

PRESS COVERAGE



## **Eirik Johnson: Borderlands**

August 2 — October 1, 2005

1. Bridge, Issue 16
2. Chicago Reader, 8. 5. 2005
3. Chicago Reader, 9. 2. 2005
4. Chicago Tribune, 8. 25. 2005
5. Front Desk Chicago, Aug 2005
6. Time Out Chicago, 8. 25. 2005



# Eirik Johnson *Borderlands*

Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago  
August 2 through October 1, 2005

Eirik Johnson creates narratives of mysterious places through the juxtaposition of nature and civilization, the traces of people in landscapes and pictorial elements in his beautiful color photographs of the *Borderlands* and *West Oakland Walk* series. The majority of the *Borderlands* series are exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago from August 2 through October 1, 2005.

Civilization encroaches upon nature in *Untitled (posts)*. One fears that the empty space will soon contain more of the houses which resemble Monopoly game pieces in their sameness. In the most striking photograph of the show, a newly installed fountain for a housing development is juxtaposed against beautiful Douglas firs. The juxtaposition is jarring in its senselessness, and one worries for the forest's demise. Nature counters against man's inroads at times. In *Car in the Grass*, vegetation surrounds and perhaps will eventually cover an abandoned car; the lush green of the grass contrasts with the flatness of the car's paint.

In addition to his chronicles of man versus nature, Johnson evokes the past and future stories of individuals in natural and built landscapes. A dirty, orange sweater tied to a tree strikes us as an anomaly in the forest in *Untitled (sweater)*. The viewer worries what happened to the people who were there and wonders if the sweater and jacket were a flag for help. The pleasant pink of a house contrasts with the scraps of a window shade and the reflection of an ambulance's lights in *Tattered Curtains*. The inanimate objects combined create concern in the viewer for the inhabitants. Shoes abandoned or for sale are a link to an unfinished story in *Red Fence*, *Blue Bag*. We question whether the people left in haste and why one shoe is missing. Devoid of people, the photographs lead us to think about those missing.

The photographer employs pictorial elements, such as line, shape, shadow and color, to create mystery in the work. We notice the artistic quality of detritus in *Untitled (fence)*. We then ask why a bike and a vacuum cleaner hang from a fence. It is as if a Louise Nevelson sculpture had been deconstructed and elongated. In *Untitled (light)*, a ghostly blue angle of light is in apposition to two beams supporting an aqueduct; the photograph is a study of angles and lines. One would like to enter the space, and read the writing on the wall to learn more. Reddish orange reverberates on the remnant of a bike, steps and a plastic playhouse in *Bike*



Eirik Johnson, *Untitled (posts)*, 2004, C-print, 38 x 46 inches, edition of 10. Courtesy of Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco.



Eirik Johnson, *Untitled (fence)*, 2004, C-print, 38 x 46 inches, edition of 10. Courtesy of Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco.

*Beneath Tree.* We question where the owners are and what happened to the bike, in addition to observing the dynamic color study. Johnson continues in the tradition of John Axelrad and Jerome Brezillon, in their investigation of deserted spaces.

The photographer focuses on the margins between civilization and nature, and their mystery. He causes us to analyze the photographs' narratives and conjecture the stories of the photographs. Through his art, we could write novels.

— Carol L. Weinfeld



# Galleries & Museums

Sat 11-5, 312-503-7240

**Arnon Packer** 118 N. Peoria. Betsy Stirratt, paintings; Satrie Stuelke, paintings and prototypes of appliances "to improve one's outlook on life," through Sat 8/20. Tue-Sat 11-5:30. 312-226-8984

**Perimeter** 210 W. Superior. William Keland, paintings and drawings, through Sat 8/27. Tue-Sat 10:30-5:30. 312-266-9473

**Polvo** 1458 W. 18th. "Contagious Brain Blurbs," work by the collective Dottedquad (Hyunjo Oh and Noah Shibley), through Sat 8/6. Sat noon-5. 773-344-1940

**Portals** 742 N. Wells. Paul Critchley, John Fraser, paintings, through Fri 8/19. Tue-Fri 10-5, Sat 11-5. 312-642-1066

**Printworks** 311 W. Superior. Paula Campbell, Bill Frederick, Elizabeth Ockwell, drawings, through Sat 8/20. Tue-Sat 11-5. 312-664-9407

