

ALEXANDRE

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## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

**FINE ART** | By Lance Esplund

### John Walker: New Paintings

■ Knoedler & Co.  
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Through Dec. 30

British painter John Walker (born 1939) straddles the worlds of memory and perception in his paintings of the landscape near his Walpole, Maine, home. Thick, swirling, dense and muddy, these 14 pictures feel as if they were created out of earth as much as paint; their coastal surf, sand, tidal pools, beaver ponds, fence posts and brush fires look embedded within, not depicted on, canvas. The strength of the paintings, which vary from 18 inches to 9 feet tall, is their dark, intestinal and underworld temperament. William Blake and Albert Pinkham Ryder are precedents; but so are, seemingly, the urge to play

in the mud. The drawback is that clarity of color, form and space are often subsumed by fleeting glimpses and heavy-footed expression. "Bird Strike" (2010)—at 13 feet wide, the largest canvas here—conflates lightning strike, tunnel and bird swoop with a violence and immediacy reminiscent of Franz Kline. The strongest work is one of the smallest. The jewel-like "Coastal Cross" (2010)—with its glowing full moon, unexpected lilt and brilliant cross—merges landscape, ship's mast and crucifix. The painting suggests a journey, a sense of becoming. Rising in levels, with Rouault-like color and intensity, the picture transcends its subject. We aren't given a landscape painting, but a talisman, an evocation.

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*Mr. Esplund writes about art for the Journal.*

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