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Studio Visit with Industry of the Ordinary

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Recently I visited the
Chicago studio of
Industry of the Ordinary, a
collaborative duo comprising
artists Mat Wilson and Adam
Brooks. A few years ago I
reviewed their big show at the
Chicago Cultural Center for
Hyperallergic ([link here](#)).

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Rereading that review, I think I did a not-bad job of capturing in a condensed piece of writing what their work is about. When I spoke to them yesterday, I tried to get a sense of their histories, both personal and artistic, in a conversation that lasted well over an hour.



Adam Brooks (l) and Mat Wilson

(r). Photo: Philip Hartigan

Rather than try and describe the conversation sequentially, I'm just going to provide bullet points of the main topics:

Being British in America:

Wilson was born in the UK and has lived in the USA for more than 20 years, Brooks is a US citizen who spent his formative years in England. I'm also an

Englishman who's lived in the US for 14 years. Would any of us return to live in England? Does the English class system still exist? Would the green card holders in the room convert to citizens? Is it easier to watch English football nowadays in the United States?

Football: That's proper football, by the way, not American Throwball. There was a Manchester United supporter, a Leeds United supporter, and an Arsenal supporter in the room. I won't shame anyone by saying who supports which. Let's just say that the spirits of Billy Bremner, George Best, and Charlie George were tangibly present in the air.

What is performance art: Well, first of all it's not what IOTO do. In their words, their work is more sculptural performance,

or performative sculpture.
Talked about their affinities
with Situationist Art, or
Relational Aesthetics, and
narrowing the distance
between observer and the
gesture to the point where it
can be so close that the
observer may not be aware at
first that they are witnessing
'art'.

Humour in art: Something that
breaks the ice with the receiver
(spectator, viewer), but which
isn't all that the gesture or
performance or piece consists
of. Humour, particularly the
joshing, ragging, bantering style
of English humour, being a
component that keeps two
long-time collaborators going.
That, and beer.

Beer: IOTO's first meeting
involved simultaneously
volunteering to go on a beer

run at a party that had
tragically run dry. I won't say
what happened next, but
clearly it was the beginning of a
beautiful friendship. Also, their
studio fridge has Stella Artois in
it.

Collaboration: Their process is
not studio-based as such,
though we were talking inside a
white box with big windows
along one side that looks like a
classic artists' studio. They
email ideas for projects back
and forth to each other, some
of which can happen fairly
quickly (as in 2004, a year after
they began working together,
when they tried to create more
than 10 ideas/happenings in
the space of a month), and
others which might take years
to come to fruition.



Chamber Gallery, Milwaukee.

Photo: Kyle Seis/Chamber.

Currently working on: a public art project in the UK, an upcoming show in Chicago. And their work can be seen for the next few weeks at Chamber Gallery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (3023 North Bremen, Milwaukee 53212).

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