

MUSEUM SHOPS

You can find some pretty cool stuff in museum stores that you can't find anywhere else. **PAGE 3**

THE ART OF NORMAL

A new Cultural Center show looks at ordinary people doing ordinary things — and calling it art. **PAGE 4**



ALEX GARCIA/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

Lake County has been coming up short in counts of some native species that ought to be there, including this once widespread, harmless-to-humans reptile.

Snakes on a plain

Released into the wild, smooth green snakes are part of Lincoln Park Zoo's repopulation plan and a 'good mascot' for conservation

BY STEVE JOHNSON | Tribune reporter

The snakes don't look like much.

Yet the little ribbons of living tissue, bright green like a candy you'd probably turn down and marked by prominent eyes and an upturned mouth that could be interpreted as a smile, were surrounded, on this hot summer Wednesday, by 11 people in a Lake County field.

With the heaviest of them tipping the scales at about 20 grams, the 18 reptiles — bearing the unimaginative yet indisputably descriptive name "smooth green snakes" — were no fatter than the skinniest finger in the human group and no longer than the shortest forearm.

The people, mostly from the partnering Lincoln Park Zoo and Lake County Forest Preserve District, were scientists, public relations specialists, photojournalists, even an intern, all of them, at times, watching the reptiles like hawks, though with the opposite intent of actual hawks.

The snakes had been at the zoo that morning, where they had been "head-started" — grown quickly to adult size over the previous year — and then placed into pillowcases and into a cooler, driven north in a zoo minivan,

then marched into the middle of this central Lake County field, well away from roadway or hiking trail.

The new home was perfect, said Allison Sacerdote, the Lincoln Park Zoo reintroduction biologist who is coordinating the Smooth Green Snake Conservation Partnership (and who is believed by her colleagues to be the first person in the country, possibly the world, with the title "reintroduction biologist").

"It has all of the components you can think of," she said. "Old trees,



Allison Sacerdote, a reintroduction biologist with Lincoln Park Zoo, coordinates the zoo's Smooth Green Snake Conservation Partnership.

downed wood, humidity ..."

And as one after another of the snakes slid off Sacerdote's and others' hands and into the temporary enclosures constructed to ease their return into the wild, another small victory was won in an ongoing battle.

This extraordinary effort over less than one pound of snake is being made because Lake County, under continual development as a Chicago exurb, has been coming up short in counts of

some native species that ought to be there, like this once widespread, harmless-to-humans reptile, biologically adapted to blend in with long grasses that once covered the prairie.

Smooth green snakes are officially endangered in Indiana and Iowa. Loss of habitat and pesticide use do them no favors. In Illinois, they are on a watch list labeled "In greatest need of

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Printers Row Live!

Julia Keller, former Tribune critic and author of "A Killing in the Hills," will discuss her mystery novel with the Tribune's Elizabeth Taylor. 7 p.m. Friday at Tribune Tower, 435 N. Michigan Ave.; \$15. More information: chicagotribune.com/tribnation/events.



Bill Larkin stars as troubled Edward Kleban in Porchlight's production.

IN PERFORMANCE 'A Class Act' ★★★½

Moving tale of a little-known lyricist

BY CHRIS JONES
Tribune critic

You've likely never heard of or, at a minimum, you've forgotten about Edward Kleban, the one-hit-wonder lyricist for "A Chorus Line" who died of cancer at age 48 with his lyrics known but without ever realizing his long-held ambition of hearing music he composed played on a Broadway stage.

Kleban was a nebbish and a neurotic, famous for not speaking to his friends. But he was a theater person's theater person. Civilians may flock to celebrities and flashy, TV-ready songwriters like Andrew

Lloyd Webber. Theater people tend to prefer characters, especially oddballs with a dry sense of humor who can't help but pour their souls into their work.

"A Class Act," a musical (book and lyrics by Kleban) that enjoyed a brief sojourn on Broadway in 2001, thus posthumously fulfilling Kleban's ambition, was penned by Kleban's friends Linda Kline and Lonny Price, a creative outlet, you might say, for their sorrow at their loss of a friend. The Kleban songs were originally written for other things, even if most of them sat at the bottom of his trunk. It is set at Kleban's memorial service and

then moves through his life: his early years struggling with his mental health; his middle years struggling with his songwriting; his later years weighed down by the pressure of following up on a mega-hit; all his years spent in complexities with women. The writers fell over themselves to avoid making this a sentimental hagiography, and Kleban's caustic personality provided much assistance there. But their love shines through.

"A Class Act" is finally getting its first Chicago production —

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The duo IOTO, as Old God and Young God, play foosball near North Avenue Beach in "Match of the Day II," photographed by Greg Stimac.

