

Between Blockbusters at the ICA

On a freezing cold January afternoon, my companion and I decided on a quick getaway to Boston's beautiful new [Institute of Contemporary Art](#).

With Tara Donovan's fantastical landscapes (composed of everyday objects like paper cups, toothpicks and drinking straws) now dismantled and a show of street-artist (and Obama portraitist) Shepard Fairey yet to launch, my companion and I were able to focus on highlights of previous exhibitions, the work of emerging artists chosen as finalists the ICA's 2008 Foster Prize, the wonderful late afternoon light, Peet's coffee (\$1.80) and huge brownies (\$3.00) in the ICA cafe, which overlooks the water.

My companion, a college student just back from a semester in Israel, was particularly taken with Rania Matar's photographs showing moments of stability in wartorn Lebanon: an elderly woman in a business suit reading the same newspaper as black-dressed muslim women, children playing amidst the rubble, and a stately home, seen through building ruins.

I liked having the quiet time to ponder acquisitions from previous shows: Paul Chan's digital animation of shadows, and Roe Ethridge's photograph of Countyline Meadowmere Park, in Long Island, New York.

A favorite oddity—by the French-born artist Kader Attia— was what appeared to be a relaxing video of ice cube slowly melting and shifting against a brick backdrop ...until closer inspection (and the writeup) revealed that we were watching oil turn sugar cubes into black, oozing goop—in a statement on global environmental decay.