**Byron Roche** 750 N. Franklin. Work by Rebecca Shore, Ann Wiens, and other gallery artists, through Fri 9/2. Tue-Sat 11-6. 312-654-0144

**Judy A. Saslow** 300 W. Superior. Work by Cat Chow, Nancy Josephson, and Christine Sefolosha, through Sat 9/3. Tue-Sat 10-6. 312-943-0530

**Carrie Secrist** 835 W. Washington. Work by gallery artists, through Sat 8/27. Tue-Fri 10-6, Sat 11-5. 312-491-0917

**Steelelife** 4655 S. King, 2nd fl. Ezekiel Mabote, woodcuts and paintings, through Fri 8/12. Thu-Sat noon-7. 773-538-4773

**Three Arts** 1300 N. Dearborn. Laurie Hogin, paintings and sculpture addressing domestic space "by reinventing and elaborating the didactic power of the bed, the quilt, and the pillow"; Lora Lode, sculpture incorporating coffee cups, cereal boxes, garden plants, and other materials, through Thu 8/25. Mon-Fri 9-5. 312-944-

**Linda Warren** 1052 W. Fulton. "The House That Joe Built," paintings exploring family



Photo by Eirik Johnson, at the Museum of Contemporary Art

history by James Rizzo; Alex Lu, paintings, through Sat 9/3. Tue-Sat 11-5. 312-432-9500

**Western Exhibitions** 1648 W. Kinzie, 2nd fl. Aaron Van Dyke, textile pieces assembled from strips of overpainted printed fabric; Eric Lebofsky, "funny, often disturbing" colored-pencil drawings, Sat 8/6-Sat 9/10. Opens Sat 8/6, 6-9 PM. Fri-Sat noon-6. 312-307-4685

**Woman Made** 2418 W. Bloomingdale. Juried members' show, through Thu 8/25. Wed-Fri noon-7, Sat-Sun noon-4. 773-489-8900

**Zg** 300 W. Superior. Work by gallery artists, through Sat 9/3. Tue-Sat 10-5:30. 312-654-9900

**Zolla Lieberman** 325 W. Huron. David Lozano, paintings; group show, through Wed 8/24. Tue-Fri 10-5:30, Sat 11-5:30. 312-

Room," camera obscura photos by Abelardo Morell, through Sun 10/16,



galleries 3-4. "1945: Creativity and Crisis, Chicago Architecture and Design of the World War II Era," drawings and

buildings designed by firms with female principals, through Sun 11/20.... Photos of buildings by 125-year-old Chicago architectural firm Holabird & Root (nee Holabird & Roche), through Sun 2/12. Daily 9:30-6. 312-922-3432

**Chicago Cultural Center** 78 E. Washington. "Sustainable Furniture," work by Chicago designers that makes use of "recycled or salvaged materials, renewable resources, and less energy intensive processes," through Sun 8/14.... "Above and Beneath the Skin," wax sculpture and photos by Petah Coyne, through Sun 8/21.... *Spirit of Korea: Humanity*, fiber installation by Hyung Joo Kim, through Fri 8/26. Related pieces, subtitled "Harmony" and "Freedom," are at Zhou B. Art Center, 1029 W. 35th, through Fri 8/26.... Work by Dianna Frid, Andreas Fischer, Richard Rezac, and seven other local recipients of 2004 Driehaus Foundation artist awards, through Sun 9/4.... Hugh Paterson, figure paintings, through Sun 9/4.... "Crossings," work by five local artists and five from Kaohsiung, Taiwan, through Sun 10/9. Mon-Thu 10-7, Fri 10-6, Sat 10-5, Sun 11-5. 312-346-3278

CC CRITIC'S CHOICE

Free FREE

R RECOMMENDED

E EVENT

C CLOSING



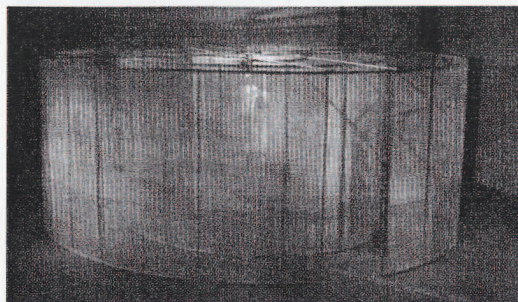
Natural Instinct, plaster, glass, and fur sculpture by Jacob Foran, in a group show at Aesthetic Eye

seniors; \$1 kids 6-12. Mondays free. 312-642-4600

**DuSable Museum of African American History** 740 E. 56th Pl. "100 Plus One," photos and artifacts related to American recorded music, through Sun 4/2. Tue-Sat 10-5, Sun noon-5. \$3; \$2 students, seniors; \$1 kids 6-13. Sundays free. 773-947-0600

