

Made in L.A. 2012: 'Mark Hagen', by Corinna Peipon, Hammer Museum and DelMonico Books, 2012

MADE IN L.A.
2012



MARK HAGEN

Mark Hagen often uses geology's law of superposition as a guiding principle for his methods, as a metaphorical device, and as a rule to be bent. The law of superposition and horizontality states that rock masses were formed out of liquids in a horizontal manner, depositing the youngest geological forms atop the oldest. Chronology is thus recorded vertically through sedimentation. As liquids continue to flow across solids, they conform to the solid masses with which they come into contact, a process similar to casting. In *Earth Monster* (2010), Hagen cut a thin slice of Mexican onyx salvaged from the 2006 Getty Villa restoration project to fit into a small window at LA×ART in Los Angeles. By turning the horizontally formed onyx marble to a vertical position, he inverted this principle. Rather than using marble as a material for subtractive carved sculpture, as in traditional statuary, he emphasized the naturally formed abstract patterns and the coincidental form of a human profile within the rock.

Hagen's ongoing series of "additive paintings" also invert both natural and art historical tendencies. Using rolls of burlap, he exposes folded and piled sheets of the material to the sun for extended periods of time to achieve variations in the inherent color of the jute fibers. Akin to making a photogram, the process produces a record of the environment in which the works are made. Laying the burlap on plastic sheeting that has been selected for its texture, Hagen pours white or black paint onto masked areas, forming geometric patterns that are determined by the mathematical divisions of each painting's dimensions. The paint is absorbed through the loose weave of the burlap, and when he peels back the plastic from what becomes the front of the painting, the resulting composition

is like a low-relief cast of the textured plastic impressed upon the thick paint. The compositions of Hagen's additive paintings recall the hard-edge abstraction of the 1960s and 1970s, but his treatment of both the support and the surface is a rejection of the precise "finish fetish" aesthetic that is often paired with this mode of abstraction. Instead he courts chance to determine the look of his paintings, steadily employing the same conceptual framework of rules to generate endless surface variations.

Hagen's "additive sculptures" share a kinship with the casting process that he employs for his additive paintings, wherein the paint is not applied to the surface but is cast between the burlap and the plastic. The building blocks of the sculptures are cement castings made from food and beverage packaging. These cast bricks reflect the shape of their molds to the smallest detail. Threaded onto steel armatures, the additive sculptures are built in units measuring roughly four by eight feet, the standard size of commercially produced construction materials like plywood or drywall, and echo the dimensions of the rooms in which they are installed. Appropriating the visual language of modern architecture and often presented in groups, the screenlike sculptures are similar to rock formations or the stacks and rows of packaged goods on supermarket shelves, "something monumental resulting from the slow, stupid accumulation of the same substance or form over time."¹

Alternatively, Hagen's "subtractive sculptures" are formed through removal rather than accumulation. Made from obsidian—a volcanic glass prized since prehistoric times for its ability to form very sharp edges when it fractures—and steel, the sculptures mimic minimalist cubes and other rectilinear shapes.

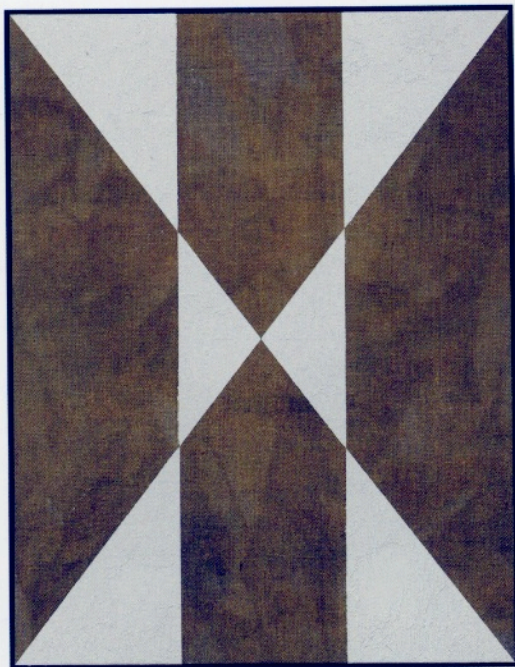
These formal shapes are anathema to the internal structure inherent in the glass. Hagen chips at the cut rock to force it to break naturally, revealing the curvatures in its structure. The obsidian forms are stacked atop or between steel boxes that act as both sculpture and pedestal, complicating our tendency to identify one as the artwork and the other as the mode of display. In the series *To Be Titled (Subtractive and Additive Sculpture)* (2011), Hagen continues to expand on his use of obsidian for its aesthetic properties and metaphorical richness and to explore its historical applications: among other uses, the material was used to fashion the first mirrors. Starting with a single obsidian boulder, he slices the rock into a sequence of plates and polishes each of the resulting surfaces to a mirror-like sheen. Mounted on a modular metal structure, both the plates and the structure can be rearranged. Reflecting portions of the surrounding space, the shiny black surfaces frame the space while also having a disorienting effect. Hagen's literal and conceptual reorganizations of objects in space challenge our habits of perception and our tendency to interpret vertical layering as an indicator of qualitative hierarchy, thereby encouraging us to examine the ways in which we see and understand the world.

