

7 LA Artists to Watch

BY MICHAEL HERREN

MARK HAGEN: The Origin-al



A solo exhibition of Hagen's work in LA, called *Paleo Diet*, runs through October 26 at International Art Objects Galleries, which represents the artist. A solo show at Almine Rech Gallery in Paris is scheduled for fall 2014. *International Art Objects Galleries, 6086 Comey Ave., LA, 323-965-2264*

For Mark Hagen—born in artistically appellated Black Swamp, Virginia, and holding a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts—the key, password, Rosebud, and vehicle for his big breakthrough were one in the same: burlap.

“I hit a reset button,” says Hagen, 41, explaining that while his previous body of paintings had reflected his profound interest in process (or how an artwork is made), the materials with which an artwork is made, and the corresponding relationship or “dialogue” between the two, “didn’t embody these themes in a material sense.”

And then came the burlap. What Hagen calls a crude precursor to canvas, it proved transformative because it was transformable. Light sensitive to a high degree (if it’s folded and left in the sun, it can create a “photogram” of itself), burlap is also roughly elemental, evoking macro-micro origins of human creative expression.

It also plays well (i.e., interestingly) with other materials. Hagen made the discovery with his “cast tile” acrylic paintings, in which off-the-shelf plastic tiles, plastic sheeting, and packing tape form a foundation onto which acrylic paint is poured through the back of burlap sheets and squeegeed to create mixed, nonrepeating gradients of color alongside linear sequences and cyclic pattern.

Hagen’s exploration of origins also extends to his sculpture, where he often works with fragile obsidian (volcanic glass). “It references the world’s first sculptures, and as a material was largely abandoned in the Bronze Age,” explains the artist, who counts design and fashion arbiters such as Peter Marino and Hedi Slimane among his collectors. “I welcome its breaks in response to the forms I’m forcing on them.” Progressive process.

