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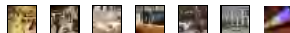
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Industry of the Ordinary at the Chicago Cultural Center

Adam Brooks and Mat Wilson discuss their retrospective. *By Lauren Weinberg*

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Industry of the Ordinary, "Googling Ordinary" at the Hyde Park Art Center, 2012.

Photo: Courtesy of IOTO

On November 2, 2012, two forklifts danced on Daley Plaza to Ennio Morricone's theme from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. Operated by professional drivers, the machines circled each other, moved wooden pallets and executed impressive spins beneath Picasso's sculpture.

The forklifts' performance, *Square Dance*, typifies the quirky humor suffusing [Industry of the Ordinary's](#) exhibition "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi," on view at the [Chicago Cultural Center](#) through February 17.

While the show presents many of the 80-plus pieces IOTO completed after its members—Chicago artists Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson—teamed up in 2003, it's more than a survey. "A static retrospective that documents nine years of work did not seem particularly interesting," Wilson recently told me at [Columbia College](#), where both artists teach.

So, as usual, IOTO shares the spotlight, with artists such as [Erik Peterson](#), who created *Square Dance*, and [Anna Kunz](#), whose collaboration with dancer [Paige Cunningham](#), *One Careless Gesture Away from Destruction*, will be performed at the Cultural Center Sunday 20. "At this point, we've probably worked with over 200 other people in the context of the show," Brooks says.

Such partnerships emerge, in part, from Wilson's background in performance art, in which "something, going into a project, is unknowable," he explains. IOTO's inclusive practice is also influenced by the two educators' desire to promote emerging artists and by sculptor Brooks's experience as a curator. "When we bring people in, we don't know what they'll do, but we know where to place our faith," Wilson says.

Both artists are committed to engaging the public as well. The subjects they return to again and again—politics, religion, labor and consumerism—dominate so-called ordinary people's lives and preoccupy plenty of artists. But Brooks and Wilson, who both grew up in England, approach these serious issues in absurd ways.

For *The Harvest* on October 26, Brooks and Wilson [paraded a butter sculpture of President Obama](#) from the West Loop to the Cultural Center, where it remains on display in a cooler until the artists decide how to bid it farewell. "People keep asking if we're going to spread him on muffins," Wilson says. "It's not a good idea. He's already beginning to mold."

One of the most prominent installations in "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi" is *Portrait* (2012), to which 71 artists, including [Kerry James Marshall](#) and [Ivan Brunetti](#), contribute depictions of Brooks and Wilson. Because the duo's methods render the authorship of its artworks

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ambiguous, "some people have accused us of using other people to make our work," Brooks admits. Yet IOTO goes to great lengths to give credit where it's due, honoring the Cultural Center's security guards in its 2006 photograph and performance *Secure*. "The artists, curators and, of course, the audience move in and out of the [exhibition] space. The security staff are always present and, despite that fact, never acknowledged," Brooks says.

Because IOTO prides itself on its connection to "the rest of the creative community," Brooks and Wilson attempt to list every living Chicago artist in the slideshow *Everyone*. Randomized so it's not alphabetical, *Everyone* is also "about the implied psychological need to sit there and find out whether you're on the list," which could take more than four hours, Wilson warns. The piece taps into an insecurity that's not funny at all. IOTO isn't just "goofing around," Wilson says. "Much of this work comes from some very serious and painful experiences."

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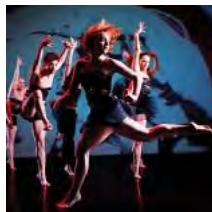
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