

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Suellen Rocca

Press Packet

Kennedy, Randy. "Suellen Rocca, Founding Member of the Hairy Who, Dies at 76." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2020.

Obrist, Hans Ulrich and Suellen Rocca. "In-Between Repetition and Variation." *Mousse Magazine* 71, Spring 2020, pp. 218–37.

"Suellen Rocca (1943–2020)." *Artforum*, March 31, 2020.

Greenberger, Alex. "Suellen Rocca, Imaginative Artist Whose Influence Loomed Large on Chicago Scene, Is Dead at 76." *ARTnews*, March 29, 2020.

Rudick, Nicole. "Suellen Rocca Turns an Inward Eye." *Hyperallergic*, October 13, 2018.

Fateman, Johanna. "Suellen Rocca." *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2018, p. 8.

MacMillan, Kyle. "Who was Hairy Who? Art Institute exhibit clarifies the influential Chicago group." *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 22, 2018.

Bradley, Paige Katherine. "Suellen Rocca's Graphite Gorgeousness can rock our world." *Garage Magazine*, September 18, 2018.

Bradley, Paige K. "Critics' Picks: Suellen Rocca." *Artforum*, September 16, 2016.

Kreimer, Julian. "Suellen Rocca." *Art in America*, December 2016, p. 121.

"Suellen Rocca." *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2016.

Gopnik, Blake. "Suellen Rocca: A Woman's Take on the 'Hairy Who'." *artnet News*, September 9, 2016.

Sutton, Benjamin. "Best of 2016: Our Top 20 NYC Art Shows." *Hyperallergic*, December 27, 2016.

Nadel, Dan. "Suellen Rocca in the 1960s." *Hyperallergic*, August 1, 2015.

Bradley, Paige. "Critic's Picks." *Artforum*, July 17, 2015.

Kozloff, Max. "Inwardness: Chicago Art Scene Since 1945." *Artforum*, October 1972, pp. 51–55.

Wells, Daniel. "Artful Codgers." *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1971, p. 8.

Halstead, Whitney. "Chicago." *Artforum*, October 1968, pp. 69–70.

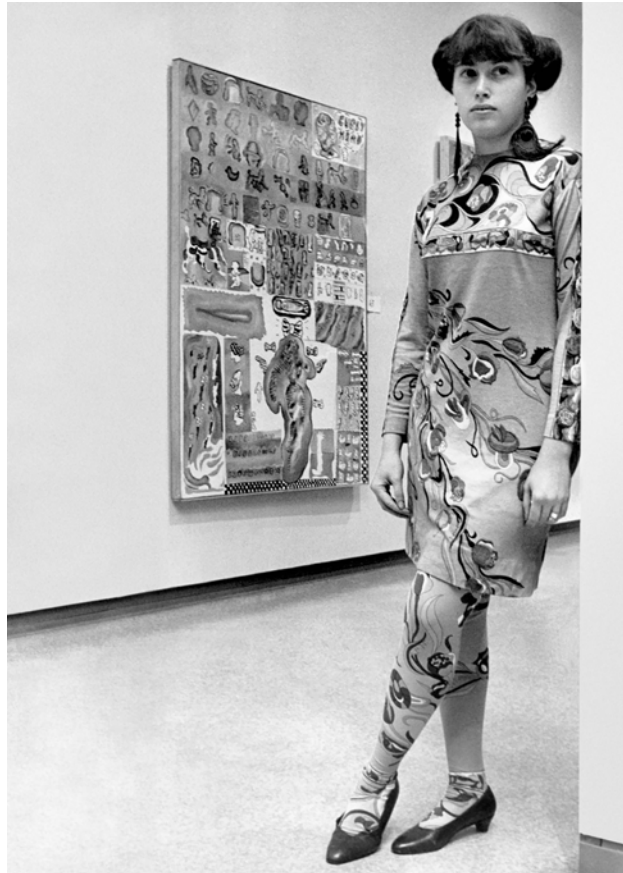
Halstead, Whitney. "Chicago." *Artforum*, May 1967, pp. 64–66.

Halstead, Whitney. "Chicago." *Artforum*, Summer 1966, pp. 55–57.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

## The New York Times



The artist Suellen Rocca with her work "Curly Head" at an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1967. Much of her work, she said, was a form of picture-writing, analogous to hieroglyphics. Matthew Marks Gallery

## *Suellen Rocca, Founding Member of the Hairy Who, Dies at 76*

Ms. Rocca and five other Chicago artists came together in the 1960s to form a group whose rambunctious style tacked hard against prevailing art orthodoxies.

Kennedy, Randy. "Suellen Rocca, Founding Member of the Hairy Who, Dies at 76." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2020.

By Randy Kennedy

April 4, 2020

Suellen Rocca, a founding member of the short-lived but influential 1960s Chicago art group the Hairy Who and a fiercely original artist whose hieroglyphic, phantasmagoric work poked a finger in the eye of late-20th-century modernist purities, died on March 26 at a hospice in Naperville, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. She was 76.

Matthew Marks Gallery in New York, which represents her, said the cause was pancreatic cancer.

At a time when the deadpan consumer imagery of Pop Art was giving way to the restraint of Minimalism and Conceptualism, Ms. Rocca and five former classmates from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago came together under the sway of influences as disparate as Dubuffet, Native American art, hand-painted store signs, the Sears catalog and the natural-history displays at the Field Museum to create a rambunctious form of painting and sculpture that tacked hard against prevailing orthodoxies.

“There is about many of these works a relentlessly gabby, arm-twisting, eyeball-contacting quality that comes as a great surprise in a gallery that we associate with the spare statements of Agnes Martin and Brice Marden,” John Russell wrote in *The New York Times* in a review of a 1982 Pace Gallery show. He



Asked about her approach, Ms. Rocca said the short answer she liked to give was that “while New York was cool, Chicago was hot.” “Easy to Handle,” colored pencil, ink and cotton on paper, 1968. Matthew Marks Gallery



“Palm Finger,” oil on canvas, 1968. Matthew Marks Gallery

added: “Why are they so repulsive? Are they all equally repulsive? Are we wrong not to like them? These are fair questions, and they deserve an answer.”

Eventually the answer was that their unorthodox ethos, ignored by many East and West Coast critics as a regionalist aberration, came to be embraced by younger generations who saw themselves reflected in its exuberance, irreverence and vernacular American overload.

Ms. Rocca and her compatriots, whose work helped foment a wider movement known as Chicago Imagism, “weren’t interested in binary oppositions or the modernist arrow of progress,” the curator Dan Nadel wrote in the catalog for a show of Ms. Rocca’s work at Matthew Marks Gallery in 2016. “Art was art. This stoic, rather Midwestern philosophy would prove to be foundational.”

In 2016, Ms. Rocca listed some of the imagery that formed the lexicon of her early work, often rendered in flat, quivery, cartoonlike lines.

“Palm trees, diamond rings, bra styles in the Sears Roebuck catalog, dancing couples from Arthur Murray ads and pictures of fancy hairdos tucked into the back pages of magazines were the cultural icons of beauty and romance expressed by the media that promised happiness to young women of that



generation,” she said. “This was the culture that surrounded me.” In a 2018 interview with *Garage* magazine, she said that much of her work was a form of picture-writing, analogous to hieroglyphics, taking in the same consumer flotsam that Pop art used but deploying it more subjectively.

Asked in that interview about her approach, she said the short answer she liked to give was that “while New York was cool, Chicago was hot.”

Suellen Krupp was born on Oct. 2, 1943, the only child in a middle-class Jewish family. Her father, Phillip, whose family had immigrated from Russia, worked as a salesman for a lighting-equipment company, and her mother, Mildred, a talented amateur pianist who performed throughout her life, worked as a legal secretary and accountant.

Suellen’s art talent emerged early and had propelled her by age 16 to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where one of her teachers was Ray Yoshida, a hugely important mentor to the Chicago Imagists who emphasized nondoctrinaire thinking and eclectic sources of inspiration.

In 1962, she married Dennis Rocca, a third-generation jeweler; they divorced in 1975. She is survived by her son, Paul; her daughter, Lia Plonka; and three grandchildren.

The first Hairy Who exhibition, featuring the work of Ms. Rocca, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Jim Falconer, Art Green and Karl Wirsum, was held at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago in 1966. (The group’s



**“Tale of the Two Legged Bunny,”** graphite and colored pencil on paper, 1982. Matthew Marks Gallery



“At Sunset,” 2013. Matthew Marks Gallery

memorable name is said to have been inspired by a riff on the name of a local radio personality and art critic, Harry Bouras, whom the artists did not hold in high esteem.) Between 1966 and 1969, the group — which did not consider itself a movement or school, but simply an informal collection of like-minded artists — staged five more exhibitions, in Chicago, San Francisco, New York and Washington.

Ms. Rocca’s work was included in several other shows before she moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1970s, at which time she stopped making art for a decade.

Upon returning to Chicago in 1981, she took up teaching and began to work again, making drawings and paintings that were emotionally darker, with titles like “Beware of My Mouth,” “Don’t” and “It’s a Secret.” A motif of purses and bags that runs through her work took on more unsettling implications. As she told an interviewer for the Archives of American Art in 2015: “Bags can hold things that you don’t want to get out. Sort of like Pandora’s box.” She added, “I’ve always felt that my work is autobiographical.”

She was featured in “What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to Present,” an exhibition curated by Mr. Nadel at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence in 2014 and 2015 and Matthew Marks Gallery in 2015 that has been credited with igniting wider institutional interest in Chicago Imagist work.

A survey of Ms. Rocca’s work — which is held in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and several other important museums — is scheduled to open this year at the Secession museum in Vienna.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# MOUSSE

## In-Between Repetition and Variation

Suellen Rocca



## in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist



The recently deceased Chicago-born artist Suellen Rocca had developed for decades a visual vocabulary inspired by advertising, featuring everything from wedding rings to palm trees, hats, purses, and small dancing couples. The imagery is organized in repetitive patterns and nebulous compositions—a form of “picture writing” that somewhat resembles hieroglyphs and pictographs. Rocca’s work possesses a sense of immediacy, its urgent iconography addressing themes such as female sexuality, romantic feelings, and domestic life.

In this conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Rocca overviewed her long career, from her early art classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, to encounters with mentors Addis Osborne and Don Baum and her peer Christina Ramberg, to her membership in the Hairy Who, the famous Chicago collective that also included Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Karl Wirsum, Art Green, and Jim Falconer. The Hairy Who first exhibited their bold, figurative, colorful work together at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago in the late 1960s. Rocca’s strong interest in art extended to a curatorial practice as well; she was the curator and director of exhibitions for the Department of Art at Elmhurst College, near Chicago, where she also taught studio classes in painting, drawing, and design.

The interview took place on September 29, 2018, at the Aon Grand Ballroom in Chicago, two hours before the event Creative Chicago: An Interview Marathon by the Chicago Humanities Festival and Terra Foundation.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

I’m curious to know what you’re doing at the moment.

SUELLEN ROCCA

I’m working simultaneously on a painting and some drawings. I consider the latter as autonomous works. I like working on a drawing and a painting at the same time because they influence each other. Actually, I have been focusing on some little tiny drawings, which is odd for me, because I usually work larger.

HANS ULRICH

Do you work every day?

SUELLEN

Maybe not every single day, but very regularly.

HANS ULRICH

And do you have a studio in Chicago?

SUELLEN

Yes, my studio is in my home. Since 2000 I’ve lived in a neighborhood in the southwest called Romeoville because my daughter and my grandchildren live nearby.

HANS ULRICH

Please, tell me about your beginnings. How did you come to art?

SUELLEN

Ever since I was a very small child, I’ve always made art and wanted to be an artist. I was a good student. When I was eight years old and in the third grade, my teacher gave me my first solo show. She called my mother and told her: “Take your child to the Art Institute.” So I started classes at the Art Institute of Chicago.

HANS ULRICH

Do you still have those drawings from the solo show?

SUELLEN

No, I don’t, but I have others from that same time, from my first Art Institute classes.

HANS ULRICH

Are they similar to the ones you do today?

SUELLEN

No, not really. It was precious because they offered a scholarship to two students from every elementary school in the city. I started going to those classes. They had two different kinds of classes: a six-week sketch class, where you worked from a live model (so from the time I was eight years old, I drew from a live model), and twelve weeks. They would alternate: six weeks, twelve weeks. You would do your work at home and then bring it in to Fullerton Hall in the Art Institute, which is an old, very beautiful lecture hall with a big dome. They would show on the stage works from the Art Institute collection and other collections on a particular theme. So for instance if the theme was a winter day, maybe they would show a Brueghel painting. It was a wonderful way, at a very young age, to become familiar with a lot of works of art. The teacher who became my mentor there was Addis Osborne. He took a very personal interest in me and my work. As I got older, I went to classes for high schoolers.

HANS ULRICH

Was Osborne also an accomplished artist in his own right?

SUELLEN

Yes, and I later found out—not too long ago—that he was also an architect. He was a very enthusiastic traveler, too. He encouraged us all to keep a sketchbook. He would sketch while on travel. So, also from the time I was eight years old, I carried a sketchbook with me everywhere. I still have those sketchbooks, and the work from those classes.

HANS ULRICH

When did the pictograms and the hieroglyphs enter your iconography?

SUELLEN

Maybe toward my last year at the Art Institute. A very important teacher at that time was Ray Yoshida. I became interested in repetitive images that I was seeing in the general culture. I did a painting called *My Santa Painting* (1964) which was a repeating image of a Santa alternating with a winter landscape.

HANS ULRICH

Was this idea of a lexicon or pictograms inspired by Yoshida? How did he inspire you?

SUELLEN

He had a wonderful way of looking at my work, and very quietly just giving me a book to look at, or suggesting that I go and see a certain exhibition. In terms of repetition with variation I was inspired by Egyptian art, in particular Egyptian hieroglyphics. I was inspired by advertising, too. Also children’s pre-readers, which are themselves a kind of picture writing.

HANS ULRICH

You are a curator as well as an artist. Could you expand a bit on the curatorial aspect of your career?

SUELLEN

I’ve been the curator of the Elmhurst College art collection, which was started in 1971 by Ted Halkin, since 2006. It’s been just wonderful for me. I never knew I was going to be a curator, but I really love it. It’s such a fabulous and amazing public collection and I’ve introduced lots of people to it. I used to talk to Sandra Jorgensen, the longtime curator who preceded me, about it as a hidden gem in the western suburbs, and I think I’ve been very successful in bringing the art community to it and creating programs

around it. We've received incredible gifts of works from museums, curators, collectors, and artists themselves, where I've been able to select the work. So many beautiful and extraordinary works have come into the collection in that way, and bequests as well. Very often we are asked to loan works to international exhibitions.

HANS ULRICH

This idea of collection is such a strong element also in your paintings, because there are so many recurring motifs in them, for instance palm trees, symbols, wedding rings, purses. Your work is like an encyclopedia. Could you tell me about these "ingredients"?

SUELLEN

The rows of diamond rings come from jeweler's catalogs. My ex-husband's father was a diamond setter and a jeweler, and I would peruse his catalogs. Sears catalogs, with the sepia-toned advertisements for bras and girdles, were another inspiration. The palm tree is kind of an icon for a vacation destination. I remember a magazine ad with very small images—maybe two by two inches—of different vacation destinations. And of course the palm trees immediately evoke Florida. The original inspiration for the purses was a little 1940s manual on how to crochet purses. Each purse had a name attached to it, and of course for me, that idea of reaching in is a feminine and sexual symbol as well as a reflection of popular culture.

HANS ULRICH

These cultural icons of beauty and romance expressed by the media were also, I imagine, promises of happiness to young women of your generation?

SUELLEN

I've been asked often about whether I was making a feminist statement. I have always responded that my statement was just a reflection of the world around me; I definitely was not trying to make a statement that things should change. But I was certainly using humor and irony, very much like the other Hairy Who artists who were using familiar icons—for the men, imagery that they might have found in the backs of muscle magazines.

HANS ULRICH

What was the connection between the Hairy Who and the Chicago group nicknamed the Monster Roster?

SUELLEN

The Monster Roster also came out of the School of the Art Institute, but they were more postwar, in the 1950s. I was certainly aware of their work. For instance George Cohen. But there wasn't a direct connection.

HANS ULRICH

What was your relationship with Christina Ramberg? She obviously was inspired by you in the sense of repetition. A lot of her imagery is about comfort: caresses, sex, rings, couples dancing, lamps, legs, wigs, purses, palm trees, hands.

SUELLEN

She was an amazing artist. We were friends and fellow artists, and in terms of our exhibitions with Hairy Who, we had three shows—in 1966, 1967, and 1968—at the Hyde Park Art Center on the South Side of Chicago. Other groups that formed were, I think, inspired by our group exhibitions. One was called False Image, and Christina was part of it, together with Roger Brown, Phil Hanson, and Eleanor Dube.

HANS ULRICH

I'm curious to know what it was like to be a woman artist in the 1960s.

SUELLEN

Personally, I never felt discriminated against as a woman, either in school or when I began exhibiting. Of course, two of the six artists in the Hairy Who were women; the other was Gladys Nilsson. It was later that I became aware of the major problem with women being discriminating against. The feminist movement confronting that didn't start until the beginning of the 1970s. But I personally didn't experience any discrimination. There was less of that in Chicago than other places.

HANS ULRICH

At a certain point, some of your subjects migrated from paintings to sculptures. How do you explain this segue to three-dimensionality?

SUELLEN

I was interested in painting on objects. I used to paint on lampshades. In a 1970 show at the Hyde Park Art Center titled *Marriage, Chicago Style* that featured a number of members of the Hairy Who, False Image, and another group called Nonplussed Some, I had paintings of lamps and also actual lamps where I painted on the lampshades. Among the Nonplussed Some group, the most widely known artist was Ed Paschke, and he was my husband.

HANS ULRICH

Ed Paschke was your husband at the time?

SUELLEN

He was a fictitious husband. I was already married, but I needed him for a poster we did for that show. Barbara Rossi and Karl Wirsum were in that exhibition as well. The second show we had together at the Hyde Park Art Center was titled *Chicago Antiqua*, in 1971.

