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Top 5 Chicago Shows of 2012

by [Alicia Eler](#) on December 28, 2012



Anish Kapoor's "Cloud Gate" and some Chicago skyscrapers (photo by Andrew E. Larsen, via flickr.com/papalars)

CHICAGO — Let's get one thing straight, East and West Coasters: Chicago is not just that city of corrupt politicians, huge gusts of wind, lake effect snow, too much beer, deep-dish pizza, da Bears, the forever-losing Cubs, the Renzo Piano Modern Wing at the Art Institute of Chicago, and that stopover between New York City and Los Angeles. Chicago is all of that and so much more.

From the [EXPO Art Fair](#), Chicago's art fair comeback attempt, to [the artist-run-not-art-fair-art-fair MDW](#), Chicago is an art mecca for the Midwest and beyond.

And get this: we don't have to worry about earthquakes or hurricanes! A *Wizard of Oz*-like tornado and another Chicago fire are more likely in this part of the country. To further enhance Chicago's reign of awesomeness, and to fulfill my duty as one of two Chicago correspondents for Hyperallergic, I've assembled this quick top five Chicago art shows from 2012 list.

Here's to looking at more great art in 2013.

#1 — Irena Knezevic's *Night of the World: Flatworks, Multiples and Music Programs* at Alderman Exhibitions

Alderman Exhibitions (1138 W Randolph Street, Chicago)
November 16–February 9, 2013



Detail featuring the live snake in “Irena Knezevic: Night of the World” 2012, Alderman Exhibitions, Chicago (via Alderman Exhibitions)

Come for the albino boa constrictor, and stay for the 100-plus years of Serbian history. [Irena Knezevic’s intensely manufactured sculptures and flatworks](#) explore notions of history repeating itself in the war-torn land of Serbia. This exhibition takes inspiration from the text *Jednje Bogova*, the diary of a chief officer at the Jasenovac concentration camp. He chronicled the unthinkable atrocities committed at the camp; his journal was later found and translated, and then blamed for helping ignite the Yugoslav Civil War in the early 1990s. But here’s the real hook for Knezevic’s dense, conceptual show: During the 1999 NATO bombing of Belgrade, every single animal at the Belgrade Zoo either died of shock, or went ballistic and started attacking their young and any other animal in sight. The only animal that survived was a reptile — the albino boa constrictor. A live one of these snakes, which Knezevic rented for the duration of the show from a local pet rental service, is the centerpiece of this chilling exhibition.

A few weeks after seeing Knezevic’s show, I noticed a strange image of a [two-headed albino milk snake](#) on the über-popular Facebook fan page, “I fucking love science.” Born in Florida, the snake appears healthy and may be able to live for years; the two heads act independently, the fan page reports, and fight over food if given the opportunity. If Florida is ever bombed, perhaps only this two-headed albino milk snake will survive the next night at the end of the world.

#2 — *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi: Industry of the Ordinary* at Chicago Cultural Center

*Chicago Cultural Center (78 East Washington Street, Chicago)
August 2012–February 2013*



A butter sculpture of US President Barack Obama (image courtesy [Industry of the Ordinary Facebook page](#))

Mathew Wilson and Adam Brooks make up the mysterious duo Industry of the Ordinary. Approaching artmaking in a populist, conceptual fashion, IOTO creates work that at once involves the Chicago art community, and is also a dour comment on contemporary culture.

In their mid-career survey — and they are intent on calling it a survey, not a retrospective — [the two artists fill one large hall of the downtown Chicago Cultural Center](#). For one work of art, IOTO posts an ad on Craigslist looking for a couple that is having an affair. IOTO offers to put them up at a hotel, where they may continue their affair, in exchange for photographs of them nude save for animal masks on their faces.

Many of IOTO's other projects involve making beer, or documenting the changing color of both the artists' piss after drinking specific amounts of beer. This exhibition also incorporates timely performances, such as the butter Obama sculpture that IOTO wheeled from a meatpacking freezer in the West Loop all the way to the downtown Cultural Center. Once it arrived at the Cultural Center, they harvested it further. For coverage of that, [read here](#).

IOTO left its mark on Chicago — and thankfully, this show continues into February 2013.

#3 — Steve McQueen at the Art Institute of Chicago

*Art Institute of Chicago (111 South Michigan Avenue, Millennium Park, Chicago)
October 21–January 6, 2013*



From Steve McQueen's "Girls, Tricky" (2001)
(image courtesy Art Institute of Chicago)

British artist Steve McQueen is more interested in feature-length films these days, but he could not have created *Shame* or *Hunger* without first mastering the moving image. His [retrospective exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago](#) is a maze-shaped walk through McQueen's mind with works spanning from the early piece "Bear" (1993), a look at black heterosexual male masculinity, to the intense "Girls, Tricky" (2001), an intimate, fifteen-minute video portrait of British trip-hop musician Tricky mixing beats and belting out lyrics in his darkened studio. This is a must-see show. It's open through January 6, 2013.

#4 — Jenny Kendler's "The Hall of the Disappearing" at Chicago Artists Coalition

Chicago Artists' Coalition/BOLT Project Space (217 North Carpenter Street, Chicago)
October 12–November 1



Jenny Kendler's "Reclaim (Mirror Test)" (2012)
(image by the author for Hyperallergic)

Chicago-based emerging [artist Jenny Kendler presented her exhibition](#) for a short, three-week run at the Chicago Artist Coalition's BOLT Project Space. Her aesthetic heightens the senses, and asks viewers to think not about how humans rule nature, but rather about how nature rules humans. Fusing nature and culture, Kendler presents this work as a peek into the new hybrid human/animal beings that we are, allowing us to walk in this world of sensorial, temporal fragility. Naturally occurring rainbows abound, from miniature flag pennants at the entrance of the show to seashells that line a wall. Kendler's work creates a sensory experience that the viewer is not likely to forget — especially if they fell asleep in the fur-lined orange tent!

#5 — *The Great Refusal: Taking on New Queer Aesthetics* at Sullivan Galleries at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Sullivan Galleries at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (33 South State Street, 7th floor, Chicago)

September 9–November 10



Aiden Simon, "My Little Pony" (2012) (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

SAIC professor Oli Rodriguez and fellow curators assembled a massive, [50-piece-plus exhibition](#) spanning multiple rooms of the Sullivan Galleries. From older established Chicago queer artists such as Doug Ischar and Barbara DeGenvieve to younger emerging artists like Aiden Simon, Steven Frost, Ivan Lozano, Hannah Rodriguez, and David Nasca, this exhibition took a broad, general approach to defining a new queer aesthetics. How does queerness intersect with race, gender, class and sexuality? What does this mean for notions of queer community? The Great Refusal took over the city, asking viewers to literally "take it" in whatever way they felt comfortable. But more importantly, it engaged viewers in a conversation about the state of queer aesthetics.

A [video screening](#) was just one of the many additional events offered.

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