John Alexander Parks
Oceans and Seas
February 4 - March 14, 2023
Opening Reception: February 4, 5 - 7 PM.

Chelsea, New York: 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel is honored to present John Alexander Parks' Oceans and Seas, the artist's fourth exhibition with the gallery.

John Alexander Parks' set of new paintings explore and revel in the time-honored challenge of representing the ocean. Riffing on historic renderings of naval battles, wrecks and catastrophic storms, Parks embraces the inherent artificiality of the genre, remaking the ocean in paint with extraordinary conviction.

"I've always been interested in the rift between our experience of the world and the way we represent it," says the artist. "Nowhere is this rift more apparent than in the representation of the ocean. The sea is an endlessly moving spectacle and prior to the invention of photography, even a basic sense of its appearance was difficult to nail down. Over the centuries artists developed a rich set of strategies and conventions to represent the sea. This is particularly true in the Dutch and Flemish tradition of marine painting. Painters managed to paint convincing oceans which non-the-less look nothing much like the ocean itself." The ability of painters to recreate the sea allowed them to explore its moods from violent storms to gentle swells. It also allowed them to engage in narratives around shipping, naval battles, wrecks, salutes, processions, or simply the celebration of a particular vessel. "I've had a lot of fun with this in my paintings," says Parks. "I've taken some classic marine paintings and kicked them around a bit, exaggerating and editing, to create a kind of excitement that somehow satisfies me. It's always hard to look at one's own work, but I think the paintings project both a sense of pleasure in the artifice of it all, and at the same time a genuine intimation about the mysteries of the ocean." Parks also points out that his family has a very personal connection to the sea. "My father's family came from a long line of seamen," he says. "My grandfather was the captain of a merchant ship and lost his life to a German U-Boat in the Atlantic in 1940. My own father began his working life as a marine engineer. All our childhood vacations involved the sea, swimming and boating and we grew up rowing and sailing. Perhaps I have a little of the ocean in my blood stream."

In two of the paintings in the present show Parks takes on the Asian tradition of marine painting. "Just like the Europeans, Japanese and Chinese artists developed conventions for the representation of the ocean," he says. "In particular Japanese artists invented very beautiful stylized shapes to represent waves and foam. I wondered if I could incorporate some of these ideas in a more western oil painting so I've had a lot of fun creating a sort of hybrid. I've also incorporated some of the ways that Chinese artists simplify landscape."

In the end the overarching quality of Parks' new paintings is one of playfulness, a playfulness informed by a deep knowledge of painting. Curiously, the lightheartedness of this approach has yielded paintings that are also visually rich, strangely affecting and highly atmospheric.

John Alexander Parks was born in England in 1952 and educated at the Royal College of Art. He has exhibited his paintings widely since the late seventies and for many years was represented in New York by the Allan Stone Gallery. In the early eighties John Russell, then the chief art critic of the New York Times, hailed Parks as "…a true poet in paint." Writing in the same newspaper in 2012 Roberta Smith described his work as "… a treat to discover." Parks is a member of the faculty of the School of Visual Arts in New York where he teaches painting and drawing. His work is in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, and many private collections.

For further information or to schedule an interview with the artist, please contact 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel by e-mail at info@532gallery.com