HANS ULRICH

And all these groups demonstrate how active Chicago was at the time. Many cities, even bigger ones, have just one group, while here you had many. What do you think was the secret of it?

SUELLEN

The hub of it was the Hyde Park Art Center and Don Baum, who was the director there starting in the early 1950s. Not enough people know about his role, but Don spent his whole life encouraging young artists, and he was a wonderful artist in his own right. He was very important to the Chicago art world. He organized large group shows, like *Three Kingdoms: Animal, Vegetable, Mineral* in 1965, where we were all invited to exhibit just one painting. One day Jim Falconer approached Don and proposed a small group show that would include himself, Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Art Green, and me. He liked the idea, and said, "I think you should add Karl Wirsum." And that's how the Hairy Who started. There was a lot of energy at that time.

HANS ULRICH

What more can you say about this form of energy? As you said, a lot of energy passed between the members of the group. For instance someone bringing their interest in a certain kind of thing and opening it up to the others.

SUELLEN

I remember as a young person, just having graduated from the School of the Art Institute, how important it was visiting Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt and seeing the work they were focusing on. I was certainly inspired by seeing their work, and perhaps they were inspired by mine.

HANS ULRICH

What do you think was the connection to Surrealism?

SUELLEN

Surrealism has always been very important to Chicago collectors, museums, and institutions. I remember during the Hairy Who period being invited to a collector's home and seeing several wonderful Surrealist pieces.

HANS ULRICH

As a curator, and/or as an artist, do you do a lot of writing?

SUELLEN

I haven't written about my own work, but I've written about other pieces in the Elmhurst College collection.

HANS ULRICH

And what about your idea of archive?

SUELLEN

I still have all my clippings and catalogs, but I must say it's good maybe to have someone else to keep them in order!

HANS ULRICH

But you're working on the Elmhurst archives, right?

SUELLEN

Yes, I keep everything, but I'm not the best at organizing the material.

HANS ULRICH

Do you have any unrealized projects? Any dreams?

SUELLEN

I just want to keep making work. I love making work. Recently I have been inspired by my early, really big paintings. I would probably need to hire an assistant to do it now, but I would like to work that large again.

#### SOLO SHOWS

2020 Secession, Vienna (upcoming)

2018 *Drawings*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York



2016 *Bare Shouldered Beauty, Works from 1965 to 1969*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

2013 *Focus 4: Four Solo Exhibitions*, Chicago Gallery, Illinois State Museum

2007 *Suellen Rocca and Art Green: Imagists Classic Hits, Vol. 1*, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

1997 University Club of Chicago

1983 Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago

(Top) Suellen Rocca and Jim Falconer with *Chocolate Chip Cookie*, 1965. © Suellen Rocca.

Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

(Opposite) The cover of the *Chicago Daily News* magazine, *Panorama*, March 11, 1967, celebrated the second Hairy Who exhibition. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

Photo: Charles Krejcsi

SUELLEN ROCCA (b. 1943, Chicago; d. 2020). Shortly after graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1964, she began showing her paintings, drawings, and sculptures alongside those of her fellow Hairy Who members. The group's exhibitions drew national and international attention and went on to influence generations of artists. Recent solo shows include Matthew Marks Gallery, New York (2018 and 2016); Chicago Gallery, Illinois State Museum (2013); and Secession, Vienna (upcoming). Among recent group shows: Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst (2019); Greene Naftali Gallery and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York (2018); Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago (2018).

HANS ULRICH OBRIST (b. 1968, Zurich) is artistic director of the Serpentine Galleries, London. Prior to this he was the curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Since his first exhibition, *World Soup (The Kitchen Show)* in 1991, he has curated three hundred and thirty exhibitions.



CHICAGO DAILY NEWS

# panorama

MARCH 11, 1967

NEW CHICAGO ART ROCKS WITH EXCITEMENT

photo by Charles Krejci



KARL WIRSUM

ART GREEN

SUELLEN ROCCA

JAMES NUTT

GLADYS NILSSON

THE HAIRY WHOS ARE JUMPING WITH VITALITY

---

AH, SWEET BASKETBALL

---

IN DEFENSE OF BEAUTY

---

'CHICAGO' COMES HOME AT LAST

---

TRIBUTE TO RUDOLPH GANZ

---





Suellen Rocca with *Curley Head*, c. 1966, in *The 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity* at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1967. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

- 01 *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present* installation view at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2015. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Photo: Sean Logue
- 02 *Hairy Who* installation view at Dupont Center, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1969. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Photo: Jim Nutt
- 03 *Departure*, 2012. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 04 *Suellen Rocca: Bare Shouldered Beauty, Works from 1965 to 1969* installation view at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2016. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 05 *Purse Curse*, 1968. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 06-07 *Famous Artists from Chicago. 1965-1975* installation views at Fondazione Prada, Milan, 2017-2018. Courtesy: Fondazione Prada, Milan. Photo: Roberto Marossi
- 08 *Bare Shouldered Beauty*, 1965. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 09 *Neatest Garbage*, 1982. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 10 *Untitled (slippers)*, c. 1968. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 11 *Lamp Poem*, c. 1969. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 12 *Easy to Handle*, 1968. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 13 *View from Kwaj*, 1985. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 14-15 *Hairy Who? 1966-1969* installation views at the Art Institute of Chicago, 2018. Courtesy: the Art Institute of Chicago
- 16 Karl Wirsum, *Youdue*, c. 1966. The Art Institute of Chicago, restricted gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel W. Koffler. © Karl Wirsum
- 17 Jim Nutt, *Now! Hairy Who Makes You Smell Good*, 1968. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt. © Jim Nutt
- 18 Jim Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum. *Hairy Who*, 1966. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt
- 19 Gladys Nilsson, *The Trogens*, 1967. Courtesy: the Art Institute of Chicago. © Gladys Nilsson
- 20 *Beware of My Mouth*, 1981. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 21 *Fish Dream Two*, 1997. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 22 *Rehearsal of Descending and Ascending the Ladder*, 1990. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 23 *Rope Tree and Ladder III*, 1991. © Suellen Rocca. Courtesy: Matthew Marks Gallery, New York





01



02



03

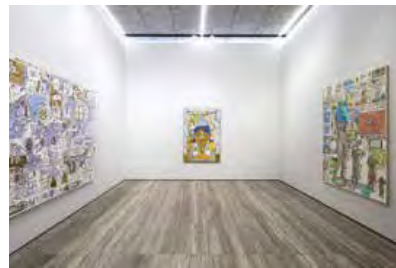




04



05



06



07



08





09

10



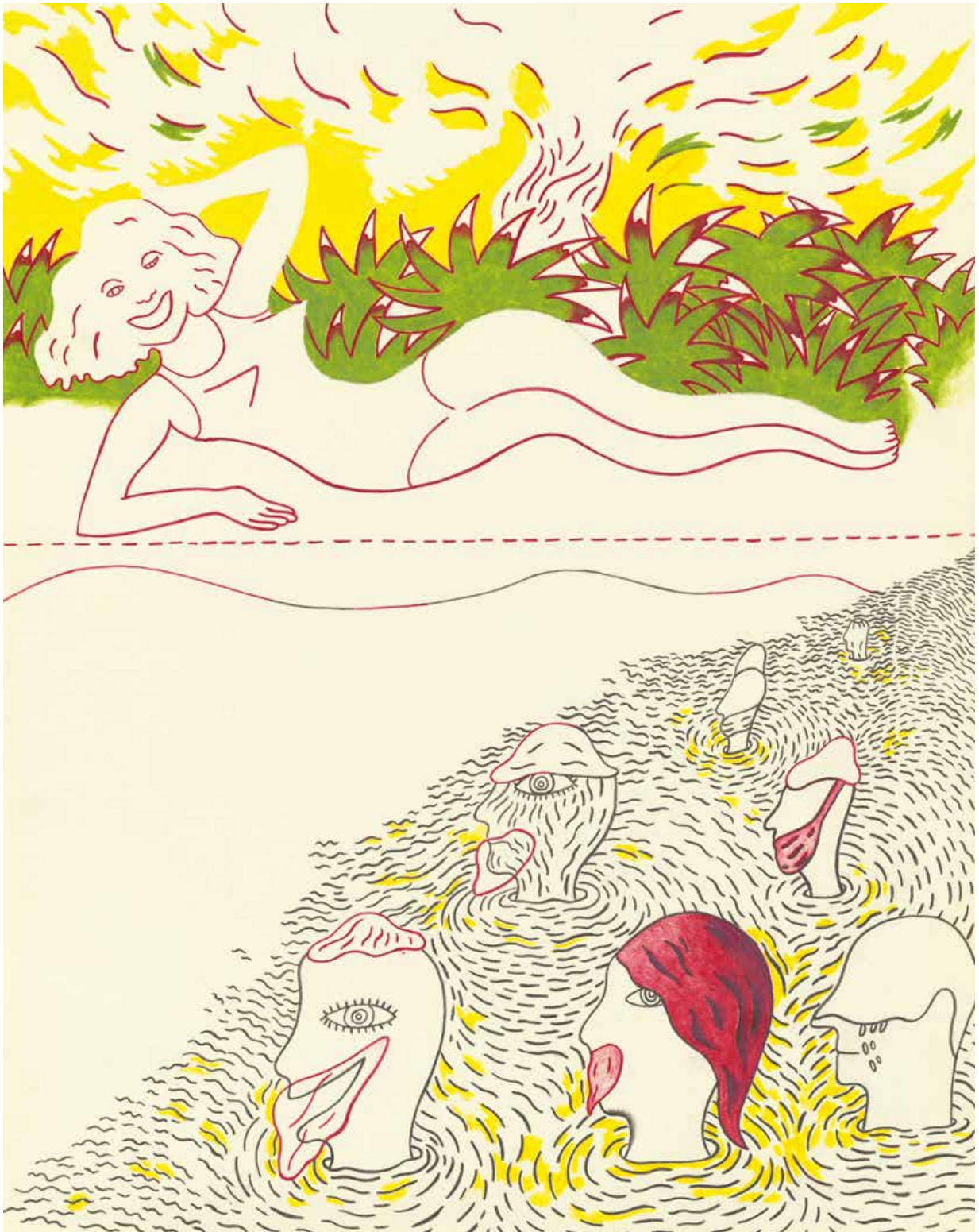


11





12



13





14



15



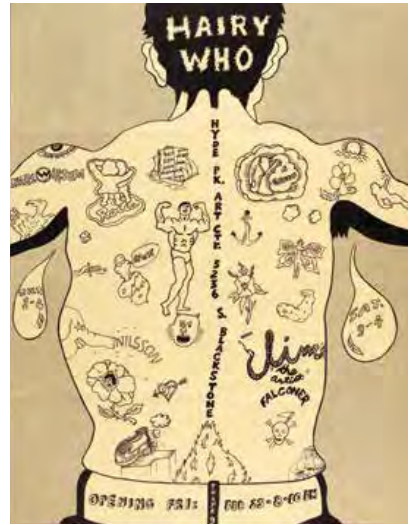
16



17



18



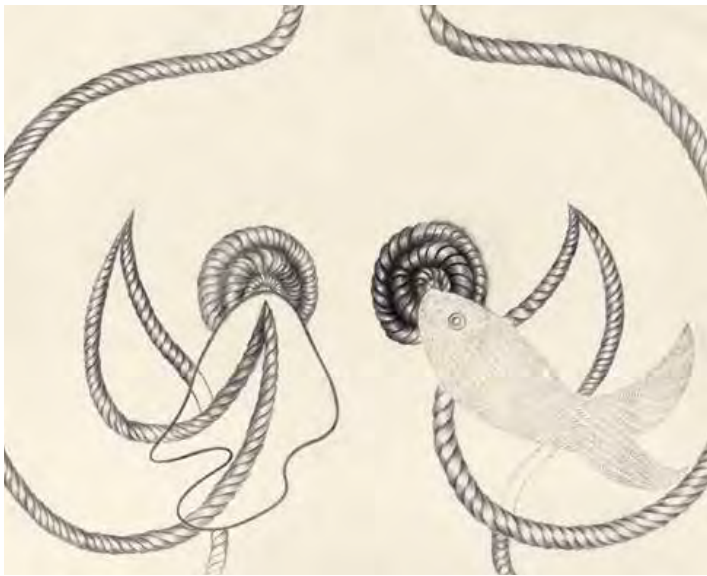
19





20





21



22



23



MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# ARTFORUM

March 31, 2020 at 11:07am

## SUELLEN ROCCA (1943–2020)

Suellen Rocca, a leading Chicago Imagist whose hieroglyphic paintings and drawings irreverently surfaced themes of domesticity, sexuality, and consumer and popular culture, has died at seventy-six years old.

Born Suellen Krupp in 1943, Rocca attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) from age sixteen, where she studied with painter Ray Yoshida, a significant mentor to Rocca and other artists associated with Chicago Imagism. She graduated from the institution in 1964 and became a founding member of The Hairy Who two years later, alongside fellow SAIC students Jim Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, and Jim Nutt (Karl Wirsum joined the group shortly after its formation). Synthesizing visual elements from American vernacular imagery as well as African, Oceanic, and Pre-Columbian art, the group's idiosyncratic, often cartoonish figuration diverged from the desubjectivizing impulse of East Coast Pop and its emphasis on the commodity form. "In New York the approach was taking that piece of popular culture and putting it into a new context, changing everything by putting it in the gallery," Rocca said in a 2018 interview with *Vice*. "In Chicago, we processed similar material in a very personal way."



Suellen Rocca with *Curley Head*, c. 1966, at the 70th Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity, Art Institute of Chicago, 1967. Photo: Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

While raising two young children, the artist developed her signature strategy of "picture writing," arranging pictograms of often gendered imagery such as jewelry, handbags, and female body parts in askew, pastel-toned grids. "Rocca's paintings extend and elaborate the fuzzy, purposefully hesitant linear movement," artist and art historian Whitney Halstead, who taught Rocca and her peers at SAIC, wrote in *Artforum's* May 1967 issue. "The squiggly line, pictographic style and candy-box colors are synthesized into a parody of the gauche and the gaudy."

Shortly after The Hairy Who disbanded in 1969, Rocca moved to Northern California and went on an artistic hiatus. She returned to Chicago, and to artmaking, in 1981. Thereafter, her work underwent a psychological turn, encompassing surrealistic dream worlds and anxious interior states. Rocca remained active as an artist and educator in recent decades, and, since 2006, she worked as the curator and director of exhibitions at Elmhurst College, just outside of Chicago. In 2016, Matthew Marks Gallery mounted the artist's first one-person exhibition in New York; she was awarded an honorary doctorate by SAIC the same year. Rocca's work is in the collections of major US museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A survey of her work is scheduled to open at the Secession museum in Vienna this summer.

"Suellen Rocca (1943–2020)." *Artforum*, March 31, 2020.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# ARTnews

## Suellen Rocca, Imaginative Artist Whose Influence Loomed Large on Chicago Scene, Is Dead at 76

BY ALEX GREENBERGER March 29, 2020 8:22pm



Suellen Rocca, *Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature*, 1965.  
©SUELLEN ROCCA/COURTESY MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Suellen Rocca, whose figurative drawings, paintings, and sculptures exude a free-spirited creativity that has influenced many, has died. Her death was announced by the Elmhurst Art Museum in Illinois on Saturday. She was in her late seventies. A representative for New York and Los Angeles's Matthew Marks Gallery, which represents her, said Rocca died at 76 years old.

Rocca is considered a legend within the Chicago scene. Having risen to fame during the 1960s for her work as part of the Hairy Who group, she is now widely known for her oeuvre that mashes together

Greenberger, Alex. "Suellen Rocca, Imaginative Artist Whose Influence Loomed Large on Chicago Scene, Is Dead at 76." *ARTnews*, March 29, 2020.





Suellen Rocca.  
COURTESY ELMHURST MUSEUM

various cartoonish forms that, at the start of her career, drew on pop-cultural imagery, from the photographs she saw in jewelry catalogues to pictures found in workbooks for kindergarteners.

The Hairy Who artists, who are also now known as the Chicago Imagists, banded together in 1966, and originally included Jim Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, and Rocca. Shortly after its formation, Karl Wirsum joined the group, whose members all attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Working in opposition to the haughty, theory-heavy Minimalist and Conceptual art coming out of New York at the time, the artists created figurative paintings and drawings that relied on a *mélange* of source material, from Oceanic art to comic books. At a 2015 talk held at Matthew Marks's New York gallery, Falconer said that the Hairy Who artists' work captured "the countercultural energy of the time." As for Rocca herself, she told *Garage* magazine in 2018 that, at the time, "while New York was cool, Chicago was hot."

