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# GLADYS NILSSON AND JIM NUTT

by  
Richard Hull



Gladys Nilsson, *Steady Bears*, 1970, watercolor, 15 3/16 × 11 7/8 inches.  
All Nilsson images courtesy of the artist, Luise Ross Gallery in New York,  
and Jean Albano Gallery in Chicago.

Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson are often described as “Chicago artists,” and it’s true that their work formed during a particular moment when Chicago Imagism appeared in the mid ‘60s with the three Hairy Who shows at the Hyde Park Art Center. But I would argue that for the last 40 years Jim and Gladys, who met as students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and have been living together ever since, could have been living anywhere. With fierce independence and a nonchalant attitude toward reigning trends in contemporary art, they create paintings and drawings that root from an intense need to make things, and to make them right.

For several years, Jim and I have been team-teaching a class about looking at and discussing paintings in the Art Institute of Chicago’s collection. A scrupulously detailed conversation about a Bruegel painting is fairly typical (we continued one in several emails), and though there are times we disagree about certain aspects of what a painting might do—much to the amusement of the students—we agree that there is always something new to discover. It is Gladys and Jim’s intense curiosity and connoisseurship of painting—and also opera and golf, among other things—that draws me to them. Of course, I admire the work, which, as Gladys put it regarding Jim’s work, has “a great deal of wonderful, masterful subtlety going on now.”

Jim and Gladys and I became friends 30 years ago, when the Phyllis Kind Gallery invited me to join them as a gallery artist. It was 1979; I was attending graduate school at SAIC. The first day I brought my work to the gallery, Jim and Gladys—whom I barely knew—were hosting a party for Roger Brown after his opening. Viewing their house and the unusual amalgamation of paintings and objects in it, and meeting some of the most interesting artists in Chicago, I felt lucky. Driving up to the house for this interview, I remembered that evening. After all these years, I still feel lucky to be in the presence of their wonderful home and great company.

—Richard Hull

**Richard Hull:** As I was coming up here I was thinking about your collection of works by self-taught artists, contemporary art, and ethnographic objects—especially with the Ray Yoshida show coming up at SAIC. As a teacher at the school he had a lot of influence on people collecting things. When did you start collecting?

**Gladys Nilsson:** We bought a small painting by a Sunday painter who couldn't quite get it right at a junk shop in the early '60s because, I don't know, it seemed like the thing to do. We didn't start out acquiring things with the idea that we must form a collection.

**Jim Nutt:** The False Image people [Christina Ramberg, Phil Hanson, Eleanor Dube, Roger Brown] and other students became aware that Ray was going to flea markets, and they started going as a group. It became almost a weekend ritual, but it also had something to do with his idea of going out and collecting images that you see in your eye. It wasn't unlike his instructing students to cut out images from wherever and organize/paste them in sketchbooks, based on formal relationships. The idea was to recognize the potential of a form or shape beyond the literal reference.

**GN:** When all of this flea market and Maxwell Street shopping was going on, we were in California. Even earlier on, before the Hairy Who shows started up, people were ripping out ads from backs of magazines or odd photos from newspapers, or picking up junk found on the street, and surrounding themselves with this curious mix in their studios.

**JN:** People acquired things just because they liked to have them. It's the kind of stuff that artists for years have had in their studios. They see something that interests them, quite often it's a postcard of a well-known painting, but it's also something from the vernacular or popular, easily acquired in the everyday world.

**RH:** Does what you collect influence you directly? Say, the African pieces or the works by self-trained artists in your home; do they have an effect on the way you use color or make shapes or images?



**Jim Nutt, *Miss T. Garmint (she pants a lot)*, 1966–67, acrylic on plexiglass, enamel on wood frame, 72 × 48 inches. © MCA Chicago.**

**GN:** That's been foisted on us and others of our ilk: that we were heavily influenced by our collections. I mean, I would be more prone to go to a museum, find an arm in a painting and use it as a source, than to say, "Oh, my God! Look how Joseph Yoakum draws a tree in a work in our collection. I must use that."

**RH:** So what you were making probably

influenced what you collected more than your collection influenced you?

**JN:** It's a normal way of acquiring things. You see something that you like and, if you can afford it, you buy it. Although Ray Yoshida often talked about literally taking shapes from objects that he had bought and using them in his paintings, so there was a direct connection between a painting

of his and something that he'd bought. I don't think that's ever been the case with us.

