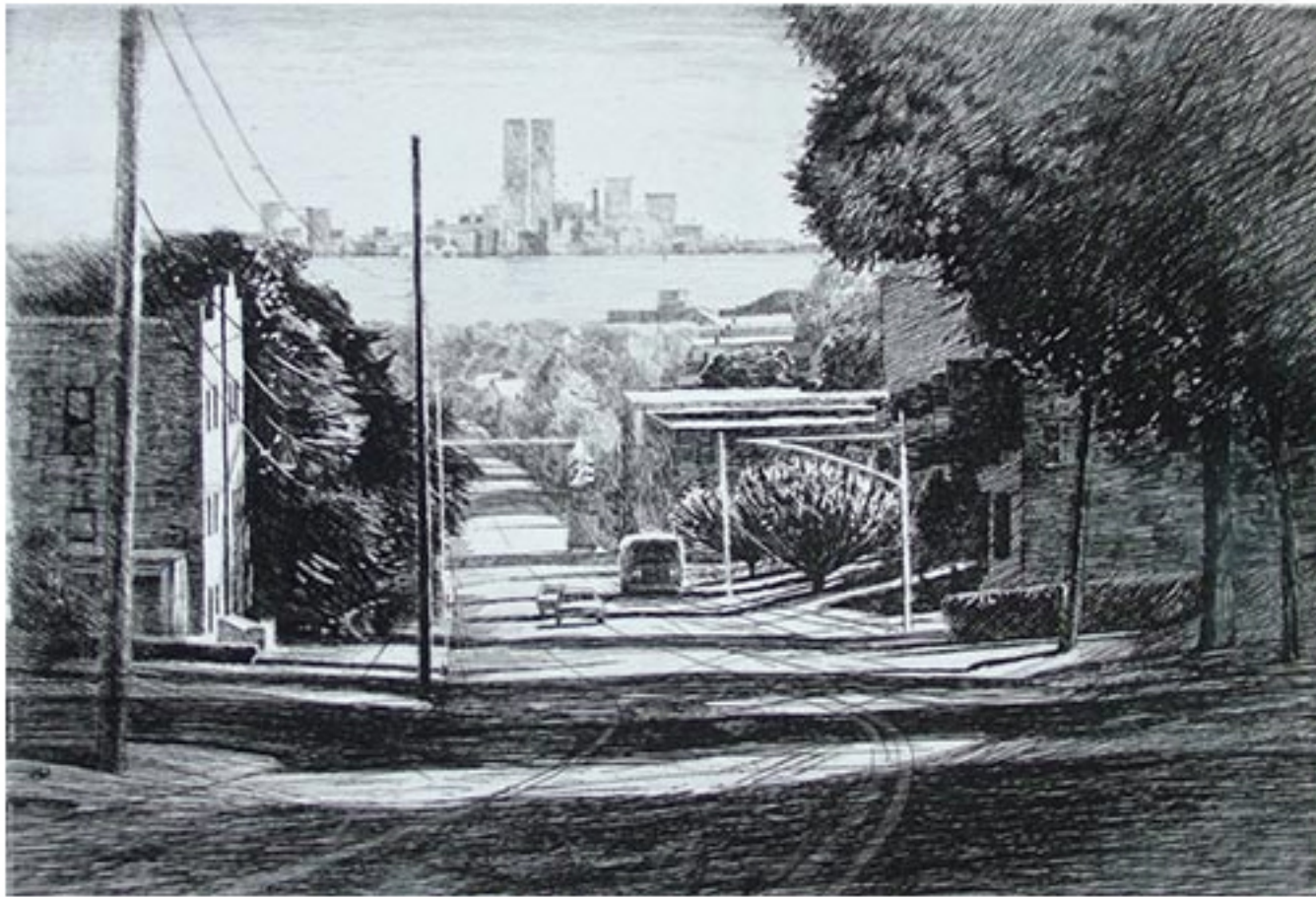
"Eulogy for Kreischerville," by Bill Murphy, etching, 11 x 22 in. Collection of the Library of Congress

# Documenting the Construction of a World-Class Tourist Attraction

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Staten Island is a curious place, with a complicated past, a placid present, and a volatile future. In the middle of this timeline is the New York Wheel, a giant Ferris wheel now under construction that could be the largest wheel in the world, depending on what happens in Dubai. Somebody has to document this historic construction. Somebody like plein air artist [Bill Murphy](#).

The artist has lived all his life on Staten Island, and he’s curious to see what the major project will do to the borough. Between this inevitable tourist attraction and a proposed outlet mall — both near the terminal for the Staten Island Ferry that links the borough to Manhattan — Staten Island seems destined for some big changes, soon. At a chance meeting with the CEO of the New York Wheel project, Murphy suddenly found himself pushing for documentation of the construction of the Ferris wheel. Photos wouldn’t do it, he asserted.



"From Silver Lake," by Bill Murphy, etching, 14 x 17 in. Collection of the New York Historical Society and the New York Transit Museum

“A camera can’t give you the artistic interpretation, the response to an event while it’s happening,” says Murphy. “I think that is really interesting, to be drawing while something is happening. I hadn’t planned it, but the idea came together at that moment when I found myself speaking to the CEO, and I presented the idea of having someone document the building of the Wheel in drawings and paintings, from beginning to its completion.”



"Richmond Terrace, Night," by Bill Murphy, pen and ink, 11 x 14 in.

Right now it’s just a construction site, a foundation, but Murphy is already drawing. Soon, a 630-foot, 1,440-passenger Ferris wheel will dominate the waterfront. “It’s a very big deal on Staten Island,” says Murphy. “It will dominate the waterfront, and there’s a lot of conversation about what it’s going to bring to the island. I’m excited about just the formal aspect of a huge form rising above this area that I know. It’s going to be visually stunning. The views from it will be incredible.”



"Factory, Winter, Dusk," by Bill Murphy, 2011, graphite, 16 x 14 in.

The artist, an instructor at Wagner College on Staten Island, says he hopes to explore how the addition of a monumental structure like the New York Wheel changes the perception of the landscape. “People like me, who have lived here our whole lives, have a hard time envisioning it,” says Murphy. He’s long been intrigued by the Staten Island waterfront. As port activity dropped off in the borough, warehouses emptied out, leaving empty hulks along the shoreline. “It makes interesting forms, interesting places to draw and paint,” he says.



"First Study for the Hunter (Rosebank, Behind St. Mary's)," by Bill Murphy, 2010, graphite, 18 x 28 in.

In addition to the end product, the process interests Murphy. “The chaos of something being built — the demolition and construction — is really interesting,” he says. Murphy draws in graphite and pen-and-ink, paints in watercolor, and creates etchings and lithographs. He says he is most intent on making large drawings of the New York Wheel construction. “I’ll make at least 10 drawings for a coffee table book that’s in the works, and beyond that, for both the Wheel company and myself, other images will come from it, more finished pieces will come from it,” says Murphy. “I’m going to see where it leads me.”



"Bayonne Dry Dock," by Bill Murphy, 2010, graphite, 17 x 23 in.

The New York Wheel is scheduled to be finished in 2017.