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VIRGINIA MOCA PRESENTS *MARK DION AND ALEXIS ROCKMAN: JOURNEY TO NATURE'S UNDERWORLD*

THE FIRST TWO-PERSON EXHIBITION OF THE CELEBRATED ARTISTS EXPLORES THEIR JOINT ARTISTIC VENTURES INTO OUR INCREASINGLY IMPERILED NATURAL REALM

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA (September 28, 2023) – The Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (Virginia MOCA) is proud to announce *Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman: Journey to Nature's Underworld*, a major new traveling exhibition of the internationally renowned and closely linked artists. Featuring approximately 30 large-scale paintings and sculptures created by Dion and Rockman between 1990 and 2021, the exhibition surveys three decades of avid exploration and engagement with the natural world. *Journey to Nature's Underworld* offers a timely examination and cautionary vision of our present ecological moment, inviting viewers to voyage with the artists to the threatened yet alluring depths of our environmental terrain. On view February 9 through June 9, 2024, the exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and guest curated by Suzanne Ramljak along with Virginia MOCA site curator Heather Hakimzadeh.

Both Dion and Rockman have achieved widespread acclaim for their probing commentary on the fraught relationship between humans and nature. Among the first artists to investigate the realities and consequences of environmental devastation, the two developed unique visual vocabularies and trajectories in the contemporary art world. Rockman produces monumental, meticulously detailed landscape paintings, at once densely populated with living creatures and devoid of human presence; Dion creates elaborate sculptural installations that often resemble taxidermy displays or cabinets of curiosities. Their distinctive styles similarly explore the cultural and behavioral forces shaping our landscape, raising alarm about the future of our planet while celebrating its lasting wonder and untamed beauty.

Since they first met in New York in the late 1980s, the artists have embarked on joint expeditions to the Central and South American tropics; bonded over their shared childhood fascination with natural history and outdoor exploration; co-edited the 1996 book, *Concrete Jungle*, on anthropogenic ecosystems; and propelled each other's commitment to art, environmentalism, and preservation. Yet never before have the artists exhibited together in a shared survey highlighting their artistic allegiances and mutual love of the natural world. A new collaborative piece entitled *American Landscape*, created specially for the exhibition, marks this unprecedented journey through the artists' 30-year creative union.

"*Journey to Nature's Underworld* speaks to an enduring reality of our region and our world—the fragility of nature," said Virginia MOCA Director and CEO Gary Ryan. "The work of Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman is a passionate appeal to take care of our planet. The beautiful and devastating voicings of their concerns about the perils faced if we, as citizens of the world, don't take care are incredibly poignant now."

Journey to Nature's Underworld premiered at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, CT, in June 2023, and will travel to the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY; the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami; and the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State University after the Virginia MOCA presentation.

Virginia MOCA presents *Journey to Nature's Underworld* in conjunction with *Spencer Tinkham: Witness*, a solo exhibition of the artist and Hampton Roads native's close study and sculptural storytelling of birds and their habitats. Together, the exhibitions remind us how inextricably linked we are with the environment and all living beings, continuing Virginia MOCA's commitment to exploring environmental issues and sustainability through contemporary art. The Museum has worked to initiate dialogue about our threatened ecological landscape through exhibitions such as *Maya Lin: A Study of Water*, *When the Water Rises: Recent Paintings* by Julie Heffernan, and *Courtney Mattison: Sea Change*, profoundly impactful presentations that emphasized the fragility of our natural world and the urgency and local relevance of our global climate crisis.

A richly illustrated catalogue accompanying *Journey to Nature's Underworld* will be available for sale. Co-published by the American Federation of Arts and Hirmer Publishers, the catalogue explores the work of Dion and Rockman in an introduction by guest curator Suzanne Ramljak; an essay by writer, art critic, and activist Lucy R. Lippard; a new joint interview with organizer and writer Patrick Jaojoco; and a timeline of the artists' lives.

The exhibitions will open to the public on Friday, February 9, 2024, offering free admission to all. An exhibition preview and member reception will take place on Thursday, February 8, inviting all members for a first look and a chance to meet the artists.

Located in the Virginia Beach Oceanfront area at 2200 Parks Avenue, Virginia MOCA is open from 10:00 AM–8:00 PM on Thursdays, and 10:00 AM–4:00 PM on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. For more information, please visit virginiamoca.org or call 757-425-0000.

Free admission is made possible through underwriting from Sentara, Optima Health, and the Goode Family Foundation. *Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman: Journey to Nature's Underworld* is organized by the American Federation of Arts. Support for the exhibition has been provided by Elizabeth Belfer and Victoria E. Triplett.

About the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art

An AAM accredited non-collecting museum, Virginia MOCA presents exceptional, locally relevant, and nationally resonant exhibitions that invite neighbors, strangers, students, families, communities, and cultures to explore our shared humanity through contemporary art, in all of its timeliness, restlessness, and beauty. For more information, visit virginiamoca.org. Follow Virginia MOCA at @VirginiaMOCA on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#) to receive the latest updates.



About the American Federation of Arts

The American Federation of Arts is the leader in traveling exhibitions internationally. A nonprofit organization founded in 1909, the AFA is dedicated to enriching the public's experience and understanding of the visual arts through organizing and touring art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishing exhibition catalogues featuring important scholarly research, and developing educational programs.



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