**RH:** I didn't think so. Actually, speaking about museums, Gladys, you go to the Art Institute every day when you're teaching at the school.

**GN:** When I'm at school, I go three times a day.

**RH:** I know you, Jim, go to museums all the time as well. During your last visit to the Met you were looking at Bruegel's *The Harvesters* [1565]; you said you had discovered something about it.

**JN:** It's one of the first paintings I was asked to do a visual analysis of—for line, plane, volume, texture, and space—as a freshman at Washington University. I did all these diagrams. It's a painting I've always enjoyed looking at. In any case, partly because they have a bench in front of it, and I was tired—

**GN:** That always helps. (*laughter*)

**JN:** —I did spend a lot of time just sitting there looking at it recently. And the longer I looked, the more I remembered my diagrams and some comments. I remember pointing out how a line intersecting another made the space deeper, and that one of the other students had said, "No, it doesn't. It makes it flatter." So upon looking at it again I realized that, yeah, it does make it flatter. Then all of a sudden I also noticed that there is something in the most distant mountains in the background: it's a tiny little point, like a steeple. It's no more than a 32nd of an inch and it's just the tiniest bit darker than everything else in the mountain. You wouldn't notice it; it took me a while to zero in on it, and, once I saw it, I began to see it in reference to all sorts of things. Then I also realized that in the upper left-hand corner there's a little disc, about half an inch; it's in the shadow of the frame, sitting up there. I mean, what the hell is that? It could be the moon, during the daytime—

**GN:** I suggested that, and you pooh-poohed that idea.

**RH:** You don't ever sit and look at the paintings together, do you?

**GN:** Oh, God; no. We might accidentally happen upon one another in any given institution, but we come in, coordinate when to eat, and that's it.

**JN:** Yeah, we have very different rates of speed and areas of interest.

**RH:** You have been together a long time, and you also have many similar interests. Are there paintings in the museums that you like, Gladys, and Jim doesn't?

**GN:** Oh, I'm sure. We try to avoid those kinds of discussions. (*laughter*) For

instance, about this Bruegel, he said, "Oh, I discovered something I never realized about it." And it became this game, I had to go and find what Jim had discovered. So, I'm looking at it and looking at it, and I'm thinking, I don't know. When I'm looking at a painting I might be looking with different motivations. I had noticed an odd thing in the lower right-hand corner and discarded it, because when he said he'd discovered something, I thought it was this monumental thing, like an enormous face coming out of a tree. Later I came upon the painting again; Jim was there and he pointed to that thing which I kept seeing



Jim Nutt, Drawing for *Wiggly Woman*, 1966. Courtesy of the artist. © MCA Chicago.



Jim Nutt, *Trim*, 2010, acrylic on linen with MDF frame, 25 3/8 x 24 3/8 inches. Courtesy of David Nolan Gallery.

as being flat, like the edge of a mirror. He said, "No, it's volumetric, like a basket." We disagreed about that. Then he pointed out the disc in the upper corner. It was curious, like a knot in the wood.

**RH:** When you find something really unusual like that, does it occur to you to incorporate, not that, exactly, but something like that in your paintings? That is, surprises within the paintings?

**GN:** All my work is a surprise! I've always painted a lot of little people getting smaller and smaller, and the exchanges that take place between them, but it's not something like, "Oh, I'm going to put a thing up there."

**RH:** I guess even in your little people, all of a sudden there's an odd—

**GN:** Are they, or are they not, wearing underwear? That's always the question.

**RH:** You often make small sketches, thinking about shapes and figures. Do you create a full-blown sketch for each watercolor?

**GN:** Not usually. The only thing I might do would be a very small thumbnail sketch that indicates where I want the main figure or figures. Also, the pieces usually have a division of space, or a particular placement. Once I get the idea of where the main figures are going to be, the division of the space follows. My sketches are extremely rudimentary and spare—a couple of lines to indicate how the characters fit. The rest is the result of the dialogue between the paper and myself as the work develops.

**RH:** There's always an indication of a story in your work. How clear is the narrative to you, or do figures and shapes just happen?

**GN:** Sometimes the narrative is based on something very specific, maybe something I saw. It's always about interaction between people, and then it takes off from there. When the show was up at the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art last spring, I was standing nearby a couple of students who were having fun inventing their own dialogue about the scenario. It shouldn't just be about what I'm thinking; it should also be about what somebody else brings to it.

