

# THE NEW YORKER

## Gladys Nilsson

BY JOHANNA FATEMAN FEBRUARY 26, 2020

The new paintings in this exhibition teem with alien vegetation and freewheeling creatures—evidence that age hasn't slowed this Chicago artist, who is now seventy-nine. The orgiastic, nine-foot-long “Gleefully Askew,” from 2017, shows a cartoonish orange woman, nude but for a ruffled apron, painting with a preternaturally long, flexible arm. Two men serve as her unsteady easel. At the Matthew Marks gallery, a companion survey charts Nilsson's course from the nineteen-sixties, when she was a member of the Hairy Who (a subset of the Chicago Imagists), through 1980. The lurid palette and Expressionist style of Nilsson's early works—such as “Nightclub,” from 1964, with its goblin face and cabaret dancers—give way to fantastic abandon and goofily sexual Boschian detail. The painter's most seductive scenes are busy with anthropomorphic shapes and pulsating patterns that spill onto her sculptural frames. A dusky, speckled landscape of abstract succulent and animal forms, from 1973, is characteristic of the artist's exuberant approach—its title, “More,” could be the motto of her prodigious career.