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## FEBRUARY 17, 2018

### IN A NEW R.L. STINE-INSPIRED SHOW, ARTIST ALEX DA CORTE GETS SPOOKY

by Bridget Read



Alex Da Corte, *Hot Pie*, 2018; Neon, vinyl siding, laminate, plywood, epoxy clay, house paint, hardware; 72 × 79 × 6 inches; Photo: Courtesy Alex Da Corte and Karma, New York

There is a new optometrist's office on East Second Street, at least at first glance. A pair of spectacles made from blue and green neon hangs over the entrance to number 188—you can see how easily it might seduce self-improvement-seeking Manhattan clientele. It could be the setting for the perfect crime, a kind of Sweeney Todd's barbershop for the Instagram-prone, luring unsuspecting victims with promises of better vision.

Philadelphia-based artist Alex Da Corte hopes visitors will bring that expectation with them when they discover that 188 East Second is actually the site of his newest show, "C-A-T Spells Murder," which he has installed at Karma, a gallery and book publisher. "I want people to be thinking about glasses, looking better, or looking clearer," he says, when they first encounter this latest project, which opens tonight, and asks whether the nobler goal is actually a more blurred perception of things. "C-A-T Spells Murder" takes its name from the nonsensical reading line on R.L. Stine's 1997 young adult novel *Cat*, one of his 52 *Fear Street* books, the older, scarier, sexier sibling to the beloved *Goosebumps* series. Da Corte read them all not as a teen but as an adult, living back at home in New Jersey after finishing art school in 2010. "I was trying to empathize with my younger sister, who was in her early 20s and going through some things," he says, and he thought the stories in Stine's novels might help get him into her headspace. For Da Corte, here, as in last year's Frankenstein-inspired *Slow Graffiti*, horror is an entry point into, rather than a departure from, human nature. (This also partially explains why he used to dress up as Michael Myers of *Halloween*, which takes place in a town named for Da Corte's own, Haddonfield, and "stalk" his family members.)