**RH:** Something is different about your new *Big Birthday Gladys* watercolor. I can't put my finger on it.

**GN:** That is a very specific self-portrait, whereas lots of people think everything I make is a self-portrait because I tend to look like my work, or my work tends to look like me. (*laughter*) Quit laughing, Jim, Mr. Professorial!

**RH:** Its materiality seemed different—maybe it's all the dark areas, and then the clarity of the figures in the back.

**GN:** It's very dense and rich. I wanted to have a lot of smoke in it because of all the candles in it.

**RH:** Oh, maybe that's what it is! The smoke. Anyway, it's a beautiful piece. Why watercolor all these years?

**GN:** Well, when we had Claude and he was the new baby in tender baby skin, I suspended using oils.

**JN:** She had done some watercolors, but almost all of her work had been in oils. A significant amount of her time was spent taking care of Claude. I was in school and working, so it became a very practical solution. She didn't want to stop making art, so she started using watercolor. Then, without realizing it, one thing led to another over a period of time. I think she realized she enjoyed working with paper and watercolor.

**GN:** There was a visceral response—it really felt good.

**RH:** This is for both of you: when you came to the School of the Art Institute, you, Gladys, in '58, and Jim in '60, what were your expectations of what your art would look like?



Gladys Nilsson, *Big Birthday Gladys*, 2010, watercolor, 40 x 60 inches.

**GN:** I had no idea. I didn't know until two years after graduating from school. Before that, if I was in a life-drawing class, I drew representational. We had a still-life set up, I painted the still life. I had no real semblance of a direction. I would notice incongruous groupings of people in the lunchroom—that triggered the need to paint this vision.

**RH:** And Jim, you came to school and did a self-portrait every day, is that right?

**JN:** Unfortunately. *(laughter)*

**RH:** Do you have any of those?

**JN:** There are a couple that were beyond the actual self-portraits. I just didn't have a clue.

**RH:** But you probably both came to the School of the Art Institute because you could draw.

**JN:** No, no. *(laughter)*

**GN:** I always knew I wanted to be an artist; I was drawing all the time.

**RH:** Yeah, I did too. I always assume that's why everybody went to art school.

**JN:** I was going to go into architecture at Washington University in St. Louis and even that was not a plan that was well thought-out.

**GN:** Are you cringing at the idea of a building by Jim Nutt?

**RH:** Not so much that. I just know it would never get built.

**GN:** Hmm... he's well known for only one house, I wonder why that is?

**RH:** And he's not letting anybody in it. )

**JN:** I hadn't taken a figure-drawing class that was part of the freshman architectural program I was in. I dropped out of college, but decided to keep my hand in by taking the class. I went

into it thinking, Drawing won't be that difficult, it's just a matter of taking your time and you get everything right. Of course, it was a nightmare; everything was wrong. Without realizing it I got hooked—I was so inept that I really worked very hard. One thing led to another, and I ended up enrolling as a freshman again in the art department at Washington University. Then the following year I enrolled as a freshman at the Art Institute.

**RH:** So you were a freshman three times? *(laughter)*

**JN:** I had no real vision; I was desperately trying to get from one class to the next.

**RH:** Did you have an awareness of what was going on in the contemporary art world?

**JN:** Not a great deal. Being in St. Louis and in Chicago, there wasn't a great deal of contemporary art. In St. Louis, the

university is very close to the museum, so we spent a lot of time there. And the School of the Art Institute was inside the museum, so I was there once, twice, or three times a day for five years.

**RH:** What transforms you from a student, trying to do drawings and life drawing, into an artist? It seems that something happened in Chicago where people started getting interested in a kind of image making that was the opposite of what was going on in the rest of the country.

**JN:** Well, I don't think it was a product of trying to do something different. It could be explained by the fact that all the people who weren't interested in this sort of thing left town, and we were the only people left. (*laughter*) I certainly think that Whitney Halstead's ethnographic art history classes were influential.

**RH:** The Field Museum classes?

**JN:** Ninety percent of the class assignments had to be done while at The Field Museum. The school was in quarters at the time I took the ethnographic class: the first quarter was African, the second was American Indian, and the last, Oceania.

