

February 23, 2016

MARK GROTJAHN

Untitled (Captain America)

EXTENDED!
THROUGH SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2016

Gagosian Gallery
980 Madison Avenue
New York



I am loyal to nothing, General...except the [American] Dream.
—Captain America

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of Mark Grotjahn's *Untitled (Captain America)* (2008–09), first shown at the Kaikai Kiki Gallery in Tokyo in 2010.

In the light of current geopolitical realities and aesthetic debates, Grotjahn's evocation of Captain America may be timely, if not more than a little ironic. Appearing in the early 1940s, the comic-book hero was designed as a patriotic super-soldier who fought the Axis powers of World War II. Aka Steve Rogers, a scrawny artist enhanced to the peak of natural human potential by an experimental serum, Captain America wears a costume that bears a stars-and-stripes motif, a hood emblazoned with an A—America (or Art?)—and is armed with a protective shield against all foes. Although he often struggles to maintain his ideals as a man out of time with modern realities, after seventy years he remains a beloved national figure, combatting those who espouse ideals contrary to the American Dream, from Nazism to technocratic fascism, and international and domestic terrorism.

In the large-scale, ten-part drawing with its centrifugal radiant motif, Grotjahn synthesizes the comic-book hero into pure, vibrating lines of force in symbolic red, white, and blue. Geometry and process resonate with each other in the

razor-sharp perspectival rays and random, all-over marks—traces of Grotjahn's tenacious working method, as he moves from one drawing to another—as well as the skeins of acid-yellow calligraphy that surface from time to time, like an Abstract Expressionist palimpsest.

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In America, the impact of twentieth-century capitalism on art promoted an increasing fixation with the sign and the series—Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* and *Campbell's Soup Cans*, Jasper Johns's targets and flags, Robert Indiana's *LOVE* sculptures and paintings, to name just a few. With his *Sign Exchange* project of 1993–98, Grotjahn aligned himself with this astute mixture of readymade and artisanal, and high and low art, replacing the homemade signs of local shopkeepers with his own handpainted copies, and exhibiting the shop originals as his own artwork.

Almost concurrently, he began working on a stream of densely worked colored-pencil drawings with radiant motifs, focusing on perspectival investigations such as dual and multiple vanishing points, techniques used since the Renaissance to create the illusion of depth and volume on a two-dimensional surface. In the *Butterfly* drawings, the motif appears as a more organic iteration of its perspectival precedent. Anchored to sloping vertical lines, the closely adjacent, triangular motifs achieve a vital dynamism, animated with a kaleidoscopic flutter. These formalist compositions of complex asymmetries and glowing, tonal color allude to the multiple narratives coursing through the history of modernism, from the utopian visions of Russian Constructivism to the hallucinatory images of Op art. The disruptive presence of errant marks and smudges across the surface of each drawing introduces a sense of active contingency into compositions that are otherwise highly controlled.

In addition to the multitudes of individual compositions, Grotjahn has produced several magisterial sequential drawings, consistent with the modernist fascination for serial iteration as free, constructive becoming. The multi-panel pencil drawing, *Untitled (Dancing Black Butterflies)* (2007), proposes a sort of formal and historical endgame, an enlivened dance of death for the butterfly motif, the normally rainbow-hued "wings" here pared back to Suprematist black. Conversely, *Untitled (Captain America)*, Grotjahn's most monumental drawing series to date, dazzles with the explosive energies of its tricolor motif pulsing across the gallery walls.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by David Anfam.

A concurrent exhibition of Grotjahn's *Sign Exchange* project (1993–98) will be presented at Karma, New York from January 9–February 7, 2016.

Mark Grotjahn was born in 1968 in Pasadena, CA. He received an MFA from the University of California, Berkeley, and a BFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder. He lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

Grotjahn's work is included in museum collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Broad, Los Angeles; SFMOMA, San Francisco; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Tate Modern, London; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Solo exhibitions include Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2005); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2006); Kunstmuseum Thun, Switzerland (2007); Portland Art Museum, Oregon (2010); Aspen Museum of Art, Colorado (2012); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2014); and Kunstverein Freiburg, Germany (2014). Major group exhibitions include Whitney Biennial 2006: "Day for Night," New York; the 54th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2004); "Painting in Tongues," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2006); "Oranges and Sardines," Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2008); "Collection: MOCA's First Thirty Years," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, (2009); "The Artist's Museum," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2010); "The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World," Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); and "Variations: Conversations in and Around Abstract Painting," LACMA, Los Angeles (2014).

For further information please contact the gallery at newyork@gagosian.com or at +1.212.744.2313. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

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Image: *Untitled (Captain America Drawing in Ten Parts 41.17)*, 2008–09 (part three), color pencil and oil on paper, in ten parts, part three: 85 5/8 x 47 5/8 inches (217.5 x 121 cm). Photo by Douglas M. Parker Studio.

Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagosian.