

MODERN PAINTERS

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Alex Hubbard



Courtesy of The Kitchen
An installation view of Alex Hubbard's "Death Never Sleeps" at The Kitchen, New York

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"Death Never Sleeps"
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"Take an object," **Jasper Johns** once famously said, describing his artistic process. "Do something to it. Do something else to it." Brooklyn-based artist [Alex Hubbard](#) has long seemed uniquely attuned to that sagacious advice, deftly transforming quotidian objects — deliberately, one thing at a time — into entrancing videos.

Hubbard's films often show him hard at work on a flat surface. In ["The Collapse of the Expanded Field I-III"](#) (2007), for instance, a camera hangs over a long table, documenting Hubbard as he slices apart a rose bouquet, spray-paints a tablecloth, and then binds detritus to it with tape. The video becomes a continually evolving painting. Covered with a dash of flower petals one moment, it drips with paint the next, and then becomes a **Christo** assemblage.

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For his new videos at the **Kitchen**, Hubbard sets his sights instead on sculpture, gingerly balancing an array of items to build towering constructions. In "Make Your Movie" (all works 2010), he gets down to business next to a dirty kitchen sink piled high with cans of beer and **7-Up**, and a television that displays the image of a **Budweiser** can. Hubbard's hands begin balancing various items on top of each other. A can of ant and roach killer is balanced nimbly on a gas can. A roll of tape alights atop that. Elsewhere, a plastic bag filled with pills is clamped on. A prescription bottle joins the mix, teetering dangerously on top of another attachments.

There are paintings, too, three of them, made with large slabs of fiberglass, resin, and oil, plastered with swirls and cascades of blue, orange, and red. Those materials look melted and fused together in some places, with bubbles bulging and popping up across their surfaces. They are titled "Hood," and look like New Age, psychedelic versions of Richard Price's stolid automobile hoods. Dramatically spot-lit in a dark gallery, they look flashy, sexy even — with appropriately splashy subtitles to boot: "Topanga Evil Wizard Woman," for example — though they don't hold the multivalent, complex appeal of Hubbard's videos.

The videos endure, charming like D.I.Y. versions of "[The Way Things Go](#)," the intoxicating **Rube Goldberg**-machine of a film that Peter Fischli and David Weiss produced in 1987, in which object topples into object, setting off a seamless chain of actions realized with a precision that befits those artists' Swiss heritage. Hubbard, however, is a problem solver that is happy to give a peek behind the scenes of his process — he is a tinkerer, a prototypical American, as one gentleman remarked in the gallery during this reviewer's visit. The artist's source materials are pure contemporary Americana, as well: alcohol, drugs, soda, television.

Hubbard is also a seductive videographer and an expert installation-builder. Another video, "Rich's Place," is projected on a tall, standing screen, letting viewers examine his work in all its rich, high-resolution glory: a *sui generis* medium that splices together painting, sculpture, and video, while being grounded in bodily presence. He places two cans of the potent elixir **Four Loko** on the inside rim of a bicycle tire that has been suspended from above. Next, he paints the cans and clamps on bright sheets of square paper. The nimbly arranged objects sway and threaten to fall over. Occasionally they do, and Hubbard fully enters the frame to provide a quick fix.

The show's title [has the feel of a thriller](#), a ridiculous conceit until you start watching Hubbard at work in "Rich's Place," and rooting for him. The network of objects keeps growing larger, though not necessarily stronger. Near the end of the film, a lit cigarette enters the scene, held up to the sculpture by the artist's hand. There is a fire extinguisher in the background. Will all of his tenuous labor go up in flames?