

# GAGOSIAN

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Gagosian to Present New Paintings by Mark Grotjahn in London

*Backcountry* Opens September 29, 2022

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Mark Grotjahn, *Untitled (Backcountry Capri 54.74)*, 2021, oil on cardboard mounted on linen, 74 3/8 × 94 3/8 inches (188.9 × 239.7 cm) © Mark Grotjahn. Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio

**LONDON, September 22, 2022**—Gagosian is pleased to present *Backcountry*, an exhibition of new paintings by Mark Grotjahn. This is his first exhibition at the gallery in London since 2016.

In his paintings, Grotjahn interweaves various modes of abstraction, employing an expansive and evolving vocabulary of motifs and techniques. Exploring color, perspective, seriality, and the sublime, he also reflects on the broad history of nonrepresentational painting, from ancient to modern times. In *Backcountry*, Grotjahn moves still further away from the anthropomorphic underpinnings of earlier series such as *Masks* (2000–) and *Face* (2003–17), alluding instead to rural landscape while edging closer to an entirely spontaneous mode of expression.

Most of the paintings on view in London are in a horizontal format on black grounds; all of them are executed in Grotjahn’s favored medium of oil on linen-mounted cardboard, which he scrapes and sometimes carves into, revealing layers of paint. The *Backcountry* series (2021–) follows from a body of work produced in 2016 for an exhibition at Casa Malaparte on the Italian isle of Capri. Inspired by the landmark modernist house of writer Curzio Malaparte (1898–1957), Grotjahn inaugurated the Capri series of paintings with a group titled *New Capri*, the compositions of which evoke the house’s clifftop setting.

In *Backcountry*, the title of which was suggested by the artist’s ski touring and fly-fishing activities in Colorado, Grotjahn again explores the formal and expressive possibilities of paint, experimenting further with abstract mark making, color, and texture, combining systematic structure with gestural

spontaneity. In using black grounds with different colored substrates, he aims to give the paintings a graphic muscularity, imparting a different feel from that of his previous white paintings. “In the new paintings,” he observes, “it’s into the night. It’s the stars; it’s being a small person on a big globe.”

Featured paintings include *Untitled (Backcountry Capri 54.79)* (2022), a composition distinguished by wide, ragged streamers of white and red that arc across deep black. These elements are interrupted by others, among them a skein of drips and a loose grid of “slugs”—small rolls of paint that Grotjahn manufactures by scraping off and reattaching excess impasto to the surface of the work. These dimensional components rest on clusters of vertical and horizontal strokes, disrupting the overall composition both visually and texturally. Grotjahn has described the slugs as being “the scar on the arm that makes the arm more beautiful.”

Other works in *Backcountry* are marked by lines of paint that collide to produce distinctive almond-shaped outlines, forms that hark back to the stylized eyes of the *Face* series. In general, however, Grotjahn’s new paintings display a broader style of application than generally characterizes his earlier work, and by an ever deeper immersion in the nonobjective, reflecting a commitment to color, texture, line, and movement. Ultimately, the paintings in *Backcountry* convey an embrace of the freedom offered by the scale and power of nature.

**Mark Grotjahn** was born in Pasadena, California, and raised in Northern California. He lives and works in Los Angeles. Collections include Tate Modern, London; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Pinault Collection, Venice; Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Cleveland Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Broad, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Solo exhibitions include *Drawings*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2005); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2006); Kunstmuseum Thun, Switzerland (2007); Portland Art Museum, Oregon (2010); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2012); *Circus, Circus*, Kunstverein Freiburg, Germany (2014); *Mark Grotjahn Sculpture*, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2014); and *50 Kitchens*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2018).

#MarkGrotjahn

## **MARK GROTJAHN**

*Backcountry*

Opening reception: Thursday, September 29, 6–8pm

September 29–November 5, 2022

20 Grosvenor Hill, London

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### **Press**

**Gagosian** | [press@gagosian.com](mailto:press@gagosian.com) | +44 20 7495 1500

Toby Kidd | [tkidd@gagosian.com](mailto:tkidd@gagosian.com)

Ashleigh Barice | [abarice@gagosian.com](mailto:abarice@gagosian.com)

**Bolton & Quinn** | +44 20 7221 5000

Erica Bolton | [erica@boltonquinn.com](mailto:erica@boltonquinn.com)

Daisy Taylor | [daisy@boltonquinn.com](mailto:daisy@boltonquinn.com)