

Satellites Programme  
Hamish Young  
*Excavation*

17.09.16 – 20.11.16

*Excavation* is a new exhibition by artist Hamish Young, consisting of carved marble sculptures and a series of screen prints made with the residual marble dust.

Hamish often makes works that revolve around one material – its process of production, materiality, historical uses and relationships to labour – and is particularly interested in the dialectical correlation between people and raw materials. Previous installations have used sculpture, video and sound to depict interweaving stories of people and matter: from an exploration of the history of a piece of Black Coral, in which three voices recount its journey from Papua New Guinea; to a mediation on the manufacture of China Clay in the southwest of England from the early 1900s.

This new exhibition *Excavation*, developed as part of Satellites Programme 2016, builds on research into the marble quarries located in Carrara, Tuscany, well known for the extraction of white and blue-grey marble and a parallel history of workers involved in the formation of the anarchist movement. The marble dominates the environment of Carrara, with Hamish drawn to this, not just because of the presence of the dramatic quarries and dust roads, but also how the material has shaped the history, economy and culture of the area. Marble is both the form and content of *Excavation*.

Found materials and publications frequently appear in Hamish's work. In this instance, a series of postcards discovered in Carrara have been used to produce three screen prints in

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which the image and material disintegrate. An image of the quarry emerges, punctuated by workers, from the marble-dusted surface and displays the vast scale of excavation on site and a landscape shaped by industry.

The carved sculptures are produced using the Statuario variety of marble, prized for its solid white surface. Objects such as a hand clasping a stone are carved in one-to-one scale. Inspired by studies Hamish observed in Carrara, the works reflect on the reductive carving process and the body as a knowing entity – 'a thinking hand', to use a term employed by architect Juhani Pallasmaa, in which the process of making brings together tacit and explicit knowledges.

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Hamish Young works in Edinburgh and studied at Edinburgh College of Art. Recent exhibitions include *Re-inscribe*, Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, 2016; *setBackground*, Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh, 2016; *RSA New Contemporaries*, Edinburgh, 2016; *New Scottish Artists*, The Fleming Collection, DRAF Studio, London, 2016; and *Entente*, Hotel Elephant, London, 2015. He was a recipient of the Edinburgh Visual Arts Award, 2016; Timespan Graduate Fellowship, 2016; and the Helen A. Rose Bequest Prize, 2015.



*To follow the material means not to discuss aesthetic issues of quality, expressiveness or symbolic content but to investigate transpersonal societal problems and matters of concern.<sup>1</sup>*

All objects in artist Hamish Young's *Excavation* are carved in marble or are covered with its chiselling residue: a hand grips a piece of stone; a crude piece of marble and a series of screen prints, made using ink blended with marble dust, portray the silhouettes of men standing amidst the dramatic marble formations in the quarries of Carrara, Tuscany. Arranged loosely and in proximity to one another, these objects (re)present different instances of the same material: from the unprocessed, rough formation to the meticulously carved hand.

The marble occupies the gallery as it does in the city and mountains of Carrara from where it was mined. Returning from his visit to Carrara, Hamish commented that "[the] material dominates the surrounding area; in a visual way, vast quarries, sculptures, marble dust roads etc., but also in a historical, economic and cultural way." Carrara's appearance and underlying reality – political and economic – are forged by the *being* of this very marble. Yet, it is rather unusual that an encounter with the sculptures can readily call to mind the enthralling sight of the mines, for, as marble and sculpture have long been entwined, the former is very often (mis)recognised as a material, which landed in a vacuum in the artist's studio.

Nevertheless, in philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's words, "[c]learly there exists, perhaps imperceptible in the materials and forms which the artist acquires something more than material and forms. [...] For the

forms, even the materials, are by no means merely given by nature [...]. History has accumulated in them, and spirit permeates them."<sup>2</sup> Squaring with Adorno's postulation, *Excavation* displays an analytical process of dissecting the (artistic) end-result – in this instance, the refined hand that holds the piece of rock, grasping tightly its materiality in an attempt to focus our attention on the very matter – to unravel the multiple layers of history that preceded it, to provoke thought more on the material than on the deciphering of the formation presented by the artist.

The (art) object, to quote anthropologist Tim Ingold, "[is] a complete and final form that confronts the viewer as a *fait accompli*. It is already made."<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, to comprehend something as a material "is to see it as a potential – for further making, growth and transformation."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when we refer to materials (and, for instance, not to a sculpture, or a painting), very often we do so to proceed into a discussion about an intentional creation. In the specific case of this exhibition, the crude piece of marble brings forth the (historical) reality of the matter before its conversion into a fixed, carved object. Therefore, it invites (and compels) reflection on the temporality prior to the production of *Excavation* – namely, *what defined the passage of time between raw matter and refined object?*

Karl Marx wrote in his *Grundrisse* that "labour is the living fire that shapes the pattern; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, their transformation by living time."<sup>5</sup> For this, the screen prints touch upon the actuality of the quarry as a site of production and thus on the entanglement between human agency/labour and matter, both being in a relation of interdependence. The screen prints

eloquently evoke the correlation between marble and human agency, indicating them as concomitant parts of an intricate historicity. In the screen prints the marble appears to be the sole constituent of the landscape, imposing its magnificent articulation in the male figures that rather look like small vertical lines within an expanding scenery. The amalgam of ink and marble dust, used to make the screen prints, further suggests the reciprocal affect/effect between human and matter and, very importantly, the agency of the material as it travels – through ecology and history – to ‘land on’ the former. To deepen the history (and temporality) of the marble, the grasping hand indicates not only the labour taking place in the quarries, but also the labour in the artist’s studio. The hand, a demonstration of virtuosic craftsmanship, further references exercises undertaken by sculptors to advance their skills.<sup>6</sup>