**Elmhurst Art Museum** 150 Cottage Hill, Elmhurst. Rebecca Shore, geometric egg-tempera paintings; Rhonda Gates, grid-based paintings; Peter Stanfield, wall-mounted sculpture, through Sun 9/18. Tue, Thu & Sat 10-4, Wed 1-8, Fri & Sun 1-4. \$4; \$3 seniors; \$2 students. 630-834-0202

**Field Museum** 1400 S. Lake Shore Dr. "Transforming Tradition," coiled ceramic vessels from Mexico's pre-Columbian Casas Grandes culture and contemporary pots from the town of Mata Ortiz, inspired by their 1950s rediscovery, through Sun 4/23.... "Sue Discovery Dig," kids' exhibit, through Mon 9/5.... "Jungles," color photos by Frans Lanting, through Sun 1/1.... "Design Innovations in Manufactured Housing," maquettes and drawings by eight designers, through Sun 1/15.... "Dinosaur Dynasty," fossils and casts of fossils unearthed





Now Showing

# Earth, Wind, and Tires

In "Borderlands," a series of lush, almost surreal large-format images at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Eirik Johnson presents urban and near urban areas that have largely been abandoned to nature. Often one wonders about the story behind what's shown. In *Untitled (Sweater)*, an orange sweater and a brown shirt are tied together and stretched between trees. It turns out Johnson found them in a creek used by urban hobos, with the shirt covered in moss. *Untitled (Debris)* shows a bundle of sticks on the concrete ledge of a freeway underpass, apparently deposited there by a flood.

Johnson began photographing in his early teens, inspired by Ansel Adams and later by Edward Weston. He and a friend shared a darkroom in his native Seattle, and together they'd shoot everything from old billboards to wildflowers in a nearby mountain valley. Entering the University of Washington as a jazz studies major, then switching to history with a concentration on Latin America, Johnson took fewer photographs. But a year in Ecuador when he was a junior rekindled his interest in photography—and channeled it in a new direction. Everything in Ecuador, it seemed, carried traces of its history, which couldn't be encompassed in the beautiful patterns of the formalist photography he loved. "There's

a huge indigenous population still speaking Quechua," Johnson says. "And Inca ruins. I felt the past was so involved with the present." Returning, he became more aware of Seattle's history and started photographing freeway overpasses and downtown intersections, built on

sites that had once been used by Native Americans for sweat lodges and funeral pyres. To produce stereo images—a format common 100 years ago—he made a camera with two pinholes. The resulting series served as his senior thesis for a double major in history and photography, and the university library bought prints for its collection.

In 1959, two years after graduating, Johnson received a Fulbright for a similar project in Peru, creating stereo images of Inca sites. On that trip, some Andes villagers invited him to go with them on an annual pilgrimage to find the "snow star," a ritual that dates to pre-Colombian times. "Tens of thousands of villagers hike to a site at the foot of a glacier to worship the sacred mountains," he says, "an animistic tradition that was later appropriated by the Catholic church. Several days of singing and dancing are followed by a 24-hour hike." Since then he's returned for the event four times, working on a black-and-white series.

In college Johnson had been impressed by such large-format photographers as Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth and by the great chronicler of human alterations to the American landscape, Robert Adams. Grad school at the San Francisco Art Institute introduced him to earthworks and to Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, whose walking trips serve as a starting point for some of their photographs. Johnson began taking pictures on long walks through his run-down neighborhood, "trying to find the exotic in the everyday." This urban series, "West Oakland Walk," led to "Borderlands." Both series have roots in Johnson's childhood, especially the time he spent exploring city-owned greenbelts, undeveloped patches of weeds and forest. One next



Eirik Johnson, *Untitled (Tires)*

to his house, he says, included "an old patio with Roman-style columns. I also remember finding a teddy bear that had been left a long time ago with a note attached to its collar. We thought we had discovered the lost ark."

