





golden age

Words by Laura Pearson
Photographs by David Robert Elliott

I first wandered into Golden Age on a snowy, brutally cold Chicago day and left feeling totally inspired by the rad things this store represents. Occupying the corner of a large brick building in the Pilsen neighborhood (just look for the red iron fence and the striped awning that reads "Pop, Snacks, Ice Cream"), Golden Age sells zines, limited edition artist books, handmade jewelry, independently released tapes and vinyl, clothing, cookbooks, and much more. But the store isn't just an assemblage of nice stuff. As I talked to the owners about the origins of Golden Age, their desire to both showcase culture and establish culture, and "curating from the heart," I realized that this place is fundamentally a labor of love.

Martine Syms and Marco Kane Braunschweiler opened Golden Age in September 2007. Both graduates of the School of the Art Institute, the couple met in 2006 and decided to collaborate on opening a store that would embody the motto "All Culture All the Time," a place where their wide-ranging interests and artistic pursuits—e.g., writing, curating, video projects, self-publishing, skate culture, idea forging, design, dialogue—could converge.

Neither was a stranger to business ventures. "I grew up around a lot of entrepreneurs," says Martine, who moved to Chicago from

Los Angeles, Torpedo in Oslo, Dexter Sinister in New York, Boekie Woekie in Amsterdam," says Martine. "Also, historically speaking, the multiple shop, Seriaal, fluxus, some of the things General Idea did. I'm interested in object and multiples."

"My original idea was a skate-culture shop," explains Marco. "But as I began to skate less, and art and culture took a more dominant presence in my life, my goal shifted into a culture-culture shop with a skate vibe."

After hunting for retail spaces, they eventually found the Pilsen location where they set up shop. The interior of the store is casual and browser-friendly: off-white walls, hanging light fixtures, and wooden display boxes and tables made by local furniture designer Andy Hall. The simple aesthetic allows your attention to focus on the colorful publications, records, and prints on display.

I asked Marco to show me some of his favorite items in stock, and he picked up a book called *Appendix Appendix*, by Ryan Gander, which is a proposal for a 13-part television series about Gander's conceptual art. He also showed me records from Arbor, a label run by a 17-year-old from Western Springs, Illinois, and books from Torpedo Press addressing issues of multiculturalism and globalism. Martine's current favorites include *North Lake Shore Drive* a book of artwork by Chicago legend Wesley



commitment to not just sell cultural objects, but to help create culture. "We want Golden Age to be a place of activity," says Martine. "It was really hard to start up. There is a steep learning curve in business, and we made a lot of mistakes. Now that we've got a few things figured out we can focus more on cultural activities."

They've already hosted a clothes swap, a block party, and a DVD release event for local poet Thax. Forthcoming activities include film screenings, in-store shows, a book club, and "some dabbling" in publishing. A book is scheduled for May in collaboration with Brooklyn-based periodical *The Kingsboro Press*.