**RH:** So people were looking at the artifacts' shapes and adornment. Do



Gladys Nilsson, *A Little Tippy*, 2006, watercolor, 14 1/8 x 20 inches.

you think that was an influence?

**GN:** I don't know. You think about the generation that came before us, the Monster Roster; they were doing internal, from-the-gut stuff. Their art history teachers at SAIC, Whitney Halstead, and before, Kathleen Blackshear, in conjunction with Helen Gardner's book *Art Through the Ages*—were urging them and us to look beyond Western

art. Anything from street signage to whatever became something to play with.

**JN:** I don't think they were asking you to look beyond anything. They were saying, "You should consider this, along with everything else." In other words, they weren't promoting it as something beyond, they were saying, "It's part of it." Theirs was broader, apparently, than a lot of other approaches.

**RH:** A lot of schools at that time were probably teaching Abstract Expressionism as the whole way of looking at or making art.

**JN:** When I was at the Art Institute from '60 to '65, as a student, Abstract Expressionism was in its dying phase. It was being contradicted by a lot of things. A lot of stuff parroted what was seen in the magazines, and there were few contemporary paintings you could see. On the other hand, the Art Institute had De Kooning's 1950 painting *Excavation* on exhibit all the time.

**RH:** You appreciate that painting now, but did you like it then?

**GN:** The painting that really resonates with me, thinking back on student days, was Seurat's *A Sunday on The Island of La Grande Jatte* [1884]. That was the



Gladys Nilsson, *Seems Straight*, 1982, watercolor, 22 1/4 x 30 1/2 inches.

one big piece that I would continually go look at.

**RH:** That makes sense in terms of your work—the coloration, the large figure groupings, the smaller figure groupings, the really odd space in it.

**GN:** I'm always fascinated with odd space. I was fascinated by dots of color that you'd step back from and... I mean, the whole premise of Pointillist work.

**RH:** When I was a student, the thing I thought of was, It's a miracle! They put these colors together and it makes another color.

**GN:** Yeah. You say miracle, I say magic.

**JN:** To answer your question: I responded to the De Kooning positively, but I just didn't know what in the world—

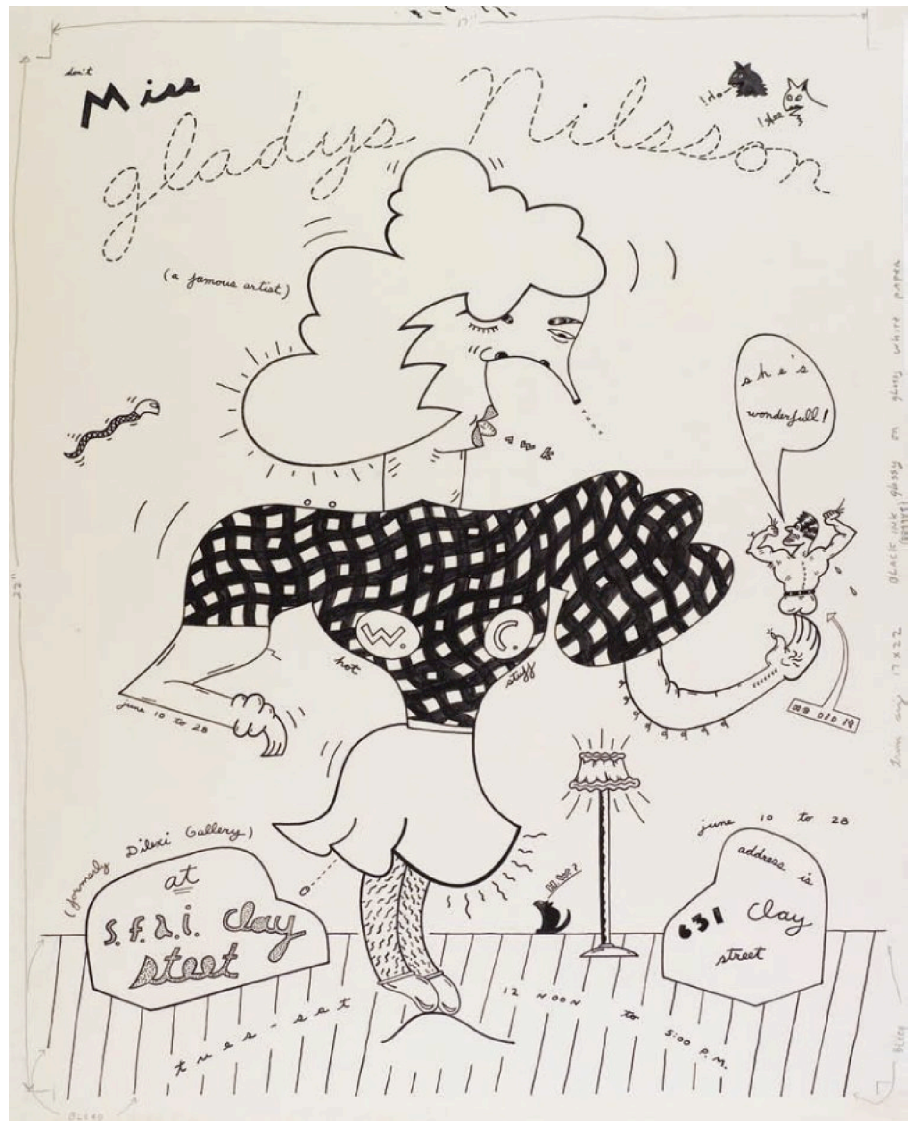
**RH:** You could do with it?

