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DAWN REISS

A QUIRK IN THE ROAD

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Love Art? Get on Chicago’s Bubble-Wrapped El



One of the eight train El cars that will be used in Saturday's Art on Track. Courtesy of Scott Ashley

Like most dreamers, Logan Square’s Tristan Hummel was told by some naysayers that his idea of putting art on Chicago’s El train just wouldn’t work.

“A lot of people didn’t believe in it, because it’s hard to image how it might work,” said Hummel, 23, who hosted the first “Art on Track” show last August. “it’s kind of a ridiculous thing, let’s put art on a train.”

After being told he had a “cute idea” and sent on his merry way, Hummel took it as inspiration and began reviewing galleries and how Chicago’s Pitchfork Music Festival drummed up support. He also created a “braintrust” of 15 artists who met once a month to help Hummel shaped his dream into a reality.

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) had already announced that 2008 was the last year for the school’s only off-campus art show, so Hummel, then a School of the Art Institute of Chicago senior decided to create another venue showcasing students work off-campus. (See the Nov. 26, 2008 story in [The New York Times](#).)



Hummel’s goal: help artists be able to make art as their primary source of income. Thus the idea of [Art on Track](#) was born to showcase artwork on the El by bringing the artwork to the people instead of making the people go to the art.

“Intially I was a little more starry-eyed,” Hummel said with a laugh. “But now, I think it’s pretty tough to make a living just on making art.”

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“Thanks for a great article, Dawn -- I wish I had known about the naked protesting bit years ago!”

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Aldo Castillo of Chicago’s [Aldo Castillo Gallery](#), which focuses on fine Latin American art, said he became involved last year, and again this year, because it was run by three School of the Art Institute of Chicago recent or nearly graduated students.

“All galleries and institutions need to be linking to the newest artists who are coming out of school,” Castillo said. “They are utilizing the latest technology, newest concepts and applying them to art. That is the difference between art of yesterday and today. You need to change and go with whatever is new.”



Around 1,000 people turned out for last year’s event, the first of its kind in Chicago. But it was more than just art. It was street performers and music to make everything more interactive.

The School of Art Institute Chicago didn’t financially back the project last year, but has purchased a car in this year’s event that takes place on Saturday in Chicago’s Loop.

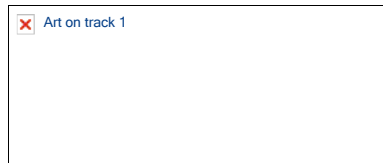
Michael Ryan, Director of Exhibition Curricula, School of the Art Institute of Chicago said he spoke on and off with Hummel and a few others for several years during the planning stages, but wasn’t given enough time to get involved last year.

“But now, we are very excited to work on it and bring this opportunity to students,” Ryan said, adding that “it is an unusual event” and “very exciting to see young people who are so organized.”

Although other Chicagoans have hosted art in unusual places, (think Michael Workman’s ArtBoat show at Navy Pier that lasted for several years,) the El seems like a perfect place to showcase. Others, are also mimicking the idea, like Chicago’s Jazz Fest which hosted a jazz-themed train in August for the first time. (Other cities like New York, have also hosted events on trains, like the Big Apple’s Duke Ellington 110th birthday tribute last April on the ‘A’ Train to Harlem.)

THE BACKSTORY

It was during the initial planning process that Hummel approached the School of the Art Institute of Chicago student magazine, [F newsmagazine](#), to write about his idea. Fellow



student, Aaron Straus, 26, a 2008 BFA graduate and photo editor of the magazine at the time, liked the idea and joined Hummel, along with David Temchulla, a 2009 School of the Art Institute of Chicago BFA graduate.

Straus won’t say how much last year’s endeavor cost or raised, but he said it was enough to pay the rent on six El train cars. (The minimum El rental charge will get you a two-car train ride for an hour for approximately \$1,500, according to CTA spokesperson, Catherine Hosinski.) And the proceeds from last year’s Art on Track helped the trio launch the non-profit arts organization, Salvo. The name refers to the simultaneous discharge done during a military salute. Hummel picked it because he hopes to “stimulate change” within the art community with Art on Track and other bigger events, like a Lollapalooza-style art fest in Chicago.

