

Chicago Standout Photography

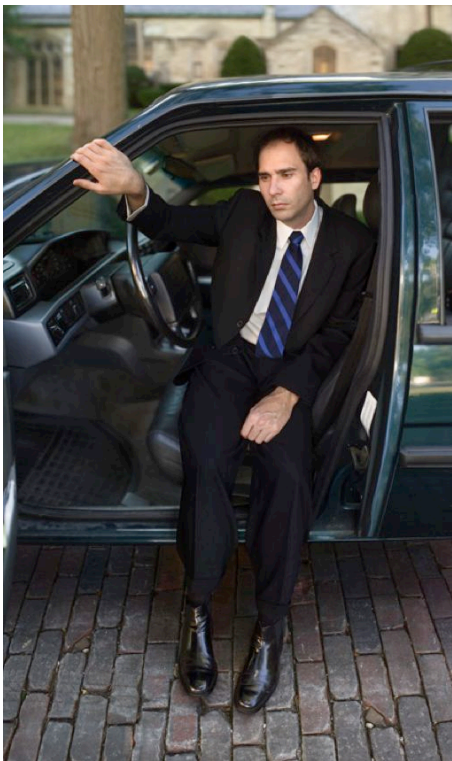
By [Amani Olu](#) | May 13, 2009



This was my first visit to Art Chicago and Next (May 1 – 4, 2009), and while the city is often celebrated for its arts and culture, I was nonetheless pleasantly surprised at how much I connected with its hip and strikingly vibrant art scene. In conjunction with the fairs, many museums and galleries hosted openings, brunches, and cocktail parties. The most dynamic exhibition was The School of the Art

Institute Chicago's MFA show. Other notable exhibitions include "Take Your Time" by Olafur Eliasson at MoCA Chicago and "Proposals for Remnants," paintings by Angelina Gualdoni at Kavi Gupta. After a few studio visits, impromptu lunch dates, random artist encounters, curator panels and the occasional drunken art world scuffle, Chicago was already beginning to feel like home.

While I was inspired by Chicago's contemporary art offerings, I was there primarily to discover photography, both at the fairs and within Chicago's larger art community



Ben Gest is a master of creating tension and anxiety, evidenced in the work he has made over the last few years. I use the word "made" literally, as his life-size portraits are the result of several perspective photographs composed into a single image. The subjects are intense, often lost in their thoughts, and while the viewer has no way of knowing what they are thinking, what has happened before or what will happen next, it is easy to relate. Printed at 40 x 60 inches, and cropped so that the subject fills most of the frame, Gest, does a fantastic job of portraying loneliness and isolation. In *Erick in His* (2005) man battles with some form of universal pain, and unfortunately, like the rest of us, he has no choice but to deal and move forward.

Ben Gest, *Erick in His Volvo* (2005), Next. Image courtesy of Stephen Daiter Gallery.