

# Alexis Rockman

## Vertigo

06.01.2026

17.01.2026

MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is very pleased to start 2026 with *Vertigo*, a solo presentation by American painter Alexis Rockman.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines vertigo as “a sensation of whirling and loss of balance, associated particularly with looking down from a great height.”

Recently affected by bouts of vertigo himself, Rockman channels the physical and perceptual disorientation of his symptoms into a visionary pictorial register. Light fractures through overlapping leaves, butterflies appear suspended like distant constellations, and petals rise overhead in monumental scale. The familiar lexicon of natural history painting—long central to Rockman’s practice—slips here into a cosmic, dreamlike terrain, where empirical observation gives way to embodied sensation. Addressing the canon of landscape painting from this uniquely vulnerable position, Rockman not only inverts conventional modes of representation, but also proposes an interval of escape: a suspended point of view that functions like an open parenthesis within daily life, offering the viewer the serene vastness of open sky, momentarily freed from terrestrial instability.

Alexis Rockman’s painterly practice has long been defined by a rigorous synthesis of scientific research, art-historical reference, and technical virtuosity. Working primarily in oil, his paintings are characterized by a meticulous attention to detail paired with an expressive command of gesture and atmosphere. Dense layers of pigment are combined with compositional precision, allowing hyper-realistic passages to coexist with more fluid, painterly dissolutions. This oscillation between control and spontaneity mirrors Rockman’s sustained engagement with ecological systems—complex, interdependent, and perpetually in flux—while situating his work within a lineage that spans from Hudson River School romanticism to contemporary environmental critique. His recent works on paper extend this investigation through watercolor, embracing translucency and luminosity as vehicles for both immediacy and fragility.

Central to *Vertigo* is Rockman’s reconfiguration of the pictorial viewpoint, which reinvents the genre of landscape painting by relocating the viewer’s perspective from the ground upward. Rather than surveying nature from a dominant or panoramic vantage, the viewer is placed supine, gazing skyward through layered canopies. This position carries multiple, ambivalent resonances: it may evoke death or an elegiac stillness, a moment of surrender or repose; it may equally suggest joy, reverie, or the simple, primal act of looking up. Crucially, this perspective constitutes a collision between two distinct experiences—the physical vulnerability of the body anchored to the earth and the boundless, transcendent pull of the sky above. In this tension, Rockman collapses distance between observer and environment, transforming landscape from a scene to be viewed into an immersive condition to be inhabited.

The paintings presented at Pièce Unique combine sweeping, gestural passages of oil with the artist’s characteristic precision, forming lush vegetal canopies that feel at once immersive and mournful.

In *Vertigo*, wonder and vulnerability coexist, as fragile ecosystems are encountered from an uncommon and destabilizing point of view—one that unsettles the senses even as it dazzles the eye, inviting contemplation of both ecological precarity and perceptual renewal.

### Alexis Rockman

Alexis Rockman, a painter based in Warren, Connecticut, is an environmental activist who began making paintings and works on paper to build environmental awareness in the mid-1980s. Embarking on expeditions to distant locations like Antarctica and Madagascar in the company of professional naturalists, his work tells stories of natural histories confronting the challenging future of the biodiversity crisis, global warming, and genetic engineering. Rockman's work has been exhibited around the world and showcased at prestigious galleries and museums including the Venice Biennale, Carnegie Museum of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and Serpentine Galleries. Rockman worked on the 2012 movie *Life of Pi* with Ang Lee as "Inspirational Artist." Recent exhibitions include *Alexis Rockman: Oceanus*, a major exhibition that premiered at Mystic Seaport Museum in 2023 and is now touring. *Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman: Journey to Nature's Underworld*, the first two-person exhibition of these closely allied artists, had five museum venues in the U.S.. *Vertigo* opens at MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique in Paris and *Feedback Loop* at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City both open in January 2026.

### Artwork details

Alexis Rockman  
*Perennials*, 2025  
Oil, cold wax and acrylic on wood  
122 × 101.6 cm / 48 × 40 inches

Alexis Rockman  
*Humboldt Forest*, 2025  
Oil, cold wax and acrylic on wood  
122 × 101.6 cm / 48 × 40 inches

Alexis Rockman  
*Quaking Aspen*, 2025  
Oil, cold wax and acrylic on wood  
122 × 101.6 cm / 48 × 40 inches

Alexis Rockman  
*Flora*, 2025  
Watercolor and acrylic on paper  
45.7 × 60.9 cm / 18 × 24 inches

Alexis Rockman  
*Cosmos and Sequoias*, 2024  
Watercolor and acrylic on paper  
45.7 × 60.9 cm / 18 × 24 inches

Alexis Rockman  
*Large Poppies*, 2024  
Watercolor and acrylic on paper  
45.7 × 60.9 cm / 18 × 24 inches