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What's Jim Zimpel's angle?

Posted in Exhibitionist blog by Franck Mercurio on Aug 22, 2012 at 4:26pm



Jim Zimpel's *Angle* at the Chicago Cultural Center

Photo: Courtesy of Jim Zimpel

Although the new exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center, "Industry of the Ordinary," focuses on the conceptual works of the artistic duo of Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson, an installation and performance piece by one their collaborators, Jim Zimpel, takes center stage.

Zimpel is an artist and avid fisherman, and his works often explore the organic bonding that happens between people through the simple act of fishing. His installation at the Cultural Center, *Angle*, explores notions of environmental sustainability, social connection and personal history.

Angle is a beautifully designed—and functional—aquaponic system complete with fish pond and hydroponic garden. The curvilinear forms of the stainless steel basin (housing three dozen or so bluegills) appear to be random; but riffing on his own history and experiences, Zimpel created the contours by compositing the outlines of ten Minnesota lakes where his grandfather chooses to fish.

The performative aspect of the piece involves Zimpel randomly selecting participants to "go fishing" on each of the six Sundays that *Angle* will be displayed at the Cultural Center. After catching a fish, the participant is presented with a choice: eat the fish or let it go. Those opting for freedom are escorted to the Chicago River to set their fish free. Those opting for dinner go to the South Water Kitchen where chef Roger Waysok prepares the freshly caught bluegills (along with lake trout for those who released their fish).

Having participated in *Angle* myself this past Sunday, I was surprised by (1) how fun the act of fishing was and (2) how engaging and enlightening were the discussions that followed at the South Water Kitchen. An unexpected bonus was a growing awareness (and questioning) of my relationship with food and where it comes from—perhaps the dessert to this "fishy" performance piece.

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