**JN:** Trying to do something with it just seemed so arbitrary. Viscerally, I liked the surface of the De Kooning painting, and have always found it engaging, it's just such a slippery painting. The painting that did it for me is El Greco's *The Assumption of the Virgin* [1577–79]. Unlike Gladys, I was always bugged by the Seurat because the grassy area in the center is dead and it just drove me nuts.

**RH:** So what about *The Assumption*?

**JN:** There are some heads, particularly on the left side, very vigorously realized. The bodies are not as firm in their realization. Then there's this strange, flat sarcophagus in the middle. Compositionally, it's symmetrical side to side, and, in a different sense, up and down. The Virgin's physical presence at the top of the painting is the formal opposite of the sarcophagus—there's space surrounding her at the top, and volumetric figures surrounding the unconvincing sarcophagus at the bottom. It's a reversal. It's a use of formal means to express the narrative of the painting.

**RH:** Gladys, in Chicago in the '60s a lot of women were involved in shows at the Hyde Park Art Center and elsewhere. Women were completely equal in terms of the respect and attention they got. Jim has said that when you



Jim Nutt, Drawing for Nilsson Show Poster, 1969. Courtesy of the artist. © MCA Chicago.

both moved to California for a while, for his teaching job at Sacramento State University, all of a sudden you were with the wives. You were both dismayed.

**JN:** Yeah, we were invited to a lot of different parties. We were in our late twenties, early thirties. So we'd go in and start saying hello to the host and hostess, and hardly know anybody. And I'd see a guy and I'd start walking over to him with Gladys, who's beginning to realize—I'm not picking up on it—that there are no women in this corner. The women are all on the other side of the room.

**GN:** Or in the kitchen.

**RH:** This is your first introduction to California?

**JN:** Well, to the art world in California; these were all artists.

**RH:** Were the women artists too?

**GN:** Some of them might have started out as such . . . There were couples who had met and married in art school, and then he kept up or didn't keep up, and she became not an artist. There were one or two women on the West Coast we knew were involved with art, but, basically, it reminded me of my childhood. You'd have a gathering and the men would be doing men's stuff



and the women would be in the kitchen with their aprons. It was like stepping back in time.

When we were showing in groups here in Chicago, there wasn't any difference gender-wise. It was all about your art.

**RH:** It was kind of unusual, wasn't it? If you think about it, men and women are equal in shows all the time.

**GN:** Seems it was unusual. Certainly what I've heard from women in other cities is that the good ol' boy system was really heavy.

**RH:** Yeah, it seems a phenomenon that was uniquely Chicago. Following the Hairy Who shows, most, if not all, of the focus shows at HPAC had women in them.

**JN:** The False Image was made up of two males, two females. They were all very good friends at school and their work looked really good together. There were fewer well-known women working in Chicago than men, but there were some exceptional ones: Miyoko Ito and Evelyn Statsinger come immediately to mind. On the West Coast you had Joan Brown, who's our age, and then Jay DeFeo, from an older generation. You had examples of well-respected women who were in shows, yet at these parties, it seemed like two different worlds. When Jim Falconer and I were dreaming up small groups to propose for shows at HPAC, it never occurred to us that by including women we might be doing something unusual. For the lists that we took to Don Baum—the lists from which the Hairy Who, in a sense, came out of—we were looking for work that we liked and fit together well and nothing else.