For now, Hummel, Temchulla and Straus, all have other jobs with the hopes of building enough momentum to eventually work full-time in the non-profit arts world. Hummel works as a chef at [Kuma’s Corner](#) on Belmont while

I’m a Chicago-based journalist. I’m known for my quirky, off-beat features, but I’ve covered everything from the NFL to eating crickets in Cambodia to Chicago’s best websites to celebrity profiles of the likes of Maya Angelou and Magic Johnson. My work has appeared in 25+ outlets including: Travel + Leisure, Chicago Tribune, Chicago magazine, American Way magazine, CNN.com, MSN.com, Restaurants & Institutions and Boys’ Life. I’m the immediate past president of the Chicago Headline Club, the largest Society of Professional Journalists chapter in the country and a former St. Petersburg Times and Dallas Morning News staff writer. My co-authored book, Armchair Reader: Chicago, about quirky, off-beat things in the Windy City, will be released this December. Twitter @dawnreiss Email me dreiss100 AT gmail DOT com
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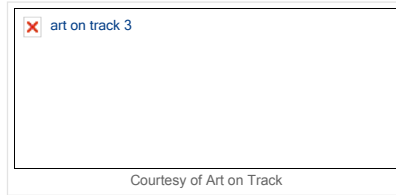


Straus, who lives in Streeterville, works as a general manager at Chem-Plate Industries and Temchulla, 22, who lives in Logan Square is a dog walker.

Since last year’s event, Salvo has also hosted some additional “bring-the-art-to-the-people” type events, on a smaller scale at bars like Climax Lounge (now called [The Griffin Lounge](#)) and [sound-bar](#). Straus said they are also working on a possible curation at the top of the Tribune Tower.

TAKE A RIDE

If you want to ride the 2nd Annual Art on Track this Saturday, Oct. 10, you must get on at Adams & Wabash. Go to platform before the ticket counter where volunteers will check people in. Get

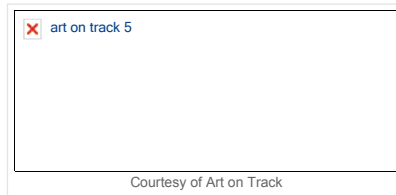


a wristband and then ride the orange line around the loop as long as you like. Doors open at 10:30 a.m., first car leaves at 11. Eight train cars will showcase student, professional and amateur work from 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. Technically it’s free, but there’s a \$10 suggested donation.

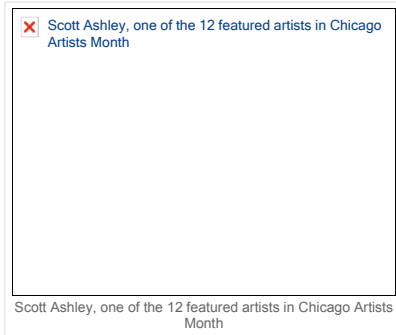
There are a few differences between last year and this year’s event which was held in late August, and only went from 6-10 p.m. This year has a longer time frame and eight cars instead of six. There will be more fine art. Being October, artists’ month, it will be cooler and likely more people, with a 2,500-person maximum.

THE ARTISTS

Look for a bubble-wrapped car, which Salvo is curating, an installation of money bags filled with statements about capitalism, and more traditional paintings, illustrations and photographs as well as live entertainment. You can even create a tiny piece of art on a sketch pad while riding the El.



The artistic line-up includes work from Aldo Castillo Gallery, who is sponsoring [Scott Ashley](#), [Hyde Park Art Center](#), Flat Iron Artists’ Association, [NFA Space](#), Pilsen’s Colibri Studio & Gallery and the [School of the Art Institute Chicago](#).



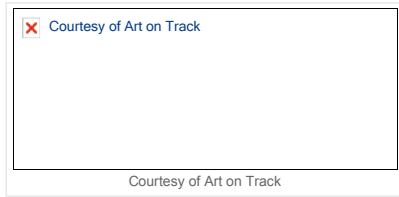
Ashley, one of the 12 featured artists for Chicago’s annual [Chicago Artists Month](#) this October, is the only artist to design an entire train car by himself.

His concept: create a segregated car of “us vs. them” to challenge how people think.

“When you’re on the train, or in a confined public space, you’re forced to be with people of all walks of life,

and it’s easy to pass judgement about people based on race, class and other stereotypes,” said 37-year-old Ashley who lives in Wicker Park. “It’s human nature to do so, but it doesn’t make it right. This is going to help create a

dialogue that you shouldn’t assume you know everything about everyone just by looking at them...People are so used to ignoring their public surroundings that it’s a great opportunity to shake people up.”



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