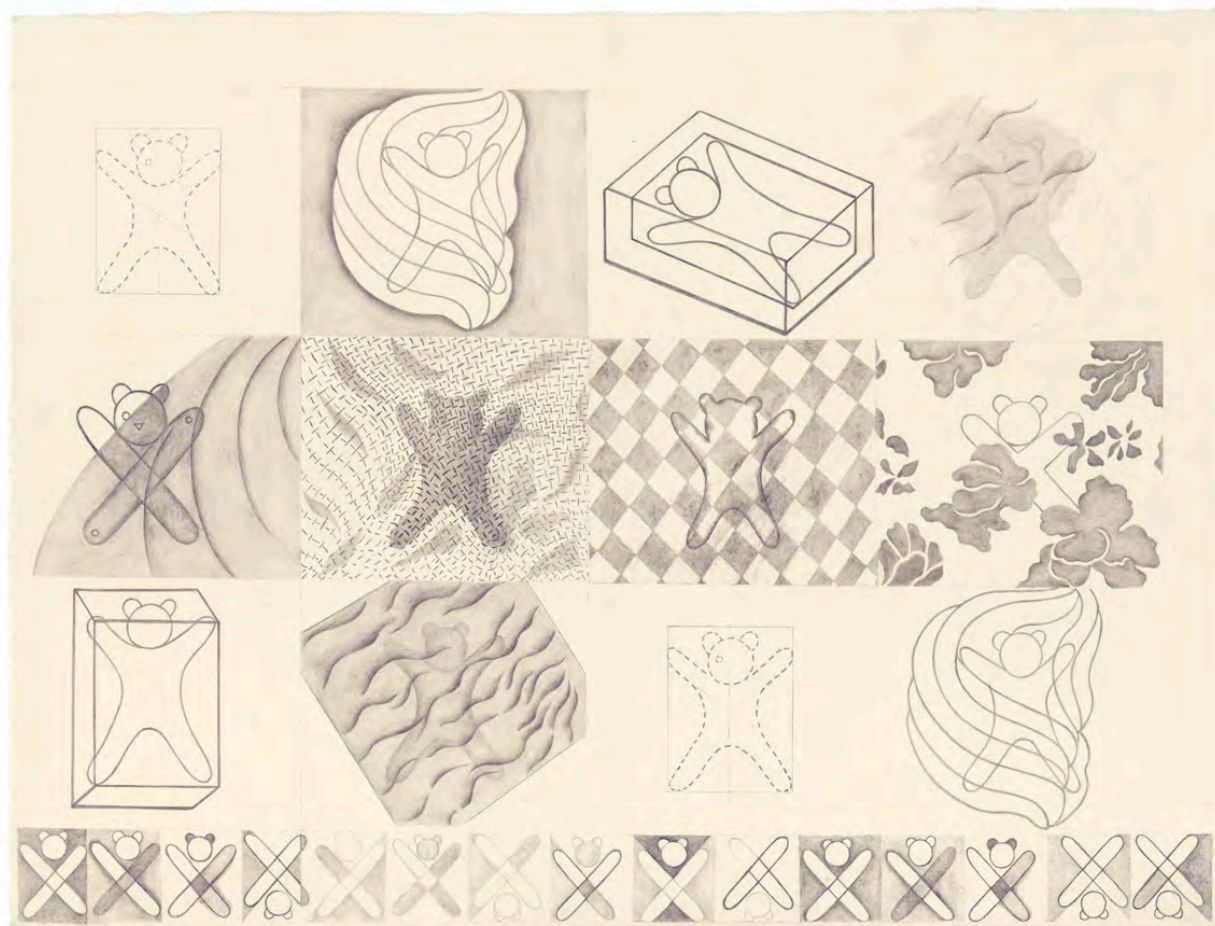
The liberated, somewhat jokey energy of the Hairy Who group infiltrated Rocca's work as well. Her '60s art is full of bizarre, idiosyncratic arrangements of forms that contain no narratives or overt symbolism. Silhouettes of nude women's bodies intermingle with blobby hands; see-through handbags contain text that sounds like advertising slogans. Her works from this era—which are looser in style than the precise semi-abstractions of her colleagues, though no less intriguing—are nearly impossible to mine for meaning, but they are all the more fascinating because of it.



The Hairy Who disbanded in 1969, just three years after its formation, but the group's influence has been immense. A recent spate of young and mid-career figurative painters has drawn heavily on Chicago Imagist styles, and it is not difficult to imagine that artists such as Dana Schutz and Sue Williams may at some point have looked to Rocca's work for inspiration.

In spite of the Hairy Who's stardom in the Chicago scene, the movement's influence has historically largely been downplayed at some of America's biggest institutions outside the Windy City. This has begun to change in recent years, thanks in part to the work of curator Dan Nadel, whose 2015 exhibition "What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to Present" ignited widespread interest in the group. (The exhibition was staged at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence and Matthew Marks Gallery in New York.) One year after that show appeared at Matthew Marks, Rocca had her first New York solo show at the gallery. A survey of her art is slated to open at the Secession museum in Vienna later this year.

Suellen Rocca was born in 1943 in Chicago. She was raised by a middle-class Jewish family, and when she was 16 years old, she began attending the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she was taught by Ray Yoshida, a figurative painter who encouraged his students to work according to their gut feelings. "Ray was interested in [students] finding their voice: 'What is it you want to say? Forget about any of the other stuff,'" Rocca recalled in a 2015 oral history. In 1962, she married Dennis Rocca, whom she divorced in 1975.



Suellen Rocca, *Teta*, 2012.

©SUELLEN ROCCA/COURTESY MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

During the late '60s, Rocca alternated between raising her two young children and making art, working on both activities simultaneously in her home. "My son would take a nap and I'd rush to my knotty pine studio and work on a painting," she told Nadel in a 2015 interview. "Having a toddler and a baby, and all these exciting shows, it was wonderful. It was a happy time."

In the 1970s, while based in northern California, she stopped working entirely, and didn't return to her art until 1981, when she moved back to Chicago. When she came back to making her paintings and drawings, her style had shifted dramatically—she was now working based on internal feelings rather than external ones, in ways that recall Surrealist art's emphasis on automatism. Gone were the influences from mass media. In their place appeared more expressionistic forms, a few of which were even borrowed from Rocca's dreams.

Rocca's playfulness and emotional generosity is immediately apparent in her post-'80s works. For one 2012 piece called Teta, Rocca envisioned an animal-like figure in various guises—ensconced in what appears to be a clear flame, abstracted into the form of an X, laid on top of a checkerboard floor. The work is named after her grandson's teddy bear, and it refers to the game of hide and seek that the two would play with the stuffed animal.

In the later stages of her career, Rocca continued to be a force in the art scene of the Chicago metro area, working as an adjunct faculty member in the art department of Elmhurst College, just 18 miles outside the Windy City, and as the curator and director of exhibitions at the school's art gallery, which houses a notable collection of Chicago Imagist pieces. She encouraged a sense of curiosity among her students. In her *Garage* interview, she said, "What I tell my older students now is you need to look, because after we think we've seen things we don't look at them anymore."

**Update 3/30/20, 12:15 p.m.:** *Rocca's age has been added to this article.*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

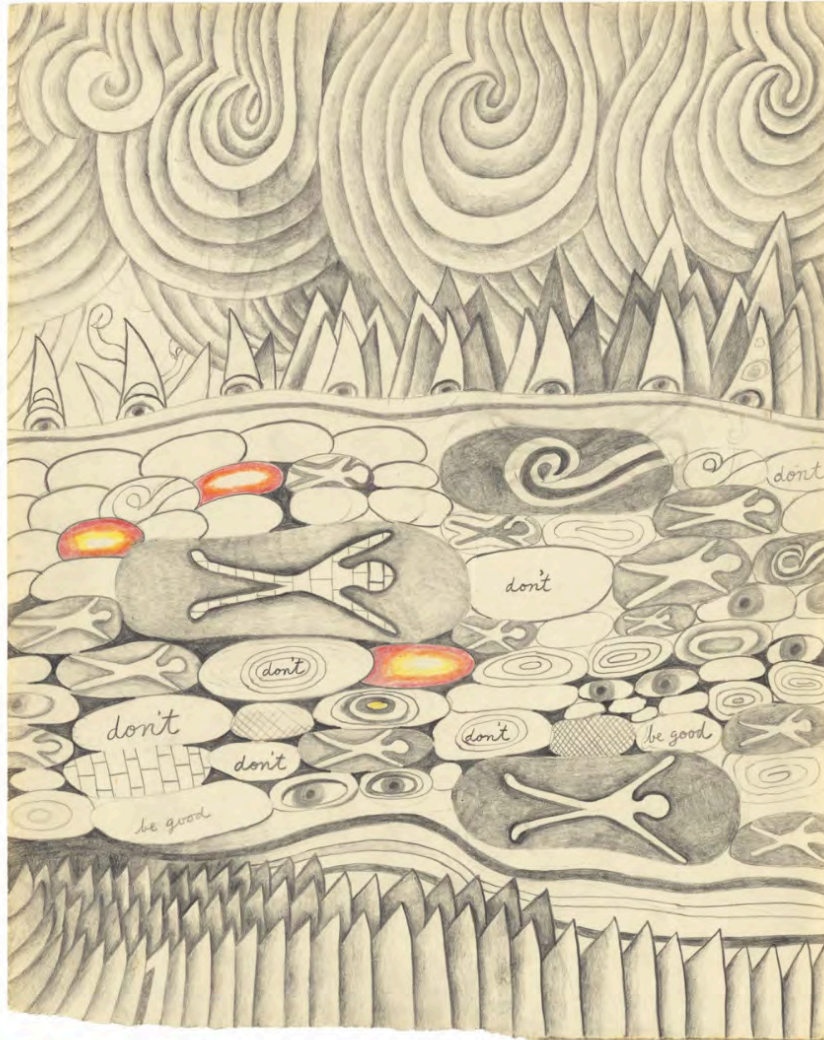
# HYPERALLERGIC

ART • WEEKEND

## Suellen Rocca Turns an Inward Eye

Rocca's drawings evidence an interior gaze and the working out of psychological states.

Nicole Rudick



Suellen Rocca, "Don't" (1981), graphite and colored pencil on paper, 14 x 11 inches (all images courtesy Matthew Marks gallery © Suellen Rocca)

Rudick, Nicole. "Suellen Rocca Turns an Inward Eye." *Hyperallergic*, October 13, 2018.



In the 1960s, Suellen Rocca was a member of the Hairy Who, a group of six artists who attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the first part of the decade and exhibited together from 1966 to 1969. Though they worked independently, their art is collectively rowdy, celebratory, and vital. Their aesthetic is all-encompassing — their sources range from comics to Mesopotamian art. Rocca's work, in particular, relies in large doses on images from jewelry catalogues and kindergarten workbooks, and of household goods. The groups' teachers at SAIC, notably Whitney Halstead and Ray Yoshida, promoted a nonhierarchical view of world art and culture and made ample use in their instruction of the natural-history collections in Chicago's Field Museum. Rocca's drawings, paintings, and objects from that period use abstracted, intimate forms to create a personal iconography — often in hieroglyphs of repeating elements — that elicits a sense of pleasure in romance, female sexuality, and domestic life. By 1968, Rocca was married with two young children; she balanced motherhood with work in her studio. "It was wonderful," she recalls. "It was a happy time."

But in 1975, she and her husband divorced, and Rocca stopped making art during the 1970s. When she returned to artmaking in 1981 (also returning to Chicago from the Bay Area), her work was decidedly different. Anxiety, threat, and psychic distress became the subjects of ferocious drawings, with titles such as "It's a Secret" (1981), "Scary Travel" (1981), and "Don't" (1981). Rocca maintained some visual themes from her '60s work, including figures, cars, hands, and bags, but her formerly joyful iconographies become syntactically dark, with the addition of knives, poison, and flame-like forms. By the end of the decade, however, her drawings took a curious turn. Rather than try to regain



Suellen Rocca, "It's a Secret" (1981), graphite on paper, 11 x 14 inches

Rudick, Nicole. "Suellen Rocca Turns an Inward Eye." *Hyperallergic*, October 13, 2018.

the playful symphony of forms that characterizes her work from the '60s, Rocca pursued and honed a new area of exploration, her interior life.

In *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929), Rainer Maria Rilke writes, “We have no reason to mistrust our world, for it is not against us. Has it terrors, they are our terrors; has it abysses, those abysses belong to us; are dangers at hand, we must try to love them. And if only we arrange our life according to that principle which counsels us that we must always hold to the difficult, then that which now still seems to us the most alien will become what we most trust and find most faithful.” This passage from *Letters* appears in Ray Yoshida’s handwritten notes from around 1960, the year that Rocca began at SAIC and attended his first-year drawing class. Yoshida famously encouraged an instinctual approach to art — based on the idea that inspiration could come from anywhere — and preached unfettered possibility. In an oral-history interview in 2015, Rocca recalls, “Ray was interested in [students] finding their voice: ‘What is it you want to say? Forget about any of the other stuff.’” Rilke’s advice — to embrace fears and hardships as our own — filters through Yoshida’s emphasis on personal expression to animate Rocca’s artmaking, from her return to art in 1981 through her present work. Rather than sidestep her emotional suffering, she took a full accounting of it, and it transformed her art.

This evolution of her drawing practice is illustrated in a current survey at Matthew Marks Gallery of 30 works on paper made between 1981 and 2017. The seven drawings dating from 1981 and 1982 express a high level of anxiety. It is work that Rocca describes as “cathartic” and a “visual exorcism.” She recalls that it was “good to be making work again” and is quick to point out that she considers all of her art to be autobiographical. “It reflects where I am in my life,” she says, “what I’m thinking.” In “It’s a Secret,” a large figure shown from the shoulders up dominates the drawing; in place of the head are wild, upright, bulbous stalks of hair, like the stout columns of pillar coral. An opening at the figure’s neck reveals a second, smaller figure: a woman weeping into a handkerchief. On her left are drawings of an injured hand, and below her is the phrase, rendered in dashed lines, resembling embroidery stitches, *Im not supposed to do that*.

“It’s a Secret” reads like an inversion of the 1967 painting “Foot Smells.” In this earlier work, a golden-blond hairdo frames a woman’s face, which is inscribed with many of Rocca’s then-signature elements: palm trees, dancing couples, legs, and other cartoonishly rendered forms. The face looks outward, reflecting the world around it. It is a keen illustration of the way Rocca gathered visual material, which could also be read as a note on identity — these are the images that caught her attention, that interested her, that informed her art. “It’s a Secret” is likewise a measure of self, but one that opens inward, onto the psychic landscape.

“Don’t” (1981) shows a road cobbled with oblong stones that carry images of brick walls, eyes, and the words “don’t” and “be good.” The cobbled pattern of the road resembles platelets, as if Rocca’s anxieties are so internalized as to be biological. The road also bears figures with arms and legs splayed, like Xs, hinting at both vulnerability and negation. This form recurs in a much later drawing, “Teta” (2012). The latter’s title refers to the name of Rocca’s grandson’s teddy bear, and the show’s catalogue describes the game of hide-and-seek she would play with her grandson and Teta. The drawing is gridded, showing the bear, always in a spread-eagle position, concealed in various





Suellen Rocca, "Neatest Garbage" (1982), graphite and colored pencil on paper, 29 x 23 inches

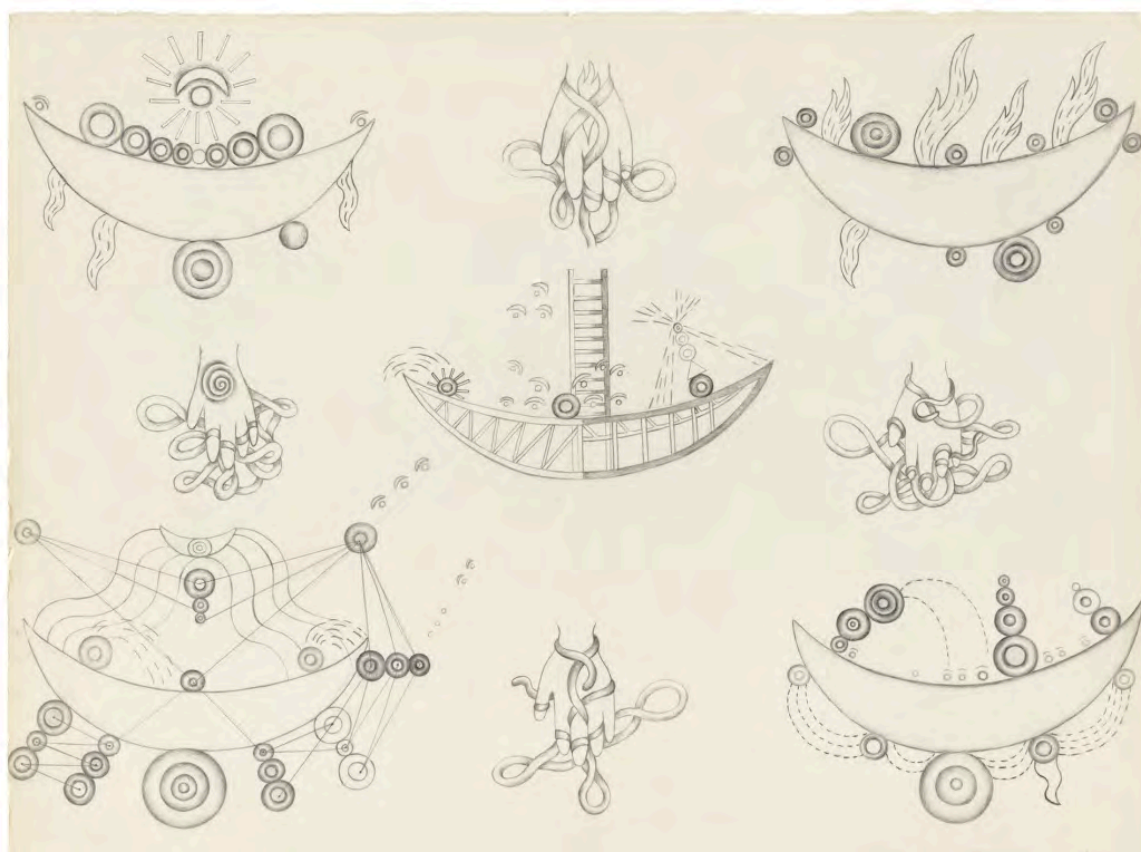
hiding places. Often, he seems to be disappearing: he is rendered in dashed lines, for instance, or as a faint shadow behind an overwhelming pattern. In two squares of the grid and in a row of smaller squares that line the bottom of the drawing, Teta's form is reduced to an X with a head atop it or inverted, with the head below. In this abridged state, Teta is a cousin to the simplified icons in Rocca's 1960s drawings — brisk renderings of peeled bananas, crossed legs, and palm trees. What's more, she frequently placed a row of playful forms across the bottom of her drawings and paintings in the '60s. But in "Teta," it's tempting to read a soft but stern warning in the 15 penciled bear-Xs in quick succession along the bottom edge.