**RH:** Oh, I didn't realize that you brought him the lists.

**JN:** A number of us had been in Don Baum's group shows at HPAC, which was the only place where emerging artists had a chance to exhibit. In addition, Don included established artists in the shows, so it was a very exciting mix. It was a coup for a young artist to be in one of these shows. Typically a show had 30 or 35 artists, one work per artist. After being in three or four of those the

head begins to swell—"I wish I could get a little more attention." Fortunately, Don was very open to suggestions; he was always asking for ideas. So Jim Falconer and I hit on this idea: what happens if you have just five artists per show? Each could show five to ten pieces, depending on the size, and then each could make a bigger impact. We based our groupings on what we thought the work would look like together. Some groups were very figurative; some were very abstract. So Jim and I went to Don with about five lists.

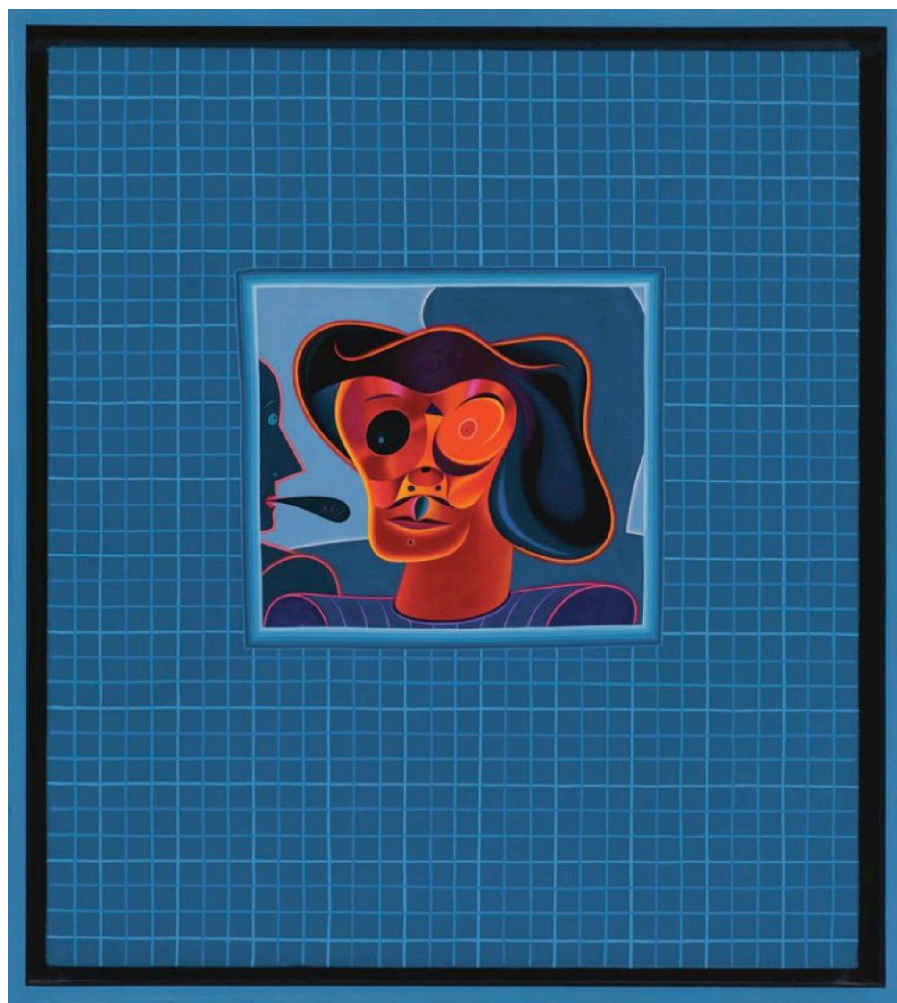
Don liked our idea. One of the lists had all but one of the members of what ended up becoming the Hairy Who: Karl Wirsum. He was in a different group we proposed. Don suggested adding Karl to our group, and though excited at the prospect of exhibiting with him, I was

a little nervous. I was influenced by Karl's work and I didn't think I could compete . . .

