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## Gladys Nilsson: The 1980s



*Léger Faire*, 1986–1987

**Garth Greenan Gallery** is pleased to announce *Gladys Nilsson: The 1980s*, an exhibition of paintings at **545 West 20th Street**. Opening on Thursday, January 12, 2017, the exhibition features twelve of the artist’s densely-layered, intricately detailed works, most of which have never before been exhibited.

The exhibition focuses on a series of monumentally-scaled watercolors—Nilsson’s preferred medium—all of which were created between 1984 and 1987. In each of them, a flowing, sinuous line is as often her subject as the frieze-like grouping of distorted figures or the brightly hued patterns of their surroundings. In the large diptych, *Léger Faire* (1986–1987), the ostensible subject matter is the construction of two house frames by two distinct swarms of carpenters: the left-hand group all male, the right-hand all female. Yet, in fact, the careful incorporation of literally dozens of different-sized “tangential” figures, all of whom twist and squirm in different manners, creates such a strong visual impression that it overrides all else, allowing viewers to focus on only one of them at a time.

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Anatomically, Nilsson's males are a curious breed. They usually appear to be hairless and bulge about the middle to one degree or another, but all are equipped with oversized conical penises. In each example, they sag or rise under stimuli that appear to have more to do with compositional forces than anything erotic. The one in *Terry Towel*, (1986–1987), for instance, is used as nothing more than a break in the bright pattern of a towel that swoops behind it.

The artist's women are another matter. Though they can often appear as caricatural as their overly genitaled male counterparts, 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, a preoccupation of hers that continues to this day.

Born in Chicago in 1940, Gladys Nilsson studied painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She first came to prominence in 1966, when she joined five other recent Art Institute graduates (James Falconer, Art Green, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum) for the first of a series of group exhibitions called the Hairy Who. In 1973, she became one of the first women to have a solo-exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1990, she accepted a teaching position at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she is now a full professor.

Since 1966, Nilsson's work has been the subject of over 50 solo exhibitions, including sixteen at Phyllis Kind Gallery (1970–1979, 1981–1983, 1987, 1991, and 1994, Chicago and New York), and two at The Candy Store (1971 and 1987, Folsom, California). Her work has also been featured in many important museum exhibitions, such as: *Human Concern/Personal Torment* (1969, Whitney Museum of American Art); *Who Chicago?* (1981, Camden Art Center, London); *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art* (1992, Los Angeles County Museum of Art); and *Chicago Imagists* (2011, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin). Most recently, Nilsson's work appeared in *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present* (2014, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence).

Nilsson's work is featured in the collections of major museums around the world, including: the Art Institute of Chicago; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the Morgan Library, New York; the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Modern Art; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Smithsonian American Art Museum; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent Gladys Nilsson.

***Gladys Nilsson: The 1980s*** will be on view at **Garth Greenan Gallery, 545 West 20th Street** (between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues), through **Saturday, February 18, 2017**. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information, **please contact Garth Greenan at (212) 929-1351, or email [info@garthgreenan.com](mailto:info@garthgreenan.com)**.

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