While in Peru on the snow star trips, Johnson observed how the pilgrims marked their route by placing single stones on piles left by previous pilgrims. For *Untitled (Tires)*, he consulted a tidal chart

and waited days for the low tide that would reveal the abandoned tires he'd noticed on other occasions. Then, before taking the picture, he waded up to his knees in mud to place sticks with colored plastic on the tires as markers. *Untitled (Tarp)* shows the remains of a white tarp against an empty field, the plastic ripped to wispy shreds by the wind and rain, their shapes echoing those of the fennel plants in the background. —Fred Camper



# MoCP

Museum of  
Contemporary Photography

## events+ exhibitions

August 2- October 2, 2005

**Taryn Simon:**  
The Innocents

**CLOSING RECEPTION**

Thursday, September 29  
5-7pm  
Museum of Contemporary Photography

**FILM SCREENING**

*Murder on a Sunday Morning* (111 minutes)  
Wednesday, September 14, 6pm  
Museum of Contemporary Photography  
600 S. Michigan Ave. 1st floor

**FILM SCREENING AND DISCUSSION  
WITH DIRECTOR LAURI FELDMAN**

*The Innocent* (71 minutes)  
Monday, September 26, 2005, 6pm  
Room 921, 9th Floor, 600 S. Michigan Ave.

**PANEL DISCUSSION**

*Mistaken Identities:  
Stories of the Wrongfully Convicted*  
Thursday, September 22, 2005, 6pm  
Museum of Contemporary Photography  
600 S. Michigan Ave. 1st floor

