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Art Green: Hairy Who?



Art Green, *Immoderate Abstention*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 66 x 55 1/2 inches

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to announce *Art Green: Hairy Who?* Opening on Thursday, September 7, 2023, the exhibition will provide an overview of the artist's work of the 1960s, his most formative decade.

In 1961, Art Green enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with the intention of studying industrial design. In his first year, however, the artist made a fateful shift to painting and drawing. Green's career, and those of five other recent SAIC graduates (James Falconer, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum), was quick to launch. In 1966, these alumni held the first of what would become a legendary series of group exhibitions called the Hairy Who. The artists' styles were assertively idiosyncratic, but most had trained with professors Kathleen Blackshear and Paul Wiegardt and adapted some of their respective Surrealist and German Expressionist tendencies—features particularly noticeable in Green's work. By the end of the packed decade in 1969, Art Green accepted a teaching position at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, marrying Natalie Novotny in the same year, whose Art Institute education in pattern and fabric design became a strong and continuing influence on his work.

The work in the exhibition demonstrates the remarkable speed with which Green established a rich personal iconography consisting of archetypal images of ice cream cones, wood grain patterns, billowing flames, and perfectly polished fingernails. These same totemic images populate his work to this day.

In *Absolute Purity* (1967) Green places a supersized cone of soft serve dangerously close to a plump female leg that billows flames and smoke like an industrial chimney. To add to the confusion, the artist freely mixes visual modes from the photorealistic to the cartoonish. The result is an uneasy, centrifugal chaos. As the Canadian artist and critic Gary Michael Dault said of the painting, “there is so much going on it all has to be lashed together to keep it, you feel, from flying in your face.”

Green’s work is packed with paradoxes and impossibilities. Each is phantasmagoric but orderly. Items are fastened and balanced in agreement with the strict but inscrutable mechanical rules that undergird each universe. In paintings like *Disclosing Enclosure* (1968), Green ties spatial dimensions into a Gordian Knot. Two disembodied fingers unzip a two-dimensional face—revealing ice cream that oxymoronically bursts into flames. When an object is zipped open, showing itself to be a two-dimensional surface, it becomes three-dimensional in its new configuration. The counterintuitive logic and potent symbolism beg to be decoded, but any attempt results in a recursive paradox. The paintings are themselves a cycle of perpetual reconciliation and rupture.

Green’s work has been the subject of over 26 solo exhibitions, including nine at Phyllis Kind Gallery (1974, 1976, 1976–1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981–1982, 1983, 1986, Chicago and New York), three at Bau-Xi Gallery (1974, 1979, and 1983, Vancouver and Toronto), and one at Corbett vs. Dempsey (2011–2012, Chicago). His work has also been featured in more than 120 group exhibitions, including *Human Response/Personal Torment* (1969, Whitney Museum of American Art); *Who Chicago?* (1981, Camden Art Center, London); *12 Chicago Artists* (1995, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.); and *Chicago Imagists* (2011, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin). In 2005, the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Ontario mounted *Heavy Weather*, the artist’s first career retrospective. In early 2009, the CUE Art Foundation, New York hosted a solo exhibition of Green’s work, curated by Jim Nutt.

In the last decade, Green’s work was featured in *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to Present* (2014, RISD Museum, Providence); *Homegrown: The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the Permanent Collection* (2015–2016, Art Institute of Chicago); *The Next Generation: Chicago Imagists from the Smart Collection* (2016, Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago); *Hairy Who? 1966–1969* (2018–2019, School of the Art Institute of Chicago), and *How Chicago! Imagists 1960s–1970s* (2019, Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, University of London).

Green’s paintings are featured in the collections of major museums around the world, including: the Art Institute of Chicago; the Smart Museum of Art, the University of Chicago; the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin; the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent Art Green.

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