'Ordinary' art leaves viewer to answer what it all means

By CLAUDINE ISE
Special to the Tribune

For at least a decade, British expats and longtime Chicago residents Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson have made the ordinary a primary focus of their art. Collaborating under the name Industry of the Ordinary — IOTO for short — they have created numerous installations, sculptures, photographs and live performances, and have also instigated a range of not-so-easy-to-define encounters with members of the public that, as often as not, take place outside museum or gallery settings. Regardless of their format, all of IOTO's projects aim to blur the line between art and everyday life, while encouraging audiences to rethink what being "ordinary" really means.

Because Industry of the Ordinary's work is often ephemeral and participatory, and relies upon viewers to interpret what they're seeing in their own ways, the task of assessing the whole of IOTO's output can be a tricky one, especially within a museum or gallery framework. The Chicago Cultural Center has done an admirable job of representing the different facets of IOTO's endeavors in a 10-year survey titled "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi," a Latin phrase translating to "thus passes the glory of the world." The show features objects relating to more than 80 past projects along with a number of live performances that are scheduled throughout the show's run. But since IOTO's working methods tend to resist efforts to break what they're doing down into tidy aesthetic categories — which is precisely what a survey or retrospective exhibition is supposed to do, in theory at least — the Cultural Center's presentation winds up raising more questions than it answers. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Brooks and Wilson have given over a remarkably generous portion of their own gallery real estate to works by other artists. A large platform placed in the center of the room serves as a mini exhibition of these interactive projects, including (through Sept. 25), artist Jim Zimpel's "Angle," a sculptural installation in the form of a makeshift pond filled with fish. Audience members can submit their names to a weekly drawing; if their name is chosen, they get to fish in the pond and can choose either to eat what they catch (chefs at nearby South Water Kitchen will cook the fish up for them), or release it into the Chicago River.

Another largish section of the exhibition contains around 70 portraits of Brooks and Wilson — both men are, not surprisingly, perfectly ordinary-looking — solicited from friends and colleagues in Chicago's art community.

The objects that IOTO creates often serve as catalysts for encounters between the group and other "ordinary" people, like the beeswax-and-glitter sculpture of a newborn baby boy lying on a stainless steel cart, which IOTO planned to auction on eBay. Other times, the object is the end result of previous interactions, as in the



2004's "Democracy" is part of "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi," an exhibit of projects by artists Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson at the Chicago Cultural Center through Feb. 17.

color photograph "Affair," which shows a nude man and woman sitting on a bed, each wearing an animal mask. Brooks and Wilson placed an advertisement on Craigslist, offering couples who were engaging in extramarital relationships a romantic night in a Chicago-area hotel (though not, evidently, a fancy one) in exchange for permission to take their picture.

Although "Affair" reminds us of just how ordinary the act of cheating on one's spouse really is — though of course, the emotional effects are anything but — it and the other performance-related photographs and objects on view here are only moderately interesting in and of themselves. Because the point at which the artwork ends and "real life" encounters begin is never clearly established, we're left to draw our own conclusions about what it all means.

Sometimes, the lack of information can be frustrating. The wall label for the wax baby, for example, doesn't mention if the auction ever really took place. Shouldn't it matter?

In an exhibition context, at least, IOTO's works make the most sense when approached as a series of philosophical questions that ask us to rethink our assumptions about ordinariness. It's an ironic and extremely rich subject to be investigating right now, in an age where Twitter, YouTube and Facebook encourage us to broadcast every mundane detail of our daily lives and "ordinary" people can become superstars by behaving outrageously on reality TV.

Stationed in the exhibition's large entry foyer is a video in which Industry of the Ordinary asked a number of streetgoers to answer the question, "What is normal?" Interestingly, many of the respondents appear to equate "normal" with conformity. "Normal is what you expect it to be," one

person says. "It's not anything you would experience in a human being," asserts another. A fair number of these voices claim that they themselves are "not normal" and that "normal is boring."

In many ways, this kind of love/hate relationship with being ordinary is a characteristic feature of American culture. Politicians calibrate their rhetoric to appeal to "ordinary folks," yet few of our leaders are willing to give up on the idea of American exceptionalism. Don't we all want to believe that we're different in some way? But if we're all exceptional, doesn't that make our uniqueness ... ordinary? "Normal?"

A parallel to the video's exegesis on normality is seen in IOTO's installation "Super Marketing 1," which contains several stacks of brown paper bags, each bag printed with the words "I want to be ordinary" in plain black text. Viewers are invited to take one, photograph themselves using it and email the image to the artists, who have framed and displayed some of the photographs they've received on a shelf above the bags.

