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ART

Breakout Artists

Chicago's next generation of image makers

Michael Workman

Against the backdrop of a Warhol show breaking attendance records at the MCA, the desire to break down any remaining distinctions between culture and fine art, to demolish any remaining boundaries on the making of art, have never been stronger. The very idea of art as only a visual medium is no longer a given, a notion that simultaneously invigorates the practice while challenging its remaining conventions and support systems. In that light, or darkness, we offer a look at a handful of yet-unsung Chicago artists who are doing their part.

Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson, Industry of the Ordinary

"Through sculpture, text, photography, video, sound and performance, Industry of the Ordinary are dedicated to an exploration and celebration of the customary, the everyday, and the usual. Their emphasis is on challenging pejorative notions of the ordinary and, in doing so, moving beyond the quotidian." So says the "manifesto" link on the Industry of the Ordinary website at industryoftheordinary.com. Comprised of Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson, Industry of the Ordinary has emerged as one of the top collaborative groups working in the city, with an influence that spirals outward from the Midwest to a larger watching art world. Whether escorting an ice sculpture of the Ten Commandments down Michigan Avenue and serving the melted water to passersby or playing foosball dressed up like Old God and Young God in the waters of Lake Michigan, their work tackles large issues of religion, politics and identity all the while strongly resonating with an earnest desire for intellectual play.

A native of New York, Adam Brooks lived in London until he was 20 with a father who made commercials and

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directed films and a mother who worked as a children's librarian. Growing up in a creative family, he was acquainted early on with art through visits to the city museums and his parent's collection. His earliest experience was seeing a Lichtenstein show at the Hayward Gallery in the late 1960s, and a Kienholz show in Amsterdam at about the same time. After a stint at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, he came to Chicago to attend graduate school, studying sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Here he found a community of artists with whom he could hone his ideas about art, and reacting against certain faculty members gave him an opportunity to stake out his own positions. "We would hope that anyone anywhere who saw our work would be able to engage with it," he says. "As we are really just starting, we have not shown the work much physically outside the Midwest, although as it is based on our website, anyone with a computer and Internet access can see and experience it."

The second half of the two-man team that comprises Industry of the Ordinary, Mathew Wilson was born in Reading, England to a father who worked as an airline steward and a mother who managed a dry cleaners. Unlike Brooks, Wilson's parents had no influence on his interest in art. "I was able to draw when I was very young. I remember copying photographs for my friends; it was a kind of party trick. It was not something I had much interest in until I was about 15 and discovered painting." It was at this age in high school that one of his teachers noticed his ability to draw and introduced him to a wide range of other media: photography, print-making, sculpture. It was upon seeing a Joseph Beuys exhibition at the Pompidou Center in Paris that he decided he'd pursue a career as an artist. After graduation, he studied at "a small, unfashionable program in the north of England." Seeking ideas for what his next move would be, he was also drawn to Chicago by the graduate program at the School of the Art Institute. "I didn't have a clear idea of where Chicago was, but they offered me a free ride and this allowed me to achieve my primary goal of continuing my studies outside of England." Since graduation he has performed mostly in the theater arts, most notably with his previous collaboration, "Men of the World." Wilson views his art practice as a calling but believes that "you need a career to survive." Wilson and Brooks, the latter of whom has shown at Rhona Hoffman gallery, are now discussing the possibility "of showing as Industry of the Ordinary."

Jon Gitelson

Born in 1975 in Mount Kisco, New York to a family of social workers, Gitelson developed his interest in art his senior year at Marlboro College in Vermont. He was a lit major and "looking for something non-academic. I'd always taken art classes but never really took it seriously. It was just to take an elective--Photo I--and it just clicked. I'd always taken painting, drawing--but I'm a terrible painter. Photography was the first time I felt confident. I liked that I