

“I’m not interested in classical beauty—or, I am interested in classical beauty, it’s just that my idea of classical beauty might be completely different from someone else’s.”

—Gladys Nilsson

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present our first exhibition with Gladys Nilsson, one of the foremost Chicago artists of her generation and a member of the Hairy Who, the venerable group that came to prominence through a series of radical exhibitions at the Hyde Park Art Center on Chicago’s South Side in the late 1960s. Featuring paintings and works on paper made in the last five years, the exhibition highlights Nilsson’s continued experiments with form, color, and figuration.

The works on view range from large paintings on canvas to intimately scaled watercolors and collages. In sprawling canvases like *Repose* (2017) and *Painting Nature* (2018), Nilsson offers her signature spin on the central tenets of the Chicago Imagist style: distorted figuration, densely layered compositions, and an electric color palette. Meanwhile, smaller works on paper like those from the “Head on a Plate” series highlight Nilsson’s sense of humor and whimsy, incorporating a playful mix of figurative drawing, abstract washes, and collaged elements. Nilsson’s newest featured works, *Out After Dark* and *Still Scape* (both 2019), depict abstracted and obscured landscapes replete with references to the body.

In light of renewed awareness of the Imagists—thanks in part to the Art Institute of Chicago’s 2018 exhibition “Hairy Who? 1966–1969”—this exhibition offers a look at an artist who remains connected with her historical lineage but has never stopped developing her unique visual language.

Born in Chicago in 1940, Gladys Nilsson studied painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She first came to prominence in 1966, when she joined five other recent Art Institute graduates (Jim Falconer, Art Green, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum) for the first of a series of group exhibitions called the Hairy Who. In 1973, she became one of the first women to have a solo-exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1990, she accepted a teaching position at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she is now a professor.

Nilsson is known for her densely layered and meticulously constructed watercolors and collages. Like many of the Hairy Who artists, Nilsson employed a type of *horror vacui*; many of her works feel filled to the brim with winding, playful imagery. Her work often focuses on aspects of human sexuality and its inherent contradictions.

Since 1966, Nilsson's work has been the subject of over 50 solo exhibitions, including sixteen at Phyllis Kind Gallery (1970–1979, 1981–1983, 1987, 1991, and 1994, Chicago and New York), and two at The Candy Store (1971 and 1987, Folsom, California). Her work has also been featured in many important museum exhibitions, such as: Human Concern/Personal Torment (1969, Whitney Museum of American Art); Who Chicago? (1981, Camden Art Center, London); Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art (1992, Los Angeles County Museum of Art); and Chicago Imagists (2011, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin); and What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present (2014, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence).

Nilsson's work is featured in the collections of major museums around the world, including: the Art Institute of Chicago; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Morgan Library, New York; the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Modern Art; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin; the Milwaukee Art Museum; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

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