American artist Carl Andre suggested that “[m]atter as matter rather than matter as symbol is a conscious political position I think, essentially Marxist.”<sup>7</sup> Echoing this, *Excavation* foregrounds the contingency and fluidity of matter. By this virtue, matter is not only becoming, altering, travelling, affecting, clashing but it is also altered, travelled, affected, clashed and essentially laboured. Hamish recounts the stories of the marble occurring before this ultimate display and thus locates viewers’ attention in the socio-political and economic relations that shape, and are shaped by, the matter. *Excavation* allows an understanding of materiality not merely in philosophical terms – grounded on the premises of the ‘circle of life’ and the pure physicality of the matter – but also in terms of an everlasting connection between subject and object. Ultimately, it transforms the gallery from a space of consumption

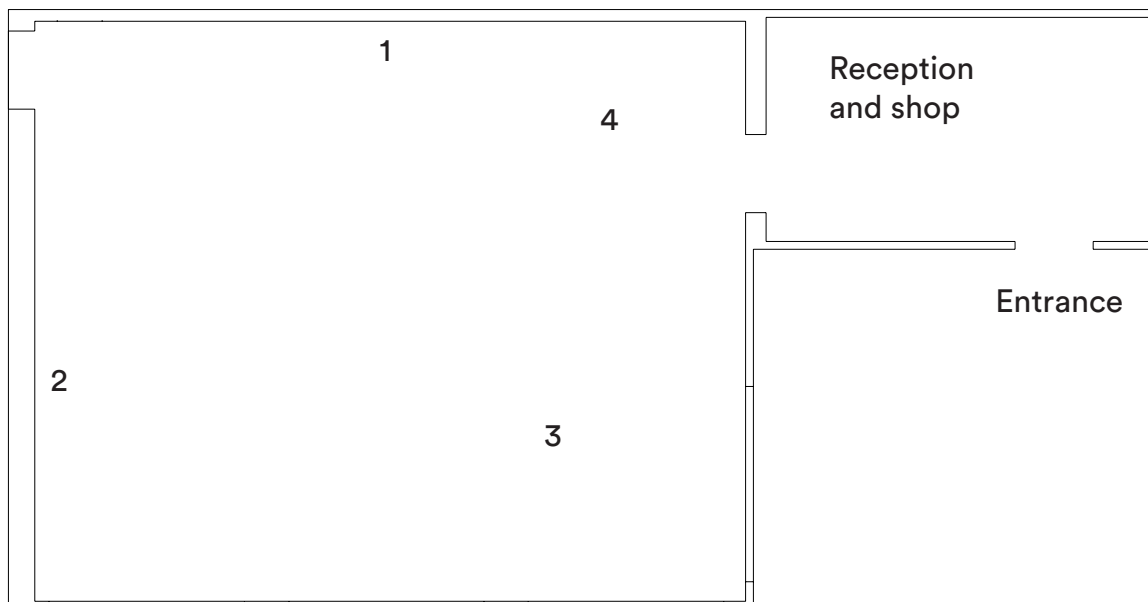
to a space of fluid knowledge pertaining to marble’s “accumulated history”.

#### Endnotes

1. Petra Lange-Berndt, ‘Introduction//How to Be Complicit with Materials’ in Petra Lange-Berndt, *Materiality, Documents of Contemporary Art Series* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2015), pp. 12-23, p. 16.
2. Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Functionalism Today’ (1967) in Neil Leach (ed.) *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 5-18, p. 12.
3. Tim Ingold, ‘Toward an Ecology of Materials’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 41 (October 2012), pp. 427-442, p. 435.
4. Ibid.
5. Karl Marx, *Marx’s Grundrisse*, trans. and ed. David McLellan (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 89.
6. Indeed, Hamish drew his form from a photograph, taken in the studios of Carrara, that depicts a wall embellished with marble hands – filled or empty – fingers and arms. Those ‘fractions’ of the human body are the products of observational studies intended to increase sculptors’ artisanship. For the photograph see Joel Leivick, *Carrara: The Marble Quarries of Tuscany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
7. As cited in Dominic Rahtz ‘Indifference of the Material in the Work of Carl Andre and Robert Smithson’, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2012), pp.33-51, p. 37.

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**Anastasia Philimonos** lives and works in Edinburgh. She has a background in art history and recently graduated from MSc Modern and Contemporary Art: History, Curating, Criticism at The University of Edinburgh; and Art History and Theory at The Athens School of Fine Arts. Anastasia is an Associate Producer at Collective and has been commissioned to develop texts for each of the solo presentations as part of Satellites Programme 2016.



1. *Excavation*, series of three screen prints, (found image of Carrara Quarry), printed in clear emulsion and residual marble dust, 59×79×3cm, 2016.

2. *Hand Stone*, carved Statuario marble, 2016.

3. *Block*, machine cut Statuario marble, 2016.

4. *Fragment*, machine cut and hand split Statuario marble, 2016.

The artist would like to thank Silvio Corsini, Cecilia Biancalana, Federica Forti, Edinburgh Printmakers and Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop.

*Excavation* is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists based in Scotland. Satellites Programme 2016 includes three solo presentations by selected artists Mark Bleakley, Jennifer Bailey and Hamish Young and two projects by Associate Producers Anastasia Philimonos and Katie Schwab. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events.

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