

REGEN PROJECTS

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Art in America

Reviews Mar 29, 2010

Alex Hubbard

New York,

at Maccarone



View of Alex Hubbard's exhibition, showing Upstairs #1 (foreground), 2010, HD video on steel-framed screen, 7 by 3 feet; at Maccarone.

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Alex Hubbard's latest New York solo show, "Somebody had to do it," combined the cerebrally slapstick and the delightfully inscrutable. Three short video loops open with a view of a cloth backdrop in the young artist's Brooklyn studio. Hubbard reaches or steps into the image, moving slowly and with great seriousness as he balances everyday objects, one atop another, to form a rickety tower, until the lot collapses with a bang. In *Downstairs #2* (all works 2010), which greeted the viewer near the entrance, he stacks two sawhorses, props a glowing fluorescent light fixture between them and then introduces, one by one, a red plastic gas can, a yellow motor-oil bottle, a large fork and finally a length of rope—at which point the assemblage teeters and tumbles. A split-second delay in the sound of the impact adds another subtly comic layer.

The videos are all projected onto big freestanding screens, framed in steel, which lend them a sculptural quality. And since the action takes place in a narrow space before a cloth, and each video has a subtle but distinct color scheme, the works serve, too, as metaphors for painting. The artist is certainly concerned with the mutability, or even viability, of distinct art mediums, having titled a recent series of videos "The Collapse of the Expanded Field."

Six abstract paintings, each about 8 by 6 feet, appear to have been produced in the kind of casual process documented in the videos, with appealingly tactile results. After rolling oil paint seemingly haphazardly onto the canvas, leaving some areas uncovered, the artist lays down sheets of fiberglass mesh, adhering them by applying abundant amounts of resin with a squeegee, often in contrasting colors to the oil. The excess resin pools; the fiberglass mesh occasionally puckers. We can read the canvases alongside the videos as parallel explorations of gesture, but on their own they're not highly satisfying.

More distinctive are several canvases with silkscreen, oil and enamel that reproduce, at the imposing scale of 6 feet high, seafood restaurant menus from either the Jersey shore or Hubbard's native Oregon. In some, gestural passages of intense dark red and blue are superimposed on the image, but some of the menus are left unadorned. Icons of shrimp, shells and seagulls are combined with peculiar bits of text ("History of the shrimp box"?) and more generic, cutesy prose ("We overlook nothing but the harbor"). Asked about these works, the artist explained by e-mail that they arose from wondering what sort of imagery still has power: "You point to the shrimp, you get the shrimp." Even for those steeped in offbeat contemporary art, or those skeptical about finding novel images in our media-saturated world, they're odd, surprising paintings.