

GLADYS NILSSON Phyllis Kind
GROUP SHOW Lorence-Monk

By **TIMOTHY COHRS**

GLADYS NILSSON

Gladys Nilsson is one of the original Hairy Who artists who, exactly twenty years ago, began a steady and insidious infiltration of the corridors of thought in the American art world. Unlike the then-reigning Pop artists of the New York art scene, the Hairy Who artists turned their back on advertising, film, and television as sources ripe for plundering in the motherlode of popular culture. More often, they looked instead to lower rung sources, such as comic books, bathroom graffiti, raunchy humor of the locker room variety, naive art, and peppered it all with irrepressible puns (both visual and linguistic). Their importance, if doubted, was demonstrated earlier this decade when the East Village scene sprang into life and gallery after gallery was hung with work that was profoundly influenced by that handful of once Chicago-based artists. It seemed as if a whole new generation of art-school-trained artists had entered the Manhattan scene with the visual tenets of Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Art Green, Suellen Rocca, James Falconer, and Karl Wirsum, just as the previous generation had held those of Hofmann or Pollock. This is, of course, not to suggest that the current art school generation could name the original Hairy Who one by one, but that these young artists demonstrated an understanding of and an affinity for the work that the Hairy Who bombarded the art world with two decades ago.

In the twenty years since her debut, Nilsson has worked predominantly in the medium of watercolor. Her current show is entirely large-size watercolors, and they demonstrate her mastery. A flowing, sinuous line is as often her subject as the friezelike grouping of humorously distorted figures or the brightly hued patterns that dot all of her current works. In the large diptych *Léger Faire*, the ostensible subject matter is the construction of two house frames being erected by two distinct swarms of carpenters: the left-hand group all male, the right-hand all female. Yet in

fact, the incredibly complicated dotting of the picture plane by different-sized figures that all squirm and twist in different manners, creates such a strong, visual pattern that it overrides all else, allowing you to focus on only one of these figures at a time.

Nilsson's males are anatomically a curious breed. Usually they appear to be hairless and bulge about the middle to one degree or another, but all are equipped with oversized conical penises that look like oddly shaped pillows or stuffed jester's hats. These devices sag or rise under stimuli that appear to have more to do with compositional forces than the erotic. I particularly enjoyed the one in *Terry Towel* which is used as nothing more than a break in the bright pattern of a towel that swoops behind it.

Nilsson's women are another matter. Though they can be as caricatured and ridiculous as the overly genitaled males, they bear much more of the content's weight. That content is certainly nothing literary or literal, it is instead a sort of lyrical speculation on the fantasies and extremes of women's roles. For example, *The Swimming Hole* displays a large, central female lounging odalisque-like in the midst of a group of attentive and nude male bathers. I read this as a light-hearted comment, in curving line and subtle color, on a female fantasy of male adoration.

The single, most powerful statement to come through Nilsson's current body of work is her self-assured mastery of both medium and imagery. These are mature works, and as such they carry ongoing themes to a state of refine-

ment and elegance that is hard to imagine when you consider the wackiness of her figures independently. (Phyllis Kind, *January 10-31*)

GROUP SHOW

This was a perplexing grouping of six artists because the work of no more than any two was related, either visually or conceptually. A found object sculptor, a photographic appropriationist, a printmaker, a performance artist, a traditional sculptor, and a building portrait photographer present a baffling potpourri.

Laurie Parsons finds cast-off objects and, through her personal editing process, dubs them found sculpture. They are presented exactly as originally found, with the only alteration being that of site and what chipping and shifting may have resulted from moving. A small bookcase long ago painted gold and most likely long ago discarded, a frame for a fold-away bed, two metal patio chairs set one atop the other and holding a taped, brown paper package, all present a stark, startling, and even disquieting visage in the clean clear space of this gallery.

Paul Laster appropriates famous photographs of famous photographers, such as Man Ray and Lartigue, and covers them with tape transfer collage. What this amounts to is several hundred tiny pieces of tape per photograph, each strip bearing a color or image element. The result is surprisingly pleasing, as subtle decorative patterns and motifs blanket without obliterating the famous images beneath.

Judy Fiskin presents groupings of tiny black and white photographic portraits of very similar buildings—in this case mainly one and two family houses. The variations in the structures grouped together can be minute, say a doorway moving from right front to left front and back again with a porch added, or their differences can be so great that their contrast-

ing geometric silhouettes seem to be the relationship under study. In any event, the content of these small photographs is so mute that they become almost as objectlike as the buildings they represent.

Paul Mogensen is represented by a series of seven woodblock prints. These depict very basic geometric shapes singly or grouped together in white on beige Kitikata paper. These appeared so basic as to lose their subtlety. However, more prints from the same series were on view in the back office and in these the artist had printed his shapes in gold leaf with very striking and very different results.

Brian Gayman was represented by three cast iron globes that rest on tubular steel legs. Each of these globes appeared almost identical to the others, and yet there were slight surface differences in coloration and texture that distinguish one from the other. The interesting surfaces have a ceramic look to them that is reminiscent of raku pottery.

Finally, Kim Jones was represented by altered photographs and one sculpture. Jones is perhaps more well known as the Mud Man, who in art seasons past would cover himself in burlap and mud and carry a complicated arrangement of bound sticks. I remember him most frequently in front of the Mary Boone space on West Broadway with a gaggle of tourists standing about him with instamatics clicking. The photographs of him that have been altered with gouache, acrylic, and ink seem nothing more than an elaboration on something better left in the original. His sculpture, *Worm Man*, is another matter. Here the primitiveness of his Mud Man costume is transferred onto a black and white insectlike creation that seems part-totem and part-prehistoric specimen. Hopefully more of these will be on view in the future. (Lorence-Monk, *January 10-31*)

Gladys Nilsson, *The Swimming Hole*, 1986. Watercolor on paper, 40 1/2 x 59 7/8". Courtesy Phyllis Kind Gallery.



Laurie Parsons, *Bedstead; Chairs with Package*, 1986. Mixed media. Courtesy Lorence-Monk Gallery.

