

The Artist as Raw Nerve

## A PERENNIAL UNDERGROUND MISFIT STRIKES AGAIN

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### ALEX BAG

American Fine Arts  
22 Wooster Street  
Through February 18

It's hard to imagine two more dissimilar artists than Alex Bag and Sam Taylor-Wood. But by some mutually illuminating coincidence, both their shows opened the same night. In marked contrast to Taylor-Wood, Bag is a perennial underground misfit, an original who's all but unmarketable, despite appearing on the cover of *Artforum* in 1996.

I went to both openings. Taylor-Wood's debut at Marks was attended by à la mode art worlders and personalities like Sir Elton John. Bag's exhibition was filled

with cool-looking kids, many lounging together on bean-bag chairs, watching a video monitor and getting stoned in a corner. The presiding celebrity was John Waters.

Though it's not on view here, Bag's main claim to fame is *Fall '95*, one of the best artist videotapes I've ever seen. Low-tech but high-impact, it features Bag in various guises, among them a beleaguered but ever evolving art student, a salesclerk, and a young woman bending but not breaking under enormous pressure. Bag is a natural talent, a combination of William Burroughs and a raw nerve. She takes chances and is as prone to running amok as nailing it. Here she runs slightly amok.

The only new works on view are 12 color photographs illustrating the zodiac, with each sign accorded its own controlled substance being used uncontrollably by one or more of the artist's friends. The video section of the exhibition, which is what everybody shows up for, is pretty much reruns. If you've never seen her legendary cable TV shows, *Unicorns and Rainbows* and *Cash From Chaos* (both collaborations with Patterson Beckwith), you're in for a treat. (The latter was taken off the air after she twice aired a shit-eating sequence from a porno tape.) Even if she's a bit off here, Bag is still one of the juiciest artists around. —J.S.