Sac State screens film on Chicago Imagists art movement


It was modern art, Chicago style. Hardly the cool New York version, the collection of artists in mid-1960s Chicago referred to themselves as “imagists” and ignored trends elsewhere to blaze their own artistic path that was comical, absurd and definitely “in your face.”

The wild, wooly and weird story of these iconoclastic artists has been captured in the documentary *Hairy Who & the Chicago Imagists* ([http://pentimentiproductions.org/projects/hairy-who](http://pentimentiproductions.org/projects/hairy-who)), which will have its Northern California screening debut at Sacramento State at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 4, in Mariposa Hall, Room 1000. A reception with light refreshments will follow in the Mariposa Hall lobby.

Collectively known as the Imagists, the artists showed in exhibitions with group names that seemed to take inspiration from psychedelic rock bands – Hairy Who (the first artists’ group of the movement), Nonplussed Some, False Image and Marriage Chicago Style.

Their art also conjures memories of underground comics of that period and is decidedly at odds with the more detached approach of the New York, London and Los Angeles artists. It has been described as pugnacious, puerile, graphic, comical and absurd.

Works include Jim Nutt’s cigar-chomping, amputated women; Barbara Rossi’s bejeweled dot paintings; and Roger Brown’s secretive silhouetted figures in windows.

There’s also a Sacramento State connection. Three of the Hairy Who artists – Nutt, Gladys Nilsson and Karl Wirsum – taught in the University’s Art Department. Three local artist friends of those Hairy Who members will discuss the film following the screening. Irving Marcus, Suzanne Adan and Mike Stevens will talk about the Hairy Who’s influence at the University.

“We felt this film just had to screen at Sacramento State,” says art history Professor Elaine O’Brien. “Our region’s art history intertwined with Chicago’s in the late ’60s and ’70s when Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson and Karl Wirsum taught here. The Hairy Who legacy is ours, and it lives on here – and far beyond.”

*Hairy Who & the Chicago Imagists* is narrated by Chicago theater legend Cheryl Lynn Bruce and has an original score for cello and voice by composer Tomeka Reid. The movie includes more than 40 interviews with artists, critics, curators and collectors.

The screening is also made possible by the Art History Club and Associated Students Inc.
For more information, call the Art Department at (916) 278-6166. For media assistance, call Sac State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Craig Koscho