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## reviews: new york

### Alexis Rockman

#### Drawing Center and Sperone Westwater

Alexis Rockman's brilliantly painted, richly imagined, encyclopedic projects have the panoramic qualities of dioramas and cycloramas, which is not surprising given that the artist spent much of his

monstrosities in the water as potential snacks. On one of the pipes, two squirrels are copulating—a signature motif. Life, evidently, goes on.

At the Drawing Center was Rockman's vividly imagined rendition of aquatic life. It included a selection of the hundreds of drawings of real and invented species he



Alexis Rockman, *Bronx Zoo*, 2012–13, oil on wood, 84" x 168". Sperone Westwater.

youth at the American Museum of Natural History and the Bronx Zoo.

His interpretations, however, are much more surreal than the models that inspired them—and can be cheekily toxic. They might be thought of as Hudson River School on acid. Apocalyptic visions of biology gone wild, the works offer up a kind of lurid, aberrant sublime, steeped in imagery from science fiction and horror films. And Rockman's subjects—thoroughly, fanatically researched—are chimerical nightmares, the fallout from industrial holocausts. They are also extravagant fantasias in which the artist cheerfully, enthusiastically imagines the worst.

In the exhibition at Sperone Westwater of recent work—including a lyrical tondo that suggests a porthole view—the focal point was two immense paintings, *Bronx Zoo* (2012–13) and *Gowanus* (2013). The former includes an irradiated landscape of destroyed buildings, a miscellany of predators, eviscerated prey, prehistoric birds, and more, above water—as in a geological cross section—teeming with primitive life-forms. The latter painting is a more direct environmental critique with chemical effluents and waste pouring into Brooklyn's murky Gowanus Canal from pipes and open sewers, as a disproportionately large cat perches on a rock, eyeing the

had created for the 2012 film *Life of Pi*. From initial sketches to the watercolors that were used for animated sequences, they were a large part of what made the film so visually spectacular—and a superb achievement of digital cinema.

—Lilly Wei