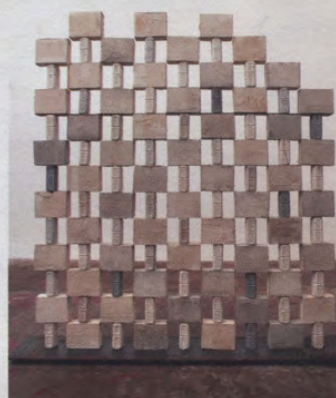


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SHAPE SHIFTER

From top: Mark Hagen's cement room divider, *To Be Titled* (Additive Sculpture), 2010; Hagen at his Eagle Rock studio.



Mark Hagen

Mark Hagen's first solo show is still months away (May 21 at China Art Objects Gallery in Chinatown), but the 38-year-old sculptor is already enjoying an enviable buzz on the local art scene. That's partly because he shares some of the same bad-boy qualities—a strong intellectual bent and a dash of street cred—that once made guys like Mike Kelley a force to be reckoned with. As a youth, Hagen kicked around as a skateboarder in rural Black Swamp, Virginia, before migrating West and eventually receiving his MFA from CalArts in 2002. Today, he easily traverses between painting, photography and just about any medium required to complete a piece. Nevertheless, it's sculpture that tends to define his sensibility. (He also teaches the medium at U.C. Irvine as an adjunct professor.) Whether he's riffing on modernist furniture via a conceptual and sculptural process or using the same materials and methods that were once used to fashion ancient weaponry, what makes Hagen unique—and why so many collectors are taking notice—is that he does it all with the most minimal of means. "That simplicity and elegance is what differentiates him. Yet [his work] is also extremely disciplined and conceptual, but without all that conceptual arrogance," says art advisor and curator Stefan Simchowit. "For me," explains Hagen, "each work represents far more than a formal investigation or expression. It's much more about time, space and who we are—ideas that are more philosophical than anything else."