In two drawings from 1982 — "Neatest Garbage" and "Tale of the Two Legged Bunny" — Rocca reimagines the purses and handbags that featured in much of her art from the late '60s, including the sculptures "Purse Curse" (1968) and "Mm..." (ca. 1968). In these earlier works, the notion of, for example, a hand reaching into a pink purse adorned with a kissing couple carries a definite erotic charge. But these pleasure purses transform in the 1980s into containers of threat. In "Tale of the



Two Legged Bunny,” a hand reaches into a bag containing sharp objects, angry dogs, and guns. The intricate pattern on the hand includes two images of couples kissing around the word “kisses,” a reminder of the celebratory romance of the early work, now engulfed in dangers. In “Neatest Garbage,” the bag is punctured with holes and its secrets and sinister contents flow out in small streams. The vibrant zig-zags that delineate the bag and various areas of the paper — rendered in blue, brown, red, yellow, and peach — buzz discordantly and warn of peril. They are echoed in the jagged graphite lines, like tiny hackles, of the sharp-toothed dogs that stand guard in the foreground.

A drawing from 1982 not included in this show is the self-portrait “Let Her Be.” It depicts a figure from the shoulders up, facing the viewer, and rendered through intersecting and curving bundles of striated bands. The head is studded with 17 eyes, and the titular phrase is written in cursive from shoulder to shoulder. The body is ringed by flame- or leaf-like forms, which are echoed by a widening shadow and hints of color. Above the figure, a body of water spans the width of the paper, its waves, like fire, walling off a castle in the far distance. “Let Her Be” was one of more than 100 works in the 2015-2016 group exhibition *Surrealism: The Conjured Life* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. The show drew from the museum’s collection and reflected the city’s storied history with Surrealist art (some of the museum’s founding members were also avid collectors). The inclusion of Rocca’s drawing is significant, as it situates this post-1981 work within a lineage of art that mines unconscious and psychic states through the evocation of dream imagery, and it reflects on an important shift that occurred in her work in 1989.



Suellen Rocca, “Ancestor Signs” (1999-2012), graphite on paper, 22 1/4 x 30 inches

Rudick, Nicole. “Suellen Rocca Turns an Inward Eye.” *Hyperallergic*, October 13, 2018.

In the late 1980s, Rocca had a “powerful” dream in which she saw a trio of pelicans in as many boats. In 1989, she produced a suite of three drawings inspired by that vision: “Astronavigate,” “Three Birds and Three Boats Over Again,” and “Family Passage.” These drawings are airy and measured in comparison with those produced earlier in the decade; they are cosmic and meditative. In “Astronavigate,” neat rows of geometric shapes, spirals, and concentric designs cut diagonally across the field of paper; above and below, two birds ride crescent-moon-shaped boats across the page. The composition of “Three Birds” is more abstract. The birds are simplified and float within nets of circles interconnected by thin lines, like constellations. Three boats hover above the bird forms, gliding through the emptiness of the paper. The zig-zag lines from “Neatest Garbage” return in “Family Passage,” but now they appear as soft, geometric rays guiding boats, as on a celestial river. The anxieties from early in the decade are transformed in these three drawings through notions of transition and passage. It is as though Rocca’s dream imagery showed her a way forward — a way, as Rilke put it, to transform the alien in us to “what we most trust.”

Rocca develops this new language throughout the 1990s, expressing states of being through the repetition of boats, ladders, and organic forms, while still populating her work with external imagery. In “Rehearsal of Descending and Ascending the Ladder” (1990), the delicate outline of a figure in the bough of a tree was inspired by an Indian miniature of a prince in a tree, and the fish that become part of her lexicon in the late ’90s — and which help illustrate a sense of loss, of “not being able to hold onto things,” she says, “and things flowing away” — stem from a dream she had while studying the work of German Expressionist Max Beckmann. (At the time, Rocca was working on a master’s degree in art history and writing a paper on the symbolism of fish in Beckmann’s art.) In the early 1990s, she introduced long, vining ropes into her drawings that spiral and coil and knot. In “Rope Tree and Ladder IV” (1991), the twining rope grows out of a figure’s head and arm, and wraps, Rapunzel-like, around the branches and trunk of a tree. By 1997, in “Fish Dream Two,” that same rope becomes the outline of a body. Looking back to the ’60s, it’s evident that this snaking line was always part of her work: as a descriptor of bodies (in “Dream Girl,” 1968, for instance) and as ornament (“Sleepy-Head with Handbag,” 1968, is rife with it, especially in the maze-like squiggles at bottom). By the end of ’90s, the rope itself largely disappears, as the torsos that come to populate her drawings adopt its meandering, fluid qualities for their shape.

But first, the boats and ropes, as well as the abstract symbology from the trio of 1989 drawings, recur in “Ancestor Signs,” begun in 1999 and completed in 2012. Rocca combines these various elements in nine discrete, syntactically complex images and sets them in a grid, a structure reminiscent of 1960s drawings such as “Game Page with Poodle” (ca. 1968) and “Unscramble” (ca. 1966–67). The pictorial system of that early work comes full circle in her drawings from the past few years. A suite of three from 2017 — “Page A,” “Page B,” and “Page C” — revives a sense of the grid and of a hieroglyphic syntax. The imagery in these drawings is inspired by Rocca’s discovery, in 2016, of dollhouse furniture she saved from the 1950s; a miniature chair, bed, table, birdcage, and piano now reside around her drawing table. The chair rests on her windowsill, and, she says, “because my studio is on the second floor, I can look out, across the way, and see a chair the same size.” Of this interest in matters of perspective, she notes that “things we know we take for granted.” In a curious way, the collapsing of difference and distance between the small the large, the near and far, mirrors the collapsed space between her interior world and the surface of the paper — a process

of examination Rocca is not willing to take for granted. Likewise, she says of her recent interest in drawing and painting clouds, “I see them all the time, but [now] I’ve been *looking* at them.”

Rocca’s close interior gaze and her working out of inner states on paper rhyme with Louise Bourgeois’s long self-examination through her art. Bourgeois, too, found solace and inspiration in putting her unconscious on the page. She describes the negative memories that make their way into her “Insomnia Drawings” as “problems to be solved.” The inexpressible, it seems, is only so when it remains unexpressed. Or, as Rilke muses later in Yoshida’s transcribed passage, “Perhaps everything terrifying is at bottom the helplessness that seeks out help.”

Suellen Rocca: Drawings *continues at Matthew Marks (526 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 27th.*



## THE NEW YORKER

### Suellen Rocca

#### Marks

CHELSEA The roguish artist was an original member of the Hairy Who, a six-person collective associated with the Chicago Imagists of the late nineteen-sixties. Rocca forged her own subtly satirical graphic lexicon within the Pop-surrealist sensibility of this milieu. In this exhibition of quietly hallucinatory drawings, made between 1981 and 2017, silhouettes of Teddy bears and doves float in tricky compositions of dense patterning, disorienting negative space, and fractured figuration. In the particularly intricate graphite-and-colored-pencil work "Tale of the Two Legged Bunny," from 1982, rabbits and birds carrying worms gather on one side as wolf heads and flying knives rally on the other. All this takes place in a cartoony landscape overlaid with a transparent sack and a pebbled hand. Rocca's wonderfully illogical sense of space and the barbed femininity of her symbols are a winning combination.—*Johanna Fateman*  
(Through Oct. 27.)

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

## CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

\* ART

09/22/2018, 08:00am

### Who was Hairy Who? Art Institute exhibit clarifies the influential Chicago group



*"Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature," by Suellen Rocca (1965) is part of the "Hairy Who?" exhibition. | The Art Institute of Chicago, Frederick W. Renshaw Acquisition and Carol Rosenthal-Groeling Purchase funds. © Suellen Rocca.*

By Kyle MacMillan - For the Sun-Times

Starting when she was 8 years old, Suellen Rocca took Saturday children's art classes at the Art Institute of Chicago.

MacMillan, Kyle. "Who was Hairy Who? Art Institute exhibit clarifies the influential Chicago group."  
*Chicago Sun-Times*, September 22, 2018.

“I would stand on the steps outside waiting for my mother to pick me up,” she said, “and I would dream that someday maybe I would have work of mine in the Art Institute.”

That dream will reach its full realization Sept. 26 when she and the other five members of Hairy Who will be featured in what the museum is billing as the “first-ever major survey exhibition” devoted to the short-lived but hugely influential Chicago group.

**“Hairy Who? 1966-1969”**

When: Sept. 26 through Jan. 6, 2019

Where: Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan

Admission: Free with regular museum admission

Info: [artic.edu](http://artic.edu)

The show, titled “Hairy Who? 1966-69,” will contain about 225 paintings, sculptures and works on paper as well as related ephemera by Jim Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Rocca and Karl Wirsum (all still active and still friends).

“When this is all over with and the [accompanying] book is out in the world, we hope that people can appreciate how significant what they did was and continues to be,” said Mark Pascale, the Art Institute’s curator of prints and drawings. He and Thea Liberty Nichols, a researcher in prints and drawings, co-organized the show with Ann Goldstein, the Art Institute’s deputy director and chair and curator of modern and contemporary art.

The show is part of Art Design Chicago, a yearlong series of exhibitions, publications and programs spearheaded by the Terra Foundation for American Art that spotlight the city’s rich art and design history.

Working between figuration and abstraction, the six Hairy Who artists bucked the dominant New York art trends and created their own off-kilter, Chicago-centric, sometimes erotically charged style that drew on down-to-earth sources like tattoos, games and comic strips.

A work that the museum is using as a kind of calling card for the show is Wirsum’s “Screamin’ Jay Hawkins” (1968), a 48-by-36-inch acrylic on canvas that pays homage to the rock ’n’ roll singer best known for “I Put a Spell on You.” His name dances across the top of this cartoonish, poster-like painting, which explodes with electric colors and throbbing patterns.

In the mid-1960s, a group of five largely unknown artists in their early and mid-20s approached Don Baum, exhibition chairman at the Hyde Park Art Center, about a possible exhibition. Tired of being





*The museum is using Karl Wirsum's "Scream' Jay Hawkins (1968) as something of a calling card for "Hairy Who?" | The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Purchase Prize Fund. © Karl Wirsum.*

overlooked in large group presentations, they thought that a show focused on a smaller number of artists would give them more visibility.

Baum agreed but suggested they add Wirsum, a sixth artist he thought would be complementary.

The new addition walked into the group's first meeting as the five were talking about art critic Harry Bouros. Wirsum asked, "Harry who?" The group immediately seized upon the question as its name, mischievously changing the spelling to Hairy Who.

The first Hyde Park show opened Feb. 25, 1966, and the six Hairy Who artists became "local celebrities overnight," according to Nichols' essay in the retrospective's accompanying catalog.

The group had two more shows at the Hyde Park Center (the Art Institute's retrospective marks the 50th anniversary of the third and last one). The critical attention they generated led to other exhibitions in San Francisco, New York and Washington, D.C., before the six disbanded in 1969.

The Hairy Who artists were later grouped with what became known as the Chicago Imagists, an amorphous classification that has since sowed confusion. One of the biggest misconceptions is exactly who was in Hairy Who.

“Even though you would think that people who are familiar with the art world would know who the six members of the Hairy Who are,” said Nilsson, “there is constant confusion: ‘Oh, yes, Ed Paschke was a Hairy Who. Oh, Roger Brown was a Hairy Who.’ No, no.”

Indeed, the point of this exhibition, Pascale said, is to shine the spotlight on this group of six artists for the first time in such a focused way and definitively answer the question posed by the show's title: Hairy Who?



Jim Nutt's "Wowidow" from 1968. | The Art Institute of Chicago, The Lacy Armour and Samuel and Blanche Koffler Acquisition funds; the Estate of Walter Aitken. © Jim Nutt.

MacMillan, Kyle. "Who was Hairy Who? Art Institute exhibit clarifies the influential Chicago group." *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 22, 2018.





Art Green's "Consider the Options, Examine the Facts, Apply the Logic (originally titled *The Undeniable Logician*") from 1965. | Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, Anonymous Gift. © Art Green.

“Finally, attentions are being paid to the initial group that started it all,” Nilsson said. “The Hairy Who is very specific, and we were first, and it’s very nice to be recognized as such. It makes me very feel old, but there you have it.”

The show is divided into two sections. The largest in the Rice Building will partially re-create the Hairy Who’s six exhibitions, including a close facsimile of the linoleum that Hairy Who used as a wall-covering in at least one of the Hyde Park shows.

“We’re not trying to ape their exhibition plans,” Pascale said, “but we have a lot of great photographic sources, and we were able to find a lot of the works and, in some cases, we will hang them in a way that is similar to the way they hung them originally.”

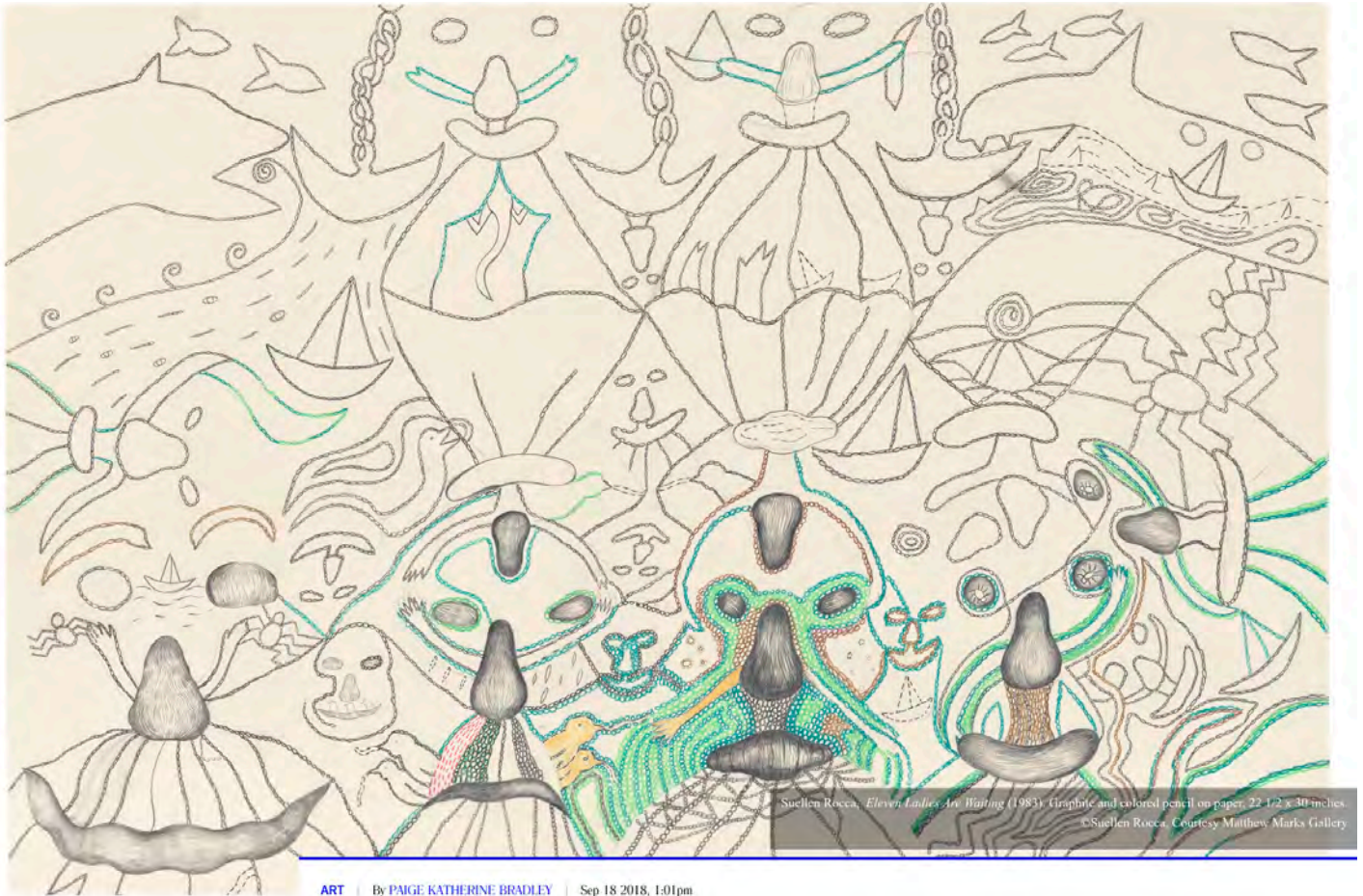


MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# GARAGE

GARAGE Magazine



Suellen Rocca, *Eleven Ladies Are Waiting* (1983). Graphite and colored pencil on paper, 22 1/2 x 30 inches.  
©Suellen Rocca. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

ART | By PAIGE KATHERINE BRADLEY | Sep 18 2018, 1:01pm

## Suellen Rocca's Graphite Gorgeousness Can Rock Our World

A doyenne of American surrealism speaks on the inspiration of kindergarten course books and drawing from the internal.

Bradley, Paige Katherine. "Suellen Rocca's Graphite Gorgeousness can rock our world." *Garage Magazine*, September 18, 2018.

Suellen Rocca is an artist who first became known for her work with the Chicago Imagists, a.k.a. the Hairy Who, whose collaborative shows during the 1960s have become a touchstone for contemporary artists who freely traverse boundaries between visual mediums, such as comics or design, and academically-trained fine art. This dynamic was explored in a 2015 exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery, *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present*, which included Rocca's work along with that of her Chicago associates and other freewheeling agents of radical American aesthetics. A new solo show of her latest drawings, as well as a selection from the 1980s, opened at the same gallery last week, so we caught up with her to discuss working in groups versus solo, pop art, and taking cues from the kids.



Suellen Rocca, *Don't* (1981). Graphite and colored pencil on paper, 14 x 11 inches. ©Suellen Rocca, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

GARAGE: In this exhibition are drawings you made from the 1980s until last year. Is this the second solo show you've done in New York now?

Suellen Rocca: Yes.



GARAGE: You've described this work as being "more internal" than the paintings you were doing in the 1960s, some of which were shown here in 2016. And following that idea of working from an intuitive place, these were also made at a time when you were also working solo, rather than in the context of the Hairy Who group as you were doing back in the '60s?

Rocca: The Hairy Who—or Chicago Imagists as we're now called—showed as a group from '66 to '69 with six exhibitions—three were in Chicago at the Hyde Park Art Center, one was at the San Francisco Art Institute, another at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and one in New York at the School of Visual Arts. That one was a drawing show. We didn't show as a group after that.

