

# UNTITLED

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## INTERVIEW

### AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEX HUBBARD



Alumnus Alex Hubbard '00 on his new video on view at the 2010 Whitney Biennial, poetic logic and keeping things alive.

Born in Toledo, Oregon, Alex Hubbard currently resides in Brooklyn, New York. He received his BFA from Pacific Northwest College of Art and participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in 2002–03. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at Maccarone, New York; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, New York; and a presentation at Art Basel Miami Beach in conjunction with STANDARD (OSLO).

UNTITLED MAGAZINE: You've just finished new work for the Whitney Biennial.

ALEX HUBBARD: It's almost finished. It's the end of a variation on the videos I've been working on. At one point these videos evolved from being tabletop movies to interacting more as sculpture. The first one was a camera moving around an object that I was making and kind of un-making. The next step with that was to reverse the camera and film a space as it

evolved. I manipulated and changed the space and so it really became more about the relationship between the camera and the artist and the room—and the viewer watching it. Who's in control?

The video I made for the Whitney is another permutation, where the camera and the object being filmed are connected. I kind of abstract a '91 Ford Tempo and then drive with the camera on the sides. You see just a little bit of the device that's holding the camera under one side of the car, which was a far more ridiculous thing to do than I had imagined. The camera had to be twenty feet away to capture the whole car, so you see the car kind of move in and out. The car and the camera travel together for a little bit and then it kind of falls apart.

U: I can't help but make a link between your work and early video work from the 60's and 70's by **Dan Graham**, **Bruce Nauman** and **Bas Jan Ader**. The camera is used to document performance—to document action rather than a way to capture footage that is then manipulated afterward.



*Weekend Pass, 2008*

AH: When artists began to use the camera, it was a different way of thinking about the camera, the idea of shooting a piece and the artist's relationship with the camera began to evolve. Like in an early video where an artist would run in a circle with the camera until they were exhausted. I feel like that's something I'm investigating now. There were connections between what you're filming and how you're filming it in these early videos and they achieved more of an emphasis on abstraction, instead of the relationship to the video. I feel like that was more in the editing. How I manipulate my own videos later through editing and sound—that's what gives them life more than if I just filmed them in real time and showed them. I don't think they would be any good. It has to be about building suspense and adding meaning and action through editing or sound. Or you add a different meaning—you add a layer—and I think it's easier to see a chain of things happening and the visual is used as a kind of stand-in for other kinds of language that we use as artists. If I use gesture or an object as a reference, I'm lucky that I inherit the meaning of something that you've seen a million times. A cane pulls something off the screen or an artist throws paint or someone places a light bulb down. I can utilize all that and through the editing I can stress those points or destabilize them by changing the sound or adding two more seconds so someone can contemplate what just happened.

I don't want to get away from your question, but I guess we're lucky in that we have all this artist's language that we're familiar with and can build from. Bruce Nauman built this kind of foundation. Somebody had to do all those "sit and dig a trench for an hour" pieces. He did so much video work that needed to be done—well, not needed to be done, but laid out.

U: He provided a foundation and a vocabulary that artists can now adapt.

AH: Yeah, and now we don't have to do that anymore. Now we do other things.



*Heads in the Dark, 2009*

U: A lot your videos are clearly situated within a studio. How does the space of the studio play a role in your work?

AH: With my first videos, it was just where I was. This was the space to make things. I had this strange studio that had been a million things: a hair salon, a weave shop. It was an unusual space and it became a part of the videos. Like the ceilings. This old aqua ceiling became a formal element. When I felt like I had exhausted that space in terms of scale and in terms of what elements I could pull out of it, I borrowed a studio. I have a friend who is this insane artist, and he has this kind of perfect art studio. And if it's about making, then that's the space we make in. When I decided to change the space in a video, I rented a really weird space to do that in. The new video I made for the Whitney Biennial is out of the studio—it's in a parking lot from a minor league sports team.

U: I find that interesting that it's not necessarily your studio every time. The studio becomes another staged site.

AH: With first videos I made, I was killing myself making a lecture about meth labs and it was driving me nuts. I was sitting with friends, painting and drawing at a table in upstate New York somewhere and I was like, this is so much more enjoyable than what I'm doing, than this research. I have a fear of public speaking and I was going to toast masters, and then

what excited me about these meth lab images were these spaces. Even though it's driven by something that's potentially bad, these people had built so freely these insane spaces. They're burying a car and turning it into a lab and then putting a TV in there to relax while they're working.

It was something that was the same, in a weird way, to a studio practice. This freedom to just work. That was far more exciting to me and so I am trying to incorporate that energy into a video, like free play. There's a **Gelatin** performance right now in New York. You just watch these guys. They're blindfolded and have other artists come in and make these sculptures. The artists have to describe the sculptures to them and then there's a stadium around them. When I watch it, I'm like, of course, this is what is interesting.

