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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ALEXIS ROCKMAN: "RUBICON"
17 September – 2 November 2013

New York, NY: 18 July 2013 – Sperone Westwater is pleased to announce Alexis Rockman's exhibition of new paintings and watercolors entitled "Rubicon." For almost three decades, Rockman has depicted a darkly surreal vision of the collision between civilization and nature. The artist's epic paintings of apocalyptic scenarios, once described as "toxic sublime," demonstrate his signature subject matter as well as his meticulous technique depicting scientific detail, skillful use of intense color, and monumental scale. The show's title "Rubicon," an expression originating with Julius Caesar's passing of the Rubicon River in 49 BC and thereafter becoming synonymous with "the point of no return," alludes to the artist's belief that our natural world has suffered irrevocable damage, beyond repair.

"Rubicon" features two epic paintings thematically focused on New York City, where the artist was born in 1962 and has lived ever since. The monumental painting *Bronx Zoo*, 2012-2013, measuring 7 x 14 feet, depicts with virtuosity and wit an anarchistic scene amid the ruins of New York's most legendary zoo, founded in 1899. The zoo's neoclassic buildings and court have been overtaken by animals that inhabit it. Although human figures are absent in Rockman's painting, their existence is implied by the decay of their buildings and the debris of their society. *Bronx Zoo* suggests the savage moment that occurs at the intersection of human culture and the natural world. To the artist, the zoo is "the last bastion for biodiversity," a place for protecting and conserving those animals whose natural habitat has been destroyed. This dystopian narrative expands the visual language and scope of traditional natural history painting into themes of contemporary relevance, most prominently the environment.

By contrast, the second epic painting in the exhibition *Gowanus*, 2013, measuring 6 x 7.5 feet, focuses on what is discarded and/or discharged as a result of urban development and mechanization. Once a rich and prosperous wetland with a thriving ecosystem, Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal "has become one of the nation's most extensively contaminated water bodies" (EPA, 2013). Since its completion in 1869, serious environmental problems have ravaged the area. It has become a putrid reminder of New York's industrial past, contaminated by PCBs, coal tar wastes, heavy metals and volatile organics – the water burns green at times and has a sulfurous smell in the summer. Rockman was inspired to portray this site when in the winter of 2013, a dolphin swam into the polluted waterway and died the same day – an event chronicled in *The New York Times* on 26 January 2013. There will also be two series of watercolors: a set in sepia and grisaille related to *Gowanus* in the East Gallery and a suite of larger watercolors, 75 x 52 inches, each, on the second floor.

Recent important solo exhibitions include "Alexis Rockman: Manifest Destiny" at the Brooklyn Museum, in 2004, which traveled to several institutions including RISD and the Wexner Center. The Smithsonian American Art Museum organized "Alexis Rockman: A Fable for Tomorrow," a major touring survey of Rockman's paintings and works on paper in 2010. Rockman's work is represented in important institutional collections, such as the Brooklyn Museum; The Baltimore Museum of Art; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; LACMA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; New Orleans Museum of Art; The Smithsonian American Art Museum; and Whitney Museum of American Art.

Concurrently with Rockman's exhibition at Sperone Westwater, The Drawing Center, New York, will show "Drawings from Life of Pi" from 27 September - 3 November 2013. Rockman recently collaborated with director Ang Lee on the prize-winning film "Life of Pi," preparing conceptual sketches of a dreamlike journey into the depths of the ocean to serve as visual inspiration.

A 24-page catalogue will be published on the occasion of this exhibition. For more information as well as images, please contact Aurelia Rauch at +1 212 999 7337 or aurelia@speronewestwater.com. Please find further documentation on our website www.speronewestwater.com.