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## Eat Your Art Out

These restaurants and cafes come with killer views... of art.

Monday Nov 05, 2007. By [Alicia Eler](#)



photo: courtesy of Todd Baxter; pictured: "Rug Monster"

How many times have you wandered into a highly recommended restaurant only to be visually assaulted by cheap neon lights and crusty posters in chintzy frames? We know it's hard to find a place that pairs supreme meals with an artistically inspired atmosphere. Lucky for all the art-lovin' foodies out there, we scoured the city for places where the fine art on the walls matches the culinary works of art on your plate.

### Lula Cafe

Aside from the ever-changing, knock-ye-socks-off eats, Lula has something else that's always on the move: its art collection. Co-curator Anders Nielsen searches for local and national artists, and switches up the shows every two or three months. Currently, Lula patrons get an eyeful of art by Todd Baxter, whose manipulated digital photos like "Rug Monster," with a well-dressed woman lovingly poking a literal rug monster with glass eyes and horns, cover the restaurant's walls. Don't wait until dinnertime to get a dose of the fine art here; it's far better to start your day off admiring the works while you nosh on brunch eats, like sweet potato pancakes doused in cranberry compote, candied pecans and cardamom cream.

### TRU

Chefs Rick Tramonto and Gale Gand don't mess around with their food or their art at this upscale, jackets-required restaurant, where minimal design elements let diners focus on the fine art scattered on the walls. Try the three-course, \$95 prix-fixe menu, which changes daily; recently, it included appetizers like prime beef tartare, with fresh red pepper, raspberry and zucchini, and plum sorbet (plum-ginger tapioca mixed delicately with buttermilk-lime foam) for dessert. Beyond the exquisite eats, it's the artwork that truly enhances your sensory experience here. In the dining room, gaze at Andy Warhol's "Marilyn," a photographic negative-style silkscreen canvas print, or lounge in the bar area with Yves Klein's "Blue Venus," a powder-blue torso set inside a glass box.

### Tweet and Big Chicks

People go to Tweet for its generously sized organic brunches and to neighboring Big Chicks for beers and queers, but they keep going back to these sister spots to gawk at the art. Owner Michelle Fire started collecting in the '70s and bought her Diane Arbus prints in the 1990s. Though they're not originals—museums have claimed all of those—they were printed by the Arbus estate and signed by Diane's daughter, Doon. Look around and you'll also find black-and-white photos of nude women by Manuel Alvarez



photo: [Alicia Eler](#); pictured: "Topless Dancer in Her Dressing Room"

Bravo and self-portraits by emerging photographer Jen Davis, who was recently in a show at Columbia College's [Museum of Contemporary Photography](#). Eat like a well-fed (not starving) artist by ordering up Chicago art sweetie Tony Fitzpatrick's favorite: skirt steak and eggs.



photo: [Alicia Eler](#); pictured: Tracy Kostenbader's paintings

### NoFriction Cafe

Works by local artists cover the walls of this easy-to-miss corner spot, with floor-to-ceiling windows, sleek wooden floors and soft brown walls. This month, catch NoFriction regular Tracy Kostenbader's amusing word-image association paintings. In one piece, an upside-down screwdriver and a scrawny screw float in space above the word "undeceived." The works here usual require a bit of pondering, so stuff your face with some brain food, like

an irresistibly doughy pumpkin scone, while you mull them over. Before you know it, you'll be inspired to create your own masterpiece. If you ask nicely, owners Hilda and Isso Rosado might just have a wall for you.

### Heartland Cafe

This spot—part cafe, part bar, part general store—is a Bohemian haven of vegetarian-friendly eats, flowing beer on tap and hemp for sale. Though it harks back to the hippie heyday of the '60s, the monthly rotating art shows span decades. For November, a group of Chicago artists have completed contemporary renditions of the Surrealist-inspired "exquisite corpse" game, which was founded in the 1920s. The artists pass around a folded piece of paper; the first person draws on the top, the next on the middle and so on, without letting the others see which image was added to the piece. The result is always a bizarre amalgamation. At Heartland, the 30-plus watercolor-on-paper or ink-on-paper corpses feature such off-the-wall images as a bird rooted to the ground like a tree and a man's nose and ears transforming into wings. Combine these pieces with a grilled soy-cheese sandwich, and you've got your eyes and your hands on works of art.