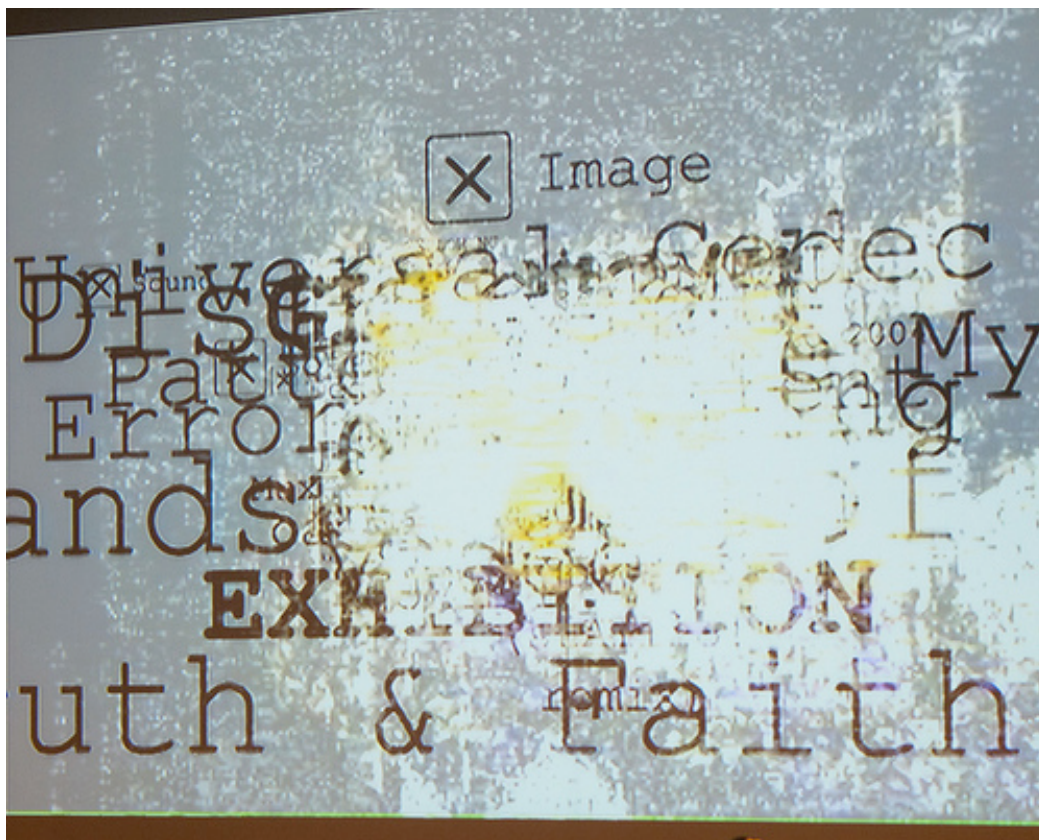


ARTslant Chicago

The Slant | HOME MAGAZINE CALENDAR GALLERIES ART SHOP ARTISTS COMMUNITY ADD

The Best of 2011 by Joel Kuennen

I'm always filled with something bordering on dread when writing a best of list. Dread at the prospect of rereading old reviews, dread at trying to recall what all I saw and mostly the dread at attempting to reflexively judge work that has long disappeared from galleries and, usually, my head. But this year...this year was a good year.



GLI.TC/H. Image via flickr user [lgnotus the Mage](#)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ignotus/>

Firstly, new media work continues to pulse in the underground art scene at established spaces like Enemy and The Nightingale as well as newcomers like Kunsthalle New. Chicago played host to the [second annual Gli.tc/h conference](#) this year, co-organized by Nick Briz, Rosa Menkman and Evan Meaney. Gli.tc/h then hopped the pond, showing in Amsterdam and Birmingham further confirming Chicago's position as a preeminent leader in the production and scholarship of new media art. New media impresario and Bad at Sports columnist, Nicholas O'Brien, co-curated *A Small Forest* with a notable new curator, Bea Fremderman that, albeit small, provided a beautiful glimpse into the multitude of possibilities for digital art's presentation in a physical gallery space. Fremderman later curated an [especially interesting exhibition](#) at the MEGAMALL on North Milwaukee, a discount mall that proved a unique and unsettling setting.



Installation view of **Zachary Cahill's** "USSA 2012: The Orphanage Project" at **threewalls**. Image by Claire Britt.

Zachary Cahill kept up the hard work all year long. Coordinator of the University of Chicago's Department of Visual Arts' Open Practice Committee, Cahill staged his [solo exhibition at threewalls](#), and curated a show comprised of work from students in a theoretically rich course about [the Animal and Society](#). Despite his affinity with bears, this bear doesn't hibernate. His work at threewalls showed a depth of critical understanding and energy that will coalesce into something greater in the future I am sure.

Fiber artist Steven Frost made a strong showing in 2011, taking part in eight group exhibitions around the country as well three exhibitions in Chicago itself, Roxaboxen and [two](#) at [Robert Bills Contemporary](#). Graduating this past summer from the School of the Art Institute's Fiber Department, Frost has made a quick impact with an adept use of material to explore LGBT ethnographies and the mythos of being male.

Throughout the year, [materiality and immateriality](#) seemed to play off each other. The immateriality of the digital – fluid, lucid, tending towards conceptual oblivion through its own weightlessness – seems to be counterbalanced by a dialectical relationship with a need to ground things through the material world. If this is the case, as new media art grows and matures, so to will material art grow richer as it strives to maintain a grip on the Real.

2011 began with much trepidation. On the heels of [the conservative slam](#) against freedom of speech with the Wojnarowicz debacle and the seemingly never-ending "economic downturn," which every artlover knows means less funding for the arts, we braced for a bitter year. But Chicago's art scene remains alive and thrives, seemingly turning inwards and getting down and dirty during the recession with a widespread use of cheap manufactured products and technologies, bright color palettes and ingenious uses of space, young art in Chicago is better than ever.

-[Joel Kuennen](#), ArtSlant Staff Writer

Posted by [Joel Kuennen](#) on 1/10

> COMMENTS (0) [\[add a new comment\]](#)