

# Art in America

## ALEX BAG

### Team

“Why buy art when you can buy the artist?” wonders Leroy LeLoup, the main character in Alex Bag’s *The Van (Redux)*, 2015. LeLoup, played by Bag’s brother Damien, first appeared in Bag’s 2001 video *Untitled (The Van)*. He is an art dealer whose MO is to troll kindergarten classrooms in search of the “the weirdos, the loners” whom he can mold into commercially successful artists. Shot at the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami for Bag’s recent show there, the video opens with a view of the museum’s exterior. In this continuation of the 2001 video, Bag satirizes the perpetual “hunt” for new talent that preoccupies dealers, curators and art advisers through the brazen and predatory LeLoup’s staging of a “residency” for child artists-in-training. The residency, he claims, “gives mothers a break.”

The video is structured as a documentary with an unseen camerawoman (Bag) recording LeLoup and his three fledgling

early 1990s (when Bag began making videos), artists have had to become more mobile and flexible in their methods of creative production, traveling from residency to residency and following grant money, fellowships and exhibition opportunities.

We learn that LeLoup has recently served three years in a federal penitentiary on charges of extortion, embezzlement, tampering with a corpse and racketeering that he claims are a “total joke.” When the interviewer presses him on the subject, he replies, “Look, money changes hands in all types of business, even the business of culture.” In an effort to change the subject, he asks the camerawoman if she’s seen the kids running around, adding, “I kinda own them. . . . I think of myself as a majority shareholder in these kids.”

Bag clues us in to LeLoup’s pathology in one scene where he wanders through an unoccupied banquet room pocketing silverware from tables set for an event (presumably the opening of the film’s premiere). The scene is scored to Ray Noble’s “Midnight, the Stars and You” (1934), the song from the ballroom scene in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*. At the end of the film, LeLoup tells the children that the residency is over and asks them what they want out of their careers. The children, visibly exhausted, cranky and tousled, launch into a cacophony of demands and complaints. Ultimately, what the young artists want is the freedom to play.

—Eric Sutphin



Alex Bag: *The Van (Redux)*, 2015, 4K video, 27 minutes; at Team.

artists (each played by Bag’s five-year-old son, August) during their adventures through the ICA. These vignettes are interspersed with clips of an interview with LeLoup, which is set against a kind of slide show of still images of the museum’s minimalist interior architecture. Images of a demonic figure that could have come from a B horror movie interrupt the slide show, filling the screen for split-second intervals while LeLoup speaks, heightening the devilishness of his comments about giving pills to single moms who are at their wit’s end and can’t sleep.

As the 27-minute video unfolds, we see that LeLoup and the three children are squatting in the museum. They bathe in sinks, eat food stolen from the employee fridge and sleep on rolls of bubble wrap and moving blankets. At one point, a museum staff member finds them napping in a storage room and forces them out. Undeterred, LeLoup moves his residency to another wing of the ICA, where he sets a child up in his new “studio,” an empty conference room with a large premade canvas, a package of brushes and jars of paint. Here, Bag comments on the nomadic and DIY nature of contemporary art practice. Since the