

M+B

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

ARTIST MATTHEW BRANDT REVIVES THE HISTORY OF EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY

March 27, 2014
By Rebecca Bates



Demolition of Madison Square Garden, 1925
Matthew Brandt, 2014

While the casual Instagram photographer is content to take a snapshot, share it with the public, and move on to the next conquest, Matthew Brandt takes a more deliberate approach. The artist toils over the development of his images, turning the production of his work into a painstaking manual labor by using long-forgotten techniques borrowed from the world's earliest photographers. Brandt's second solo show at Yossi Milo Gallery in New York City, aptly titled "Excavations," is dominated by large-scale images of the past, from 20th-century ruins to found photos from yesterday's news to the shadowy outlines of ancient fossils.

Many of Brandt's images seem to reach back across lost time. For his "Dust" series, the artist scoured the archives of the New York Public Library for historic photos of demolition sites around the city (e.g., the Madison Square Garden arena that was pulled down in 1925, or the remnants of destroyed tenement buildings). Brandt reproduced these images as large prints and used the dust and dirt he gathered from where these structures once stood as pigment in a process known as gum bichromate emulsion. Each image features a piece of historic design lost to the modern cityscape, and even Brandt's technique is rooted in the early history of the medium. "[This method] was most prominent when photography was struggling to establish itself as an art form," Brandt explains. "It's a very painterly process: It is brushed on and can be brushed off." Brandt's "La Brea" series engages with even more distant history, with the artist first photographing fossil displays at the

La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles and then developing the negatives on an emulsion of tar collected on-site. Known as heliographs, Brandt says he was drawn to these images for their historical implications, explaining that the technique "is a very crude and primitive process and is the earliest stable photographic form." The resulting series consists of large images, almost amber in hue, of giant birds and mammals that look like cave paintings or even fossils themselves.

M+B



La Brea B2, 2013



Crop 2, 2014

Other works on view incorporate enlarged sections of a photograph Brandt clipped from the Los Angeles Times, each snippet a reminder of just how transient and easily overlooked daily print news is. Ultimately, the crux of Brandt's work lies in the tug-of-war between forgotten history and changing technology and design, as the artist repurposes artistic practices that have long since gone the way of the saber-toothed tiger.

Through May 10 at Yossi Milo Gallery, New York; yossimilo.com