

ALEX BAG



Alex Bag

Born 1969, New Jersey

Lives and works in New Jersey

## EDUCATION

1995-1999      BFA, Cooper Union, New York, NY

## Solo Presentations

2020            *I'm Sorry You All Ended Up Here*, von ammon co, Washington, DC

2011            *Alex Bag*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland

2009            *Reality Tunnel Vision*, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY

*Alex Bag*, Galería Marta Cervera

*Alex Bag*, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

2005            *Coven Services for Consumer Mesmerism, Product Sorcery, and the Necromantic Reimagination of Consumption*, Locust Projects, Miami, FL

2004            *Coven Services for Consumer Mesmerism, Product Sorcery, and the Necromantic Reimagination of Consumption*, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY

2003            Catalyst Arts, Belfast, Northern Ireland

2002            *Crack Up*, American Fine Arts Co., New York, NY

2000            *12 Spells*, American Fine Arts Co., New York, NY

*All You Need is Love*, Laznia (Bathhouse) Center of Contemporary Art Gdansk

1999            Galerie Almine Reich, Paris, France

1998            Zaal de Unie, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

- 1997 Art Pace, San Antonio, TX
- 1996 Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA  
Marta Cervera Gallery, Madrid, Spain  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Le Magasin, Open Project Room, Grenoble, France  
Emi Fontana Gallery, Milan, Italy
- 1995 303 Gallery, New York, NY
- 1994 303 Gallery, New York, NY

### **Group Exhibitions**

- 2022 *Retail Apocalypse*, Centre Canadien d'Architecture, Québec, Canada  
*new images of women*, Shoot the Lobster, New York, NY  
*Girl and Doll*, Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich, Switzerland  
*Alex Bag*, *Art Club 2000*, *Daniela Rossell & Larry Johnson*, Los Angeles, CA
- 2011 *The Van*, Flint Institute of Arts, Michigan  
*Coven Services for Consumer Mesmerism*, Paradise Row, London
- 2010 Esopus Space, New York, NY  
*The Pursuer*, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, NY  
*One Film - One Week*, Freymond-Guth & Co., Zürich, Switzerland  
*Auto Kino! (presented by Phil Collins)*, Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin, Germany
- 2009 *100 Years (version #2, ps1, nov 2009)*, PS1, Long Island City, NY  
*Video Journeys*, Sister Gallery at Cottage Home, Los Angeles, CA

- 2008 Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL  
Traveling to Huntington Museum of Art, Huntington, WV  
Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum, Lafayette, LA  
*Slightly Unbalanced (with catalogue)*, University of Richmond Museums, Richmond, VA
- 2007 *Television Delivers People*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
Gagosian Gallery, New York, NY  
*Playback*, ARC/Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France  
*five day exhibition, curated by Electronic Arts Intermix*, Threewalls, Chicago, IL  
*Beneath the Underdog*, Gagosian Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 *Panorámica*, Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City  
*Alex Bag, Mike Kelley, Richard Hoeck & John Miller*, Babylon Kino, Berlin, Germany  
*Unfinished Business (curated by Sinisa Mitrovic)*, Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Pariska, Beograd  
*Failure (curated by Mike Fitzpatrick)*, Kilkenny Arts Festival, Kilkenny, Ireland
- 2005 *Day Labor*, PS1, Long Island City, NY,  
*Master Blaster, (curated by Stacey Allan)*, Kresge Gallery, Ramapo College, Mahwah, NJ  
*Baltic Triennial, (curated by Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, Raimundas Malasauskas, and Alexis Vaillant)*, Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania  
*When Humour Becomes Painful*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland  
*What Business Are You In?*, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA  
*Group Show*, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, NY
- 2004 *Election (curated by James Meyer)*, American Fine Art, New York, NY  
*Grotesque, Burlesque and Parody*, Abbaye Saint-André Centre d'Art Contemporain, Meymac, France  
*Incantations*, Metro Pictures, New York, NY  
*California Earthquake*, Daniel Reich Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 *Not Quite Myself Today (curated by John D. Spiak)*, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ



- 2000 *Performing Bodies*, Tate Gallery, London, UK  
Catalyst Arts, Belfast, Northern Ireland  
*Sentimental Education (curated by David Rimanelli)*, Deitch Projects, New York, NY  
*Elysian Fields*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France  
*Herz aus Glas*, Parking Meters, Cologne, Germany  
*Marking Time*, Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Palm Beach, Florida  
*Post-Pop Post-Punk*, Museum of Contemporary Art DC, Washington, DC
- 1998 *Visioni*, Pitti Immagine, Florence, Italy  
*All Of Me (curated by Lorelei Stewart)*, New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA  
*I Hate Movies (curated by Tom Borgese)*, Andrew Kreps, New York, NY  
Feria Internacional de arte contemporáneo: Arco '98, Madrid, Spain  
*The Video Room Festival*, The Video Room, New York City, The Fifth International, New York, NY  
*Harriet Craig*, Apex Art, New York, NY
- 1997 *Young and Restless*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
*100 Photographs*, American Fine Arts, New York, NY  
*Up Close and Personal*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA  
*Some Kind of Heaven (curated by Sadie Coles)*, Kunsthalle Nuremberg and Sadie Coles HQ, London, England  
7e Semaine Internationale de Vidéo (Biennale de Saint-Cérats), Geneva, Switzerland,  
*Video Divertimento (curated by Susan Hapgood, San Casciano and Dei Bagni): Doug Aitken, Alex Bag, Naotaka Hiro*, Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1996 *Does Television Inform the Way Art is Made?*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, Austria  
*Persona (with catalogue)*, The Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL, and Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland  
*Nirvana. Capitalism and the Consumed Image*, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA

1995      *How We Will Behave?*, Robert Prime Gallery, London, Y, UK  
*Push-Ups (Curated by Emily Tsingou)*, “The Factory” at Athens Fine Art School, Athens, Greece  
*Smart Show*, Landesmuseum, Zürich, Switzerland  
*Nach*, Smart Show, Stockholm, Sweden  
*Hero (curated by Ivan Moskovitz)*, Commonwealth Gallery, Madison, WI

1994      *Dirty Pictures (curated by Jack Pierson)*, Chateau Marmont, Los Angeles, CA  
*Supastore Boutique*, Laure Genillard Gallery, London, UK  
*Closing In*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA

## **Grants**

1997      Art Pace, San Antonio, TX

1996      Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Visiting Artist sponsored by Creative New Zealand,  
Dunedin, New Zealand

1995      Foundation for Contemporary Performance

## **Performances**

1996      *Utopian Art Festival*, Hotel 17, New York, NY,  
*Circus of the Stars*, Hotel 17, New York, NY  
*The Alterknit Theatre*, The Knitting Factory, New York, NY

1995      Thread Waxing Space, New York, NY

## Bibliography

- 2011 Coomer, Martin, *The Pavement and the Beach*, Time Out: London, July 28  
*Alex Bag at Migros Museum, Zurich*, Mousse Magazine, July 18  
Frankel, David, *Alex Bag*, Artforum, May, p. 180
- 2010 *Artist's Project: Alex Bag*, Esopus, Number 15: Television  
Spampinato, Francesco, *Still Life Channel*, Flash Art Italia #280, February, p. 72
- 2009 Shaw, Cameron, *Alex Bag*, artforum.com, October 8  
McGinley, Ryan, *My Top 10 Art Films*, VICE Magazine, September.  
Indrisek, Scott, *Artist to Watch: Alex Bag*, Whitewall, Issue 14, Summer, pp. 52-3  
Licht, Alan, *Alex Bag*, Modern Painters, April  
Halle, Howard, *Alex Bag*, Time Out New York, January 29  
O'Neill-Butler, Lauren, *Alex Bag: 500 Words*, artforum.com  
Momin, Shamim, *Alex Bag*, Purple Fashion, Issue 11, Spring-Summer
- 2008 *Escape Artist*, Jacobs, Mark, Tokion, Winter.  
Klein, Sheri R., *Comic Liberation: The Feminist Face of Humor in Contemporary*, Art Education, March  
Rosenberg, Karen, *What's on the Art Box? Spins, Satire and Camp*, The New York Times, January 11  
Alemani, Cecilia, *Television Delivers People*, Artforum.com, December 2007  
*Playback* (exhibition catalogue), Éditions des musées de la ville de Paris
- 2005 Rimanelli, David, *New York*, Artforum, December  
Smith, Roberta, *Day Labor*, The New York Times, November 11

- 2004  
Kelsey, John, *On the Ground: New York*. Artforum, December.  
Rimanelli, David, *Best of 2004: 13 Critics and Curators Look at the Year in Art*. Artforum, December  
Frankel, David, *TV, or Not TV*. Artforum, October  
Leffingwell, Edward, *Alex Bag at Elizabeth Dee*. Art in America, September  
Pollack, Barbara, *The Elephant in the Room*. Art News, September  
Finch, Charlie, *Bend It Like Beckham*. Artnet.com, August 18  
Bellini, Andrea, *New York Tales*. Flash Art, May-June  
Griffin, Tim, *Editor's Letter*. Artforum, May  
Kelsey, John, *Alex Bag*. Artforum, May  
Smith, Roberta, *Alex Bag*. The New York Times, March 19  
Goodbody, Bridget L, *Alex Bag*. Time Out New York, March 18-25  
Levin, Kim, *Show World*. The Village Voice, March 15  
Finch, Charlie, *A Bag Is a Bag Is a Bag*. Artnet.com, March 4  
*Opening: Hostile Takeover*, New York, March 1
- 2002  
Kimmelman, Michael, *Alex Bag: Crackup*, The New York Times, June 28
- 2001  
Rimanelli, David. "Best of 2001," Artforum, Harvey, Doug  
*About Time—Bitchen Video Art at the Hammer*, L.A. Weekly, 22.December. February 16-2000
- 2000  
Cotter, Holland. *The Nocturnal Dream Show*, The New York Times, July 28  
Saltz, Jerry. *Realm of the Senses*, The Village Voice, July 5-11  
*Sentimental Education*, The New Yorker, July 10  
Koether, Jutta. *Kunst: Gier und Glamour*, Vogue (Germany), April  
Saltz, Jerry. *The Artist as Raw Nerve: A Perennial Underground Misfit Strikes Again*, The Village Voice, February 22  
*Alex Bag*, Paper, February  
Gingeras, Alison. *The Salon of 1999: Friends and Enemies*, Artpress, January. 1998  
Smith, Roberta. *Art of the Moment, Here to Stay*, New York Times, February 15

- 1997 Jones, Kristin M. *Young and Restless, Museum of Modern Art*, Artforum, Summer. Van de Walle, Mark *Push-Ups, Athens Fine Art School*, Artforum, April  
Smith, Roberta. *The Resurging Video, Reclaimed and Reoriented*, The New York Times, February 21  
Neste, Robin. Review, Art & Text, 56
- 1996 Stafford, Amy. *Alex Bag (unplugged)*, Surface, Winter  
James, Caryn. *Art Flickers from Video Screens*, The New York Times, July 26  
Guha, Tania. *How Will We Behave?*, Time Out: London, July 17-24  
O'Brien, Glen. *Who's that Girl?*, Frieze, May  
Alexander, Randy. *Hero: Commonwealth Gallery*, New Art Examiner, May  
Hainley, Bruce. *All the Rage; The Art/Fashion Thing*, Artforum, March  
Fleiss, Elein, and Rian, Jeff. *Alex Bag's Girl World*, Purple Prose, 10  
Rubinstein, Raphael. *Alex Bag at 303*, Art in America, January  
*Alex Bag: Skewering the Art World*, Newsweek, January 15  
Gordon, Janine. *SM (Art) Alex Videos*, Flash Art, March-April  
Keall, Michael. *Real Far Gone*, Pavement Magazine, 19, October/November  
Hutter, Frido. *Stellen Sie (sich) durch Aus!*, Kleine Zeitung, October 13  
*Mediala Seiten Blicke*, Kronen Zeitung, October  
Behr, Martin. *Die Vertug Barkeit de (flimmer)Bilder*, Salzburger Nachrichten, September 25  
Krumpel, Doris. *Visionen Von Der Ferne Oder Nahe*, Der Standard, September 25  
Niegelhell, Franz. *Das Fernsehzeitalter als ein Produktionsmittel der Kunst*, Neue Zeit, September 25  
Hutter, Frido. *Die Enkel der Infizierten*, Kleine Zeitung, September 22  
Titz, Walter. *Kunst aus den Kanalen*, Steirischer Herbst, September 15  
Hainley, Bruce. *Openings: Alex Bag*, Artforum, January
- 1995 Smith, Roberta. *Alex Bag: 303 Gallery*, The New York Times, October 20. ZAPP Magazine, 6, December  
Avgikos, Jan. *Best Exhibitions 1995*, Artforum, December  
Halle, Howard. Review, Time Out Magazine, October 11-18

## Catalogues

- 2007 ARC/Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 2006  
Kilkenny Arts Festival, Ireland, Failure
- 2005 *When Humour Painful*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland
- 1997 *7e Semaine Internationale de Vidéo (Biennale de L'Image en Mouvement)*, Curated by Simon Lamunière, Saint-Gervais Geneve, Switzerland
- 1996 *Persona*, Renaissance Society, Chicago and the Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland  
*Push-Ups (curated by Emily Tsingou)*, "The Factory" at Athens Fine Art School, Athens, Greece

## Videography

- 2004 *Coven Services/Demo Reel*, Alex Bag
- 2001 *The Van*, Alex Bag
- 2000 *Le Cruel et Curieux Vie Du La Salmonella Pod*, Alex Bag and Ethan Kramer
- 1998 *Harriet Craig*, Alex Bag
- 1996 *Untitled (project for the Andy Warhol Museum)*, 22 minutes by Alex Bag  
*His Girlfriend is a Robot*, 16 Minutes by Alex Bag  
*Artist's Mind*, 22 minutes by Alex Bag
- 1995 *Untitled (Fall'95)*, videotape, 57 minutes by Alex Bag
- 1994 *Untitled (Spring 94)*, videotape, 28 minutes by Alex Bag

## Lectures and Seminars

- 2009      Witte de With, Rotterdam  
Electronic Arts Intermix, New York, NY
- 2004      The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA
- 1997      Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA
- 1996      Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA  
Yale University, New Haven, CT  
Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY  
Otis College, Westchester, CA  
Parsons School of Design, New York, NY Cal Arts, Valencia, CA  
Arts Center, Pasadena, CA

## Video Screenings and Festivals

- 2009 *Coven Services, Three Black Minutes* Kunstlerhaus Stuttgart, Germany
- 2005 *Late at Tate*, Tate Britain, London, United Kingdom
- 2004 The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA
- 1998 *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 1997 *Alex Bag, Alix Pearlstein, Paul MaCarthy*, Anthenem, Dijon, France
- 1996 Dan Bernier Gallery, Santa Monica, CA  
The Contemporary Center Honolulu, Honolulu, HI  
*Images*, Saint-Gervais, Geneve, Switzerland  
*Wish You Were Here*, De Appel, Amsterdam, the Netherlands  
*The 5th New York Film Festival*, Walter Reade Theatre, New York, NY  
Lincoln Center, New York, NY  
*Performance Arts, Individual Artist Award*, New York, NY



## Alex Bag

*I'm sorry you all ended up here*

29 August - 26 September 2020

Washington DC: I always feel surprised when I learn that someone is frightened of dolls. It could just be that I myself am so fond of them, but it seems sort of silly to imagine that a Madame Alexander ice skater could ever strike the chords of terror with any accuracy. The technical term for this particular anxiety is *pediophobia*, which stems etymologically from the Greek *paidion* and translates literally to the phrase “dread of little children.” It is maybe helpful to think of dolls as *little* little children, extra small imitations of life that simulate the general contours of the human body, but cannot help but reveal the radical totality of their emptiness (ie: deadness). It is this mortal void, I suppose, that imbues the little little child with the power to spook, and perhaps the *pediophobe's* fear stems not from scaled down limbs or the *unheimlich* blush of a porcelain cheek, but rather from a suspicion that the static figure is afforded a lifetime of opportunities to consolidate its resentment.

People are afraid of clown dolls, they are afraid of whispering Raggedy Anns and Andys, they recoil from the pouting silicone toddlers who stare dully into the middle distance with murder on their minds. Though a wild-eyed Annabelle or the clickety-clacking jaw of an unmanned dummy might strike fear in the heart of the *pediophobe*, they pale in comparison to what I will suggest with great confidence is the scariest doll story in the history of America. This story comes to us not from a horror movie or the antique notebooks of a dubious paranormal investigator, but rather courtesy of a middle-aged x-ray technician who had a taste for arts and crafts and a profound misunderstanding of the word “deceased.”

It was in a Key West medical clinic in the spring of 1930 that radiologist Carl Tanzler first encountered Maria “Elena” Milagro de Hoyos, a beautiful but gravely ill young Cuban woman who had lost most of her immediate family to a particularly virulent strain of tuberculosis. Convinced that she was the physical manifestation of a vision he'd once had of his soul-mate, Tanzler immediately dedicated himself to curing her with an aggressive course of x-ray treatments. Elena's death in 1931 came as a terrible shock to Tanzler, who suddenly found himself exiled from this unrequited fantasy, cast out of his imaginary Eden by the swinging scythe of the reaper.

Though Elena's family likely found the intensity of Tanzler's grief inappropriate, they agreed to allow him to pay for her funeral and accepted when he offered to build a mausoleum so that there might be a permanent site at which to remember her short life. While the careful observer may have noticed that Carl frequently visited Elena's grave, it took nearly a decade for anyone to realize that he had actually emptied it. In 1933, Tanzler staged a late-night disinterment. He used a small wagon to transport the body to his house, where he set himself to reconstructing what was left of Elena so that the body might more closely resemble the person it had once been. Tanzler painstakingly reconnected disarticulated bones with piano wire, he stuffed her chest cavity with perfumed rags, he set a pair of glass eyes into skin made of plaster and waxed silk. Once satisfied with his handiwork, Tanzler lived quite happily with this bizarre approximation of life for nearly a decade, sleeping and dancing with the body until his indiscretions eventually resulted in his arrest.

The contemporary press coverage that was dedicated to this grim saga primarily portrayed Tanzler as a tragic romantic, and the incredible interest that the story generated likely seemed justification enough to mount a public display of the corpse at a local funeral home. It was later reported that nearly 7,000 people, scores of school children included, filed past the doll formerly known as Elena, each of them gazing at a body so strangely divorced from its humanity that it almost ceased to be a body at all. Sufficiently evacuated of all the parts we equate with life and burdened by a veneer too artificial to accommodate the uncanny, the figure presented as little more than a ghoulish souvenir, a curiously hollowed out knick-knack gleaming beneath a heavy layer of wax.

Oscillating between the roles of the surrogate and the host, the doll is, at its core, a social tool that facilitates both self-identification and the construction of the other. Perhaps the unifying characteristic that defines the doll qua doll relates directly back to the pediophobe's anxiety, that strange flux between recognition and alienation that instigates memory and dread in equal measure. It is inaccurate to identify the doll as neutral, and the Bratz Dolls and Reborns and Real Dolls of this world function primarily as vessels into which culture pours itself. It seems fitting to me that there exists at this moment a gallery full to overflow with reclaimed trinkets negated of their sentimentality and a battalion of misshapen figures too self-absorbed to recognize their own impotence. Liberated from the prison of nostalgia, the residents of I'm Sorry You All Ended Up Here remind us that abjection often veils itself beneath quotidian signifiers, that the clown doll only hisses if you expect it to.

- Alissa Bennett



*I'm Sorry You All Ended  
Up Here*  
von ammon co  
Washington DC  
29 August - 26  
September 2020

























It's all  
diamonds and Rosé,  
but it should be.

















*Untitled (Strange and Anomalous  
Right-Wing Lesbian Couple: One  
Mansplains, One Really Needs to Pee),  
2020  
mixed media  
dimensions variable*



*Untitled (Sephora Bitch)*, 2020  
mixed media  
17 x 11.5 x 6.5 in / 43.2 x 29.2 x 16.5 cm





*Untitled (The Ghost of Shopping)*, 2020  
mixed media  
27 x 8 x 5.5 in / 68.6 x 20.3 x 14 cm

*Untitled (Patriot / Various)*, 2020  
mixed media  
22 x 10.5 x 5.5 in / 55.9 x 26.7 x 14 cm







*Untitled (16 and Pregnant (Again))*, 2020  
mixed media  
dimensions variable





*FOCUS GROUP 3*  
von ammon co  
Washington, DC  
17 July - 31 August 2022

*Not Yet Titled, 2022*  
mixed media  
dimensions variable





Paris Internationale,  
2021





*Not Yet Titled*, 1993-2021, found dolls, tailored clothing, electronics, dimensions variable





Coven Services, 1998  
Video, 14:40

*Untitled (Margiela Suicide Doll)*, 2021  
found doll, tailored clothing, knife, electrical outlet  
dimensions variable





*Alex Bag*  
Kunsthall Stavanger  
Norway  
05 April - 03 June 2018

















*Alex Bag: The Van (Redux)\**  
Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami  
01 December 2015 - 31 January 2016











*Cash from Chaos /  
Unicorns & Rainbows Team  
Gallery, New York  
29 March - 28 April 2012*











*Cash from Chaos/Unicorns and Rainbows,*  
1994-7  
Video, 458 minutes



*Untitled (Fall '95)*, 1995  
Video, 56:45





*Alex Bag*  
Migros Museum für  
Gegenwartskunst  
Zurich, Switzerland  
28 May - 14 August 2011







*Untitled (Aufschub), 2011*

*Coven Services for  
Consumer Mesmerism,  
Product Sorcery, and the  
Necromantic  
Reimagination of  
Consumption, 2004*







Coven Services For Consumer Mesmerism, Product Sorcery, And The Necromantic Reimagination (?)  
Of Consumption®/ Michael Jackson, 2004  
pencil on paper  
25 x 19.5 in / 64 x 50 cm





*Untitled (Project for the Whitney Museum)*, 2009  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
09 January - 12 April 2009



*Untitled (Project for the Whitney Museum),*  
2009  
Video, 38 minutes





*Untitled, 2021/2022,  
Retail Apocalypse, Centre  
Canadien d'Architecture,  
Québec, Canada  
15 April 2022 - 15  
January 2023*





*Untitled (Project for the Andy Warhol  
Museum), 1996*  
Video, 22 minutes

At Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburg, PA  
1996



*Harriet Craig*, 1998  
Video, 12:08

In *Harriet Craig*, curated by David Rimanelli  
apexart  
19 November - 19 December 1998



*Untitled (Spring '94), 1994*  
Video, 30 minutes





*Twelve Spells*, 1999 Alex  
Bag, Art Club 2000,  
Daniela Rossell & Larry  
Johnson  
House of Gaga  
Los Angeles, CA  
11 June - 13 August 2022





*Twelve Spells (Aries)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm



*Twelve Spells (Taurus)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm





*Twelve Spells (Gemini)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm



*Twelve Spells (Cancer)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm





*Twelve Spells (Leo)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm





*Twelve Spells (Virgo)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm

*Twelve Spells (Libra)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm







*Twelve Spells (Scorpio)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm





*Twelve Spells (Sagittarius)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm



*Twelve Spells (Capricorn)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm





*Twelve Spells (Aquarius)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm





*Twelve Spells (Pisces)*, 1999  
Chromogenic print  
16 x 24 in / 40.6 x 61 cm



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*Press Release*

# Alex Bag

Reception 18.00-21.00  
26/5-10/6 2000

Catalyst Arts are very proud to present Alex Bag - the New York bag lady of numerous guises cometh to infuse Belfast with her frivolous flare.

'Twelve Spells' are twelve photographs of Bag's mates representing the zodiac signs, each sign induced by it's favourite drug.

'The Artist Mind', 30 min video spoof on Damien Hirst, starring Alex's brother Damian Bag.

Video lounge/library. Come and lounge and get seduced in her very own living room - warped through timezones and the Atlantic- and landing right here in the upper gallery space at Catalyst Arts. Zinging seats and fizzy carpets will be offered for your comfortable viewing of her video library spanning the works: spring 94 , fall 95, fancypantz, his girlfriend is a robot, harriet craig, untitled project for the andy warhol museum, a compilation of her public access show, and a compilation of various appropriated television and video clips.

Bring your own rizlas, spoons and creditcards.

Photo: Patterson Beckwith







*Alex Bag*  
Catalyst Arts  
Belfast, Northern Ireland  
26 May - 10 June 2000











*The Artist's Mind*, 1996  
Video, 31 minutes

## Catalyst takes a tour of the artist's mind

**A**lex Bag is the New York artist's name, and the invitation to view her library of homemade videos, at Catalyst Arts, includes the constraints to bring your own Rizlas, spoons and credit cards, while the Gallery will provide the 'zinging seats and fizzy carpets'.

Also on the invite, is the info, that one of the artist's photo-works on show consists of photographs of 'the Bag's mates representing the zodiac signs, each sign induced by its favourite drug.'

Twelve Pieces turns out to be in the downstairs loft, rows of self-indulgent colour snaps, mocking astrology at the level of a really crass B-feature campus horror flick.

But, on the other hand, you'll need the appropriate bags of time to checkout the rows of videos, spoofs on one art genre or another.

So, for your first visit,

you'll probably be content to slump back in one of the really cool chairs and take your time over 'The Artist Mind'.

This is an extended art school two-joke prank, an androgynous person who may be the artist's long-haired brother, followed on home-video, as he does an extended take-off of the tedious self-centred superficiality of Damian Hirst at his worst.

In it, our grungy vocabulary-challenged hero sips beer for breakfast, burps a lot, wanders around Wal-Mart, before cutting out circles of MDF, which he rolls down wooded hills, squiggling paint on them in a parody of Hirst's over-hyped circle paintings.

But most of the time, our man puts on overalls and roams early morning rural byways, picking up last night's 'road-kill' ie squashed feral fauna, to pickle in glass cases for his exhibitions.

Ok you've got the point.

*Till June 17*





# KALEIDOSCOPE



Issue 29, Spring 2017

Pre-Internet, when media was one-directional, Los Angeles artist ALEX BAG started “talking back” to television, her best imaginary friend growing up. Here, in conversation with PIPER MARSHALL and MITCHELL ANDERSON, she recounts how messing with tropes and formats with her “dirty little DIY hand” helped her make work that’s at once cynical and sentimental.

**MITCHELL ANDERSON** In putting together a survey covering two and a half decades, how do you look back at work that is so connected with the culture of the time it was made, yet still feels really relevant today? So much of it doesn't feel dated at all.

**ALEX BAG** That's nice to hear, that it is not dated. Well, you know, when working on a video, I watch it so many times, go over it so many times during the process of making it and editing, that it's like I sleep the words and everything—and then, after its done, I really don't look at the videos for years. So it is very odd to walk into a room and see them all going simultaneously. I had that experience at the Migros Museum with a kind of survey show, and it was very strange. I really hate watching myself on television; I do like watching videos that have my friends in them, and I especially like watching my brother and all the torment I've put him through over the years, but watching myself really makes my skin crawl. Please don't ask me for any kind of revelatory or profound statements about my body of work until I'm on some kind of deathbed, or at least until my dementia has progressed further.

MA Right now is the moment of the rehash or the remake. The '90s especially have been rediscovered by corporate America; you see it in movies, fashion—even *Roseanne* is back on TV again. So when your characters sing Nirvana songs, it doesn't feel like the past. I think this is part of how things don't die anymore. What do you think?

AB I don't know. At the time, it really seemed important to me to talk back. Media was so much more one-directional—this was pre-Internet, obviously—so the point was to just sort of mess with it, to get in there and use the tropes and preordained formats, using my dirty little DIY hand to auteur the fuck out of it. Now there's YouTube, so it's almost hard to remember the olden times when it wasn't so easy to talk back, or put your voice out there into the Akashic records. I was also obsessively taping television because again, there was no YouTube—if you missed something on television, it was gone, and there was no way to find it again. So I always felt that it was God's work to stay up all night, recording the crappiest shows on television and re-editing them. It just seemed wildly important at the time. Now the stress is off.

PIPER MARSHALL When you taped television, edited it, and then re-performed its tropes in your videos, did you think of that as sentimental or as cynical?

AB Both. I try to avoid cynicism; I really am sincere, even though it doesn't appear that way. I try to be optimistic. Coming out of the punk rock ethos, I feel like it was more about reclaiming something that should be everyone's. There is something beautiful in that, as opposed to just finding fault, which is really, really easy to do. A bit of the downfall of the '90s was incessant fault-finding.

PM It seems like a lot of care and labor went into making these works.

MA It is a really interesting thing. There is a ton of labor there that you don't ever see on the screen, so I think, as Piper said, there is cutting, copying, watching, writing—there is so much labor here that we are also talking about how it is not cynical.

PM It is actually really beautiful: the amount of love hours which accompanies the labor. There is a lot of handwork that goes into your pieces, but because the artwork is video, the hand is elided. Can you talk about your interest in hand-craft?

AB The only kind of kind of artwork that I have any compulsion towards making is drawing and writing. I feel like all those videos come from an urge to be a writer which was never realized. I am teaching a drawing class now with four ten-year-old girls at my house. It is just starting, and I spend the entire hour just telling them to make a mess—"It's OK, it's alright! That line doesn't need to be perfect!" I feel like this is doing a service to the future for these future women and all who will surround them. I wish somebody was there when I was ten telling me, "Make a mess!" Because it is insane how those tendencies toward perfection are embedded at such a young age. I'm constantly waging this eternal internal war with perfectionism, but my superhero is called Procrastinator. If I put off doing something long enough, there will come a point where I no longer can afford the luxury of agonizing. When my son draws, I just love his drawings, and I'm almost the opposite with him, because I'm afraid to put my voice in his head: the perfectionist's voice. Right now, he would happily go to school in his underpants, because there is no self-criticism or self-doubt to cripple him yet.

MA I think this brings up the social issues in your work, where we see you bringing up topics or parts of society that should change, especially the art world. I watch this now, and it's clear that nothing has changed in twenty, twenty-five years.

AB Super sad. Isn't that so sad? It is heartbreaking. No, it is just another place where it is so necessary, and continues to be necessary, to talk back. I know from *Untitled Fall '95* (1995), it emerged from going to a Josh Decker panel discussion and just listening to him drone on and on about, you know, "My generation of artists" or "This generation of artists." He was just talking out of his ass, and I was just so angry about what he said. I was just like, "Why do only the critics get a voice? Why can't I as an artist speak out?"

PM One of the topics I want to cover is your connection to television, and what it was like to grow up with television so present in your life. For instance, your mom was performing on television. How did you feel about that as a kid? How do you feel about that now?

AB Well again, it is interesting, because my mom was on television when I was young, but I didn't watch because it made me extremely upset to see her with another group of children, telling them the same stories she told me. She was the writer of the show, she'd created it, so a lot of her banter with child actors were the stories that she'd told me, and I felt angry about having to share her or something, so I didn't really watch the show until I was in college. By that time, the show was in reruns, and it was on at maybe five the morning on Saturdays. If I was up all night, she would magically appear on my television with this psychedelic background and giant collared shirts and sing and talk me down through the sunrise. My father was in advertising, so I got to be on the sets of a lot of television commercials, as well as his office, where more dark arts were happening. Also, my uncle is a writer/director/filmmaker. He made this movie *Death Collector* in 1977-ish; my brother and I are extras in that, in this scene where this guy gets shot in his car.

MA What's your connection to television now, as an adult?



AB I watched so much television as a child, and I still watch so much television today. That was like my best imaginary friend growing up. I was an extremely awkward child, but television fed me—it's candy. That was an escape that I needed, and it still is. It's still a huge part of my life, and I am not embarrassed to say that. So that is just part of my subconscious, consciousness, whatever.

MA Has your idea of watching TV shifted along with the prevalent viewing modes? You know, like, with Netflix and the ability to binge-watch?

AB Being able to watch almost exactly what I want, without advertising breaks to ruin it, makes me think that my attention span is changing, lengthening. I am choosing to binge TV shows, not movies, so it is making me think that movies should be at least six hours long now. But there is this trade off: I have a longer attention span, but I also have a circadian rhythm disorder. As soon as I can't sleep, I am on Netflix; hours go by, and then before I know it, I have to get up. So I'm tired all day, and then I want to take a nap, so I will watch more Netflix to fall asleep. It is really awful. My son has been watching these YouTube videos of people playing video games, which I find really interesting. It is the favorite and preferred entertainment of seven-year-olds everywhere.

MA All my thirty-year-old friends, too.

AB There are so many layers of removal. You are not playing the game; you are watching somebody else play the game. My son is on these ones now that are gameplay but with storytelling—like a *Minecraft* game, where somebody has created a world and then goes back into the world and snaps videos around and makes voiceovers for the different characters, so it is like a movie. They have made their own movies. I love that, that you can make your own film that way. I've been playing a lot of video games lately. Within a preconceived world, the world of the programmed game, there are sometimes opportunities to fuck around and play. My son is into these LEGO games, where you have to gather up these chips for missions by breaking and shooting bricks. I can't tell you the joy I get from running amok and breaking LEGO houses. There's one where you're in New York City and you walk down the street and break the shit out of the city. The entire city landscape. It's fucking awesome. It reminds me of my favorite game back in the day, *Grand Theft Auto*. My boyfriend at the time was all about the missions, but my favorite thing was to go on these crime sprees, mugging people and running them down. The joy in that, just being able to be within an environment and make mayhem. I would love to make a video game some-day.

MA I don't know if you'll have something to say about this, but I think it is also crazy how, ten or fifteen years ago, I would have been very lucky to have seen one of your videos—I would have to wait for an exhibition—but now I have the ability to binge-watch your work all at once. It changes the viewing experience for all kinds of video art at the same time. Do you think about this while you are making new works? Or are you going about your process the same as always?

AB I try to not think about that. Anytime I am making a video, I am making it for my people, this small little group of people who are friends. If I tried to think about that larger audience, I'd get terrified and nothing would ever happen. I would never make anything. It really used to scare me that you could see my videos. I have gone through the ups and downs, the pitfalls, the trials and tribulations of video art—which, shockingly, is not the most profitable of artmaking mediums. I used to run into people who'd say, "I just got a copy of your video." And I'd say, "Where'd you get a copy of my video?" Because I never sold anything; I still haven't, really. A few people bought videos early on and only occasionally, so as soon as they started showing up on YouTube, the first thought was again horror and dismay. But now it makes perfect sense to me. I was always happy that they were at EAI, and that if you wanted to see them, that you could always see them there. That's where all the big boys have their videos.

MA I think these kind of market things are interesting, especially since you've dealt very much from the beginning with the objectification of the artist as someone who creates a product and that's their job.

PM While you've been talking about these ideas for years, they seem to align with the current mood and political climate, where the objectification of the artist, specifically the female artist, is being spoken about very publicly. As someone who has been speaking about this since the '90s, how do you feel about that?

AB I just find it interesting. It seems like something that is worth talking about—especially since I feel like with my work, it's *made* of talk. There is not ever really so much to say about it when it is done, because it's all sort of there. It is direct communication. It is not like there are layers of interpretation. The kind of celebrity around art, or even being interviewed like this—that's something else. A couple of years ago, I got asked to be interviewed at a school in Spain, and it was simultaneously translated into five languages as I was talking. I still have nightmares about that day. There is nothing I have to say that should be translated into five languages simultaneously.

MA This kind of echoes back onto the art world system.

AB There's this whole other job that you're expected to do after you've made what you made. I've always been uncomfortable with speaking at length about the work, and suspicious of people who are very comfortable with speaking at length about their work.

PM Do you think there is a reward in the art world for this kind of self-presentation?

AB I always hoped not, but yeah. That is definitely part of the artmaking process. I do think that some people are rewarded; when someone has that talent, you see their career taking off early on. But I also feel like if the substance isn't there, it eventually bites them in the ass. They get found out. That's another fear I have—that somebody's going to find out just how stupid I am.

MA *Untitled Fall '95*, *The Artist's Mind* (1996), *the Van* (2001), *the Van Redux* (2016): throughout your films, there are consistent characters that play with the idea of the artist talking about their work, and even make fun of it. Do you think artists shouldn't talk about their work?

AB No, I don't know if that's the answer. It depends on the art that you're making. If you are working in a more abstract way, or poetically, like with painting, you should be able to explain some things. What I would expect from a good arts patron is that they have a personal connection and they get out of a piece what they want, rather than what they're told it's about. Where's the fun? Art should mean different things to different people. In an ideal world, I don't think there should be so much fast talk, but that's part of the market. To sell the work, you need to have a slogan and a jingle. It's another product to sell. The whole world around it is about the marketing of it, which is always ugly, always. That's advertising. So I guess, yeah—shut up! – Piper Marshall, Mitchell Anderson, Spring 2017



# BOOKFORUM



ALEX BAG



IN 1995, AS MATTHEW BARNEY became famous for his opulent, surrealist film epic, video artist Alex Bag rose to stardom as a kind of anti-*Cremaster*, creating no-budget video art with little more than cheap wigs, bedsheet backdrops, appropriated television clips, and stuffed animals. In *Untitled Fall '95*, Bag played a student at SVA, reporting on each semester in a satirical video diary, which she punctuated with sketches that featured warring toys, a fake phone-sex commercial, and Björk explaining how a TV works. Now, Bag's first monograph has finally been published, as her work is absorbed into art-school curricula and newly pirated excerpts are posted online. The book contains stills, photographs, reproductions of her notebook pages, essays by critics, and scripts for the videos. Reading these screenplays shifts the focus from the brilliance of Bag's performances and her purposefully makeshift art direction to the strength of her writing. Her pitch-perfect use of vernacular speech and mastery of plot and character become clearer, underscoring what's long been known—she is a comic genius, and one of the art world's coolest harridans. Bag's punk-inflected institutional critique was leveled against novel targets like the sexual politics of art school and the alienated labor of a professionalized art scene, and she depicted these insider subjects with the damning detritus of mass media and advertising culture. In one of *Untitled Fall '95*'s interludes, a Ronald McDonald doll's brutish come-on to a Hello Kitty toy is followed by Ronald proposing a marketing partnership—it's the perfect introduction to the penultimate installment, about a summer job for a Williamsburg artist. She notes that she's "never heard of him before, but apparently he's like an overlord of this pathetic scene out there," and almost two decades later it's still funny, even on paper. Bag's post-Pop, pre-YouTube tour de force has become a prescient cult classic for a new generation. – Johanna Fateman

# PURPLE



Shamim Momin // S/S 2009 Issue 11



In the mid-'90s ALEX BAG was a phenomenon. She appeared on the cover of magazines — Purple Prose and Artforum in the same month. She was the young, up-and-coming star of the new generation of video artists. People called her the Cindy Sherman of video for the way she played dress-up in her short, funny, and thought-provoking videos, acting out roles, throwing her ego and her voice in all different directions. She wasn't just an artist playing games with images and mass media, she was a comedian and a social critic. Now, after several years of laying low, she's back in the limelight. She's interviewed here by the curator of her current exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

SHAMIM MOMIN — This isn't the first time you've been featured in Purple, is it?

ALEX BAG — No, it isn't. I was on the cover once, a long time ago, and Patterson and I did two projects for the magazine. One was about the difficulties of being a Goth in the summertime. We portrayed a group of teenagers from upstate New York. Patterson and I worked together in our usual way: I came up with an idea and did the styling — I chose the clothes and stuff — and Patterson was the technical wizard with the photography.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Being a Goth in the summertime presents it's own set of issues.

ALEX BAG — Yeah. All that black clothing and caked-on make-up. It's very difficult to maintain that look in the broiling heat.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Were you ever a Goth?

ALEX BAG — Oh yeah.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Some people think I must have been a Super-Goth, because my aesthetic runs that way, but I was more pseudo-hippie-boarding-school. Were you a Goth throughout your teenage years?

ALEX BAG — Well, I got into Bowie early on, like in 7th grade or 8th grade, but by 9th grade I'd started my all-black period. Black on the outside, because black was how I felt on the inside. But now it's so much easier to define yourself aesthetically by your musical tastes.

SHAMIM MOMIN — It's also easier to find all the stuff.

ALEX BAG — Yeah, it's easier to track it all down. The looks are very clear. I saw this great book that breaks down all the different kinds of Goths. I didn't realize there were so many — like 50 different types: Emo-Goth, Hippie-Goth...

SHAMIM MOMIN — Really? I thought there was about five.

ALEX BAG — The book showed you how you're supposed to wear your hair.

SHAMIM MOMIN — It sounds like The Preppy Handbook.

ALEX BAG — Exactly. In my freshman year

I was told that if I didn't play a sport no college would touch me. I decided that cheerleading was the easiest way to go.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Wow, a Goth cheerleader!

ALEX BAG — Yeah. I had black hair and black eyeliner. I hated the football team and I hated the other cheerleaders. I think I was smoking by that point, too. It was really bad.

SHAMIM MOMIN — It's like one of your pieces.



ALEX BAG — Then I stopped wearing black and started wearing raggedy clothes. It was like pre-pre-Grunge. I was like every art school kid in the late '80s. Wearing ripped up dresses, lots of slips, and my hair was always a mess. I think things would've been a lot easier for me back in high school — and I would've had a lot more friends — if I'd had a straightening iron.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Is your hair naturally curly?

ALEX BAG — It's insanely curly, in a really bad way. Sometimes it looks pre-Raphaelite, but mostly it just looks like a rat's nest. Anyway, my misspent youth — and my misspent midlife crisis — was defined by music. In the ninth grade I was into The Dead Kennedys, The Butthole Surfers, The Cure, and The Smiths. The Aquarius-time shape-shifter in me goes back to 1977: then it was The Stooges, Joy Division, Gang of Four, Wire — mostly punk. And then it was Patti Smith, Suicide, and all that New York punk stuff. I really liked Television and I loved Richard Hell. I went through a lot of phases — music's always been super hard on me.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Where are you from?

ALEX BAG — Well, I was born on the Upper West Side. But when I was four or something we moved to glorious, glamorous New Jersey, the place I'm staying now. It's like 20 or 30 minutes away from the city.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Didn't you have an affair with your high school boyfriend or something like that?

ALEX BAG — Well, no. He was never my boyfriend. He was just someone I had a crush on.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Oh, that's even better. I love it.

ALEX BAG — It finally happened, 25 years later.

SHAMIM MOMIN — That's hilarious. Tell me the story!

ALEX BAG — My crush on him started when I was really young. Our parents were friends and one time we all went on vacation together. I was awkward and weird — surprise, surprise. I must have been 11 or 12 and he was two years older. He was really beautiful — and he still is. I asked him if he remembers all this, but he doesn't.

SHAMIM MOMIN — He doesn't remember that your families went on vacation together?

ALEX BAG — He kind of remembers that, but he doesn't remember this particular moment — it's one of those things that's etched in my memory bank — when we were sitting at a picnic table and he was singing along to a Beatles tape. He sang "Come Together" to me, all the way through. I couldn't remember what song it was, and then when I did, it totally cracked me up because that's what we'd been trying to do for the last four months. I think I might have bought some pot from him in high school a couple times. But it was a secret crush, because he was a Lothario.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Did you tell him all this when you saw him again?

ALEX BAG — Yes. After we started hooking up, I spilled my guts to him. I mean, it wasn't a freakish thing — I wasn't stalking him.

SHAMIM MOMIN — No, no, you just had a crush on him. Has he changed? Is he cuter? Is he lame?

ALEX BAG — Well, I was trying to get over breaking up with someone else, so the timing was right. It was a bad breakup. The man, who shall remain nameless, and I went out for eight years, and he broke up with me on New Year's Day, which was just great. I heard the death rattle before it happened but it was still really bad. Not that it's ever good. But he just sort of stopped speaking to me and wouldn't give me an explanation why. I kept saying, "Alright, alright, so you met someone else." And he was like, "No, it's not like that. That's not what's going on." I'm like, "So it's me, then!" But he wouldn't say anything. And I'm like, "What's wrong with me?" And he really knew me — what a vivid imagination I have, what a big ball of self-hatred I am. He should've known enough to at least offer me some kind of explanation, so that I wouldn't spend endless hours going over everything with a flea comb, like, "What did I say? What did I do?" I went into therapy again after that happened, and it was helping me. Then this other guy came along. I couldn't have sat down at a drawing board and come up with a better plan of action. My therapist agreed. He's just a nice guy. Another musician — another Gemini carpenter-musician. The first guy was also a Gemini carpenter-musician.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Are you a Gemini?

ALEX BAG — No, I'm an Aries.

SHAMIM MOMIN — What's Aries, again? May?

ALEX BAG — April, March/April. What are you?

SHAMIM MOMIN — A Leo. I'm characteristically Leo, meaning I only know my own sign.

ALEX BAG — Ah, we're both fire signs — that's good. Leos are cool. I like the fire signs. We look for air signs and then we burn them up. But it makes us shine brighter.

SHAMIM MOMIN — When did you move back in with your parents? And what's it like?

ALEX BAG — It's weird. I had the house to myself for the summer — actually longer than the summer; for six months while they were upstate — and it was lovely. Now they're back and it can be difficult at times. I'm a teenager again, in the belly of the beast.

SHAMIM MOMIN — I can only imagine. I love my parents, but going home was always freaky for me, because I felt like I couldn't stop myself from turning back into a child. I was very aware it was happening but I couldn't stop it. Our connotative and associative responses are just too strong. But you've been living back with your folks for a while now so maybe you can develop new responses and supercede the past.

ALEX BAG — I'm still working out the kinks. My brother lives about five minutes away.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Isn't he in some of your videos?

ALEX BAG — Yeah, he's in a lot of them. He's one of my favorite people to work with.

SHAMIM MOMIN — He's the only one you let improvise, right?

ALEX BAG — Yeah, he's the only one I trust with improvisation. He's just a natural character-maker. I give him direction, we build characters together, and I give him a couple words or lines that I want him to throw in. I tell him what I want him to talk about and then I just let him go. I have to keep the number of takes to a minimum — two or three — because each one will be completely different; there'll be great things in each one and I try to avoid editing nightmares.

SHAMIM MOMIN — You're very specific about your scripts, correct?

ALEX BAG — Yeah. Everything is written out.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Which is surprising because there's such a dynamic, spontaneous feel to the dialogue. How do you make that happen? Is it just the nature of your scripts? Do you want the dialogue to feel improvised?



ALEX BAG — I never work with professional actors, thank God. And usually everything is done at the last minute. My procrastinating tendencies create part of the dynamic of things being rushed. I work with friends and I try to make things simple. There's no crew to speak of. It's usually just me and a camera and the actors, so people tend to be a lot more natural. People who might have suffered from stage fright or who aren't used to acting tend to relax somewhat. We use cue cards when it's necessary, when someone can't remember their lines.

SHAMIM MOMIN — I've never acted so I'm totally fascinated by it.

ALEX BAG — I'm not really an actress myself, either.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Don't be ridiculous! You're brilliant.

ALEX BAG — Please kill me. You can't really tell, but for my first art-school video I wrote my lines down on index cards that I placed in various parts of the room. It's an old trick Marlon Brando used. You'll notice I'm not always looking in one direction. Basically, I'm looking around the room for the cue cards — you'll see me staring off this way, looking off that way. I'm terrible at memorizing lines.

SHAMIM MOMIN — I can imagine you doing that in my head. But I thought that was the effect of the character — she never looked straight ahead. I was just talking to my performance department about your new play...

ALEX BAG — The Stage Fright Players.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Is that what you're calling it? Great name. I love the idea of a play cast entirely of folks with stage fright. I can't even imagine the awkward tenor of the space during the performance. Someone asked if I was going to be in it, to which someone else responded, "Oh, Shamim never has stage fright, ever. She loves to talk!" It's part of my job, obviously — I talk in front of people for a living. I just like people and I'm very social. But I'm a terrible, terrible actress. I freak out when it becomes real acting. But maybe I will try out for it.

ALEX BAG — You should.

SHAMIM MOMIN — In your new video piece for the Whitney show you use an interview format. Will you be sticking with that for the show?

ALEX BAG — There'll be a host and guests. It's based on the '70s children's show, The Patchwork Family, which, as you know, my mom was the host of. Basically, there'll be a short introduction of the guests, and then an audience-guest exchange. Have you seen any of the original episodes my mom was in?

SHAMIM MOMIN — No. I tried to look them up but they're really hard to find.

ALEX BAG — My mom sat behind a desk with a puppet. They sang songs and talked about things. Then they'd have the guests come on.

SHAMIM MOMIN — What kind of guests?

ALEX BAG — Well, it was progressive, '70s children's television, so they'd have a musician, a scientist, or a painter, and people who brought in creatures. I was on as a guest. I was really lucky because I was there when the animal guy was there.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Was he an animal trainer of some kind?

ALEX BAG — Just a guy who came on with pets. It was like presenting the spectrum of the animal kingdom.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Like the kind of thing David Letterman does.

ALEX BAG — Yeah. The day I was on he brought a monkey with him and I got to wheel it around in a stroller all day. I was seven or eight or something. It was the greatest day of my life.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Bizarre, but understandably fabulous. Was your mom the host of the show for its entire run? Was it her concept?

ALEX BAG — Yeah. She wrote it. She had a show on PIX, which is now Channel 11, called the Carol Corbett Show, from 1964 to '67. It was in black and white. She used a hand-held dog puppet named Doodly-Doo. She did drawings and stuff. The Patchwork Family ran from '72 to '78, and it was in reruns, at six o'clock in the morning on CBS, into the early '90s, when I was in college. I remember watching it after some really rough Saturday nights.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Was there a theme song?

ALEX BAG — Yes. [Singing] We want to have you as a member of the Patchwork Family! There's plenty to do as a member of the Patchwork Family! We're looking for sisters, and brothers, and all sorts of others, like nieces, nephews, uncles, cousins — We need members by the dozens! All kinds of people in the Patchwork Family!

We're gonna be happy as can be, because it's certified and stated that everyone's related in the Patchwork Family!

SHAMIM MOMIN — Are you going to have a theme song for your new piece?

ALEX BAG — There has to be a theme song. And I'm hoping to have animals — it's a new challenge to try and track down and rent some. The feel of the piece is going to be very dark, like a suicide note to the youth of today, so I've got to find the right animals, ones that shouldn't be around children.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Like a ferret, maybe?

ALEX BAG — Fire ants and a poisonous spider — dangerous things that children shouldn't touch. I'm gathering talent as well. Spencer Sweeney and Tom Borghese are going to be in it. So is my brother. A lot of people are volunteering. I want to do the commercials for the breaks, too, and that's going to require more actors than you can shake a stick at.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Are you working with local kids?

ALEX BAG — I've got friends who have kids. I don't need a lot of kids, fortunately.

SHAMIM MOMIN — But will the audience be made up entirely of kids? When we first spoke I thought you'd said the audience might be a mix of different characters.

ALEX BAG — Oh, no, just kids.

SHAMIM MOMIN — But the guests will be of all ages.

ALEX BAG — I don't imagine the kids are going to have a lot of lines. It will be reaction shots, mostly, and possibly them asking questions, but they won't really do a lot of talking.

SHAMIM MOMIN — And what will your puppet be like? Do you know yet?

ALEX BAG — Not yet.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Have you chosen any of the guests you'd like to have on?

ALEX BAG — Tom [Borghese] wants to be the art guest and do a painting with the kids — maybe a Rothko sort of thing.

SHAMIM MOMIN — That's good, seeing that Rothko killed himself — that's always charming.



ALEX BAG — We're going to have an animal guy, and a neuropsychiatrist who'll talk about neurochemistry and brain disorders and hyperactivity. All those meds — if the kids aren't already taking them, they soon will be. I think Spencer would make a great wizard or magician — something to do with the darker art forms. I've got to get some chicks in there too, but I don't really know how yet. I'd also like to use my mom, at some point. There will definitely be some montage-like, dream-sequences. I'm going to use old footage from her show, move back and forth in time, and try to do double exposures of our faces, or something. I think that could be really fun. My mom is a real actress; I've wanted to work with her on something for a long time.

SHAMIM MOMIN — So you have tapes of the original show.

ALEX BAG — I just found them. I wish I had more episodes. I only have six.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Even a couple would be fine. It all sort of sounds familiar, but sometimes I don't remember things until I see them.

ALEX BAG — They used the puppeteer from The Magic Garden.

SHAMIM MOMIN — That makes sense. The Magic Garden is what I use as a reference for people who might not have seen The Patchwork Family.

ALEX BAG — Maybe when you see it it'll spark a memory.

SHAMIM MOMIN — It probably will — when you sang the theme song I did remember something. Was it the first time a real spate of kids took part in a TV show?

ALEX BAG — I don't know the entire history of children's television, but I know that the show didn't look like other shows that were on at the time. It was very much geared towards education, rather than just showing cartoons. It was empowerment-based and really instructive. The creative arts were really pushed, too — there was always a guest musician or painter on.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Seems like a hippie kind of thing, coming as it did out of that timeframe.

ALEX BAG — Yeah, my mom's background is so psychedelic it hurts. I've been trying to watch children's television now as part of my research and I'm not very impressed.

SHAMIM MOMIN — This may be a bit of a tangent, but I think it relates to the time period we're talking about: I'm obsessed with girl's survivalist books from that era, books like *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Julie of the Wolves*, *From The Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, and *Harriet the Spy* — individualist epics in which girls were the protagonists. They were very important to me in my formative years. I remember them so well I can actually still tell you what pages certain things were on.

ALEX BAG — Did you like Judy Bloom books, as well?

SHAMIM MOMIN — Yeah, some of them. All these books were about girls becoming super-empowered — although not in the way boys can be — and without being a girl in a traditional sense. It seems like the books clearly come out of the feminist moment and tried to impart its values to girls. It also seems significant that they were written around the same time and a lot of them were about girls who suddenly had to take care of themselves. Like in *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, which is maybe the most obscure of them, a girl runs away from home — not because she hates her parents, but because she wants to have an adventure. She takes her little brother with her; they break into the Metropolitan Museum and they live there. They live from the coins they take from the fountain. In *Harriet The Spy*, a girl's secret book was found. It's not moralistic; rather it's about the power of creativity and the power of information. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* was another book from that era. A girl gets stranded alone on an island, which is ostensibly a true story. Anyway, I thought maybe there might have been a similar shift in kids' television in this period, in terms of its educational value, perhaps. I mean — kids' books really suck right now. They're insanely bad. Television for adults has become very sophisticated, but it's totally lost its shit as far as kids go. It's really strange.

ALEX BAG — Kids are definitely heavily marketed, too; this seems to be the *raison d'être* of all their television shows. There's always a doll, books, toys, or games that go along with a show, things being sold to the kids.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Have you seen *Gossip Girl*?

ALEX BAG — No.

SHAMIM MOMIN — I'm kind of obsessed with it: it's so bad and totally awesome — so over the top. It's about the ludicrous life of super-rich Upper East Siders. One of the main characters' apartments is full of art — not Picassos, but art by people we know, like the Prada Marfa store photographs, or that Elmgreen and Dragset piece. Agathe Snow did a piece for one episode — which was fucking hilarious — and Ryan McGinley did one for another.

ALEX BAG — So there's somebody with some savvy involved in it.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Yeah, but at the same time, it's totally wack. Their marketing ability is so sophisticated, they don't even need cool-finders — those people who try to figure out what the kids on the street think is really cool, and then use it as a capitalist tool — that whole thing Naomi Klein wrote about. They don't need to bother with that. What's really shocking is that the marketing people are as sophisticated as the kids.

ALEX BAG — When I was in college I read a great essay about the percentage of people who go to art school to study fine art but eventually wind up in advertising. I think it was like 80 percent, but don't quote me on that. I dropped the book when I read that. And I'm sure the statistics are even scarier now. My dad was in advertising. He worked for Time-Life for a long time and for a big agency on 23rd Street. He did the Chrysler Cordoba commercials with Ricardo Montalban and his Corinthian leather.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Which were hilarious.

ALEX BAG — They really were. My dad went to Cooper Union, too. The gulf between art and advertising has always been interesting to me. There's always been some kind of crossover. I see art stolen and used in ads all the time, especially in America. Like in the movie, *The Cell*, for example.

SHAMIM MOMIN — *The Cell* is the most egregious example. There's a scene in it that's literally a recreation of an Odd Nerdrum painting. This is my best LA story ever: When *The Cell* came out we were all pretty shocked and felt like the artists they ripped off, like Damien Hirst and Matthew Barney, should sue the producers. I was talking about it with friends at a bar in Los Angeles and I got so worked up I had to go outside to have a cigarette and calm down. A guy standing next to me said, "Hey, I overheard you at the table in there." And I was like, "Oh, yeah, sorry, I just feel really strongly about it because I'm a curator, blah blah blah." And he said, "Well, I'm actually the guy."

ALEX BAG — What guy?

SHAMIM MOMIN — That's what I said. He said, "I'm the guy they hired to pick the artists they used in that scene." And I was like, "Why would you tell me that when you just heard what I think about it?" He said, "Because out here, to be stolen from is the greatest compliment an artist can get. Everybody wanted their stuff recreated in that scene." I guess on one hand it's kind of awesome to advocate an artist and then two years later — actually, not even two years later because I feel like it's almost simultaneous — to see the aesthetics of that artist circulating in the world. But this guy really didn't have any idea that to be stolen from could be anything other than a major compliment. I sort of get his point, the thing about wholesale imitation being the greatest form of flattery. Maybe it really does come down to money — the millions and millions of dollars artists never get for inventing the things that people go ahead and steal from them.



ALEX BAG — I'd love to be an intellectual property lawyer. There's a lot of work for them right now.

SHAMIM MOMIN — No doubt. Anyway, it all just seems kind of crazy. I'm curious about one of the last pieces you did, Coven Services for Consumer Mesmerism, Product Sorcery, and the Necromantic Reimagination of Consumption. I think you researched think tanks and corporations for it. Can you tell me about the process of working on it?

ALEX BAG — Yeah, corporate wrongdoings. Nefarious activity. I did so much research I became mired in it. I'm always reading, always trying to distract myself with information. The tip of the iceberg is as far as I got on that one. I tried to repackage and sell it with brutal honesty. I like to be educational, but I don't want to be didactic. There's the intention of ultimately informing people about something, but having them laugh at the slap in the face they're getting, grimacing at some horrifying new information. I think it kicks you harder, and you remember it. It's much better that way, when it's harder.

SHAMIM MOMIN — Maybe it's just me, but don't you think it's funny that people have a really hard time understanding something that's been a part of human communication for such a long time? I mean, the earliest plays — in Ancient Greece — used a similar satirical bent. It's always present and inherent in intelligent communication. There's something about a humorous analysis that is much more natural. I don't know what the right word is; I think that today the word "satire" is overused in the wrong way. But humor can resonate in a realer way than serious, earnest didacticism.

ALEX BAG — Your brain switches off when you're being preached to.

SHAMIM MOMIN — But it seems like people think they have to present things logistically in order to be convincing, which they think is most important, instead of just letting people see those things for themselves. I almost feel like it can't be done without using humor — or without something that keeps it from being preachy, like a lecture format. Humor is more communal, which is why your Stage Fright Troupe project is such a great idea: in a weird way it exacerbates the necessity of the audience and the players working together, so that when they don't — when it's difficult or awkward or embarrassing — the audience is implicated as a part of it. Yet we feel empathy for someone who's being humiliated. I feel more awkward and embarrassed in this situation than I do watching people being hurt, which is weird. Maybe I shouldn't say it, but it's awful how your body refuses to empathize with pain; we can't remember how much pain hurts. We can remember it intellectually but not physically. But when you watch someone fail, it's like it's happening to you. There's a great study in neuroscience that supports the idea that empathy isn't a notion but an actuality. Areas of your brain are activated when you watch people fucking, in love, laughing, or whatever. They are the same areas that are activated when you yourself experience such things. Which is why porn, the obvious example, is so effective. But the same thing happens with other emotions. But, as I understand it, much less so when physical pain is involved, because we kind of block that out.

ALEX BAG — When the suspension of disbelief is shot to hell — this is almost like Beckett or something — you're left with theatre, and an awareness of the acting process. I've had such an experience watching a play or some kind of performance in which the performers are flailing and failing — it makes you feel sick.