

Stuff to Art: A Conversation with Alex Da Corte



photo: Constance Mensh

“When [Kathryn Andrews](#) first came here and said she was going to make a big fence and put it in front of someone’s work, I said, ‘Me first!’” Alex says.
“There’s nothing to be gained in a group show by people’s work sitting politely and not looking at each other.”



photo: William Hidalgo

The fence intervention—and the living statues that periodically move it around the gallery—comprise a piece by Kathryn Andrews called *Serial Killer* which vividly dramatizes many of the issues the show explores: What happens when artists work together? Where does cooperation end and competition begin? What does it mean when one artist uses other artists' works of art as material for their own?

This unlikely sounding situation can be found in many forms in *First Among Equals*, including Alex's *SCENE TAKE SIX* itself, a two-sided installation that uses works by six artists on one side and six on the other to make a new whole—almost the way a group exhibition, organized through a curator's vision, makes a new whole. Alex, though, takes marvelous liberties it's hard to imagine a curator taking. He has fashioned a microphone for [Sam Anderson](#)'s bust of Aretha Franklin, for instance, and piled works by [Anna Betbeze](#), [Paul Thek](#), and [Karen Kilimnik](#) on top of each other. Some of the works have been borrowed

from collectors for the run of the show. Others, which Alex calls dedication monuments, are recreations he built himself with direction from the original artists. Which are which, though, he'd rather not say: "I don't want to say if it's real or fake, because in my mind it's all real. I was thinking that all these materials are equal, even if some have a greater monetary value."



photo: Alex Klein

Alex relates this constant presence of absence to the nature of the scavenged materials he often uses as material: "Most of the things I scavenge are missing parts, and I don't know what they are." A little later he says, "My work is just stuff—just a bunch of crap piled together—but the minute it's in a white cube being photographed..." He trails off.

It becomes art, he means, that trailing ellipsis alluding to the moment of transformation without naming it. Another missing piece, though this time we can see what it is.

Stuff to art: when exactly does that happen? I was in the gallery last month watching as Alex put *SCENE TAKE SIX* together: spray-painting vitrines, twisting branches, nailing painted flowers to the wall. Was I there for that elusive, magical moment? Did I miss it?

A little earlier, talking about all the disparate elements that go into a work of his, Alex said, "It's a bit like a dream where your mother, your pet dog, and Johnny Depp are all there."



photo: Constance Mensh

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The next living statue, an evergreen tree, will move the fence on Saturday, May 12th at 2:00.

First Among Equals is open through August 12.

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