GARAGE: How did your work change or develop after you stopped showing together and collaborating?

Rocca: I think my work changed, but not so much for that reason. I had moved to northern California in the 1970s with my family and I wasn't making work. I was there from about '72 to '80, and even after I came back to Chicago, until about '81, I took a hiatus from making. The first four drawings in this show were done in 1981, and the work became more expressive of where I was at the time.

GARAGE: Did you feel like you were approaching things in a very different way when you started again? Did you have really different concerns or interests by then?

Rocca: We all go through different transitions in life, and I think it was more related to that.

GARAGE: They're very quiet and subtle, and the softness of the graphite throughout the drawings feels like a real shift from the colorful and graphic paintings you did in the '60s, or the purse sculptures from the same time. The tone of this work is very different.

Rocca: If one were to generalize, I think the imagery in my work from the Hairy Who period was more about external things, things from the culture. I was in my twenties raising children then, and reflecting the popular culture around me by depicting things like diamond rings and working with the purses. The work starting in the early '80s was more about what was going on with me internally.

GARAGE: Does the text in these drawings, as in one of the earliest ones here, *Don't* (1981) and some others, come from thoughts you have while you're drawing, or is the text from another source, like something you'd already written and then use as a source to pull from for the drawings?





Suellen Rocca, *Page A* (2017). Graphite on paper, 22 1/2 x 30 inches. ©Suellen Rocca, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Rocca: I like that question, but the words came as I was doing the work rather than from journals or previous writing. I don't think of the words as being separate, I think of them as images.

GARAGE: You studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and graduated in 1964, after which in 1966 you became part of this Hairy Who group that was taking influence from a broad range of visual culture, not just art history.

Rocca: Well, certainly art history was important to all of us. Going to school at SAIC, you're right in the museum. We were encouraged by teachers like Whitney Halstead to go and look at indigenous art, not just Western art, and to go to the Field Museum of Natural History, which has wonderful collections of Oceanic art. Inspiration came from popular culture, but it also came from many, many other sources of visual culture. Egyptian hieroglyphs are a good reference for me, because of the sort of picture writing that I did. Also, when I was looking for resource material for the book based on my previous show, I discovered a box of my 1950s plastic dollhouse furniture. The objects in a lot of the drawings in this show, such as *Page A* (2017), are based on those pieces of dollhouse furniture.

I was also inspired by the visual idioms of catalogues—my father-in-law was a jeweler, and I was inspired by rows of diamond rings and things like the Sears catalog for its colors, imagery, and the compositions in it. There have been some very good things written about the difference between pop art in New York and what has become known as Imagist work in Chicago, since they happened at the same time.

GARAGE: What do you think the difference was?

Rocca: I'm the curator of an extraordinary collection of Chicago Imagist work at Elmhurst College in Illinois, and the short answer I give on the subject when leading tours is that while New York was cool, Chicago was hot. So, although we were inspired by maybe some of the same sources, in New York the approach was taking that piece of popular culture and putting it into a new context, changing everything by putting it in the gallery. In Chicago, we processed similar material in a very personal way, along with those other influences I mentioned. It was a more idiosyncratic expression. One thing that I think the upcoming Hairy Who exhibition at the Art Institute will establish is that this was not just a Midwest expression of pop art, that it is a style in its own right.

GARAGE: Kindergarten workbooks were mentioned in the description for your last show, of the work in the '60s. Did you teach kindergarten at all, or were you looking at these when your own children were in kindergarten?

Rocca: I have taught young children, but the kindergarten pre-readers from my own childhood were an inspiration before I was teaching kids. I was interested in how these materials had a kind of picture writing, similar to the hieroglyphics. When I was in California during the '70s and I wasn't making my own work, I taught preschool at a private school, on what had originally been a ranch, in a big red barn. I loved the children's drawings and paintings, and that's been an inspiration for me. I love children's perceptions because they really see things. They haven't seen them before, so they really see them. What I tell my older students now is you need to look, because after we think we've seen things we don't look at them anymore.

Suellen Rocca: *Drawings is on view at Matthew Marks Gallery's 526 W 22nd Street location through October 27, 2018.*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS

### New York

#### Suellen Rocca

**MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 523 WEST 24TH STREET**  
**523 West 24th Street**  
**September 9–October 22**

Paintings, drawings, purses—if one of these things does not belong, then who really wants to be in that club? Suellen Rocca's show of twenty-five works from 1965 to 1969, featuring that happy trio, blithely goes its own way, giving pointers to younger artists who incorporate the bold outlines and bright colors of comics, animation, and traditional illustration in their paintings. Mind you, this isn't some wiseass appropriationist's high/low move—Rocca's pictures are resolutely hieroglyphic, and what they take from the ancients gets made up into wiggly modern forms with funky, plastic colors. A pinup-posed figure shrinks away in *Bare Shouldered Beauty*, 1965, while stuttering scenarios wallpaper the background. Its language is a cipher, but this doesn't date it, as the scattered focus has the frequency of now.

The title for the drawing *Easy to Handle*, 1968, announces itself in the picture with cursive relish. In it, a faceless figure gingerly holds up a bag that promises her ease and deference. Her loins sport lovers doing a bland smooch surrounded by an aura of "ahs" and a "kiss me." Beneath the scene the artist pays herself a compliment: "This is a lovely picture." Against a black ground, drooping fingers, or dicks, point to hovering flicks of cotton fuzz, which set Our Lady of the Lovely Picture in bright relief. *Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature*, 1965, seems to be the anchor of the show. The oil-on-canvas diptych is predominately pink, with accents of lime green and chocolate brown. Organized with a rough symmetry, it sends the eye bopping around like a pinball. You can try counting the bottles, sofas, and ice-cream cones for clues, but in the end, Rocca's world might just be out of your league.

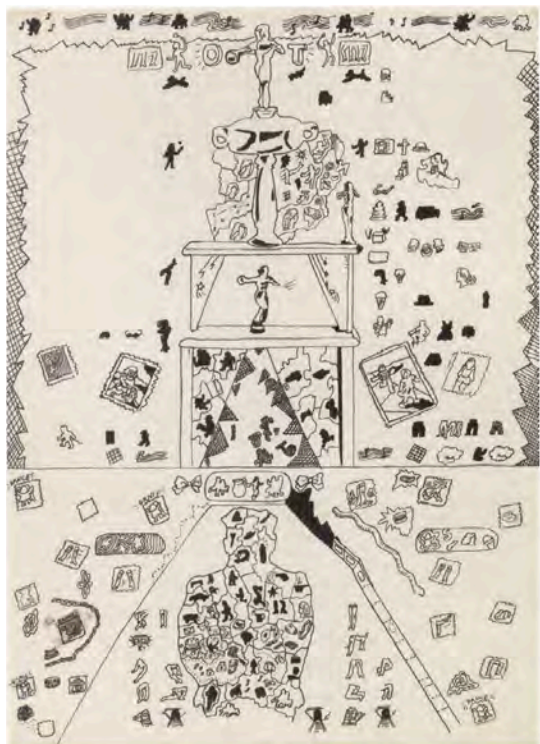


**Suellen Rocca, *Easy to Handle*, 1968,**  
colored pencil, ink, and cotton on paper, 29 x 23".

— Paige K. Bradley



# Art in America



Suellen Rocca:  
*Big Policeman*,  
ca. 1968, ink on  
paper, 25 by  
18 inches; at  
Matthew Marks.

## SUELLEN ROCCA

Matthew Marks

The recent proliferation of smart, funny, cartoony paintings by younger artists in New York has coincided with the rediscovery, through a spate of museum and gallery shows, of work by artists who made smart, funny, cartoony work half a century ago, often outside New York. It's not clear which trend is driving the other, but both are certainly welcome. The two-dozen works by Suellen Rocca in her first New York solo show were made between 1965 and 1969, while she was exhibiting with the Hairy Who, the standard-bearers for the larger Chicago Imagist group.

Given that she was twenty-two and a recent graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago when she made the four largest paintings in the show, it's no surprise that they're not as accomplished as the later drawings and paintings here. The word COMICS cuts across the diptych *Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature* (1965)—the largest piece, at just under seven feet tall and ten feet wide—and identifies a major source of her imagery. The canvas is jam-packed with small pictograms—flat forms with bold outlines—that represent ice cream cones, people, and furniture. Reminiscent of Egyptian

hieroglyphs, Rocca's emblems reflect the visual culture of midcentury American suburbia, a world of advertisements, cartoons, and junk food. The palette is dominated by dirty peach and pea green, applied in an unfussy manner on some of the pictograms. Others are left bare so that the gessoed surface of the canvas and a few stray marks of charcoal underdrawing are visible. Despite this lack of finish, which feels indebted to a kind of residual art-school expressionism, the work, like Rocca's other large paintings, has chutzpah. It reflects an encyclopedic ambition to create a dense visual catalogue on such a scale that the work barely fits through a gallery door.

In the following four years, Rocca stuck to her root language of iconic forms rendered bluntly, as if constrained by the conditions of a cheap printing process. But she transformed her subject matter through more complex compositional techniques so that her pictograms create unexpected resonances with dream imagery. She experimented most freely as a draftsman. *Big Policeman* (ca. 1968) is a crisp, black pen-and-ink work on paper featuring a menagerie of tiny objects, including pants, pine trees, and poodles. These elements are layered and superimposed, creating odd negative spaces and complicating the meaning of each iconic form. A cop's silhouette is filled with squiggly lines that separate it into three dozen smaller spaces, the way geographic boundaries function on a map. The figure is in the bottom third of the composition and separated from the upper portion by a line, above which is a shelving unit with bowling trophies. A complete description of any of these drawings would fill a novella, but this drawing, with its repeating pyramid shapes and masculine icons, suggests how imposing figures can be broken down into many small parts.

By the time Rocca painted *Palm Finger*, in 1968, her mastery of color had caught up to her compositional virtuosity. She switched palettes for different parts of this painting. Against a sky-blue background, a giant phallic finger is rendered in naturalistic pinks with pale blue veins. On its tip sits a palm tree in a full chromatic scale. Two braids of green, yellow, and purple yarn serve as a frame for the picture, and pick up the colors in the palm tree.

The show's bet on Rocca's timeliness is a good one. Dana Schutz and Trenton Doyle Hancock are only two of the best known of the countless younger artists working with cartoon-inspired figuration. Rocca approached pop culture through humor and the uncanny. It's inspiring to think of the twenty-something Rocca, often working while her two young children slept, riffing on commercial culture's id.

—Julian Kreimer

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

THE  
NEW YORKER



**SUELLEN ROCCA**

September 9 2016 - October 22 2016

A lesser-known member of a lesser-known art movement—the bumptiously surrealistic Chicago Hairy Who of the nineteen-sixties—Rocca is a find. Her hyperactive paintings and drawings of pictographic glyphs, frolicking figures, cartooned common objects, and wordplay (a diptych from 1965 is titled “Bare Shouldered Beauty and the Pink Creature”) enlist formal ingenuity to ends of flagrant charm. Romantic excitement is a theme, or at least a beleaguering condition. Certain outlined figures prophesy Keith Haring, down to the radiating lines.

“Suellen Rocca.” *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2016.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

artnet® news

Opinion

## Suellen Rocca: A Woman's Take on the 'Hairy Who'

THE DAILY PIC: At Matthew Marks, the Chicago Imagist revels in breasts and pink paint.

Blake Gopnik, September 29, 2016



**THE DAILY PIC** (#1645): *The Pink Creature on TV* is a painting by Suellen Rocca from around 1965. It is now in a solo show of her '60s works on view at Matthew Marks gallery in New York – Rocca's first-ever such show in the city. That's a surprise because Rocca was a founding member of the famous Chicago "Imagist" group called the Hairy Who. It's less of a surprise given that she was one of only two women among its four men.

But in fact it's Rocca's female imagery and esthetics – all those boobs; all that pink – that I find notably compelling, since it's rare for art in this mode at this date. "Imagist" distortions and disjunctions seem to make special sense in dealing with the distortions and disjunctions imposed by life in a misogynist culture. (©Suellen Rocca, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)



## HYPERALLERGIC

### Best of 2016: Our Top 20 NYC Art Shows

This list barely scratches the surface of the city's artistic offerings this year, from overdue retrospectives to surprising sides of artists we know well.



Hyperallergic December 27, 2016

New York is no longer the center of the art world, its art scene is doomed, and artists are fleeing because the rent is too damn high. Writers can declare all sorts of doomsday scenarios, but the fact remains: New York is still an incredible place to see art. This list of 20 exhibitions (plus honorable mentions) barely scratches the surface of the city's artistic offerings this year, from overdue retrospectives to surprising sides of artists we know well. It provides a small comfort: 2016 may have been really shitty, but at least we saw some really good art.

#### 12. Suellen Rocca: *Bare Shouldered Beauty, Works from 1965 to 1969* at Matthew Marks Gallery

September 9–October 22



Suellen Rocca, "Paul's Umbrella Painting" (1968), oil on canvas (photo by Benjamin Sutton/Hyperallergic)

After getting a taste of her delightfully colorful, whimsical, and comics-influence work in *What Nerve!* (also at Matthew Marks Gallery, in the summer of 2015), I was delighted to delve deeper into Suellen Rocca's Hairy Who-era paintings, drawings, and drawn-on objects. Spanning just five years, the works offered a glimpse of a strange world with its own playful iconography — featureless torsos and faces, umbrellas, underwear, palm trees, car radios, hands, handbags, and other icons of

everyday Americana — deployed in enigmatic compositions. Like so many of this year's best gallery shows, it left me wanting to see a lot more (hint, hint, Whitney Museum). — *Benjamin Sutton*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Suellen Rocca in the 1960s

by **Dan Nadel** on August 1, 2015



*Suellen Rocca, "Purse Curse" (Recto) (1968), oil on plastic purse, 8 3/4 x 5 7/8 x 2 1/2 inches (© Suellen Rocca, all images courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)*

It starts with the pink purse. On one side is a finger pointing to, what, a bunny rabbit? If so, it's a worried rabbit, emanating nervous squiggles. On the other is a quavering blue outline of a couple, their heads pressed together, lips locked, the same squiggles surrounding them like a halo. There is the purse, painted in 1968 or so, as simultaneously hopeful and sexy a work as I've ever seen. It reminds me of a pre-1963 world of images that did not have double meanings, and of the fantasy of love, pure and simple — blue meets pink. But the purse also conceals. What's inside? What happens after the couple kisses? Is that finger really just a finger?

Nadel, Dan. "Suellen Rocca in the 1960s." *Hyperallergic*, August 1, 2015.

In 1968, Suellen Rocca, the artist who painted “Purse Curse,” was a member of the [Hairy Who](#), a group of six artists who exhibited under that moniker from 1966 to 1969 in Chicago, San Francisco, New York and Washington, DC. All had graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago in the early 1960s and remained in the city. Most had also grown up there, and the Hairy Who exhibitions represented a home-grown art style that trafficked in highly personal visual languages rendered in bold lines and exuberant colors, and embraced an omnivorous array of influences, from pre-Columbian art to Joan Miró to barbershop signs.

Suellen Krupp was raised into art by her supportive Jewish family. Middle-class and, on her mother’s side, all highly musical. “I was a good student,” she says. “I always finished my work in plenty of time and then I would draw. When I was in third grade, my teacher collected all my drawings at the end of the class and hung them in the hall outside my classroom. It was my first exhibition! She called my mother and told her to sign me up for classes at the Art Institute, which my mother did.”

Classes at the museum were held in the grand Fullerton Hall and in the galleries themselves. These classes, to which mothers would escort their children on endless El rides, were incubators for a number of prominent artists, including Rocca’s Hairy Who compatriot, Gladys Nilsson. At age eight, the young artist was drawing from a live model and carrying a sketchbook everywhere she went.

In 1960, just sixteen years old, she entered college at the School of the Art Institute. Rocca says she “grew up in the Art Institute. It was like a second home.” There she met Ray Yoshida, a profound influence on her generation of artists. Yoshida, she notes, “was able to see things in your work, possibilities and directions, that you didn’t even know of. And he would very quietly come by and drop a book next to you. It might be Kandinsky or whoever, and allow you to make the connection. He emphasized that anything could be an influence.”

To that end, Rocca will mention Egyptian hieroglyphics as easily as Peter Saul, or the voluminous jewelry catalogues her husband, Dennis, whom she married in 1962, would bring home. These catalogues jibed with Rocca’s childhood memories of kindergarten pre-readers: “I liked the little simple black line drawings. They were so incongruous. You might have a person’s finger ringing a bell, a man’s head, a hat ...” Taking cues from the simplicity of these readers and the rigid grids of catalogues, Rocca developed a kind of picture-writing using her own vocabulary of colorful glyphs. Ultimately, she was writing her autobiography — her drawings and paintings are very directly about her life at the time.





Suellen Rocca, "Chocolate Chip Cookie" (1965), oil on canvas, two panels. 7 x 10 ft (© Suellen Rocca)  
(click to enlarge)

"Chocolate Chip Cookie" (1965), a 7 x 10-foot diptych in purple, green, and brown, is the perfect example of Rocca's early aesthetic — embracing couples drift across the painting, grounded by fields of purple as well as raw canvas. A bare-shouldered woman dominates the picture (at one point, à la Goya, another semi-nude seems to swallow a man's body), which also contains clusters of rings, cookies, and glyphs of men in hats, women's faces and ice cream cones. These groups are arranged almost like a topographical map, as if the artist were inviting the viewer in for an easy reading, only to rebuke any attempt at a simple interpretation through variation upon variation of symbols and groupings.

In the ensuing few years Suellen had two children and kept at it in the studio. "I was this young mother making these paintings. It was a wonderful period. My son would take a nap and I'd rush to my knotty pine studio and work on a painting. Having a toddler and a baby, and all these exciting shows, it was wonderful. It was a happy time."





Suellen Rocca, "Handbag" (1968), ink on paper, 23 3/4 x 17 7/8 inches

Later works, like "Palm Finger" (1968), are more intimate and less busy: a palm tree (the palm tree icon being a constant presence in her work — an easily recognizable symbol of vacation and exoticism) exuberantly balanced on a tumescent finger with amoebae and high heel-clad legs scattered around. The canvas edge is wrapped in braided rope. Here's the more surreal, and sexier, Suellen.

