

Mark Hagen

TBA de Nouveau

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Almine Rech Gallery is pleased to present Mark Hagen's first Paris solo exhibition of new paintings and sculptures. Mark Hagen was born in 1972 in Black Swamp, Virginia. He lives and works in Los Angeles, California. In *TBA DE NOUVEAU* subtle temporal disorientations are framed and contingencies foregrounded as physical entanglements mirror visual ones. For this show Hagen manipulates the materials of burlap, acrylic house paint, cement, and obsidian through numerous controlled and surrendered processes and serialization to explore categorical slippages of value, history, and vision.

Julie Boukobza - Can you please explain what is behind the title "TBA de nouveau" of your first show at Almine Rech gallery?

Mark Hagen - This show is very similar to my Los Angeles show from this past May which was titled TBA, similar not only thematically but materially as well. In fact several of the patterns in the paintings are revisited, and some of the cement screens get recycled, broken down and reconfigured into this show, therefore the title "TBA de nouveau". TBA is an American acronym for "to be announced" — a placeholder term used to indicate that although something is anticipated a particular aspect of that thing remains to be decided. I like this phrase because it speaks to the subtle temporal disorientations that I frame in my works as well as contingencies that I foreground. "De nouveau" is something new but also something again, and there is an absurdity in its addition to the title, a cyclic or temporal impossibility to it.

Your work, from sculptures to paintings, almost oscillate between a desire to control the material and process and at the same time you seem to have the desire to let go or leave it to nature, the elements. Is it something you are aware of, and how does it help to understand your work?

I generally like to avoid the word "nature" in the discussion of this work, as a concept it's too loaded and ill-defined. Process is something I employ in making my art though and therefore randomness finds its way into most stages. In making my work I design systems and then use unstable materials that, because of their instability, allow random and irrational things to happen. These patterns or systems are rational and reasonable springboards, arenas, and frameworks on which or within which the amorphous and the impractical flourish, creating unstable perspectives. Contingent is also a word I use because many of my pieces affect subsequent pieces in a very material and tangible way. For example my paintings start as burlap "grounds" casually folded and piled outdoors for several months while sunlight "tans" the exposed areas. The result is that each layer leaves a visual, photogram-like record of itself on the sheets underneath, making each piece contingent on another and ultimately physically connecting them all.

What is the performative aspect of your artworks, for example the "Additive Painting"?

The titling of this series as “Additive Painting” is at once stating the obvious—all paintings are additive, something added to an already existing ground or framework (physical and conceptual), or layer after layer of paint, etc.—and also suggesting the possibility of me exploring in the future another type or way of painting (can there be a “subtractive” painting?). In any case these paintings are meant to unsettle common relationships between paint, canvas, and viewer all the while narrating the material circumstances of their manufacture by using essentially an analog, mold-making process in which successive/additional layers of acrylic exterior house paint are poured through the back into geometric shapes.

You often use the term “cognitive dissonance” to describe the viewer’s perception of your artworks. Can you explain this term?

Cognitive dissonance as I understand it is holding two conflicting thoughts in one's mind simultaneously. The perspectival instability that I mentioned earlier is visually analogous to “Cognitive dissonance”. For example many of my paintings oscillate back and forth between 1 of 2 overall geometric images or schemas, and it is impossible to see both simultaneously. Also because these paintings are made facedown, when stretched and up-righted the layers of paint become out of chronological order in relationship to the viewer creating a subtly anachronistic object. My cement screens being modular and rearrangeable (and thus non-hierarchical) are seen as much as seen-through, allowing and impairing vision, acting as a filter or lens that becomes visually entangled with other objects and viewers in the room.

You describe you obsidian sculptures as “Ur” mirrors, this ancient iconic city – state in Mesopotamia (now Irak). So how would you define your relationship to archeology?

I really dig archeology! Seriously though the psycho-spatial orientation of digging down as going back in time is endlessly fascinating to me... that spatial orientation is temporal orientation blows my mind. I use obsidian (volcanic glass) for many reasons, because of its deep historical use in culture as the predominant and preferred material for tool making (its utilitarian status), its inherent material ironies (as an amorphous solid it lacks any internal crystalline order, i.e. random), and the fact that as a medium for sculpture it is impractical and essentially abandoned. All of these aspects to it I reference, embrace, and highlight. I impose on my obsidian boulders rectilinear forms which invoke everyday consumer containers (similar to the screens) and when cut and polished these forms become highly reflective and in various combinations produce a range of fragmentary views. These darkened reflections conjure the primordial and the prehistoric, hence their description as “Ur” mirrors.

Interview by Julie Boukobza