

REGEN PROJECTS

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ARTFORUM

Alex Hubbard

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY

In his seminal 1956 essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," Allan Kaprow praises Pollock's use of everyday materials, noting that his "so-called dance of dripping" is ultimately more interesting and influential than his canvases themselves. "Pollock, as I see him," writes Kaprow, "left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life. . . . Not satisfied with the *suggestion* through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch." More than fifty years later, these ideas resonate in the feverish videos of Brooklyn-based artist Alex Hubbard, who assembles, manipulates, and ultimately destroys elaborate painterly surfaces made from everyday objects.

In the five videos that comprised the bulk of his first New York solo show, Hubbard uses flowers, balloons, plastic letters, and other mundane things in bizarre, at times aggressive ways, calling attention to their purpose and altering them through a series of vaudevillian maneuvers. Each video is shot from overhead in a single take, delineating a flat surface against which the drama unfolds. The fast-moving *Cinéopolis*, 2007, depicts the tarring and feathering of a projector screen lying on the floor. Shiny Mylar balloons billow over the screen, only to be deflated by a blowtorch; tar pours over the entire tableau; pillows are cut open so that their feathers flurry around, and finally the pictured screen rolls partially shut.

Though the link that Kaprow (whose work was once described by Susan Sontag as "animated collage") is palpable, Hubbard's videos also evoke a handful of other artists. Stuart Sherman, William Wegman, Bas Jan Ader, and Roman Signer all come to mind, for their experi-

mental use of humor, bathos, and suspense. However, Hubbard's work is most in sync with Ader's slapstick film performances, which tend to end abruptly in humorously disastrous ways. Hubbard raises the comic ante by peppering the diegetic clamor with popping, buzzing sound effects to confuse what we see and hear. Moreover, by creating a short script and allowing for some unscripted divergence, he creates works that fall somewhere between *Jackass* and *legerdemain*.

Hubbard also presented two untitled abstract paintings and a collage, all of which appeared as codas to the videos. A deflated, tortured balloon, ostensibly a remnant from *Cinéopolis*, affixed to the collage, seemed to symbolize other sad objects in the videos that are eventually nullified or swept away. Hubbard's unremitting stockpiling and effacement in these works gave the show a caustic, endgame-like spirit. While he displays an appetite for destruction, his visually seductive videos trump entropy with action. All is energetic and in constant motion, and a few fleeting scenes are remarkably beautiful in their colorful density. These moments occur through particularly strange and deadpan maneuvers such as the blowtorching of birthday balloons and the saran-wrapping of pink plastic letters, and through the series title, "The Collapse of the Expanded Field." Still, it's hard not to think of the final resting place of Hubbard's objects, the landfill. His work turns on this paradox—so funny it's sad and so sad it's funny—and it is this contradiction that allows some existential truth and gravitas to seep in.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler

Alex Hubbard, *The Collapse of the Expanded Field III (turquoise)*, 2007, still from a color video, 1 minute 37 seconds.

