

JOHN BERGGRUEN GALLERY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

John Alexander: Recent Paintings and Drawings

March 16 – April 23, 2016

I try to look back at my life and see where I came from as an artist, see where my roots are, what emotional situations I've gone through, and put all that into my work. . . . I want the art to be highly personal and very much about my interpretation, my reflection, of what my experiences in the world have been, not in an illustrative way, but in a real emotional way that is universal.¹

John Berggruen Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings and drawings by Texas-born, New York-based artist John Alexander, on view March 16 – April 23, 2016. *John Alexander: Recent Paintings and Drawings* is the first solo exhibition for Alexander in the gallery and will feature works inspired by the natural landscape—canvases abound in highly detailed, realistically rendered botanicals and animals—a subject the artist has returned to in recent years. An opening reception for the artist will be held on Wednesday, March 16th from 5:30pm–7:30pm.

For Alexander, whose childhood consisted of camping and fishing trips in the bayous and woods of East Texas, nature is a frequent subject. His lush paintings populated with diverse flora and fauna signal a reverence for the tradition of landscape painting as practiced by such art historical masters as Claude Monet or the more recent Hudson River School painters of the American northeast. As an undergraduate majoring in applied-arts at Lamar University in Beaumont, Alexander was influenced by professor and friend, Jerry Newman, whose courses emphasized academic training in drawing, painting, and art history. Himself a skilled draftsman, Newman encouraged his students to develop of a firm foundation in still-life drawing and to copy sketches by such masters as Leonardo da Vinci. Evidence of Alexander's rigorous formal training is not lost on a viewer of his works, which profess the skill and knowledge of an artist eagerly passionate about nature from the standpoint of enthusiastic student and devoted environmentalist. Alexander's vision of nature, for example, was influenced by his father's avid environmentalism and acute awareness of the devastating effects that industry and pollution had on the forests and habitats of his native Texas.

The bucolic subject matter of Alexander's paintings belies their subtle energy. His keen observations of the natural world and vivid imagery are the idiosyncratic expressions of an artist for whom everything is symbolic. The exoticism and beauty of his creations, as romantic as they seem, possess an introspective quality and speak to the psychology and experiences of the artist. Alexander has described his manner of painting as being akin to the same quality of emotional expressiveness that characterizes the work of the Abstract Expressionists.

There's very much similarity in the way I paint, even though my subjects are realistic, and the way Abstract Expressionists paint. It's very gestural, very direct, a lot of paint. Pushing the paint around. Letting it splash and drip and so forth.²

His landscape paintings, though charged with rich expressive content, are relatively more moderate in subject than is another category of Alexander's oeuvre—his heavily satirical, oftentimes scathing

¹ John Alexander, quoted by Patricia C. Johnson, "Ex-Houston Painter Feels Comfortable with His Emotional and Professional Maturity," *Houston Chronicle*, October 14, 1984, 16.

² John Alexander, quoted by Bridget leRoy, "Texas Twang in Amagansett," *The Independent*, August 31, 1994.

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figurative paintings. His work has been described as capturing, “nature at its grandest and man at his worst.” With the same urgency towards symbolism and inciting activism, be it environmental, political, or social, Alexander’s allegorical paintings are as caustic as his paintings of nature are serene. Influenced by the moral insistence and satirical aspects of the work of Spanish painter Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, Alexander imbues his work with a similar social conscience, commenting on the human condition and society’s demons—immorality, political corruption, governmental dysfunction, and race. His protagonists are a cast of heavily caricatured, derisive figures intentionally masked to lend to them universality and timelessness. As Alexander has confessed, his landscapes provide a welcome counterbalance to the intense, oftentimes heavy-handed critical agenda of his figurative works. Though only the former category will be on view in this exhibition, it is revealing to place these in the context of Alexander’s larger body of work.

John Alexander was born in Beaumont, Texas, in 1945. He received his B.F.A. from Lamar University in Beaumont in 1968 and his M.F.A. from the Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1970. Following graduate school, Alexander taught at the University of Houston. Though much of his art is influenced by his Texas roots, to categorize Alexander as solely a “Texas” artist would be inaccurate. More than 30 years ago in 1979, having established himself in Houston as a prominent local artist, Alexander moved to New York City. Today the artist divides his time between his SoHo studio loft and home in Amagansett, East Hampton. Alexander’s work has been widely exhibited at such prestigious institutions as the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, both in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. His work is featured in the permanent collections of a number of leading institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Dallas Museum of Art; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; as well as many other distinguished public and private collections worldwide.

The artist and John Berggruen Gallery look forward to welcoming you on March 16th at 5:30pm for the opening reception of *John Alexander: Recent Paintings and Drawings*, on view March 16 – April 23, 2016 at 228 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108. Images and preview are available upon request. For all inquiries, please contact the gallery by phone at 415-781-4629 or by email at info@berggruen.com.

Gallery hours: Monday – Friday: 9:30am – 5:30pm; Saturday: 10:30am – 5:00pm