

# Reading the rooms

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Like every year, emails hawking books with a Chicago angle have accumulated faster than I can reasonably read, let alone review, them. Here's where year-end lists come in handy. Not definitive by any means, this list instead offers a bit more than a handful of local recommendations that I and other *Reader* staffers read and enjoyed this year. We've got fiction, comics, an artist's book, nonfiction, and a few that don't fit neatly into one particular category (here's looking at you, Nora Wendl). My wish for 2026? More time for reading and for digging deeper into the plethora of books that come my way. Until then!

***Thing*** edited by Robert Ford, Trent Adkins, Lawrence Warren (Primary Information)

In 1989, Robert Ford, Trent Adkins, and Lawrence Warren launched *Thing* out of Ford's Old Town apartment. The publication, which quickly found a national audience, focused on Black queer life through a mix of essays, interviews, arts criticism, literature, erotica, photography, and real talk about issues like sex and politics, while also documenting club culture—especially the rising house music scene. During the height of the AIDS pandemic, when Black queer voices were often marginalized, *Thing* was refreshing and subversive by design; Its motto, “*She knows who she is,*” celebrated liberation and self-expression while refusing to be repressed, silenced, or cast aside. *Thing* published ten issues before ceasing operations in 1993 due to Ford's ongoing struggles with AIDS—he passed away from complications of the disease in October 1994, but its influence grew in its wake. *Thing* compiles all ten issues into a single book, presenting them as they are, unvarnished, and without editorializing on what was or what might've been had the publication continued on. The collection feels like both a time capsule of a certain era and a timeless primer on cool. An essential read for any student of Black LGBTQ+ studies or underground culture. — Jamie Ludwig