There are so many small spaces right now, new galleries who are trying to conform to this Chelsea model, where you get twelve artists with work in frames. There's so much of that. Maybe the pieces are great, but I feel like there should be an equal amount where people are just experiencing, like play in a way. And it's so hard to get to that point. You have to do so much work to have a half hour or hour of freedom to create.

*Lost Loose**Ends, 2008*

U: Do you film your videos in a single take?

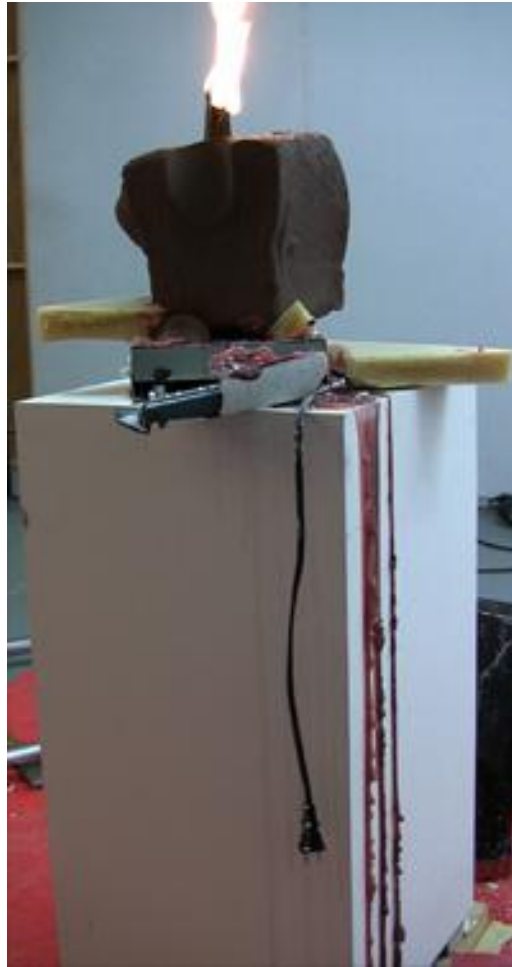
AH: Some of them. That used to be a necessity, because the camera would be up on the ceiling and I would have pretty much one take to do it. I've tried to go back and do things that really failed. There was one with a Wagner power painter and those things are just impossible to use, and I didn't know that. I hadn't tested it. They have to be one take, just because I'm using the materials, I'm either destroying them or dumping them all out or whatever it is. So yeah, they're usually one take.

U: Do you script all of the actions?

AH: All of them are scripted but things go wrong and sometimes you have to improvise. It's like painting or anything else, you'll see a moment where, "this will work better, I'll do this."

U In *The Way Things Go*, a video by Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss, the artists use a similarly choreographed series of actions. Things seem like they're working as they should, and then there are moments that are uncontrollable or violent, like explosions. There's an interesting link between humor and destruction. Oftentimes the humorous moments *are* the destructive moments. Is that intentional?

AH: I guess sometimes it's intentional and sometimes it's the only way to get out of a problem. That humor comes from seeing people do the wrong thing. Like drilling a boot and seeing crap pour out of it. It's an unintended use for an object. I guess that's what's funny about it. Or maybe just seeing someone do the wrong thing.



*Weekend Pass, 2008*

U: There's a definite pleasure in seeing things actually go there. You see how things might happen, when you start drilling the boot and something inevitably comes from that—paint explodes all over which in turn puts out the fire that's raging below it. Can you talk about the role of pleasure in your work? There is a sense of tactility in the way you use materials in your videos.

AH: The pleasure comes from a freedom, a sense of play. You get to watch somebody do all of these wrong things. For me the pleasure I get from them is the projection of logic, like somehow this is communicating something but I don't know what that is. The artwork that I like the most has that kind of poetic logic to it, like it's explaining something else or doing something else, but you can't say what that is. Those are the things that I like, that I respond to the most. You realize there is a system but you couldn't ever say what it was.

U: Can you talk a little bit about what's in store for you beyond the Biennial?

AH: It's always about going back and trying to clarify. Even if I set up a structure and execute a movie, it comes out with problems. You go back and see what worked about it and why didn't something else work. Or what is exhausted and what needs to move on. For me, the important thing is to keep it alive. To keep what you make alive. Even if you make bad work, you have to keep changing it.

I think it's important to not get comfortable with what you make. You find a way to destabilize what has become easy and make it exciting again. For me it's how I get different ideas into what I'm doing. A lot of times there will be another artist's piece that I find myself thinking about again and again and again. And then I try to incorporate some of it. Not to copy the piece, but to see what does it communicate, what's calling you back. You work with that and see where it takes you. Just keeping things alive. You can't get too comfortable. Once you start being on autopilot, then why do it? It's not fun anymore.

*Interview by Katherine Bovee*

*Images courtesy the artist and Maccarone*

*-- Posted on 03/29 at 12:33 PM*