August 2- October 2, 2005

**Erik Johnson:**  
Borderlands

**CLOSING RECEPTION  
AND BOOK SIGNING**

Thursday, September 29, 5-7pm  
Museum of Contemporary Photography

**LECTURE:**

**JOEL-PETER WITKIN**  
Thursday, September 8, 2005, 6pm  
1104 S. Wabash, 8th Floor

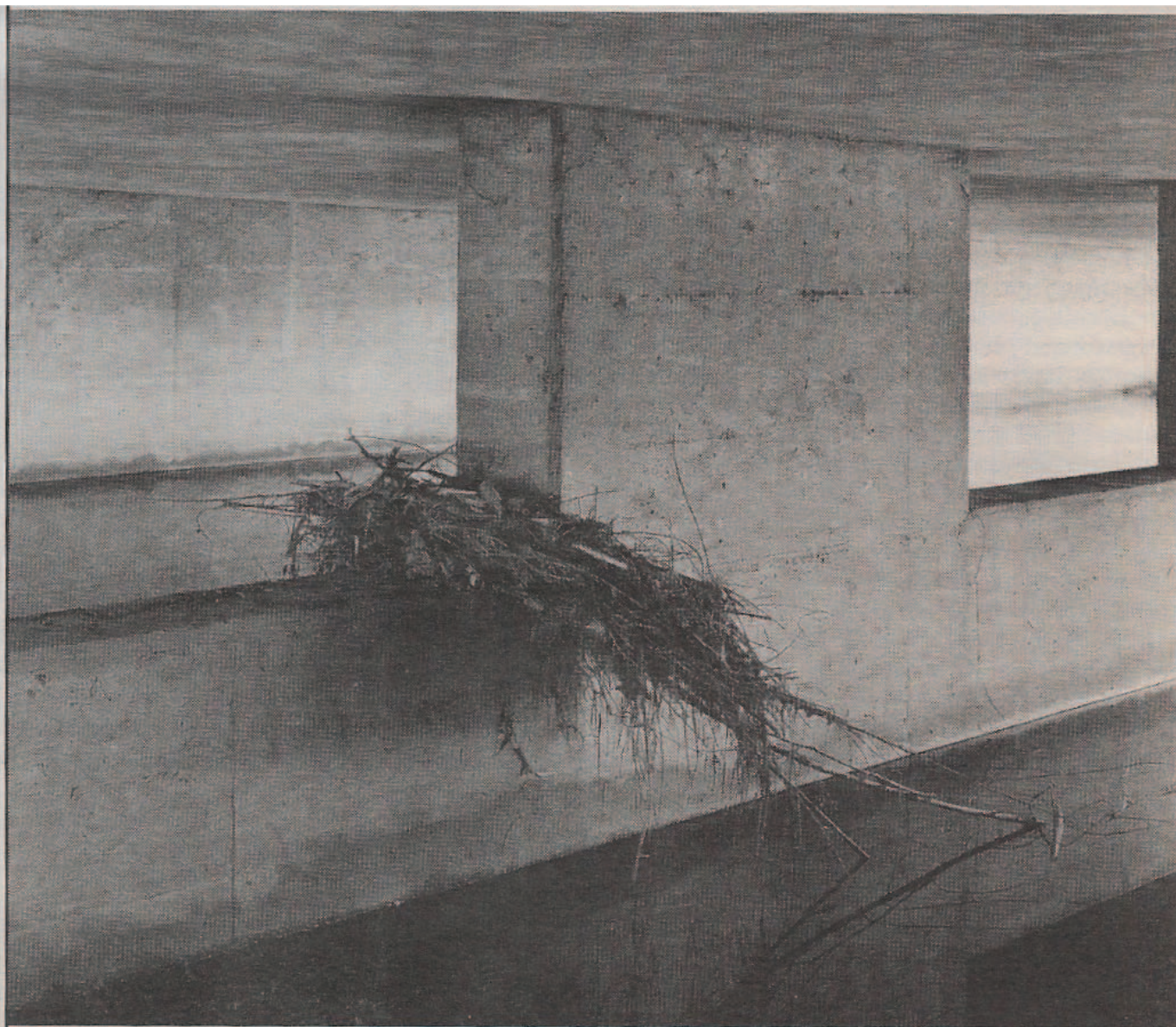
**MEMBERS EVENT**

Photographic Excursion  
Saturday, September 24, 1-4pm  
reservation required

ABOVE: TARYN SIMON  
*Charles Irvin Fain*  
*Scene of the crime, the Snake River, Melba, Idaho*  
*Served 18 years of a death sentence*  
c-print  
46 x 59 inches  
Courtesy of Gagolian Gallery

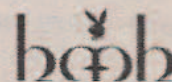
BELOW: EIRIK JOHNSON  
*Untitled (underpass)*, 2002  
c-print  
30 x 39 inches  
Courtesy of the artist





Museum of Contemporary  
Photography  
600 S Michigan Ave  
Chicago, IL 60605  
312.663.5554  
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mocp.org

Free and open to the public  
Monday through Friday  
from 10 am to 5pm  
Thursday until 8pm  
Saturday from noon to 5pm



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C O L L E G E C H I C A G O



## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

## ART

## Photos of exonerated memorable

By Alan G. Artner  
Tribune art critic

Taryn Simon spent 2001 photographing people who had been accused, convicted and incarcerated for crimes they did not commit. The irony of this was not lost on her, for often the people had been misidentified from photographs, and to say something about the injustice, there she was photographing them again.

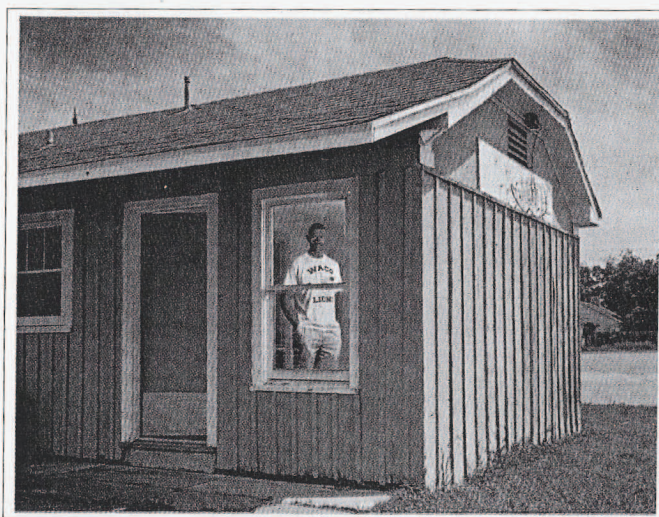
The results were collected in a book, "The Innocents" (Umbrage, 2003), and an exhibition, which has come to the Museum of Contemporary Photography. Both prove difficult to forget.

