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Review: Matthew Brandt at Yossi Milo

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By Paul Laster, Modern Painters

Since his first solo show five years ago, Matthew Brandt has made a major impact on the avant-garde photography scene. The son of a successful commercial photographer, Brandt rebelled by pursuing painting as an undergraduate at Cooper Union. He later merged the mediums of painting, silkscreen, and photographic processes both antiquated and digital, creating a DIY body of work while attending UCLA. Brandt returns to Yossi Milo Gallery for his second solo show, titled "Excavations," on view through May 10, with three new series of works that explore archeological subject matter in adventurous ways.

Most impressive is a selection of 2013 heliographs of the skeletal remains of Ice Age animals photographed in displays at the George C. Page Museum of the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles. Using tar from the pits to make unique, large-scale prints on aluminum that have a dirty patina, Brandt captures saber-toothed cats, American neophrons, and Brea condors using the same 19th-century process that Joseph Nicéphore Niépce used to make the first photographs. The blackness of the tar defines the prehistoric beasts in haunting detail.



Matthew Brandt's "La Brea D2AB," 2013, from the series La Brea. (© Matthew Brandt, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York)

Mining his East Coast roots, Brandt's second most convincing series of the three presented utilizes archival photographs of New York City demolition and construction projects to make gum bichromate prints with dust collected from the current sites. Demolition of Madison Square Garden, 1925, (2014) depicts the wreckage of the Neoclassical building with grime from the municipal arena's second incarnation while Yossi Milo Gallery, 2012, H6 (2014) shows a worker on a ladder constructing a hallway that connects the gallery's spaces. The photo is displayed in the same hallway, which is a nod to the reflexive nature of the artist's practice.

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