Another drawing, "Handbag" (1968), brings together a several of her concerns: a tilted head of phallic curls (a dreaming girl?) surrounding a vaginal crease, into which a handbag seems to be merging. All around is a field of glyphs, from stout women in profile to

tools to guns to palm trees.

Rocca has referred to these works, from the beginning of her mature phase in 1965 through 1970, when she took a decade away from art-making, simply as her "autobiography." Without ever being explicit, the work is achingly felt — a lush self-portrait of a young woman making art from her daily life, of purses and diamond rings and holidays in the sand — the dreams, hopes, and secret fantasies of America in the still-sunny 20th century.

*All quotations are from a June 2015 interview by the author with Suellen Rocca.*

Suellen Rocca's work is on view in New York for the first time in over 20 years as part of [What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present](#) at Matthew Marks Gallery (502, 522, and 526 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through August 14.

Accompanying the exhibition is [The Collected Hairy Who Publications](#), to which she also contributed.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# ARTFORUM

## New York

### “What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present”

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 502 W. 22ND STREET

502 W. 22nd Street

July 8–August 14

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 522 W. 22ND STREET

522 W. 22nd Street

July 8–August 14

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 526 WEST 22ND STREET

526 West 22nd Street

July 8–August 14

It begins with a darkened room and a gleeful sheer-noise terror from a blank screen—a ghoul running its tendrils up and down musical keys, head thrown back and shredding out its wet, throaty mating call. It's the 1990s Providence collective Forcefield, of course—audio tracks and a video dispatched straight from some utopian past. The impudence implied by the title of this exhibition of Chicago's Hairy Who and Bay Area Funk artists, in addition to the freaks and no-goodniks of collectives Destroy All Monsters and Forcefield, is apropos. Then again, any nerves one might bring on board for this show are well ironed out by the latter's don't panic room.

With the mood set, amble on over to the other two galleries of paintings, sculptures, shrouds, beautified chairs, prints, drawings, zines, and a small pink plastic purse resembling a

hat box for the shrunken among us. *Purse Curse*, 1968, is one of a few works included by Suellen Rocca, a painter associated with Hairy Who. A larger oil painting by her, *Chocolate Chip Cookie*, 1965, sticks an unassuming title to a work chock-full of big chip ideas and sweetly endearing imagery rendered in a palette of cocoa, lavender, and mint green. Nearby, fellow Hairy Who-er Gladys Nilsson and it-came-from-San Francisco troll Peter Saul make cartooning as strange as pure abstraction must have looked when it first debuted.

Though the works here tend to hail from the '60s and '70s via under-the-radar locales, early works by pivotal figures such as Mike Kelley attest to a slow-burn tension between the mainstream circulation of art objects and the fringes of artistic production and existence. Who needs the other side more?

— Paige K. Bradley



Suellen Rocca, *Chocolate Chip Cookie*, 1965, oil on two canvas panels, each 84 x 60".



# ARTFORUM



Irving Petlin, *Rubbings from the Calcium Garden . . . Rachel*, o/c, 120" x 96", 1969.



George Cohen, *Limbus*, m/m, 42" x 34½", 1958.

## Inwardness: Chicago Art Since 1945

MAX KOZLOFF

In Chicago for over 25 years, artists have been responding to the history of their times without feeling in the least obliged to further the history of art. They have not subscribed to the belief that the avant-garde has a monopoly on the modern. They have not understood that they are required by critics to develop a new look at regular intervals. Elsewhere, outside New York, masses of artists absorb at some distance in time and understanding the latest ideology of the art capital. They would escape their terror of being regional only at the cost of becoming provincial. Provincial art depends upon and contracts with the stylistic authority of a center. The best known art of London and Los Angeles, during the '60s, well illustrates this complimentary mode of work, although these cities had their strong regional coteries, too. Regional art derives its subjects from its immediate environment, and its style from anywhere but the center, to which it exhibits great enmity. But it often displays an ethnic and political insularity alien to those working in Chicago. Their needs, it is true, compel them to burrow within their milieu and their memory. The resulting output is fixated on its urban background, recoiling from or embracing the city, deeply entangled with conflicting moods of resentment or enthusiasm, the like of which has not been so strongly concentrated anywhere in this country. These artists seek an emotional knowledge, not the status of formal innovators, nor, still less, the portrait of a local scene. For them, what primarily distinguishes their place is not where it is on the map, but what it does, or has done, to their minds.

Much recent American art, of course, deals explicitly with its surround, for example, such idioms of high specific detail as Pop art and sharp focus Realism. In terms of outlook, procedure, and motif, they oppose each other, but their iconography is still so deliberately recognizable and public that they can be said to engage mutually with the surfaces, signs, and artifacts that form our common visual experience. Their sifted references are to a collective America, to those

images that are so ubiquitous and characteristic that they may be found anywhere in the United States — so that the country itself has become an artistic region. Ironical or documentary approaches have been adapted to this material, coloring it with different kinds of stridency, but never obscuring the fact that it is part of our national landscape.

Chicago art, on the other hand, plumbs an interior landscape that may at any moment dream of the primordial past or the upstairs attic. This work foregoes the advantages of ready correspondence between painted allusion and super-typical object, preferring instead deeply personalized, nonrecurring nightmares and traumas. They derive obliquely from the lost, garbled, peculiar experiences of separate people, and are hard to translate, or are sometimes illegible for that reason, even when projected as imaginary archetypes.

The fantasies of the Chicago school — one would not call it a movement — are as intriguing from a cultural point of view as from an artistic one. They highlight the problem of relating autobiographical impulses with general statements and formal consciousness as an overall expressive concern. In Pop art, Lichtenstein and Warhol found a shortcut to this problem by standardizing their means and programming single or serially repeated icons whose level was almost mythically American. Rosenquist and Oldenburg, both originally midwesterners (Oldenburg was, in fact, raised in Chicago and worked there as a reporter), represent the more self-involved, composite, and personally reminiscent side of Pop art. In subject, their art variably mixes meanings that we can share without much thinking with modes and conventions that require special empathy. Something similar may be said of Ed Kienholz, who is more obscure in juxtaposing objects, but also far more literalist in the furnishing of dioramic tableaux. The artists of Chicago have not extended themselves very distinctly into any of these socializing channels. To interpret their themes, we are obliged to revert to our own unedited backlog of alarms, tactile sensations, an-





H. C. Westermann, *Angry Young Machine*, wood and metal, 89" high, 1960.

Seymour Rosofsky, *The Doctors*, o/c, 49 1/4" x 65 1/2", 1967.



tagonisms, conceits, nostalgias—all those inarticulate or uncommunicable moments in our lives of which we doubt others have had any inkling. Most art at least implies some revelation about our identities and possibilities; in asking who he is, the Chicago artist irksomely provokes the question who we are.

The accelerated flow and mob of heterogeneous images in this art mark it as an urban discourse — something that could only have been inspired by the city, though it frequently is not, in any geographical sense, of the city. And even when such work deals with crowd tastes and cliché elements, it appeals to the social separatist in each viewer. Of course, a certain fondness for the creepy or the ludicrous relates a number of disparate talents and identifies them as a school. But the gamey quality of Chicago existence does less to explain this phenomenon than the literary-poetic sensibility of those artists who deem life a carnival. (A reason for that I'll mention shortly.) Then, too, the presence of an allied art — Funk — in the tasteful setting of San Francisco weakens the argument that local physical conditions are most responsible for the ornery or prickly look of Chicago art. Indeed, once he has been exposed to the second city dreamworld, the artist may leave, develop elsewhere at length,

and yet carry it all the more vividly graven in his psyche. He may gather new kinds of information, become aware of other persuasive beliefs and traditions, but nothing seems to him as tenable as a loyalty to his own inwardness. To have made art above all a vehicle for this kind of attitude is the principle of the Chicagoans.

None of this, as yet, is to talk of the content of their work. The publication of Franz Schulze's *Fantastic Images, Chicago Art Since 1945* and two retrospectives of the school, one at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and the other, pitifully truncated, at the New York Cultural Center, last summer, give us an overview of what has been accomplished. The spectacle they provide is volatile, enlivening, and problematic.

For one thing, the styles about half these artists have adopted, and in some cases, possessed, are by no means as indigenous as their imagery. Leon Golub's skinned Roman giants, Seymour Rosofsky's Ensor-like grotesques, and Ted Hal-kin's medieval whimsies feed off European art history remote from a midwestern scene. Their work contrives hallucinations of past cultures demanded by the artists' rhetoric, perhaps, or their irony, but not by any immediately obvious connection with American experience. Contrarily, in H. C. Westermann's homespun wooden cases, Ed Paschke's photographically derived cribs based on Latino and skid row sources, and Karl Wirsum's and Jim Nutt's scrambled ultrajuvenile and quite porno comic strip manner, stylistic origins have nothing to do with art at all, although they are extremely available vernacular idioms. At first sight, it is difficult to relate in any coherent fashion the European references that date from the postwar generation, and the local motifs of the younger artists in Chicago art.

However, such scope is almost inevitable whenever one considers a group of artists who use art as instinctual gratification before they turn to it as a model of ideal order. The old master accents are not eked out to persuade any one of a conservative point of view, and the kitschy icons have little to do with current bourgeois fashion. To account for this stubborn differentiation, one must recall that the time-sense of individuals often runs out of step with general history, and that individuals frequently are constrained by their painful or pleasurable conflict with the present. What might be called prophetic insights or retarded moments elsewhere pass by each other in Chicago, innocently, and without consequence.

These facts also explain what tends to unify the school as well: a chronic quoting of motifs, unwitting or conscious parodies of styles and various uncertainties of tone. Doubtless Chicago art is frequently a projection of wish and desire, but this does not make it more spontaneous than art that aspires to modify a canon of forms. On the contrary, I am struck and often interested by qualities of strain in this work—overelaborations



of crowded imagery (Gladys Nilsson, Robert Barnes, and Kerig Pope), and laboriously worked or crafted surfaces (Irving Petlin, Rosofsky, Westermann, June Leaf). It is a syndrome also familiar in the tense but otherwise quite disparate work of Lucas Samaras, John Altoon, Oyvind Fahlstrom, Peter Saul, Robert Hudson, and Bill Copley. These artists treat the picture surface or sculptural volume, not as opportunity to dispose rhythms and intervals, but as an environment to be infested with minute, creaturely episodes. Dialogues and scenarios of objects and figures are packed into corners or wriggle at the tips of masses and pleaded in unlikely spots, as if the artist fears to let go or leave something out. *Horror vacui*, then, is hardly confined to Chicago art, but it exists there most often as normal parlance. Despite the huge difference between the early painterliness of the Leon Golub-George Cohen generation, and the linear, flat, designy offerings of Wirsum and Nutt of *The Hairy Who*, more recently, a taste for garrulous narrative composition runs through them all. Their proliferating details and ceaseless iconic energy have identified for the last 25 years a common structural outlook to be found in no other art center for any comparable length of time.

Psychologically, such structure bespeaks of a storytelling interest and an animistic impulse that can be childlike when put into operation. In order to demonstrate their inner states, a goodly number of the figures in this art stick out their tongues, roll their eyes, grimace, shimmy, smirk, sweat, flex their muscles, caper, gargle, and shriek. They are relentless, rollicking muggers, carrying on in an environment which we do not know is more hysterical or hilarious. Nilsson, Leaf, Wirsum, and Paschke have retailed bodily and facial tics with a mean verve.

On the other hand, this Chicago climate encompasses an approach to life in which the capacity for human action and expression seems to have slowed, and where weight or silence, some great hushing curse, inhibits all social exchange. One has merely to look at the art of Barnes, much of Rosofsky, and a great deal of Petlin, to find an iconography of paralysis. (A bound and gagged figure, incidentally, turns up in all kinds of Chicago art from time to time.) George Cohen and Ellen Lanyon occasionally waft their people with a pleasant breeze that does not make them less uneasy or transfixed. Leon Golub's early damaged men from the beginning of the '50s are not in the least capable of motion, but their eyes probe with a malignant gaze. Their atrophied limbs combined with the overly intense facial glare of his creatures suggest that he exerted his important influence on the Chicago school by anticipating both the repressed and hyperactivated subjects of the younger artists. As for the bird-egg sculptures of Cosmo Campoli, they exhibit a rigid stance and jammed-down force, in which the larger of his dual forms protectively clenches the

smaller. It is sculpture that holds its breath in a defiant pose.

Campoli's art illustrates the cardinal point that, with the body of work produced in his city, we are dealing with proud egos conjuring their own unique race or cast of characters. Such characters are always types whose emotional traits, anatomical drawbacks, and behavior patterns could originate only in the sealed universe of their creators. As subjects, they would be vulnerable, often inconceivable in any other context. And the artist seems to feel for them that tenderness, that sometimes inexplicable love a parent has for his or her offspring—even offspring that is malformed or retarded. By now, of course, there has been much cross-fertilizing of imagery in the Chicago school; many of the younger people, and a few of their seniors, have newly assimilated a range of mannerisms that are common property. The scene verges on the promiscuous, but it is still possible to note a certain possessiveness that seems to describe the relation of many of the more original artists to their imagery. It is the pride one finds in a family whose heritage is flawed, and yet, for that reason, appears only to draw its members more closely together. No doubt there are deep unconscious causes why an artist trademarks his art by aggregations of



James Nutt, *Da Creepy Lady*, oil on acrylic, 75" x 51½", 1970.



Kerig Pope, *Infants Observing Nature*, o/c, 68½" x 84", 1962.



cheap, broken girl-baby dolls, or why he persists in an inane scatology. What can finally explain that simian crowd appearing for years in one artist's work, or what can account for a fascination with arachnoid life or the flabby obesity of the middle aged? The answers to these questions, if they could ever be determined, are medical more than they are esthetic. How very often, for instance, does Chicago art allude to sexual pathology in the presence of figures either lacking or oversupplied with genital equipment. Evoking ancient hangups, it is an unrelieving art that reopens those memory sluices of an early home life the adult is only too happy to flee, or whose closure he thought assured.

But these artists, adults themselves, are concerned with the qualities and degrees with which artistic stimuli can be phrased — not merely the outpouring of "soul." That they are grown-ups remembering and incarnating the parental figures of their childhood is a complication they welcome. Where, other than in Chicago, has there been such rich artistic commentary on the theme of the great mother? From Golub's *Sphinxes* to Westermann's *Great Mother Womb*, on to Leaf's *Woman-Theatre*, and Nutt's *Da Creepy Lady*, the female subject illuminates the stylistic course of the school. For their maturity makes these artists self-conscious, and it is their self-consciousness worked out in style and tone that provides a main critical problem.

It has always seemed to me that the burlesque framework of much Chicago art acts both as a

mask to conceal and as an aid to expose content. As it happens, an excess of bad taste may encourage the artists' authenticity — but it also functions as a mode of detachment. Their buffoonish accents do not compromise, but they do mitigate the freaky aspects of this art. We are asked to take seriously, not the literal statement, but a sensibility that can caricature itself and that thumbs its nose at its own angst.

When, on the contrary, Chicago art becomes sententious, as in Rosofsky, or decorative and refined, as in the later work of Cohen, it is likely to graft on to kitsch subjects high art styles that are too innocent of the convincing irony such work implies. Kerig Pope's slithery fauna are most imaginative, but his technique is so predictably even that they verge on the illustrative, as does also the related work of Max Ernst.

On the other hand, Ed Paschke's tattooed wrestlers and transvestites purvey a hard-core fetishism greater than anything in Chicago art. They are its most shocking insignia. "So Paschke works all day and hangs out at bars late at night. He watches people, talks with them. Sometimes he takes along a couple of different jackets when he drinks, changing his image from bar to bar to fit in with the clientele." (Quoted from Denise DeClue, *The Chicago Daily News*, July 29-30, 1972.) Paschke observes the visual icons consumed by the blue collar masses as acutely as Nelson Algren and Studs Terkel once reported their mores. More touchingly than ever in Pop

art, he offers the spectacle of Marilyn Monroe, with padded shoulders of the '50s, "in ecstasy," playing the accordion. He runs rampant with the myths of social classes and ethnic minorities other than his own.

For her part, June Leaf obtains a different kind of distancing and power by putting her characters through the paces of a vaudeville, show-must-go-on routine. In *Ascension of Pig Lady*, of 1969, their puffy, dumpy features have been smeared over with a slaphappy good cheer. Leaf acts as the nostalgic Barker for these worn goods, and her parade of floozies and bums are seen with an affection that does not have to be coy.

Chicago art wallows in kitschy moods with bloody-minded aplomb. It may roll up its shirt sleeves or unzip its fly. I know what critics mean when they speak of the Expressionist or Surrealist influences on Chicagoans, but it doesn't go far as a means of locating their garish work. A field day can be had making connections between motifs in the American and European scenes. Particularly today, Turin and Paris are more hospitable to Chicago artists than New York. I suspect that affluent Europeans see an endearing exoticism in hog-butcher tackiness, couched reassuringly in terms of yesteryear's familiar avant-gardes. But it is quite easy to overestimate these affinities; with Dali's *Persistence of Memory*, Matta's *Vertigo of Eros*, or Magritte's *Promenades of Euclid*, Chicago art has no significant rapport. In the midwest, one feels more



Gladys Nilsson, *Big Bluegoil Pynup*, watercolor on paper, 30 1/4" x 22 1/4", 1970.



