

# Journey to Nature's Underworld





*An exhibition exploring the  
intersection of art and ecology.*



MARK DION and ALEXIS ROCKMAN (with Aaron Delehanty, Loud Cow Studio), *American Landscape*, 2022, mixed-media diorama with taxidermy, found objects, and painted background, 96 in. x 16 ft. x 87 in. Courtesy the artists and American Federation of Arts.









In his book *Consilience*, the biologist E. O. Wilson writes that, during a time overwhelmed by data yet lacking in wisdom, the ability to synthesize information critically has become essential. This challenge is at the heart of a unique exhibition that brings together two artists and friends whose work reflects deep engagement with environmental issues over the past three decades.

Titled *Journey to Nature's Underworld*, the exhibition showcases the work of two prominent figures in contemporary art: Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman. The show offers a comprehensive survey of both artists' work from 1990 to the present, highlighting their shared dedication to exploring human relationships with the natural world. According to Dion, "Alexis and I both look to the natural sciences as a source of inspiration. As artists in frequent dialogue with scientists, we know that art and science are very different endeavors, each with their own distinct methodologies, jobs, and rules. While they are not the same, art and science are powerful allies. At the very least, they share the same enemies: intolerance, prejudice, fundamentalism, ignorance, and doctrinaire thinking."

Although their media differ—Dion often utilizes taxidermy dioramas and specimen cabinets, and Rockman produces detailed landscape paintings—they share an approach rooted in meticulous research, allegory, and cultural critique. Their works serve as visual dialogues with scientific disciplines, blending factual observation with artistic interpretation.

Their art challenges traditional notions of authority and objectivity associated with museums of natural history and scientific inquiry. By mimicking and subverting these display conventions, they invite viewers to question how nature is represented and understood. Their works often incorporate elements of dark humor and popular culture, making complex ecological issues accessible and thought-provoking.

Organized by the American Federation of the Arts and curated by Suzanne Ramljak, the exhibition has toured across several institutions, including the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut, the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, and the Lowe Art Museum in Miami. It will be on view at the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State from August 30 through December 7, 2025.

*Journey to Nature's Underworld* exemplifies how art can serve as a lens into environmental issues, encouraging viewers to reflect critically on humans' relationship with nature and the urgent need for informed action. As the world faces complex ecological dilemmas, such cross-disciplinary explorations become increasingly vital in fostering understanding and inspiring change.

ALEXIS ROCKMAN, *The Farm*, 2000, oil and acrylic on wood panel, 96 x 120 inches. Collection of Joy of Giving Something, Inc., New York. Courtesy American Federation of Arts.





ALEXIS ROCKMAN, *Pioneers*, from *The Great Lakes Cycle*, 2017, oil and alkyd on wood panel, 72 x 144 inches. Courtesy Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York, and American Federation of Arts.



ALEXIS ROCKMAN, *Departure*, from *Wallace's Line* series, 2018, oil on Dibond, 44 x 56 inches. Collection of Barbara and Jonathan Lee. Courtesy American Federation of Arts.

(right) MARK DION, *Cabinet of Marine Debris*, 2014, wood and metal cabinet, marine debris, plastic, rope, 113 x 84 x 32 inches. Margulies Collection, Miami. Courtesy American Federation of Arts.













MARK DION, *Department of Tropical Research – Jungle Station*, 2017, mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery and American Federation of Arts.