

# Get Contemporary in Chicago

With massive museum renovations, a growing gallery district, and an active residency program, the Second City is striving for first prize in culture.

By Rachel Wolff

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Walk the new pedestrian bridge, the **Nichols Bridgeway**, that opened this spring linking Millennium Park to the **Art Institute** (\$18 for adults, \$12 for seniors and students, children under 14 are free), where killer views of Lake Michigan and Frank Gehry's free-form Jay Pritzker Pavilion await at the building's landing spot. Inside, wander through the Renzo Piano–designed Modern Wing, where you'll find a veritable hit parade of 20th- and 21st-century pieces spattered with gems rarely shown in the main building. Afterward, visit the nearby **Museum of Contemporary Art** (\$12 suggested admission). The current exhibit, "Constellations," makes good on new director Madeleine Grynsztejn's pledge to promote area artists by including eighteen of them. Finish at the **Spertus Museum**, the award-winning Jewish art and culture museum at the Spertus Institute, which reopened in late 2007 in a brand-new building (next door to where the old museum was) and now features an interactive children's center (\$7 for adults, \$5 for children; children under 5 are free).

Gallery-hop through the **West Loop**, a Chelsea-like art scene where cutting-edge commercial and nonprofit art spaces are popping up in post-industrial buildings. Swing by North Peoria Street to the **Rhona Hoffman Gallery** for big names like Kehinde Wiley and Sol LeWitt, then visit the **Peter Miller Gallery** on the same floor for lesser-known contemporary painters. Walk across the street to the experimental nonprofit **threewalls** to find quirky, themed group shows; affordable artist-designed tchotchkes; and independent art zine *Paper & Carriage*, nominated for a 2009 Utne Independent Press Award. Finish at neighborhood newcomer **EC Gallery** for a fascinating roster of emerging and mid-career artists from Poland working in oil on canvas, mixed media, and prints.

On the first Friday of the month, attend a public opening at the **Flat Iron Arts Building**. For a more polished presentation, walk a few blocks south to the recently relocated **Monique Meloche** gallery, a former West Loop resident that boasts an impressive roster of buzzy natives like local photographer and video artist **Carrie Schneider**.