



Cat-scratch fever. Toxoplasmosis from a litter box. There are many ways that cats can make us go bonkers—and have for thousands of years. Kitty craziness did not start with the online avalanche of cat memes and famous feline influencers. Overblown cat obsessing may just be one of the most universally human acts. For instance, in ancient Egypt, the death of a precious furbaby led grieving families to shave off their eyebrows, a tradition that undoubtedly should be rekindled. From spiritually sacred felines of antiquity to playful pussies of modern art masters, art history is chock-full of cats. While the art historical may legitimize feline fixation, the even more deranged drive to hoard saccharine cat tack—figurines, dolls, and other adorably tasteless tchotchkes—shouldn't be dismissed but understood as another form of sincere and serious dedication.

Philip Hinge, both a cat owner and passionate cat stuff collector, draws on the high, low, and in-between cultural legacy of cat compulsion in his exhibition *Crack-Up*. As the title indicates, *Crack-Up*'s combination of paintings, sculptures, a custom-made rug, and video contains both humor and a seething darkness. Cat paintings are joyful follies unless that poor pussycat is cartoonishly blowing its brains out as in *my visions are fading* (2025), its head erupting in a Warner Bros-like cat ear-shaped cloud in front of a pre-bloodstained patterned backdrop. Though not as overtly violent, Hinge's other paintings, no matter how seemingly innocuous the subject, exude an eerie foreboding as if they're going to spew blood like the cute white kitty painting in Nobuhiko Obayashi's wacky 1977 horror classic *House*. In *purr-suasion* (2024), a gigantic menacing cat face looms over an unflappable mouse like a poster for a film noir version of *Tom and Jerry* while in *i dwell in a mournful symphony* (2025), the whimsy of a cat surfing on a squiggly blue ocean is shattered by the kitty's grumpy glower, evoking illustrator Louis Wain's shiftest side-eyeing cats.

For *Crack-Up*, Swanson Kuball transforms a lived-in apartment into sterile minimalism like a psychiatrist's waiting room intended to induce a cat-themed nervous breakdown. With few other distractions, viewers cannot hide from the visual barrage of mid-20th-century patterns, ever-present cat eyes, and bizarro assemblages. A rubber mask-wearing drowsy Garfield doll plops on his scruffy cat tree and kitty slipper throne in *sad and stupid* (2023), a royal monument to thrift store dejection recalling Mike Kelley's discarded stuffed animals. Much of the uneasy undercurrent of danger in the exhibition comes from the fate of mice, whether treading on a rug featuring an unlucky rodent snapped in a trap or locating the scattered mouse gewgaws trapped under glass weighted down by a rock (another of Hinge's favorite collectibles). Are they being kept safe or suffocating?

*Crack-Up*'s centerpiece is its most cracked: Hinge's first longer-form video, from which the exhibition takes its name. The 22-minute video is a chaotic mash-up (its own form of digital hoarding) of viral cat content like cats perilously sniffing snails and bashing their owners with knocked-over TVs, raging black metal concerts, campily delivered lines from gloriously godawful D-movies, audio interviews from iconic painters, assorted other media trash like rats crawling out of a toilet (close the lid!), and Hinge's own self-made videos, with occasional meta-commentary provided by George Lucas ("If it's intense for us, a regular person is going to go nuts!"). In its channel-changing frenzy, *Crack-Up* (2024) offers a choose-your-own-adventure approach to response, whether passing out in a fit of spiritual ecstasy mimicking those included roller coaster riders losing consciousness or simply contemplating the aesthetic similarities between black metal corpse paint and the stage makeup in Andrew Lloyd Webber's slick theatrical atrocity *Cats*. No matter what viewers take away, both the video and the exhibition as a whole are moving and maniacal musings on destruction, creation, obsession, and redemption.

—Emily Colucci, 2025

Philip Hinge (b. 1988) is an artist, curator and project space operator. He holds an MFA in painting from the Virginia Commonwealth University. His work has been exhibited at a variety of venues, including Stepsister, (NY, NY), Brennan & Griffin (NY, NY), 427 (Riga, Latvia), General Expenses (CDMX), Final Hot Desert (Utah), Melange (Cologne, DE), mcg21xoxo (Chiba, Japan), 106 Green (NY, NY), Plague Space (Krasnador, RU), Freddy, (Harris, NY), and Lower Cavity (Holyoke, MA).

In addition to his studio work, Hinge also runs and curates two separate projects, Catbox Contemporary (Ridgewood, NY), and darkZone (NJ). Catbox Contemporary has regularly held exhibitions in and out of the artist's apartment since 2017, with notable external shows being held at Alyssa Davis Gallery (NY, NY), Hot Wheels Athens (Athens, Greece), Felix Art Fair (2019), and Baitball (Polignano a Mare, Italy). darkZone started in 2019 in his childhood home's basement. The project in its original form concluded in 2022 with the sale of the house. The artist reopened darkZone in 2023 in his parents' new house. On occasion, he also writes reviews and conducts interviews. Hinge lives and works in Ridgewood, NY.