

**Alexis Rockman: *The Toxic Sublime***

**January 11–February 24, 2024**

**Level Two**

Magenta Plains is pleased to present *The Toxic Sublime*, a solo exhibition of new watercolors by Alexis Rockman. These watercolors are conceived from unexpected perspectives, collapsing the boundary between the viewer and the world we inhabit. Examining the euphoria, psychedelia, and enchantment of experiencing nature, these works encourage the viewer to set aside fatalism in favor of an energetic defense of the environment.

The works featured in *The Toxic Sublime* hew to Rockman's career-long interest in biology and ecology, with a naturalist's eye for detail. However unlike much of his previous work, here the human element is conspicuously absent. Instead, moments of wonder typically unseen by human beings are captured; a migration of monarch butterflies seen from the forest floor, soldier ants in conflict with a fly on a branch, or the gentle opening of a poppy's petals. The careful attention and care for these moments from Rockman is clear in his thoughtful execution, however the studied realism of his past work in oil paint is exchanged here for a much more abstracted, almost hallucinatory quality in these images. One gets the sense that the viewer is not supposed to imagine these moments as observed experiences, but instead as almost dreamlike phenomena, representations of an ideal natural world separate from the empirical human experience.

*The Toxic Sublime* is an expansion of Rockman's ongoing project to use the tools of fine art to draw attention to human degradation of our natural world. However, as opposed to crafting a forward-looking dystopian warning, Rockman uses these watercolors as an opportunity to meditate on the perception of wonder and beauty inherent to our Earth. In his hands, these glimpses seem almost alien, a world onto their own.

Born in New York City in 1962, Alexis Rockman is an artist and environmental activist who began making paintings and works on paper to build environmental awareness in the mid-1980s. Embarking on expeditions to distant locations like Antarctica and Madagascar in the company of professional naturalists, his work tells stories of natural histories confronting the challenging future we face of the biodiversity crisis, global warming, and genetic engineering.

Notable solo museum exhibitions include *Alexis Rockman: Manifest Destiny* at the Brooklyn Museum (2004), which traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts (2004) and the Rhode Island School of Design (2005). In 2010, the Smithsonian American Art Museum organized *Alexis Rockman: A Fable for Tomorrow*, a major survey of his paintings and works on paper which toured to The Wexner Center for the Arts. In 2013, The Drawing Center mounted *Drawings from Life of Pi*, featuring the artist's collaboration with Ang Lee on the award-winning film "Life of Pi" (2012). His series of 76 New Mexico Field Drawings was included in *Future Shock* at SITE Santa Fe (2017-18). *Alexis Rockman: The Great Lakes Cycle*, a major exhibition of large-scale paintings, watercolors and field drawings, toured the Midwest in 2018-20, opening at the Grand Rapids Art Museum and traveled to five other institutions in the Great Lakes region. *Alexis Rockman: Shipwrecks*, opened at the Peabody Essex Museum (2021) and traveled to Guild Hall (2021), Ackland Art Museum (2022), and Princeton University Art Museum (2022). In May, 2023, The Mystic Seaport Museum presented *Alexis Rockman: Oceanus*, featuring ten large-scale watercolors and an 8-by-24-foot panoramic painting commissioned by the museum for their permanent collection. *Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman: A Journey to Nature's Underworld* was presented at the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT in Summer 2023 and will travel to the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, The Tang Teaching Museum and other institutions through 2025.

Rockman's work is represented in many museum collections, including the Baltimore Museum of Art; Brooklyn Museum; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; Grand Rapids Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; New Orleans Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; and Whitney Museum of American Art. He lives and works in Warren, Connecticut.