**RH:** You were afraid the work would look too similar?

**JN:** Yeah, in part. I was taking a lot of things he was doing and trying to make use of them. Also, I had only met Karl once, briefly, a few years before. I didn't have a clue if he would be interested in exhibiting with me or any of the others, who also did not know him personally, but very much admired his work.

**RH:** When you started showing together in the Hairy Who shows, did that spark some ideas among you, or did it change your work, having it next to Karl's, for instance?



Jim Nutt, *Ssh!! If You're Quiet No One Will Know*, 1979, acrylic on canvas and wood frame, 19 9/16 × 17 5/8 inches. © MCA Chicago.

**GN:** By that point I was pretty firm in how I wanted to deal with what I was dealing with.

**JN:** Yeah, if you look at the very first Hairy Who show in 1966, and then compare it with the work that everyone was doing, say, in the '70s, what you see is that other people's work didn't move into everybody's work. Everybody had established where they were going, and Karl was, by far, the most firm in his awareness—

**RH:** Actually all your work seemed to get more physically refined, right? I'm thinking about Art Green's work from then, those big, loosely painted figurative things. Slowly they became more and more tightly rendered.

**GN:** Certainly, in terms of refinement, when I look back at something from 1966 or so, I'm overwhelmed with how crudely drawn everything was. It was sparer at that time than it became in '68 or so. There's a great difference in the numerical content of figures, but I also played with a lot less color then. Everything was a little more simply dealt with.

**RH:** Jim, I'm curious how you go about starting a painting.

**JN:** Well, in a sense, it's always been the same. I start with a drawing. When I started getting involved with the plexiglass paintings, I'd make a full-scale drawing, a cartoon, which I would then tape to the plexi, look through, and use as a guide.

I could have started it and just done it freehand, but that didn't lend itself to what I had in mind, which was these flat areas bounded by a colored line. I wanted to work out the arrangement of all the forms before I started using paint.

**RH:** So when you're doing the drawings, you're thinking about the forms and the shapes rather than the image?

**JN:** Well, at this point, they're confused; I don't think about one or the other. Figuratively speaking, I always draw with an eraser in one hand and a pencil in the other. Every line is under threat. I have a thought and start it, and if I like it, I go on to the next part. We're not

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talking about a big part. If we're talking about a face, I usually start with a shape that will be an eye, then I'll try to get a nose to go with the eye. As I start to do another eye, I might need to change the first eye so the two eyes go together, and then maybe I need to change the nose. Sometimes it never ends.

**RH:** What do you mean, "go together"? You don't mean they're both going to be blue or have the same shape, right? The eyes in your paintings are sometimes quite different from each other.

**JN:** It's a continual give and take. There are all sorts of reasons to like or dislike something, different frames of reference. It's a constant shifting things around until I can get the whole thing to sort of work together, and that's something I discover as I'm developing it—

**RH:** As you're drawing?

**JN:** Yeah. I have a simple, preconceived notion; say, with the earlier work, it might be a large figure doing something—running, standing, pondering, or whatever—and then the environment it's in. With the portraits, it's been a female head.

**RH:** They've been female heads for how long now?

**JN:** Too long.

**RH:** Well, there's only one other alternative, right?

**GN:** Unless he slips into floral.

**RH:** Yeah, or animal. (*laughter*) Jim, do you do several drawings before you start a painting?

**JN:** No, I deal with all of the variations by erasing. When I moved off the plexiglass, I then started drawing on the surface of the canvas—

**RH:** And erasing?

**JN:** Yeah, or painting over, because it doesn't erase so well. When I started working smaller I went back to developing my ideas on paper, which is much easier to erase, and then I would transfer. It's a cartoon the same size as the painting.

**RH:** When do you start thinking about color?

**JN:** It varies. Now I do more drawings than paintings, but there was a period when I would work on a drawing knowing that I was going to go right to a painting with it, so often I was envisioning the color. Now, quite often I'm just drawing. Occasionally some color ideas will come to mind as I'm working, but other times not a thing until I've started looking at recent drawings and deciding if I want to develop any into a painting. I spend too much time on a painting, so I am desperate for an image whose feel is different from the last one. In that case I do start thinking about color in connection with the image and the character of the figure.

