

WEISMAN ART MUSEUM

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Contact: Michael Curran | curranm@umn.edu

Alexis Rockman: The Great Lakes Cycle

October 11, 2019 – January 5, 2020



MINNEAPOLIS — This fall, WAM is proud to present *Alexis Rockman: The Great Lakes Cycle*. Organized by the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) in Michigan, the exhibition features an ambitious suite of paintings and works on paper by New York-based artist Alexis Rockman. In a state bound by Lake Superior and part of a region contiguous to Lake Michigan, Minnesotans are keenly aware of the importance, robustness, and fragility of these shining, open waters.

Intrigued by and concerned about this essential water system, *The Great Lakes Cycle* developed out of Rockman's rigorous research, travel, and interaction with people in the region—especially scientists who specialize in the lakes and their ecosystems. Rockman has translated this information from first-hand experiences to biological facts, to digital sketches, and finally to the works we'll display. The culmination of this intensive research project—the exhibition—is divided into three sections: field drawings, large-scale watercolors, and monumental, mural-sized paintings.

During his travels to the region's varied ecosystems, Rockman collected dirt, sand, leaves, and other organic materials to create his field drawings—monochrome studies of flora and fauna. The twenty-eight framed field drawings of *The Great Lakes Cycle* encompass a wide variety of species, sites, and materials. The sources for his pigments include sand from Whiskey Island along the Cuyahoga River, the beaches of Presque Isle off the coast of Lake Erie, and Michigan's Sleeping Bear Dunes, and coal dust from the Grand Haven Power Plant near Grand Rapids.

Rockman has an important parallel practice of work on paper, and he has created a dramatic suite of six watercolors for the exhibition. His mastery of watercolor painting distills an atmospheric energy and brings a lively spontaneity to the forefront.

The centerpiece of *The Great Lakes Cycle* is a suite of five panoramic paintings exploring themes that emerged during Rockman's research, through direct observation and dialogue with scientists, historians, and anthropologists. Rockman embeds evidence from geological, climatic, biological, and human history within these broad vistas, passing through the centuries to focus on humankind's present relationship with the Great Lakes, and in some cases going beyond to a vision of the lakes' futures.

Combining compositional approaches from the history of landscape painting with stylistic languages, pictorial practices, and the vocabularies of science, these paintings make visible the many stresses on the lakes' ecological equilibrium. It is our goal that *The Great Lakes Cycle* will create wider awareness of these issues and inspire everyone to play a role in

protecting our environment and preserving these precious resources for future generations.

About Alexis Rockman

Born in 1962, Rockman was raised in New York City. As a child, he explored Central Park, watched early nature documentaries on television, and frequented the Museum of Natural History, where his mother worked for anthropologist Margaret Mead. Rockman pursued art at the Rhode Island School of Design and Manhattan's School of Visual Arts, and gained early recognition in the mid-1980s for his eerie bio-botanical scenes. The scope of his imagery expanded as he explored historical and contemporary artistic expression and mined the vernacular and practice of scientific representation. Rockman has been recognized for his artistic range and for the intensity of his commitment to environmental preservation.

Related Programs

The Great Lakes Cycle Preview Party | Friday, October 11, 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.

Be the first to view the exhibition, see and touch specimens from the Bell Museum, and visit the Water Bar to taste and learn about water from the Twin Cities' region and Dakota peoples' relationship to it.

Artist Talk with Alexis Rockman | Wednesday, November 6, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Join Rockman as he discusses his multi-faceted project.

Field Drawings with Alexis Rockman | Friday, November 8, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Work alongside Alexis Rockman, and immerse yourself in his creative process and the ecology of the Great Lakes. Create an original work of art of your own with found material from around campus.

Weekend with the Weisman | Saturday, November 9, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

An afternoon full of water-themed activities based on *The Great Lakes Cycle*: Build a diorama alongside Bell Museum guides, write to your legislators, adopt a drain, and learn about environmental organizing. All ages welcome!

About WAM

Since its origin in 1934, the Weisman Art Museum has been a teaching museum for the University of Minnesota. Today, education remains central to the museum's mission to create art experiences that spark discovery, critical thinking, and transformation, linking the

University and the community. WAM is located at 333 East River Road, Minneapolis, on the University of Minnesota campus. Exhibitions and programs are always free.

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