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Color Scheme: Angel Otero takes his paintings-and his buzz- to Art Chicago

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Art Chicago kicks off on May 1st, and with it comes a stupefying list of events: a lecture series, and outsider art fair, and antiques market, a student show. Our pick for the best way to spend your times is NEXT, the up-and-coming exhibition. It's the place to meet emerging talent such as Angel Otero, a 27-year-old Puerto Rican-cum-Chicagoan whose sudden popularity has startled even him. His work is selling; gallerists are calling; visitors keep tromping through his tiny ten-by-ten-foot studio at the School of Art Institute, where the young painter is a master's degree candidate. "Having people respond this way is intense," says Otero, whose soothing accent grows stronger when he talks about Bayamon-his hometown-and the grandmother who raised him there. His grandmother influences many of his abstract expressionist canvases-a wad of oilskins compose her dining table in one; her fabric sofa pops out of another. The paintings will be on display at NEXT, which coincides with Otero's graduation. His present to himself? A larger studio, he says, adding, "This is my moment."