**RH:** Do you start thinking about the heads as characters?

**JN:** That has a lot to do with what works and what doesn't work.

**RH:** They're not all Gladys? (*laughter*)

**JN:** Not entirely. It usually has a lot to do with the way the eyes sit. When I'm out on the street I'll see a head and it will remind me of a well-known person. I'll notice facial similarities and stuff. As I'm drawing, sometimes it will occur to me that my drawing looks like it has so-and-so's eyes, male or female. The final image may make connections.

**RH:** And what's the deal with the noses, Jim?

**GN:** The nose is a very important part of the face.

**JN:** Well, if you're lucky enough to have one. (*laughter*) I'm always confused why somebody would think I'm so fixated on the nose. Here you have an image and it's got a red forehead and a yellow chin and a black this or that.

**RH:** Maybe because it's central?

**JN:** You know, when I was growing up, students would have rhinoplasties and there was a time when it seemed like every female star would have a cute little button of a nose. There weren't many stars like Barbara Stanwyck, who had a pronounced, characterful nose.

**RH:** So you've got the drawing down. Then you start coloring in. The paintings become so intricate, like Gladys's, in a way. There are broader areas and then there are really intricate areas. Do you lay in one flat color, slowly developing texture and form?

**JN:** I paint with the acrylic thinned down because I'm not looking for brushstrokes—visual brushstrokes don't bother me, but physical, impasto ones do. The acrylics are kind of translucent to begin with, so I know that an area will need three coats minimum—and four or five coats probably—before it's actually the color that I've mixed. Also I need to get rid of all the white ground, so I do paint the whole painting at one level or another. The surrounding area of a head will be held by a basic value and color for an extended period of time while I'm developing the inner forms. Same thing with the hair or things that tend to be a little more uniform in their overall value and hue.

**RH:** So are you adjusting the drawing as well?

**JN:** Not unless I realize that I've made some terrible mistakes, and then I go back to the drawing and make changes, transfer them to the painting, and so on.

**RH:** I know it takes you forever to do a painting. Is one of the issues that, because of the changes in color, there are all these relationships that get complicated, and you can't quite justify them or feel comfortable with them?

**JN:** Yeah, the best I can say is that I make a lot of mistakes and have to redo a lot.

**RH:** You guys worked here in the house together for how many years before Jim got a separate studio outside of the house recently?

**JN:** Thirty years.

**GN:** But never in the same room.

**RH:** You didn't pay attention to each other during the day because you were working?

**JN:** We'd say hi and acknowledge each other's presence.

**GN:** We were always aware of what the other was doing. We would never talk about it, except maybe in generalities, like, "Oh, that looks pretty interesting."

**RH:** So that'd be your exchange. You'd never sit down and help each other, looking at a painting?

**GN:** Oh, God! No.

**JN:** At the beginning I was presumptuous enough to give Gladys some suggestions and it didn't go very well. She was very polite. (*laughter*)

**GN:** There are maybe two colors that Jim really doesn't care for, so, jokingly, we'd say, "Oh, I see you're using blah, blah, blah." If somebody said you can never paint purple and green together, it just doesn't look right, I would say, "Oh yeah? Wait till you see this!"

What Jim was saying about realizing that the colors are wrong... There have been a lot of times when there's a big area behind figures where I have decided to put a color in: the minute the empty space gets filled in, I've known it's the wrong color, but because it is a watercolor I have to go through and fill everything in and then deal with it. The difference between the earlier and the later work is a more complex layering of paint.

**RH:** Maybe that's what struck me about the big self-portrait. There was a lot of layering, color coming through, and texture.

**GN:** Over the last several years I've been having more casual marks as opposed to solid areas. There are plenty of brushstrokes and mottled areas that I'm having a lot of fun with, maybe going back to the Seurat. So it's all one big circle.

**RH:** So you've seen Jim's paintings when he's close to having one done and

then he repaints it? Jim once told me that one time you, Gladys, said to him, "Oh, this is done. You should stop."

**GN:** Well, I tried that once or twice, trying to encourage him that it was a good painting, which, of course, is the wrong thing to do to anybody. Way back in California there was one sizable canvas he was working on. It seemed like every day there was a new painting on the canvas, a new version of the head. It was just amazing how the painting had totally different paintings underneath. There's a great deal of wonderful, masterful subtlety that's going on now.

**JN:** Thank you, dear.

**RH:** Maybe that's how we should end.