Ed Paschke, *Stick Man*, acrylic, 28" x 24", 1969.



at home with a title like Gladys Nilsson's *Stompin at the Snake Pit*. Nor do Chicago artists go in for Soutine's convulsions or Beckmann's allegories. The disturbances and effusions of the Europeans were generated on a hypothetical level, soliciting response in cultural memory, or more vaguely, in something beneath or beyond it. This has not prevented Surrealism and Expressionism from alluding to attitudes of a particular time/place, but it does show something of their drive toward breadth. Chicago artists, as I've said, have no such embracing, common-denominator symbolism at their disposal. They are no more individualists than their forebears, but for them, individual, not cultural experience, is both the initial and ultimate departure made by their work. They may lack an outlook on art today, as Harold Rosenberg asserts, but they are hardly deprived of a point of view. They differ from the Surrealists because they do not have a general theory for getting at the subconscious, such as automatism. And where Expressionism married tortured form with landscape or portrait, the Chicago artists are caught up with extremely bizarre iconography that carries a heavy emotional burden in its own right. When the brackish presences of American street life penetrate their work, they play a role comparable to the myths of Surrealism, but give Chicago art a much more intimate and slangy tone before being absorbed into the psychic stew of whoever is concerned.

But these are historical and social distinctions,

not critical ones. If the critic is professionally and emotionally committed to the ideological structures of art in New York, he will be at best indifferent to that in Chicago, and can have nothing to say about it. Franz Schulze fits the painting and sculpture of his town into the category of "eccentric" — a term that certainly applies in many instances. But "eccentric" is hard to use as a critical tool because it reduces artistic manifestations to case studies. Nothing is to be learned from a criticism whose object, in the end, is defined as a quirk or a neurosis.

It seems to me, on the contrary, that we are dealing with highly conventionalized art whose persuasiveness crucially depends on the balance it strikes between its external style and its internal motivations. None of the Chicago artists are so far gone in their own dementia that we cannot gather some idea of their character, aims, and originality, along the lines of the tension I have suggested. For example, Don Baum's collected plastic dolls and animal bones score too easily in a one-shot hokey way, redolent of a thrift or antique shop. And if Baum overrelies on the standardized forms of dolls, Robert Barnes' interiors, with their mysterious clutter, are not articulated enough stylistically to declare themselves as arresting visions. Barnes has gifts as a composer, but some fatal genteel impulse schematizes his paintings before we would want to ask what they mean. My guess is that Baum is supplied with too much, and Barnes with too little, artistic security.

These artists, however, are somewhat atypical of a very idiosyncratic school. More representative in this regard is Irving Petlin, whose art is the most cryptic of all his colleagues, which is to say a great deal. But his strokes and chroma do not so much depict, as they become part of, his netherworld. Differing rates of liquid absorption, and the tiny pressures of an almost cellular growth seem to mottle the radiant nerve ends of a vegetation that almost is, or once was, animal, e.g., *Rubbings from the Calcium Garden*. Lately, he has achieved surfaces worthy of Redon; they seem to whisper as they create themselves before our eyes.

Petlin's art serves as contrast to a most unlikely feature of Chicago fantasy — its loud hermeticism. Westermann's and Wirsum's art bursts with open mouths and written expletives that would utter catcalls and other rude noises. Paschke's and Nutt's people have tantrums. Come alive, the creations of The Hairy Who would scratch your eyes out. In front of all these bawling images, though, I often think of the impossibility of sound and the futility of rage. We are shown contorted, withered, mutant beings. But they do not seem so much comments on the human condition as outlets for artistic exasperation. These artists would conceivably be pickled in their own heats if they did not exercise a stylistic authority — pardon the cliché — as cool as a cucumber. In the end, I can imagine them saying, "There's no other way, brother . . . no other way!" ■



Robert Barnes, *James Joyce*, o/c, 96" x 72", 1958.



Cosmo Campoli, *Bird Protecting New Born*, bronze, 76" high, 1970.



June Leaf, *Ascension of Pig Lady* (detail), m/m, 8' x 17', 1969.



## Chicago Tribune 'Artful Codgers'



By Daniel Wells

● THE PHOTOGRAPH reproduced here, of six somewhat fossilized senior citizens, reached THE TRIBUNE last week along with an announcement that their paintings are on exhibit thru April 17 at the Hyde Park Art Center, 5236 S. Blackstone Av., under the title "Chicago Antigua."

For some mysterious reasons, photographs of artists are becoming increasingly common these days. What makes this particular shot stand out from the others, however, is that the others try to be serious. Typical examples of this type record the artist, obviously suffering from some sort of identity crisis, contemplating one of his own works as if the photographer luckily had just dropped by the studio at the right time to capture a glimpse of the creative process.

When a gallery announces a new exhibit, it normally sends out a few pictures of

the art itself, assuming correctly that most people and most newspapers are interested in the product rather than the source.

But in the case of these senectuous six—also known as the "Artful Codgers"—this photograph works perfectly, capturing the exact disposition of the artists and the spirit in which their show is presented.

Aside from this, the photo serves as an example of the uninhibited position of the Hyde Park Art Center, whose independent, and at times unorthodox, nature sets it apart, as far as I know, from any other commercial or community arts organization in the country.

Under the direction of Don Baum, HPAC continues to receive wide respect and support while other galleries and organizations come and go. Baum seems to have a second sense for exposing talent and an insight into providing exhibits which are not only good, but have

character, style and excitement.

As with any nonprofit community art organization, part of HPAC's survival depends on community support thru a \$10 annual membership, and of course, a few "angels" here and there.

The overriding stance of the center has been its almost exclusive concern and feeling of responsibility to Chicago artists of all styles and persuasions. This has helped fill a vacuum created by commercial galleries which are, for the most part, uncertain of the financial feasibility of such undertakings, and in the process it has provided a beginning for many artistic careers which otherwise might not have gotten off the ground.

As a matter of fact, the six "codgers" in "Chicago Antigua" [all born circa 1940] got their first significant exposure at Hyde Park. This is the group's second annual show, the first was titled "Marriage Chicago Style." By their appearance, it

seems to have been a long year, but judging from their work, a rewarding one as well.

Individually, they have received their own recognition, and for the most part, enough encouragement thru sales of their work. They are, from left to right: Ed Paschke, who opened a one-man show in New York recently and consequently exhibits only seven works here, none too new or major; Suellen Rocca, continuing to work with images and objects of a childlike nature, exploring the expressive possibilities in such things as small handbags and felt slippers; Ed Flood, whose sensuous beaches and palm trees painted on sheets of vinyl get bigger and better; Sarah Canright [Flood], still using her delicate pastel pinks, greens and yellows while the shapes in the paintings have become more flowing, unlike the venus flytrap beauty of her earlier work; Karl Wirsum, now constructing female figures similar to, but



more frightening than the cardboard skeletons which hang in windows at Halloween; and Barbara Rossi, whose recent work consists of wonderful little etchings printed in rows on white silk and quilted in squares.

All of the extras and the razzle-dazzle of the openings at Hyde Park, the costumes and the makeup and the crazy posters, have very little to do with the actual works of art in the shows. Their real function is to get people interested. Baum's ability as a sort of press agent showman, is accented by the artist's willingness to go along for the fun of it. Each of the six in this show is good enough not to have to resort to gimmickery; but they have dressed up in silly outfits for the last two years, and will hopefully do so for several more, because they enjoy it, other people enjoy it and it brings crowds to the openings at the art center.

And because it lies off the beaten track and its public hours are limited [Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday afternoons and Saturday, 10 to 4], this is important. Friday is the big night. HPAC must get as much mileage as possible out of its traditional Friday evening events. It tries to make them as festive and exciting as it can. It works.

By 9 o'clock the L-shaped gallery [with its institutional yellow walls, old tile floor and glaring white lights, which spread an even illumination over everything] contains an L-shaped crowd of maybe 200 collectors, dealers, artists, curious passers-by, assorted youngsters, college students and possibly someone's stray German shepherd.

It is where it's happening, and that is what it is all about, including the picture on this page.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

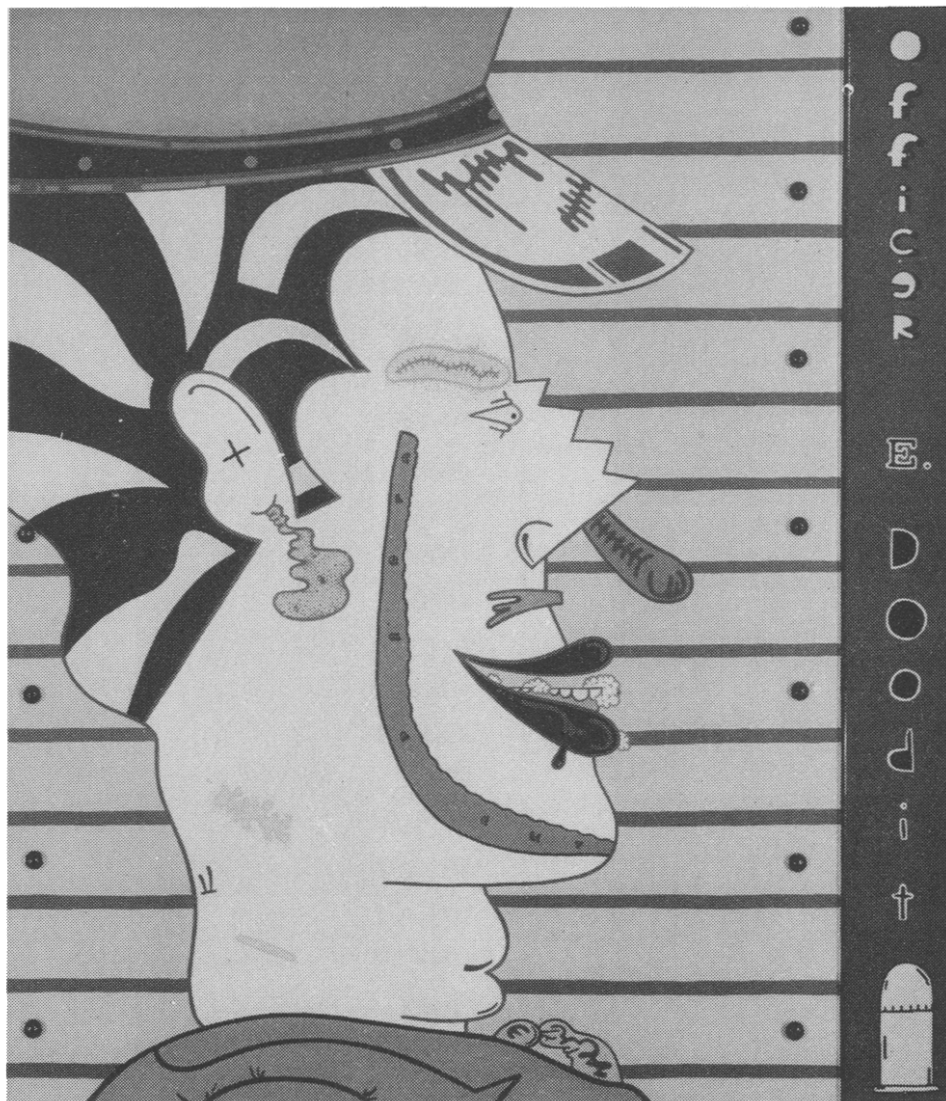
# ARTFORUM

## CHICAGO

The third "Hairy Who" exhibition occurred in the late spring and it was the finest to date. This was true both of the works themselves, and also of the installation. Karl Wirsum's "skulpture" was an innovation; Gladys Nilsson's work, while not drastically new in theme, showed her continued growth in power and her unobtrusive mastery of her means; Jim Nutt's inventiveness is almost dazzling and Jim Falconer's work included a series of frenzied serigraphs; Suellen Rocca and Art Green have both expanded their themes and have greater control.

But the work, fine as it was, was incorporated into a superb display, which in itself can be counted as an achievement of this group. The walls of the Hyde Park Art Center where the show was held again were covered with bright, flowered linoleum and the banal gaucherie of it acted as a foil for the works, coming as it did from the same world of the cliché and the slogan which these artists take as a starting point. Its gaudy pattern would have dominated some styles, but not this group and instead their strength and the power of their paintings and sculpture were complemented by the sheer crassness. In fact, Falconer's serigraphs were mounted on colored linoleum panels and their intensity succeeded in dominating the ground, in fact was enriched by it.

The three shows by this group have led to a number of misconceptions and there is a good deal of loose talk about a "Hairy Who style" and



James Nutt, *Officer and Doodit*, acrylic on Plexiglas, 1967.  
Hyde Park Art Center.

about its "funkiness." Any close examination of their work will dispel the first of these misconceptions, since there is no common style although they have a common ground —their response to those recurrent ideas, images, slogans that fill the mass media. It is also true that they each have a strong feeling for the comic strip, the stylizations used there and the episodic arrangement. They are commonly referred to as





Karl Wirsum, *Three "Skulptures,"* 1968. Hyde Park Art Center.

They are commonly referred to as "Pop" in their orientation, and this, too, is misleading and an oversimplification. There may be a similarity of imagery to be sure: the Hairy Who may at first surprise (and appall) with their selection of subject matter. However from here on the processes they use are remarkably close to the direction used by more

conventional artists, although they are often very inventive in the transformations, and also in the material (Plexiglas, inlay, etc.) that they use. Their alleged "funkiness" is only in the source material and not in the final work. It must be counted as part of their achievement that they have avoided the blind alley that much of funk art is in.



# ARTFORUM

## CHICAGO

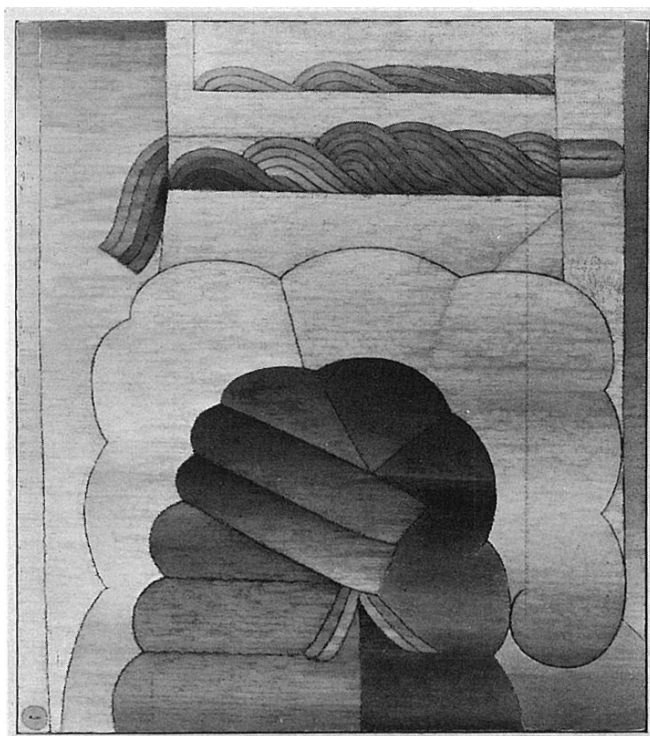
The 70TH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE BY ARTISTS OF CHICAGO AND VICINITY was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago during March. The 75 pieces in the show covered the work of artists in this region in breadth if not in depth and it should be said at the outset that the show contains the highest percentage of good pieces of any of these annuals in recent years. Big omnibus exhibitions of this sort are a questionable way of evaluating a particular segment of work, but both tradition and the considerable amount of prize money (thought by some to be anomalous and anachronistic in itself) work against a change.

The exhibition this year achieved an unexpected notoriety with the injection of the issue of censorship. The jury, composed of Lawrence Alloway, Walter Hopps and James Speyer, accepted a painting entitled *Events* by Leanne Shreyes and the jury further awarded the painting one of the substantial prizes. Although their decision on the prize was accepted, the painting was not shown by the museum because of its nature. Without having seen the work it is impossible to comment upon it or its merits, but the issue of censorship is not difficult to evaluate. Whatever prerogative supposedly sanctions it is a shibboleth as false as it is untenable and it should not exist. The action will undoubtedly be rationalized, it will not be justified.

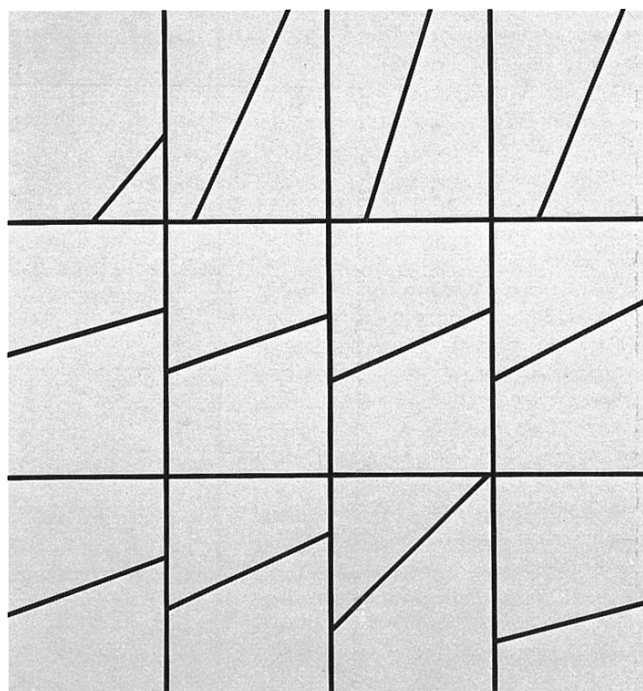
In the show's installation, James Speyer, Curator of 20th Century Art at the Art Institute has placed the works so that the figurative confronts the abstract. The emergence of a healthy expression in abstract

art, here, is something comparatively new; the figurative is a more indigenous component. In the present show the abstract (i.e., non-objective) is represented in both painting and sculpture — or whatever term is suitable to the varied manifestations of three-dimensional form. Gary Bower's painting, *Seventy Seven* and Tom Milo's untitled painting both display a mastery of the formal idiom, limited, precise, restrained; Curtis Barnes's *Gallic Green* with its touch of chiaroscuro breaks the strict formalist discipline and the introduction of such an illusionistic element heightens the surface tension. John Paskiewicz's *Box Kit Up And Down* has almost the specificity of a graphic designer's commission — the rectangles of color projected from the flat canvas hung on the wall to the cube set in front of it; the extension from one dimension into another. The abstract tendency, though somewhat modified, characterizes another group of works in the show such as Francis Piatek's *Ninth Tube Painting* and Jordan Davies's untitled painting with its interlacing bands of color — illusionistic in the former in the representation of rounded surfaces, coloristic in the latter. Jack Powell's painting with its floating slices makes use of the conventional ideas of form and manner of rendering, though its sweet pastel colors relate it to other, less timely, expressions. One of the very handsome paintings, Ray Siemanowski's *Cardboard Landscape*, epitomizes certain qualities expressed in the show by many others, e.g., the impatience of so many of today's artists with traditional devices, stylistic as well as medium; content as well as overall concept. This excludes among other things any richness of surface texture or any possible exploitation of the medium and it eliminates nuances of tone and color. In fact one impression gained from the show is of the cacophonous colors, bright, hard, sometimes involved in unremitting optical effects. Emphasis upon the optical exclusively and for its own sake is minimal here.

