

metro. The mood is less that of Kafka than Goya in the black paintings. But whereas Goya's rage was honest and grand, and possessed a scope of character consonant with tragedy, Lebenstein's monsters are contrived and merely theatrical. The best they manage is bathos.

Mary McCarthy has written an essay which is part of the gallery brochure for this show. It is full of smoldering writing that seeks to tie the artist's mythology to Plato and Zeus and St. Anthony and the Apocalypse. Such references are not surprising, since Lebenstein rather evidently desires his work to function on the lofty level of poetry as well as that of painting. But if it is fustian painting, can it be more than that as literature?

—Franz Schulze

The Jan Lebenstein show at the Michael Wyman Gallery was held February 2–March 6. Scheduled are an auction preview for the Museum of Contemporary Art and Lillian Desow-Fishbin (May 11–30).

Gladys Nilsson at Phyllis Kind

Seven years have passed since the six painters who called themselves The Hairy Who first showed at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, and it is pretty clear by now that they were, as a group, the most important artists to come to light in this city during the 1960s. They were the first of a number of local art combos that assumed sobriquets, after the fashion of rock ensembles, and made a point of exhibiting together: The Non-Plussed Some, The Artful Codgers, Chicago Antigua and The False Image were several others. Moreover, The Who turned their own affection for a cheerfully crude and febrile kind of funk imagery into a movement that continues to gather new Chicago adherents with every season, even though The Who themselves have gone their individual ways and, in general, moved on to cooler, more refined styles.

Gladys Nilsson, one of the original six, is a case in point. Her earliest show paintings, mostly watercolors, were crowded with warty, preposterous little humanoids that thrashed about bootlessly, in comic disarray. The composition and hard linear manner of these works brought George Grosz's early Berlin fantasies to mind, but unlike Grosz, Nilsson appeared amused rather than outraged by human foolishness, and she heightened the mood of burlesque—as did the rest of The Hairy Who—with misspellings and puns in her titles: *Stompin' at the Snake Pit*, *Blewboy Heeman*, etc.

Nilsson has lived in California since 1970, which may or may not be related to a gradual increase in the size and formality of her recent work. Certainly the raunchy old swagger—which is tempting to regard as a mark of her Chicago generation—is noticeably diminished now, and her imagery has grown less immediately recognizable. She works in acrylic, on formats

as large as six by seven feet, and continues to paint pullulating scenes. But it takes a few moments to make out the figures and landscape elements in them, for everything about them is more generalized than before, more subdued, more abstract—even in a psychological sense. The wit and fantasy are still evident, especially if you take the trouble to unravel the drolleries acted out by her characters (who now resemble anemones as much as people), and the titles are as kinky as ever (*Pear of Horces*, *Dipped Dick: Adam and Eve After Cranach*). But the palette is now more Parisian than pop, the line clean and surgical, with only a trace of its old stutter, and the patterns blandish rather than jostle.

In short, Nilsson has gone very arty of late; for an old Hairy Who, she is startlingly well-coiffed. And that is all to the good. If no longer salty, she is now wry—a profitable exchange, especially since she has developed such keen, even delicate formal sensibilities with the passage of time. She designs rather than paints her pictures, and she might be little more than a quiltmaker if it weren't for the uncommonly sure balance of color, drawing and overall organization with which she consistently endows her work. She is now in her early thirties and her last several shows, this one included, have revealed a sustained growth. The prognosis is good.

—Franz Schulze

The Gladys Nilsson show at the Phyllis Kind Gallery was held February 2–March 1. Scheduled are Cynthia Carlson in May and a group show including Ray Yoshida and Marguerite Munch in June.

DENVER

Michael Balog at Friends of Contemporary Art

A few years back, Michael Balog's large, layered fiberglass paintings were sandblasted in spots to reveal cratered rings of soft color. Though toughish and slightly abrasive in appearance, the paintings still had most of the ingredients that one has come to associate with the nearly new California "look"—a High Tech gloss, a sense of artifice and a consuming interest in soft color. Since then, Balog has made the requisite pilgrimage to Big Apple to confront the Issues (e.g. the serious one), and to rub shoulders with the Big Leaguers who formulate them. Most of the West Coast wunderkind make it back to sunny Southern California in due time, but Balog stayed on in SoHo and his work has consequently undergone a major shift in emphasis.

His new paintings or wall constructions are less "fussy," and color choices are considerably less important. Balog is now an art worker in the world of street maintenance: handmade coveralls have replaced

Michael Balog, *Untitled*: wood, fake fur, gauze, acrylic, 6 x 6', 1973 (collection of the artist); photo courtesy Leo Castelli.

