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The Incomplete, Self-Generating Exhibition

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by Abraham Ritchie



"Match of the Day II," 2005, Industry of the Ordinary, as Old God and Young God, play table football, first to 100 goals, on the promontory point by North Avenue beach.
Photo credit: Greg Stimac

When is the proper time to review an exhibition? It's a seemingly simple question that has become complicated because of another question: what constitutes an exhibition? Concluding on February 17, the Industry of the Ordinary's sprawling retrospective *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi* pushes these questions to their limits, mirroring the shift in contemporary practice from traditional expectations.

Industry of the Ordinary (IOTO) is a collaboration between artists Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson, and as this exhibition demonstrates, IOTO is also a collaboration between their collective and other artistic collectives, the artists and the viewers, the artists and the general public. The objects on view reflect these interactions: photographs document various interactions both with a participating audience and with the unsuspecting public; an entire section is set apart by a kind of wooden mobile home-like structure that contain contributions from a healthy percentage of Chicago's art world.

Given the artists' wide-ranging connections to the art community it seems relevant to say that I have almost no connection to IOTO aside from meeting Mr. Brooks twice. However Bad at Sports as an entity does, and so may some of its constituent members, depending on the person.

Throughout the course of the exhibition, framed as a mid-career retrospective, a multitude of events have been scheduled and taken place. These have spilled out of the main exhibition hall into other galleries, into the interstitial spaces of the building, and to other locations throughout the city. They've branched off into multiple sub-events—the month-and-a-half performance series from the Happy Collaborationists featured no less than seven artists.

It should be abundantly clear that these events are to be considered just as much a part of the exhibition as the physical objects on display, which are themselves often documents of those events. Certainly a visit to the Chicago Cultural Center could yield a variety of experiences depending on the day, and the gallery has refigured itself over the course of the exhibition. A recent visit on a weekend day was the kind of experience that would be typical of a mid-career retrospective, with documentary materials and art objects occupying the space, whereas at the opening the art itself was set in motion, literally being actively created.

The crucial point above is that the exhibition becomes self-generative and therefore is not complete until the end. This is, of course, in contrast to the traditional art exhibition that is at the outset self-contained and complete. Therefore, one can only review and assess an exhibition like this at the end, when all of these elements have been realized.

This seems to be the essential point that the *Wall Street Journal* ignored to their own detriment.



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