In marked contrast with this are several paintings, e.g., Miyoko Ito's *Aurora* and Tom Kapsalis's *Artist's House* that demonstrate the fascination which the more traditional qualities of the medium, its application and subtle control of nuance in color and tone for evocative effects still have for some artists. Seeing such



Miyoko Ito, *Aurora*, o/c, 1967. (70th Annual, Chicago Art Institute.)



Gary Bower, *Seventy-Seven*, acrylic, 1966. (70th Annual, Chicago Art Institute.)

paintings as Ito's with its lyrical grace and quiet power, hung alongside others so emphatically different reaffirms the fact that style must be personal and individual, at least for some artists.

Stephen Urry's steel sculpture *Blat* arching through space achieves an effect almost like drawing; Olaf Borge's and William Cowan's sculptures, both untitled, are local expressions of minimal form. Richard Goldwach's rippling floor panels are environmental in concept, though not large in actual dimension. Displayed under fluorescent light they become a poetic dreamscape, a somewhat unexpected quality in the abstract formalist concept.

The more figurative modes of painting and sculpture have, as in the past, had a pervasive appeal for many Chicago artists. Several examples demonstrate the staying power of some artists, e.g., Gertrude Abercrombie's painting *The Magician*, visionary and dreamlike and Cosmo Campoli's sculpture *Birth* which is more universally symbolic.

Popular imagery — almost the whole range of it from all possible sources appears to be the inspiration for a number of young artists: David Hickman's *Sara's World*, Jerry Garrett's *The Flower Vendor*, in mixed media, Norbert Leinen's *We Three*, Roy Schnackenburg's construction, *Lincoln Park*, or Peter Holbrook's somewhat more literal *The Perfumed Garden*. These, indicative of a characteristic found in a number of others, all seem to be pitched in a huckster's intensity, unvarying, unremitting, the hard sell. Such terms are not necessarily perjorative but they indicate something of the air which attests to the content and the consistency of a common style. Frank Gaard's *A Clear Shift*, cut-up images coloring book in style, in plastic envelopes, suspended within the wood frame is a deft expression of the fragmented image which by its presentation is transformed into a new image.

Several pieces in the Chicago Show are by five artists who are currently exhibiting as the "Hairy Who" group at the Hyde Park Art Center. The interest in imagery drawn from all of the mass media rendered in five distinct styles can be viewed as an extension of the oft-mentioned concern with the figurative but it has converged with forms of a more top-



ical nature and this should be read as a local expression of Pop art.

This is the second annual show of the *Hairy Who* group and its recurrence has of course caused much curiosity about the title. It seems to be evident that its arcane meaning — if there is one — will die with the artists involved. Of course the Dadaists took inordinate delight in obfuscation and Hairy Whoism must be traced to that illegitimate parentage. This year's show, which includes paintings by Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca and Karl Wirsum is even "hairier" than the first; it is also by any criterion, sparkling with a good humored vitality and is without qualification excellent. With all of the various promotional devices and press coverage, it is possible to fail to consider the works themselves, or to give them the proper consideration.

The announcement poster was an outlandish, exquisite corpse — done by all five artists. In true Dada spirit, their delight in perversity made it all but unreadable. Other exquisite corpses were scattered throughout the 32-page *Hairy Who* comic book. Though each artist contributed several pages (as well as designing a button for distribution at the vernissage) all of these contributions, both group and individual, demonstrate the unadulterated lampooning of nearly everything from traditional media and styles to exhibition display and exhibition catalogs.

As indicated in the review of the Chicago Show these are not the only artists in Chicago who are doing fine work, but the fact that they are a cohesive group makes them unique, especially in a city where such groups have seldom coalesced. Except for some overlaps in style (more in medium than in content or manner of presentation) the common ingredient, and this is not all-pervasive, is their unadulterated élan. Common to all, it is not constricting and each artist succeeds in his individual expression of an irreverent caricature — a cool celebration of all or at least a great deal that is banal and trivial. Both subject and title in individual pieces range from the bizarre and absurd to the "punny" (both verbal and visual) and the funny and outrageous. If slapstick films of the silent screen gave vent to a particular humor certainly this is a present day manifes-

tation of the same.

Karl Wirsum's paintings are often horrendous and elegant in their intricate patterning. His one man show was reviewed here in April and many of the same pieces are included here.

Gladys Nilsson's paintings on plexiglass are more fanciful, more Learian in their tradition of burlesque, and, citing antecedents suggestive of Ubu Roi and company. Though not sheer fantasy they "take off" on the unbelievable juxtapositions and incongruities of our world and with a slight development toward caricature are peopled by a duck-billed, elephant-snouted comic chorus line.

Rocca's paintings extend and elaborate the fuzzy, purposefully hesitant linear movement. The squiggly line, pictographic style and candy-box colors are synthesized into a parody of the gauche and the gaudy. This tendency to parody is accentuated by the somewhat painterly application of oil to canvas.

*L'Art Brut*, discovered by Dubuffet and others, ranges from the exotic and the esoteric to the trite and the commonplace. As source material it has interested the entire group but it seems especially meaningful in Jim Nutt's work. This is not only true of the primary or major image in a piece but also the tiny images tattooed over the surface. There is a sensitive feeling for the pattern and its interaction with the idea—its expression of the idea — and a fine feeling for color which is generally bright but with occasional overtones of subtle tones. Painted on plexiglass they transform and celebrate the trivial and seem to be meant for the walls of a penny arcade, a super-doooper penny arcade.

Of the five artists, Art Green seems to give expression to less of the generally acknowledged H. W. components than the others. Mass media images are less apparent and they seem close to De Chirico's enigmas. Although such a comparison is justified it must not be overemphasized since Green's is a consistent and personal style. "Marvelous" juxtapositions of images and constructions, these negate any feeling of nostalgia in the use of contemporary motifs painted in bright, almost fluorescent colors. They are fantastic constructions, strange, stage machinery from which the curtain has suddenly been drawn.

— WHITNEY HALSTEAD

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# ARTFORUM CHICAGO



Dominick Di Meo, untitled, plastic and plaster, 20x14", 1960. Fairweather-Hardin Gallery.

One of the artists who typifies a predilection here for the figurative rather than the abstract or the geometric is Dominick Di Meo. Since the early '50s his work has been infused with both Expressionist and Surrealist tendencies. In the early work, the former, cast in a very personal manner, was dominant but Surrealist elements of fantasy and mystery were allowed full play in a series of relief paintings which came at the end of the '50s and the early '60s. As in the reliefs of Halkin and the scumbling of Golub's painting, the material itself was given an important role in the final result. Di Meo's reliefs were heavily encrusted and impressed, and they often included various addi-

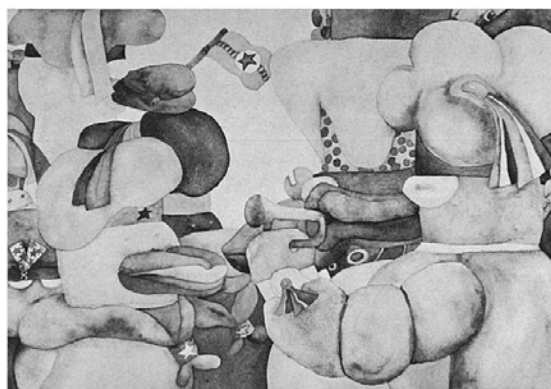
tional materials or objects such as bones, etc. Sometimes large but as a rule moderate in size the image was found in the punctures, imprints, and cracks of the surface — outspread arms, hands and fingers. Skull-like heads were catcombed into cloud or figure-landscapes; grinning skulls tinged with irony danced in a macabre day of the dead.

In his recent exhibition at the Fairweather Hardin Gallery irony and satire have persisted and are interwoven with the comic. The impressed reliefs are gone but the objects which had left their fossil-like imprints are present in some as negative shapes against the dark, sprayed ground; others include

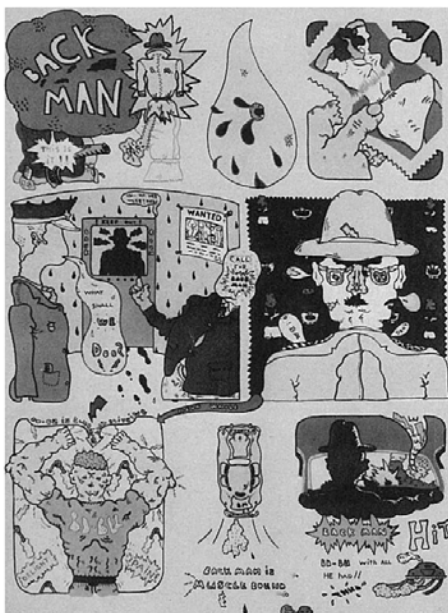




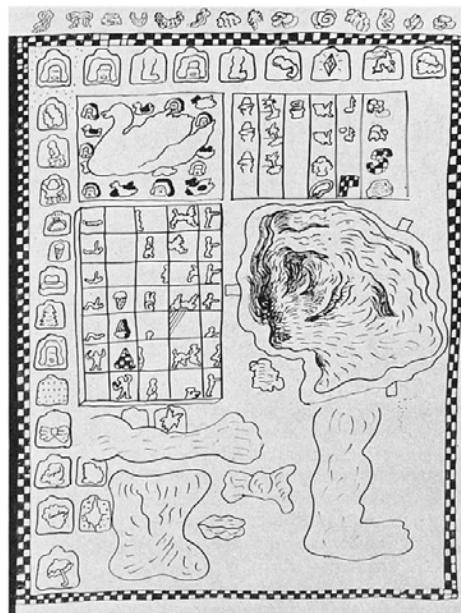
James Falconner, "Slep Portrait," watercolor, 7x9". Hairy Who Show, Hyde Park Art Center.



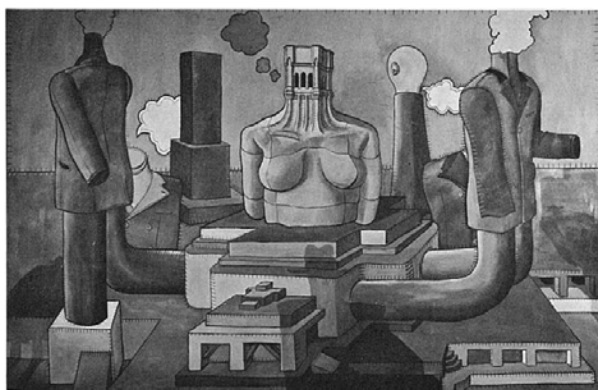
Gladys Nilsson, "Duck Troops," watercolor, 10x14". Hairy Who Show, Hyde Park Art Center.



James Nutt, "Backman," acrylic on plexiglass, 12x16". Hairy Who Show, Hyde Park Art Center.



Suellen Rocca, "Hairy What Game," pen and ink, 9x11". Hairy Who Show, Hyde Park Art Center.



Art Green, "Confusing Departure," o/c, 48x78". Hairy Who Show, Hyde Park Art Center.

collage-like transfers. If the early work had romantic overtones the transfer images, often in color, taken from current magazines, are topical by contrast. If the earlier reliefs had a subterranean character many of these transfer images are almost bawdy parodies, their tangle of forms like some midsummer beach. Of the paintings with sprayed shapes, "Woman By The Sea" is a tour-de-force in black and white, more relaxed and carefree than most and effective because of its simplicity.

According to the six artists in the exhibition at the Hyde Park Art Center, they are not a "group" nor is there a program. One must insist that they are a combination, at least, and in accepting their assertions of individuality draw attention to a certain attitude they share. HAIRY WHO! is the title this combo found for their show and it may serve as a key to the characteristics which they have in common. The extent and degree of similar qualities is demonstrated in the catalog of the show, which is a handsome comic book. Usually relevant information, such as title, size, medium and price do not clutter its pages, each of which is the work of one of the six artists, whose styles, for the most part, needed little adaptation for the purpose. It is a joint achievement that expresses individual images in the simplified manner of comic strips and it is as fine as many of the pieces in the show.

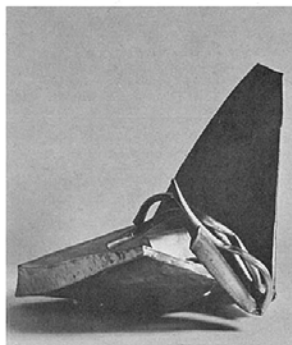
All of the artists were in the "Phalanx" exhibition last December and several were reviewed here in March. The 60 pieces in this show allow for further evaluation and it is evident that original ideas are being generated and that the means to give them form are developing. Common ground for all is an attitude of irreverent detachment, yet they are obviously much involved with the material. Their statements are oblique, often expressed in pun-like images accompanied by word-play in the titles. As the comic book catalog suggests, much of it is a commentary on mass media, in some instances a frank and discerning appreciation of it. It relates to the broad trend in which artists have turned to this heretofore largely-ignored area for source material.

James Falconner, whose work has developed within the last year, is closer to direct satire than the others and his work is a mixture of the scornful and the comic. Both his oils and watercolors are crude with a force which gives them their power and which is also their weakness. Their harshness contrasts with Suellen Rocca's drawings and oils. Both her drawings and paintings are linear, pictographic, serial groupings that are blurred and ill-defined as a TV screen. The greater clarity in the ink drawings plays against the





Karl Wirsum, page from the comic book catalog, *Hairy Who Show*, Hyde Park Art Center.



Richard Hunt, "Glider," welded aluminum, 30" h., 1966. Holland Gallery.



Aaron Siskind, "Rome, 49," 1963. photograph.

wavering line and gives them more effectiveness than the blurred oils.

Gladys Nilsson's watercolors are technically accomplished and authoritative, a virtuoso display of the medium. Her subjects border upon the absurd; the wild, erotic imagery, however, is controlled and disciplined. At first they seem suggestive of Grosz but their tone is comic and burlesque (one is entitled "Burly-Q") rather than biting and satirical and their affinity is with Jarry's *Ubu*.

Marshall McLuhan's premise that radio, TV, movies, the press, advertising, all of the mass media, are "extensions of man" takes on new meaning in reference to today's art and to some of these artists in particular. Our sloganized environment has been transformed in Art Green's fantasies with their cryptic wisdom. Few paintings seem so remote and yet so involved with the absurd and unbelievable puzzles of our everyday world as "Udeniable Logician" or "Confusing Departure." The extensions of man are made both more incredible and more acceptable.

Comic strips are characterized by a direct, graphic treatment and are involved with a story content. James Nutt's paintings wittily satirize this and the abstract power of Karl Wirsum's paintings is an intensification of this graphic style. Comic strips too in-

clude the dialogue and many of these works, essentially linear, include letters, words, whole phrases or the title itself (e.g. Falconner's anagrammatic "Slep Portrait," Green's use of readymade phrases such as "Occupational Hazards"). The puns and word play in Nutt's parody "Back Man" parallels Duchamp's interest in these devices (e.g. Duchamp's "Fresh Widow" as a substitute for French Window). Readymade images are transformed by a sharp precision in Wirsum's work and both his and Nutt's have as a starting point the manufactured folklore inherent in the comics or in the other mass produced materials of our culture. HAIRY WHO was a unique exhibition.

New sculpture by Richard Hunt is shown almost annually at the Holland Gallery. His development has been sustained and consistent and his work evolves naturally and logically. In the present show are a number of welded steel pieces as well as a number in welded aluminum. These in aluminum indicate a new direction for Hunt and present the viewer with certain difficulties. They lack the variations in tone and color that are to be found in the steel, color and surface qualities that enhance the forms themselves. The iridescent variations made by the torch against steel are so much a part of the whole concept in which readymade

forms evolve into an organic structure that the bright, white burnished surfaces of the aluminum pieces seem to call for a more drastic change in the form itself. In Hunt's work with its variety and range and his capacity for invention and growth this is quite conceivable and in such pieces as "Pyramidal Complex," not wholly successful, this change in form seems imminent.

At his best Hunt achieves a very lyrical quality and even the titles embody this feeling (e.g. "Plant Bone," "Wing Stand" and "Glider"). In the finest pieces both in this and past shows this lyricism is achieved with great economy and grace; when it occasionally falters, convolution becomes an end in itself.

The retrospective exhibition of Aaron Siskind's photographs that was assembled by George Eastman House is being shown at Herman Hall and Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology. The space is far from satisfactory and these photographs, some of which are great works of art, deserve better.

They have been selected from the work of the last 30 years and the show includes examples from several series, "feet," the "Terrors and Pleasures of Levitation," architectural facades and details, and the stone fence. But the theme that recurs and with which Sis-

kind the artist has become identified is that of the scarred surface, the cryptic ideograph. Concerned with surfaces such as walls, signs, torn posters, the tactile qualities are often emphasized but sometimes the tactile is blended into the pattern and the surface as surface is lost. Their ambiguity is further heightened by the absence of scale and these photographs demand of the viewer a disorientation and a losing of oneself in order that their ideas may be fully absorbed. Their richness echoes that of Schwitters; their austerity links them with the stone garden of Ryoanji Temple.

The object as an idea has been enlarged to a philosophical concept and accepted in an esthetic context in 20th-century art. Siskind like many other contemporary artists, deals with it, the object or a fragment of it, in such a way that its identity remains and the role of the artist as selector is stressed. Photography as a medium has a degree of "transparency" that allows this collaboration — between object and artist — its fullest expression.

The richness of experience implicit in these works has been found, not by chance but through patient persistent search. They are infused with a vision of breadth and richness. ■

Whitney Halstead