

Since forming, the group has campaigned to save important homes, like the Freuh House in Highland Park, designed by architect Robert Bruce Tague. It also supports projects like the Illinois Initiative on Recent Past Architecture, launched by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) to document buildings that might need protection. Here's the problem: If a building is less than 50 years old, it can't be listed with the National Register of Historic Places. And a lot of great houses in the suburbs exist in this gray zone. "They are almost too young to be appreciated but too old to be appreciated," says Lisa DiChiera, director of advocacy at LPCI. This is the age in which buildings start to fall apart and need work. Land has become so expensive and the lots tend to be huge while the houses are relatively small. When a house like this goes on the market in the MacMansion belt, it becomes a teardown. Those interested in midcentury architecture can learn about these issues and more at the show.

Margaret Doyle, the copresident of Manitoga/the Russel Wright Design Center north of Manhattan, will present a slide lecture on the restoration of Wright's 75-acre estate. Wright (1904–76) created a line of household items and championed American design. He also offered a design philosophy with his *Guide to Easier Living*, a book that borders on the obsessive with instructions on how to make a bed with hospital corners. Doyle said she counted more than 30 steps done in the bedroom chapter. "I call it *Guide to Easier Living—Not*," she says. Doyle has deep roots in preservation, beginning with her work at the landmarks preservation office in Manhattan and later in Miami's South Beach, and is also concerned about the loss of residential modernist architecture. She says people equate history with George Washington slept here."

"People aren't psychologically omitted to things they saw go up a their lifetime," Doyle says. "History is what they learned in school."

Maybe this show, which offers plenty of eye candy, will stimulate a deeper interest in modernist history.

**The Chicago Modernism Show opens Friday 7 and ends Sunday 9. The slide lecture on the life and work of Russel Wright is Sunday 9 at 2pm. See Events.**

## Reviews



Ruth Chambers, detail of *Beneath the Skin*, 2005.

**Ruth Chambers: "Through the Skin"**  
International Museum of Surgical Science, through Apr 21 (see Museums & Institutions).

You have to turn left at the gallstone display to find "Through the Skin," which is tucked into an obscure corner of the delightfully weird and informative International Museum of Surgical Science (IMSS). The show comprises two installations by Canadian ceramic artist Ruth Chambers and continues the museum's "Anatomy in the Gallery" series.

In both works, Chambers uses porcelain in unfamiliar and innovative ways, etching scientific text and botanical ornament into the nearly translucent material, and illuminating it from within. Her technique is most successful in *Beneath the Skin*, which suspends from the ceiling at varying heights about 50 ceramic vessels shaped like vital organs. Each contains a light source, so that when you first enter the darkened gallery, the breathtaking array of glowing stomachs, brains, lungs, hearts and uteruses resembles a strangely intimate constellation.

*Materia Medica*, which Chambers created specifically for the IMSS, consists of three tables made from peeled branches and boards that hold roughly made porcelain replicas of Renaissance-era apothecary jars. The jars' surfaces bear the impressions of medicinal plants, but they don't contain any remedies: In fact, when you look into each one, all you see are grainy photographs of contemporary violence.

It's difficult to decipher the artist's intentions. *Materia Medica* seems to say, "Porcelain is my antidrug," but Chambers is actually referencing 17th-century beliefs about herbal medicine to investigate the origins of cruelty. It is clear, however, that more people should be exploring the relationship between science and art.

—Lauren Weinberg

**Michiko Itatani: "Cosmic Theatre"**

FLATFILE galleries, through Apr 30 (see West Loop).

All the universe is a stage in Michiko Itatani's "Cosmic Theatre." The SAIC professor's new oil paintings meld inner and outer space while using light and texture in innovative ways. In *Untitled/CT-1*, for example, one glimpses the galleries of an elegant, old-fashioned theater with a grand chandelier, but the rest of the interior is swallowed by a dark-blue haze at the bottom of the canvas. An oval chain of sparkling green spheres floats in the void. Is this venue real, or a psychological theater in which we "star" in our daydreams before a phantom audience? Itatani's "Hybrid Vibration" series creates a different mood. Most of these canvases are left uncovered, except for crisscrossing strands of white paint that the artist applied with a syringe. Itatani lets these precise rows of lines intersect in clumps; piles one layer upon another to form nets; "erases" some areas with large, flat circles of paint; and scatters thick

globs over others. She affixes one or two small, square canvases with the same white-on-white treatment to each piece, giving the series even more three-dimensionality.

*Untitled/Ts-x1* from "Torque Sequence" employs two of these techniques—the lattices of paint, this time in blue, gold and white; and the layered canvases, which depict a more naturalistic setting: a lake surrounded by dark vegetation or hills. This image is repeated in miniature on two "inset" canvases, one of which



Michiko Itatani, *Untitled*, 2005.

also seems to feature a spaceship. Like Itatani's other beautiful and mysterious works, the painting is out of this world.—LW



Máximo González, *Carmen's Portrait*, 2006.

**"Máximo González: Chignahuapan"**

Skestos Gabriele Gallery, through Apr 15 (see West Loop).

In his Chicago debut, González supplies documentation of his interaction with the youths from the village of Chignahuapan, Mexico. Blurring the lines of authorship, he asked high-school students to participate in the creation of community-orientated artwork.

For the centerpiece of the exhibition, *Net*, students cut pieces of their handwritten notes from the previous school year and arranged them into a huge net suspended from the gallery's 15-foot ceiling. This piece stands as the crux of González's collaborative project, but appears flimsy and fragile because it relies upon a video for explanation.

Fortunately, González successfully presents a series of light-box photos that shine like glowing beacons in

the darkened gallery. These diptychs place equivalence upon the students and specific sites of the village, which effectively describes the community as a construction of people and place.

However, the most interesting piece of the show is *Penance*, a photo of the students obediently standing in formation in the schoolyard. No longer active participants, the youths embody discipline with their hands pulled behind their heads and become pieces of a larger whole. The photograph thus demonstrates how the students have become "docile bodies" in the school system.

In this exhibition, the artist's efforts are taken out of their original context of collaboration and read as finished artworks about the particular village. At times this documentation is unable to accurately voice the interactions, but González is still able to create poetic works about his subjects.—John McKinnon