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Grill

ART IN CHICAGO

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Painter Angel Otero in his studio at the
School of the Art Institute of Chicago



Ones to watch

Irena Knezevic

Drawing on what she's thinking

Irena Knezevic has a mind like a kettle of crickets—she'll come across this, which reminds her of that, and off she'll go, drawing parallels and connections and envisioning her next multifaceted work. An artist-as-activist-intellectual fascinated by everything from black magic to fascism and free jazz, she materializes her cerebrations through imagery that confronts its viewers from within elegant vitrines and is as likely to be projected onto a wall as hung there.

Native to Serbia, as a teen Knezevic organized student opposition to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. Offered a scholarship, she came to Chicago in 1999. She completed an MFA at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2007. With "The Summit," her stunning installation show last April at the Museum of Contemporary Art, she stepped into the spotlight by exploring the power of darkness: artifacts such as conducting batons inscribed with the names of composers who wrote works dealing with the devil, and a slide show of satanic images calibrated to a history of bombings in Serbia. She is working on a video project and preparing "The Gesture Guild" for a solo exhibition this fall at Chicago's threewalls gallery. There's a buzz around her to match the one in her head.



Irena Knezevic working in her studio in Pilsen: From the "Summit" to another devilish notion?



Painter Angel Otero in his studio space at the School of the Art Institute, a long way from Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

Angel Otero

Finding his voice in the now

How far has Angel Otero come? This far: from Bayamon, Puerto Rico, and a household with neither books nor art to a Chicago studio brimming with both. At age 7 he learned how the world might be represented when a neighborhood girl showed him how to draw the fictional character "Hello Kitty." Now he is 28 and poised to receive his MFA in the spring. Arriving in Chicago in 2005 after being handpicked to receive a scholarship at the School of the Art Institute, Otero knew little of contemporary art, content to ape the drizzles and scrawls of the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s. When a professor asked him how it felt to live in the 1950s, he decided he needed to update. Now he references painterly painters—Peter Doig, Luc Tuymans—and such media mixmasters as Rachel Harrison, while forging his own style: colorful images of his island's landscapes and buildings and of the women who raised him recur.

However far he has traveled, he's destined to go even farther.