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BEST VISUAL ARTS 2011

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This was a year of institutional shake-ups, with a bizarrely reconfigured Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, the first new mayor in decades, a cutting-edge director brought on to the perennially stodgy Block Museum (at Northwestern University in Evanston), and the replacement of nearly everyone at the Museum of Contemporary Art. It's hard to know exactly what it will all mean for 2012, so best to look back and appreciate what we can know from a year full of so much novelty. Here are some highlights.

"Evidence of the Material World," at Devening Projects + Editions in October, was Dianna Frid's exhibition of sculptures, collage and artist books. Characteristically lush yet spare, it gave tactile, anomalous form to the ephemeral phenomena of love and being, light and space. Frid brings the planets home but keeps them strange; she puts death in the palm of your hand, lightly.