

Art in Review

By KEN JOHNSON; ROBERTA SMITH; and KAREN ROSENBERG
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DAVID ELLIS

Dozens

Roebling Hall

606 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through July 25

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Roebling Hall

A scene from the video "Okay" by David Ellis. His show at Roebling Hall includes some idiosyncratic musical instruments.

The work in David Ellis's latest show alternates between routine and ingenious, and ingenious invariably involves sound and motion. This is not surprising: Mr. Ellis excels at percussion, animation and the form of action painting known as Graffiti Art; he also has a tendency to build idiosyncratic musical instruments. (For this show he collaborated with the musician Roberto Lang.) For example, "Heap" is a very large pile of trash from Brooklyn and Manhattan that regularly bursts into gadget-driven drumming. Paint cans, spackle buckets, aluminum beams and tinfoil are among the noise-makers and they're all miked. "Ok Superman" is a reinterpretation of a player piano, which plays [Laurie Anderson](#)'s classic performance piece "O Superman" — albeit quite faintly — using small fans directed at a series of empty wine bottles; its moving parts also include a computer that prints out the song's lyrics in the shape of the airborne action hero's S-logo.

The tour de force occupies a separate space: "FAMS 1 (Fine Art Moving and Storage)" is one of Mr. Ellis's exhilarating stop-action painting performances which uses the floor as the canvas and is shot from above. During this 10-minute work, Mr. Ellis and the occasional assistant transform the floor with rapid-fire sequences of cartoons, speech balloons, graffiti lettering (words like okay, fly and see) and abstraction (geometric, monochrome and swirling deluges of color). A signature design of billowing lines that Mr. Ellis calls "flow" recurs repeatedly. A high point is a splash of blue paint that eventually evolves into a peacock. The catchy percussive soundtrack is provided by a series of paint trays, bottles, cans, paint buckets and paintbrushes, miked like the trash in "Heap," but arranged in orderly fashion in their own shipping crates.

Two less ambitious videos and a mass of large drawings in which the flow motif swirls across collages of letters and manuals pertaining to the construction of the work in the show are handsome but understandably inert. His best efforts operate in terrain populated at various points by Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Tim Hawkinson, Tom Friedman, Jon Kessler, Christian Marclay, Aaron Young and Ian Burns. His particular kind of Rube Golbergian, street-wise Guy Art veers closer to pure entertainment than any of his neighbors, but that doesn't mean he's out of the running. **ROBERTA SMITH**