



Work by Sergio Vega,
at Julia Friedman Gallery

On the Town

Westward, Go

September is party time for the city's art galleries. Here's a guide to the West Loop district, home to the edgiest openings in town

IN 1995, INVESTMENT BANKER KAVI GUPTA opened Vedanta Gallery in a third-floor walkup on Peoria Street, hoping to create a buzz in the West Loop—which had a handful of contemporary art galleries but no “scene.” It worked. Other galleries moved in, and the area is now a must stop for every contemporary art collector or curator who comes to town.

More than a dozen top galleries dot the blocks surrounding the intersection of Washington Boulevard and Peoria. They kick off the fall season on September 13th with openings where new art debuts, wine flows, and artists mingle with the crowd. Start at Vedanta, where Austrian Erwin Wurm will show his “one-minute sculptures,” which take him—you guessed it—60 seconds to create. Then sample the rest of the scene with our abbreviated guide:

The Veterans

Eminent dealers such as Rhona Hoffman, Donald Young, Peter Miller, and Paul Klein have brought the neighborhood attention and hard-earned respect. They represent such heavy hitters as Bruce Nauman, Sol LeWitt, and

Robert Ryman, but also show important newer artists, from Dawoud Bey (at Rhona Hoffman) to Jason Salavon (at Peter Miller). Their client lists include major museums—Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), L.A. County, the Corcoran—and major celebrities: Leonardo DiCaprio, Gillian Anderson, and John Cusack among them.

The “Alternatives”

There was once a noticeable difference between the slick professionalism of commercial galleries and the raw edginess of so-called alternative spaces. Not anymore.

Still, certain galleries exude that antieestablishment freshness. One is Tony Wight’s second-floor **Bodybuilder & Sportsman**, where Bean, the gallery cat, lives amid eclectic work by young artists. A collaborative installation by William Staples and Georgina Valverde opens September 13th. Aron Packer shows work with an emphasis on deft craftsmanship, such as drawings by Michael Dinges and painted ceramic tiles by Don Colley.

The Galleristas

Savvy thirtysomethings Monique Meloche and Julia Friedman have two of the hippest spaces in town. Meloche, a former MCA curator, proves that painting can still be cool, showing artists such as young Chicago sensation Laura Mosquera and conceptual painter Joe Baldwin (whose new work debuts September 13th). Friedman opened her gallery in 2001 with Eduardo Kac’s *Genetix*, which continues to travel worldwide, while his controversial *GFP Bunny*—a genetically altered, live green rabbit—still makes headlines.

Where to Eat

The city’s hottest restaurant strip, Randolph Street, is within strolling distance. Try **Blackbird** or **Sushi Wabi**—or go where the dealers go: **Perez** (855 W. Randolph, 312-666-3640), a Mexican joint that far predates the arrival of the art world. Julia Friedman gets a chicken tostada with everything; Tony Wight suggests the fresh-mango margarita. If you’ve a yen to see even more great art, cab it to four-star **Tru** (676 N. St. Clair St., 312-202-0001; dinner only), where you can eat while gazing at works by Cindy Sherman, Ed Ruscha, and Gerhard Richter.

—ANN VIEWS

WEST LOOP ART SCENE*

- ① **Vedanta**, 835 W. Washington;
(312) 432-0708; www.vedantagallery.com
- ② **Rhona Hoffman**, 118 N. Peoria;
(312) 455-1990; www.artnot.com/rhoffman.html
- ③ **Donald Young**, 933 W. Washington;
(312) 455-0100; www.donaldyoung.com
- ④ **Peter Miller**, 118 N. Peoria;
(312) 226-5291; www.pettermillergallery.com
- ⑤ **Klein Art Works**, 400 N. Morgan;
(312) 243-0400; www.kleinart.com
- ⑥ **Bodybuilder & Sportsman**, 119 N. Peoria;
(312) 492-7261; www.bodybuilderandsportsman.com
- ⑦ **Aron Packer**, 118 N. Peoria;
(312) 226-8584; www.aronpacker.com
- ⑧ **Monique Meloche**, 993 W. Fulton;
(312) 435-0099; www.moniquemeloche.com
- ⑨ **Julia Friedman**, 118 N. Peoria;
(312) 435-0755; www.juliefriedman.com



*For a more comprehensive guide, with schedules for the season, call Vedanta Gallery.