

## Creator Destroyer Preserver

ANTHONY PEARSON IS SCULPTING THE NATURAL WORLD

Written by  
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**One of the earliest relief sculptures** created by a human is that of a rather surprised looking horse. "The Magdalenian Horse" was created around 17,000 years ago in France, and it's not a stretch to think the creator saw the horse in the rock before they started chiseling. That, perhaps, the horse was there all along and made itself known to the artist. Now, Los Angeles artist Anthony Pearson is not carving horses out of rock, but he sees nature world through his works of art—wooden-framed reliefs he calls "Embedments" that are made from hydrocal, a gypsum cement. He does this through a process which starts with "stretching a length of cotton fabric in a wooden frame. [Pearson] then pours in layers of liquid hydrocal, each of which has been treated with a different pigment, creating an array of hues that flow over and around one another. After the material has set, the work is turned over and the fabric removed, leaving behind the texture of its weave and tiny, embedded cotton filaments." Pearson's new Embedments will be showing at David Kordansky Gallery from mid-July through August 26. We spoke with the artist about creating the pieces to fill spaces, and how the natural world works into his art.

**MM** Do you consider that you're filling a certain space when you're creating a piece?

**AP** Certainly: I consider a given artwork in its place amongst other pieces in the studio. This is the first critique I make. I then may consider how it could fill a space in a given exhibition. I think of the cultural contribution that comes with making each work. I think of how these things take on their own life once I am done with them. I think of their place in the world when I am no longer in control of them. I must ask myself how a given artwork may function in the world independent of my intent and my language. I also consider how the object will age and what it will come to represent as the years pass [by].

**MM** When you are imagining an Embedment do you place your creations against a white backdrop? Grey? Blankness?

**AP** In conceiving the work I am thinking of it in its original environment, which is on the naturally lit, twelve-foot-high white walls of my studio. Often, when these works enter the world at large, it can be a bit shocking to see them in incandescent light or in domestic environments, but much to my surprise and relief they seem to function positively outside of the studio as well. The gypsum works are peculiar things, beautiful but peculiar. I think it is important to frame them, when possible, with a heightened awareness of architectural space. This may be because they are so minimal and simple in their form. The work has an architectural quality itself and is actually made of an building material. I think the spaces around the work, the relationship between an object and its surroundings, and especially between two or more pieces, are locations where things become clearer in regards to the exact function of the work as a whole entity. A certain amount of ambient space and light is needed to create an ideal setting for the artwork to fully activate.

**MM** Do you appreciate the fact that the pieces you're creating are solid, amorphous, non-moving objects?

**AP** I very much appreciate this both as an aspect of the work I make and the material I am working with. Gypsum is an of-the-earth material and there is something quite enchanting about creating forms that have such weight and solidity. I refer to the poured panels of the new Embedment works as slabs. The weight and mass of these slabs is very important to me in both the way I form and present the work. This is not only a solid, earthy material, but it is also a traditional and ancient one. It has been used for centuries in both sculpture and in architecture. I very much try to honor and support this history, making sure these qualities are explicit in its usage.

**MM** Your works seem to be informed by the natural world. Does Los Angeles—as a counterpoint of mountains, beaches, ocean, and desert—inform your work?

**AP** Most certainly. With this new exhibition, I think ideas of the cosmos and the earth are clearly evoked, with the etched works suggesting sky and the Embedments recalling landscape to a degree. Not in a literal or representational sense, but in a more referential one. Growing up here on the Westside and residing here nearly my whole life certainly has informed my work in regards to thinking about the natural environment. I grew up a few blocks from the beach near the mouth of Santa Monica Canyon. Sea and sky have been a critical part of my visual understanding of the world around me. The shimmering, ever-sifting ambient quality of much of my work clearly references real-life experiences, such as the observation of light on the surface of the ocean and the feeling of moisture in the air. I don't think these references have ever been more explicit in my work than in this new exhibition. **MM**