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### Courtesy of Greg Stimac

Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson dress up as Old God and Young God for a performance art piece. They not only battle each other in a game of foosball, but the chilly waves of Lake Michigan as well.

Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson don't like to be called pranksters.

The highly original and offbeat duo, who call themselves Industry of the Ordinary, would rather be referred to as gutsy artists and teachers who seek to avoid the typical posh galleries and instead, bring their art free of charge to the streets of Chicago.

Whether their performance art consists of a foosball battle dressed as an Old God and a Young God teetering on the edge of Lake Michigan or lugging around their entire wardrobe for a day, Industry of the Ordinary will go to great lengths to get the public to mingle with them.

"I've always found an accidental audience, the kind of audience you get in a street, to be a very interesting audience to make artwork in front of," Wilson said. "The elected audience in the gallery has seen work so much, they are almost nonchalant about it."

The "accidental audience" isn't always ready for their innovative ideas, as Wilson found out from a performance art piece consisting of drawing a line down the sidewalk on State Street. A cop on a bicycle followed the line and found an unsuspecting Wilson at the end. He was handcuffed and thrown into a cop car as his attentive students waved gooby to him.

"All of these cops were pretty threatening characters and were initially pretty pissed off with me because they didn't know what the hell I was doing," Wilson said. "In the end they were sort of into it, asking about future projects and telling me where I could get a really good pint of Guinness in Chicago."

Although their preferred audience is the general public, Matthew Hoffman, co-curator of Research and Development for AI Gallery, 676 N. LaSalle Drive, thinks it is important to show Industry of the Ordinary's work in the gallery. It will be on display until Feb. 24.

“They’re doing some really interesting explorations,” Hoffman said. “They are sort of doing ordinary things in extraordinary circumstances. The photographs have some very poignant information worth looking at.”

Brooks and Wilson choose to focus on the mundane and lackluster aspects of life for inspiration for their artwork, which is where their name comes from.

Brooks said many artists and movements focus on the sublime and the transcendent. He thought it would be more interesting to take everyday items and recontextualize them into something else.



[Mauricio Rubio](#) / The Chronicle

Columbia teachers Adam Brooks, left, and Mathew Wilson, right, set up for their gallery opening at AI Gallery, 676 N. LaSalle Drive.

“Just looking out the window, the world is an extraordinary and peculiar place,” Wilson said. “Making art out of something familiar seems to be one of the main responsibilities of art, making you look at the world around you, just by the fact that it’s always been there but you’ve never studied it. Art makes you look again and look harder.”

But Brooks and Wilson also like to inject a large sense of themselves in their projects, which sometimes stem from nothing less than hanging out, watching soccer, drinking beer and, of course, exchanging a chuckle or two.

“Adam and I both share a very specific and bizarre sense of humor,” Wilson said. “Much of the work comes from us cracking each other up.”

Brooks and Wilson often talk about things completely unrelated to art, but then suddenly find themselves marveling over a new idea.

Industry of the Ordinary also helps inspire other artists by teaching in the Art and Design Department at Columbia.

“It’s setting an example of what is possible and also working in a realm that is untraditional,” Brooks said. “More than anything, it’s presenting the possibility of working in this way as a viable option.”

Brooks also said he can see an attitude change throughout every semester he teaches at Columbia. At first,

the students usually don't take their work very seriously, but that changes after 15 weeks.

Currently, Brooks and Wilson are being commissioned to do artwork in the Bucktown/Wicker Park Branch Library, 1701 N. Milwaukee Ave., and they wouldn't want to be doing anything else.

“There's a difference between the [artists] that almost made it and the ones that did: The ones that did have no choice,” Wilson said. “They've got no choice but to do this, and they absolutely refuse to stop.”

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