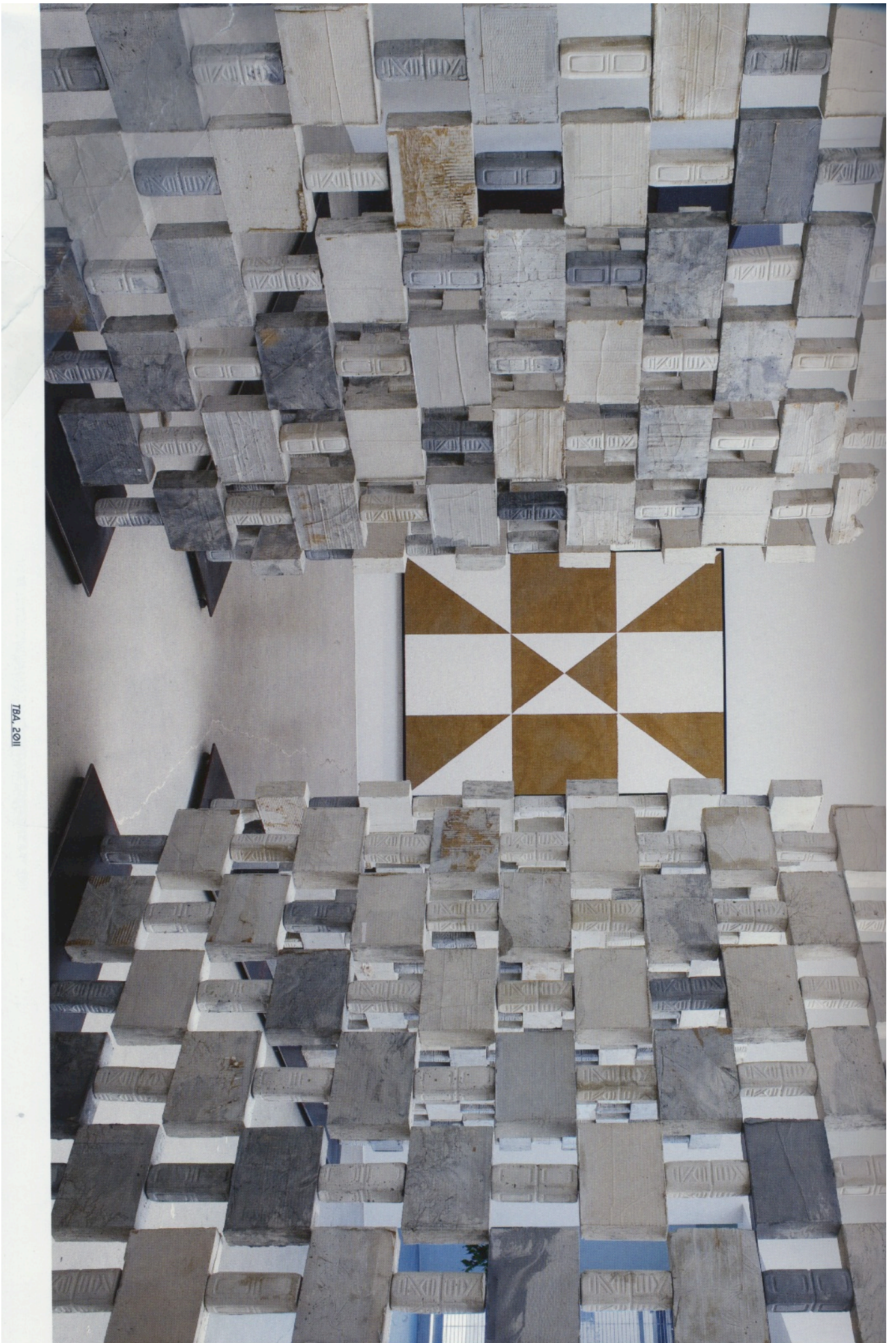
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Notes

1. Michael Kowalinski, "Mark Hagen Dreams On," *i-D Magazine*, May 9, 2011, <http://i-donline.com/2011/05/mark-hagen-dreams-on/>.

TOP: TO BE TITLED (ADDITIVE PAINTING #25), 2011
BOTTOM: TO BE TITLED (ADDITIVE PAINTING #27), 2011





TBA, 2011

TO BE TITLED (SUBTRACTIVE AND ADDITIVE SCULPTURE #6), 2011

