

for art's sake

By Elio Iannacci



Elevated art: Matt Irie and Dominick Talvacchio's video, part of "Artists on the Map: Between Here and There," opening Oct. 10 at Unit B Gallery.

scene/heard

Mark Your Calendars

October 24-December 6: Schopf Gallery on Lake (942 W. Lake, 312/432-1630) opens "Three Chicago Painters," featuring works by Niki Kriese, Gabriele Stich and Carl Virgo.

October 24, 25 (7:30 p.m.) and October 26 (3 p.m.): Akram Khan Company with Anish Kapoor and Nitin Sawhney put on a dance performance that mixes contemporary movements with the traditional and physically challenging forms of classical Kathak dance of India. At the **Museum of Contemporary Art** (220 E. Chicago, 312/280-2660). MCA Members \$17, non-members \$22.

Short & Sweet

Name: Olga Stefan

Place of Birth: Bucharest, Romania

Work on display: Stefan will curate "Palpable Disequilibrium: Contemporary Art in Romania" at the LIPA Gallery (160 E. Illinois, 312/329-0812), featuring the work of five internationally known Romanian artists: Matei Bejenaru, Ioan Godeanu, Teodor Graur, Dan Perjovschi and Lia Perjovschi. The interactive exhibit will include drawings, photographs, a short film, a multitude of objects featuring globes, wet cement on which the visitors are invited to step, an interactive website and human-size houses to be explored by visitors. The show will run November 7 through December 7, with an opening reception November 7, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

What drove you to curate this show, and what drew you to the work that will be on display? For my master's thesis at the School of the Art Institute, I did research in Romania about nonprofit art organizations and their viability in a country in transition, so naturally I met many artists. The fact that there are artists who do work in a language that is understood internationally, for example, contemporary art, yet who are not very recognized at home, interested me, and I decided to curate a show that discussed the problems that these artists face at home.

How politically relevant is this show right now? Very. Countries like Romania, for example, who are transitioning from a dictatorship to a democracy, are everywhere. Iraq is the most obvious example. The point of the show is to demonstrate the difficulties that people go through while their country transitions. It's a long process and cannot be expected to be done overnight. Romania has been transitioning for more than a decade, and all the while it has been supported by Europe. What can we expect of a country like Iraq that is not getting all the support and help of other countries that eastern Europe did?

What piece is the most visually surprising, and which will initiate the most reaction? I feel they are all extremely strong, and since the show is interactive, all the pieces are meant to get a reaction. I feel that they all will. People like to touch art, and this show actually requires the audience to interact with the pieces.

What was the hardest part of coordinating this show? Getting the funding to make the show happen. In my experience trying to raise money for the show, it seemed that almost nobody was interested in supporting it.

What makes a first-rate curator? The curator has to combine concept with aesthetic to make an interesting show. The work should be visually and conceptually interesting and strong.



GROUPIE

Art Groupies looking for a fresh gallery to peruse during Chicago Artists' Month can rejoice. Chicago's greater Pilsen area is now home to the brand-spanking new **Fleur Fine Art Gallery** (1883 S. Halsted, 312/421-8929), an exceptional space that opened its doors the first week of October. The debut exhibition, "Beautiful and Challenging," runs through November 10, and the title sums up the show's simple but essential messages, one being that beauty reflects, in all of its greatness, not only a challenging entity but also a deeply demanding one.

Artist Jeff Colby's (1956-1996) intensely personal pieces of collage work are probably the best representations of how beauty can explain, and even define, the complicated process of struggle and recovery. This is seen through Colby's remarkable gift in using artifacts that represent his struggle with AIDS (he was diagnosed in 1988) and transfer them, and his memories of pain and release, via visual expression. Also included in the show are the cultivated offerings of artists Jonathan Gillette, Jennifer Farmer and Michael Rubenstein, which help balance beauty's challenge quite nicely.

Pilsen has long been one of Chicago's greatest opportunities to view underground works that seldom see the light of day in West Loop or River North. A great example is **Unit B Gallery's** (1733 S. Des Plaines, 312/491-9384) consistent effort to keep it real, especially with current show "Artists on the Map: Between Here and There," running through November 1. This multi-level exhibit features new paintings by Kelly Brannon, Bryan Dewhurst and David Moskow, but the profound reality comes from the performance video documentation by collaborators Matt Irie and Dominick Talvacchio. The video gives viewers a look at loosely scripted moments during commute times at Chicago's el train stops. What is most extraordinary about these "real" moments is the way the camera takes in public reaction with such an uncanny and suspicious lens that the viewer is forced to watch the commonplace experience of train waiting and riding as something both mundane and magical.

Also in Pilsen, Chicago's acclaimed **Polvo Art Studio** (1257 W. 18th, 312/217-3050), run by an artist collective formed in 1996. Polvo's current "Low Rider Show" features artists from Chicago and beyond (South America, Michigan and Idaho), each working within the mainframe of modern and folk aesthetics, and coming from and/or inspired by Mexican-American communities. From smarmy expressions derived from political and social frustration to articulate and slicing analyses of current issues, both internal and external, with the Mexican-American populous, this show serves up a brilliant punch of innovative interrogation.



A symbol from the Construction and Deconstruction Institute website, www.theinstitute.ro, founded in part by LIPA featured artist Ioan Godeanu.