

X·TRA



Artist: Mark Hagen

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Mark Hagen — Untitled

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When I was a kid I visited archaeology digs around my hometown outside Washington, D.C., and wrote book reports on Heinrich Schliemann. I later took anthropology and archaeology classes in college and helped with a dig in the backyard of a suburban home in Pismo Beach, California, excavating a Chumash midden that was thousands of years old. As amazing as this experience of the strange hiding just beneath the familiar was, I realized I liked thinking and reading about archaeology more than I liked doing it. Unfortunately, archaeology can't merely be theoretical, one must make a hole.

To dig down is to go back in time. Looking out into space is the same. To see the sun is to see it 8 minutes and 20 seconds ago, to see the moon, 1.3 seconds ago. Even face-to-face communications are bound by the speed of light and sound, plus the time it takes for information to travel from sensory organ to brain, and finally add the 80 milliseconds that our consciousness takes to register these experiences. Every perception then is not the present but already the past, however minutely. In all directions the past envelops us, as if we are forever tunneling just under the surface of things. The past is truly all that is “at hand.”

We are archaeologists in less subtle ways too, like how we instinctually infer past actions from the environment with our everyday “archaeological imagination” (think footprints or bread crumbs). Archaeological excavations are an intensification of this ordinary attunement to the world. These inverse structures manifest the occidental narrative. They are a striptease, the unveiling of a secret alien horizon withheld beneath a lugubrious lingerie of incremental linearity and non-repeating strata, awaiting an epiphany and revelation. Finally, excavations are subtractive sculptures, with their cross sections of temporally self-sorted matter in space, which, before the spade, was concealed, contextualized, and cemented all together and all at once.

Mark Hagen was born in Black Swamp, Virginia, and received his MFA from CalArts in 2002. Recent exhibitions include *Lost Line: Contemporary Art from the Collection*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; *Made in L.A.* 2012, Hammer Museum; *Handful of Dust*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara; *TC: Temporary Contemporary*, Bass Museum of Art, Miami; and the *California Biennial 2008*, Orange County Museum of Art. Recent solo exhibitions include *Mark Hagen*, Parapet Real Humans, St. Louis (2015), *The Outdoor Type*, JOAN, Los Angeles (2015); *Schmanthropocene*, China Art Objects, Los Angeles (2015); *a parliament of some things*, Almine Rech Gallery, London (2014); and *Guest Star*, Marlborough Chelsea, New York (2014). Hagen’s artist’s book *2013?* was published in 2012. Public collections include LACMA and the Hammer Museum. He likes to think about but not do archaeology in Los Angeles, California.