Each of these snapshots has its charms, but one is particularly telling. In it, a smiling young woman has scrawled the word "never" between the "I" and the "want" on her bag. Her small, cheerfully defiant alteration is one that dozens of other people probably made on their bags too. Maybe it's time we accept it: None of us wants to be ordinary, yet that's exactly what most of us are.

"Industry of the Ordinary: Sic Transit Gloria Mundi," through Feb. 17 at the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington, 312-744-6630, chicagoartcenter.org

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MUSEUMS

Elmhurst Art Museum

150 Cottage Hill Ave., Elmhurst; 630-834-0202, elmhurstartmuseum.org
Exhibiting late 20th- and 21st-century American contemporary art, the museum is located in the AIA award-winning building designed around McCormick House, one of only three Ludwig Mies van der Rohe-designed residences. In addition to exhibitions of art, from national touring shows to Chicago and Illinois artists, the museum offers public tours, programs, guest lectures and art classes.

Friday through Jan. 5: "No Rules: Contemporary Clay": The third exhibit in the museum's series on traditional ceramics and new developments is a group show focusing on clay-based work. A variety of styles are on display, from large- and small-scale sculpture and performance art to video and photography.

Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art

756 N. Milwaukee Ave.; 312-243-9088, art.org

The nonprofit organization is dedicated to presenting self-taught and outsider art and holds international exhibitions, a permanent collection with more than 1,100 works and the Henry Darger Room Collection. Intuit's Robert A. Roth Study Center, a noncirculating collection with a primary focus in the fields of outsider and contemporary self-taught art, is a resource for scholars and students, and offers educational programming for people of all interest levels.

Sept. 14 through Jan. 5: "Hawkins/Hawkins: One Saw Everything, One Saw Nothing": The exhibit brings together the work of two folk art masters, William Hawkins and Hawkins Bolden, who use everyday materials to create complex images.

Loyola University Museum of Art

820 N. Michigan Ave.; 312-915-7600, luc.edu/luma

Loyola's art museum is dedicated to exhibits that focus on spirituality in art.

Ongoing: "Gilded Glory: European Treasures From the Martin D'Arcy Collection": The collection of more than 500 works from the 12th through 19th centuries is considered one of the finest of medieval, Renaissance and Baroque art in the Midwest.

National Museum of Mexican Art

1852 W. 19th St.; 312-738-1503, nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org

Located in Chicago's Pilsen/Little Village communities, the museum exhibits traditional and contemporary Mexican art prints and drawings, papier-mache, ceramics, photographs and avant-garde installations from local and international artists. NMMA also brings children in by the busload to see art demonstrations and hear storytellers. Each year around Halloween, it hosts the city's most-visited Day of the Dead exhibit.

Through Sept. 23: "Mardonio Magana: Circa 1938": An exhibit of carvings in wood tells the life story of Mardonio Magana, whom Diego Rivera in 1930 claimed was "the greatest contemporary Mexican sculptor." The collection comes from the museum's permanent collection, the largest intact collection of Magana's work outside of Mexico. Carvings in the exhibit also celebrate two of Magana's biggest fans and collectors, Louis Kaufman, one of the most-recorded musical artists of the 20th century, and his also musical wife, Annette.

National Veterans Art Museum

1801 S. Indiana Ave., third floor; 312-320-9767, nvam.org

Formerly the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, this is the world's only museum with a permanent collection focusing on the subject of war from an artistic perspective. The museum houses more than 1,400 works of art by 255 artists, including paintings, photography, sculpture, poetry and music.

Ongoing: "The Things They Carried": This collection of pieces from the permanent collection serves as a visual companion to Tim O'Brien's novel of the same name, using fine art and photography by combat veterans to illustrate the narrative.

Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago

5550 S. Greenwood Ave.; 773-702-0200, smartmuseum.uchicago.edu

The museum is home to special exhibitions and a collection that spans 5,000 years of artistic creation. The Smart Museum has established itself as a leading academic art museum and an engine of adventurous thinking about the visual arts.

Through Dec. 16: "Chris Vorhees and SIMPARCH: Uppers and Downers": The next installation of the Threshold series is an abstract landscape that fills the reception hall of the museum. A kitchen cabinetry, countertop and sink formation is reworked into a large-scale rainbow arching over a waterfall, playing on the utopian promise that restraint yields bliss.

Submit information to ctc-ent-events@tribune.com.

Pick of the week

"Ex-Static: George Kagan's Radios" features more than 50 radios hand-built by Chicago folk artist Kagan over a 14-year period. The exhibit also includes drawings, sketches and documentation of Kagan's concepts for the vast set of radios that range from small, battery-powered units to large, jukebox-inspired pieces. *Through Jan. 5 at Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, 756 N. Milwaukee Ave.; 312-243-9088, art.org*



Ex-Static: George Kagan's Radios" is at Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art in River West through Jan. 5.