

ARTFORUM

Alex Bag

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

545 West 20th Street

September 17–October 24

What an Alex Bag show lacks in sense, it makes up for in dedication. Earlier this year, the New York–based artist converted the Whitney Museum’s lobby gallery into a psychedelic rumpus room. In her latest exhibition, the maven of make-believe continues her satiric, lo-fi assault by tackling the goliath of brain decay—reality television. She has created a rambling installation that features the requisite performance video but also wispy drawings and a shoddily installed, woodsy photomural. With a hefty dose of dead foliage, the effect is equal parts enchanted forest and chintzy pandemonium; a bewildering mix of real, unreal, and surreal, which is Bag at her best.

The five drawings on view reference screen grabs from reality-competition programs including *Charm School* and *Rock of Love 2*.

At the corner of one work, Bag has scrawled the description CUNT DESCENDING A STAIRCASE, recalling Duchamp’s famous *Nude* and its trajectory from scandal to cultural standard. For the video, the artist poses as the goofy necromancer-*cum*-host of an imagined medieval cooking program. With predictable zeal and astonishing facial dexterity, she giddily dispenses ludicrous recipes, occult histories, and psychobabble. The parody takes a turn for the meta when she eats a magic concoction, which alters her appearance and sends her into a drug-addled haze (and a Blockbuster Video store). For an instant, Bag, who ultimately dictates the terms of her self-transformations, seems to unwittingly morph before the viewer’s eyes. The moment undermines the conditions of production—offering a flash of clarity on the constructions of reality.



Alex Bag, *Reality Tunnel Vision (Medieval Grillin' A'Field, version 1)*, 2009, still from a color video, 15 minutes 40 seconds.

— Cameron Shaw