Simon shot each of her exonerated subjects at a site central to their cases. In most instances, this meant the scene of the crime, though some photos were taken at the scene of the misidentification or alibi. Once there, she posed them and photographed in color. The exhibition prints are large and accompanied by labels giving the subject's name, time served, length of sentence and crime(s) for which they were convicted.

Apart from a palette that emphasizes golds and browns, Simon's picture-making vision does not stand out. The poses of her subjects are ordinary. Her images convey next to nothing about the subjects' character or psychology.

The strength of the work comes from us seeing people in landscapes and interiors the labels tell us had life-altering effect. We scarcely can imagine why they would want to re-engage so directly a part of the past that brought them ruin. But the fact that all of them did suggests the wrong may have been the largest thing they've had in life, and what we imagine they feel about it overwhelms us regardless of how much feeling the pictures actually show.

Simon's book complemented the photographs with brief interviews of her subjects. In the exhibition, they speak on video, adding tones of



defeat too terrible to be borne.

A second exhibition, of color landscape photographs by Eirik Johnson, offers a kind of palliative. Johnson is interested in what happens at sites that are between places of habitation and desolation. In his travels he found that things accrue, and he makes often unexpectedly

beautiful photographs showing them.

Some of his pictures are of secluded wooded areas through which few people pass. Others are of the margins of suburban housing developments where large numbers of people live. In both are objects the hand of man has left behind. Usually the objects are pieces of junk a trav-



Above: "Untitled (Tires)" from 2003 is part of "Eirik Johnson: Borderlands."

Left: Taryn Simon's "Calvin Washington C&E Motel, Room No. 24, Waco, Texas" (2002). The photo caption says:

"Where an informant claimed to have heard Washington confess  
"Served 13 years of a Life sentence for Murder"

eler has dropped or the wind has blown in. But sometimes Johnson has come upon collections that clearly have been formed and crude habitations that have been built only to have been abandoned. These are, of course, disfigurations on the land, though the photographer does not present them that way. He celebrates them, as if they were prized finds on an expedition.

Thus at the core of each show are accidents, grim or serendipitous.

Taryn Simon: "The Innocents" and "Eirik Johnson: Borderlands" will continue at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave., through Oct. 1. 312-663-5554.

aartner@tribune.com

## ARCHITECTURE NOTES





## MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

**WHAT'S ON** Eirik Johnson's new show, *Borderlands*, depicts scenes in nature that have been influenced by human forces

**LOCATION** 600 S. Michigan Ave., 312.663.5554

### ROY BOYD GALLERY

739 N. WELLS ST., 312.642.1606

Established in 1972, the gallery primarily focuses on abstraction in paintings, works on paper and sculpture. Many of the artists represented range from emerging to established. *Richard Gibbons: Paintings*. **THROUGH AUGUST 27**

### SOTHEBY'S

188 E. WALTON PL., 312.475.7900

The Chicago office is a full-service operation, capable of evaluating property in a wide range of fine and decorative arts, as well as furniture and jewelry, for sale at Sotheby's international auction centers.

### THOMAS MCCORMICK GALLERY

835 W. WASHINGTON BLVD.,  
312.226.6800

A variety of 20th-century and contemporary art, specializing in mid-century abstraction. *Jan Matulka and the Modern Landscape*. **THROUGH AUGUST 27**

### ZG GALLERY

300 W. SUPERIOR ST.,  
312.654.9900

Eclectic emerging artists who specialize in contemporary and abstract paintings, drawings and sculpture. *Summer Show: New Artists, New Work*. **THROUGH SEPTEMBER 3**

### ZOLLA/LIEBERMAN GALLERY, INC.

325 W. HURON ST., 312.944.1990

Emerging and established contemporary artists working in all media. *David Lozano: A Crush of Veils and Glimmers*. **THROUGH AUGUST 24** *Remembering Memory: Group Drawings*. **THROUGH AUGUST 24**



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Charles Irvin Fain  
Scene of the crime, the Snake River, Melba, Idaho  
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### Erik Johnson: Borderlands

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ERIK JOHNSON  
*Untitled (underpass)*, 2002  
c-print  
30 x 39 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

Wednesday, September 7, 7-9 pm

### Sigur Ros: Takk... Listening Event

MoCP debuts the new Sigur Ros  
album 5 days before the official release.

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