

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

The Chicago Show

May 12 - May 20 2018

Noon - 6pm

May 12th: Opening reception 6-8PM

56 Downing St Brooklyn NY 11238



Ed Paschke, *Untitled (Nudes)*, 1973



Darius Airo, *Chicago Faucet (Venus)*, 2018

Jim Nutt
Ray Yoshida
Ed Paschke
Jim Falconer
Ed Flood
Sarah Canright
Bryant Worley
Darius Airo

Jenn Smith
Kailyn Perry
Jeffly Molina
Chris Capoyianes
Mel Cook
Aviv Benn
Amadeo Morelos
Jin Jeong

Caleb Beck
Anwar Mahdi
Omar Velazquez
Kenrick McFarlane
Mason Pott
Yvette Mayorga
Nikko Washington

Brooklyn, New York —April, 2018— Curator Madeleine Mermall is pleased to present *The Chicago Show*, a selection of work from emerging Chicago-based artists alongside the pieces by the Chicago Imagists of the 1960s. *The Chicago Show* will open on **May 12th** at a private residence being opened to the public, **56 Downing St Brooklyn NY 11238**. Mermall invites you to join artist **Richard Hull** and **Sarah Canright** for a conversation on the terrace at **6PM** on May 12th.

The Chicago Show provides an insightful look into the work of a distinct community of Chicago artists, comprised mostly of painters, who developed their style and visual modes of expression in a vein that runs outside of the mainstream, bicoastal circuit. Chicago, largely overlooked by the New York and LA circles currently monopolizing

the art world, has a culture and environment vastly different from the other major art hubs. Situated in the middle of the country, Chicago's unique, Midwestern-Americana culture has been created by long stretches of corn-field lined highway and endless lines of railroad track that converge on the big shoulders of the country, speckling the city with scraps of lowbrow, small town American culture picked up along the way.

Since The Imagists of the 1960s, Chicago painters have episodically embraced the city's distinctive blend of metropolitan buzz, environment of complementary opposites—the space where hard-edged urbanity meets flat, expansive water—and unpretentious, sometimes unpolished, Midwestern appeal: the visual language of middle America, found in comic books, caricatures, and “uncouth” commercial art. The current contemporary Chicago artists featured in *The Chicago Show* are a part of a “second coming”, of sorts. The artists embody the audacious, unabashed, rebellious spirit of The Imagists, embracing alternative imagery and the individual experience through humor, illustrative narrative, distortion, brazen vulgarity, and an awareness of both art history as well as commercial imagery. Similar to The Imagists, the featured artists are a part of a smaller community of painters inviting their direct environment and individual experiences to speak through their work. Though these artists have the shared experience of living in Chicago and encountering and engaging with similar visual stimuli, idiosyncrasies arise from the infusion of the individual into the work. There is also a turn towards the representational within painting, blending the weird and surreal with a formalist investigation of color and composition. Chicago-born curator Madeleine Mermall exposes New York audiences to the burgeoning art scene in Chicago, presented alongside the works of the Chicago Imagists as an insight into the unique art historical lineage that has developed on the “Third Coast”.

The Roger Brown Study Collection (RBSC) was the curatorial inspiration behind *The Chicago Show*. Preserved by The School of the Art Institute of Chicago's (SAIC) special collections, RBSC is the former home and studio of SAIC alum and Chicago Imagist, Roger Brown. The space is decorated with Brown's art collection, including works by the Imagists and other lesser known local Chicago artists. The artist's former home is also brimming with personal items and sources of inspiration; folk and tribal art, costumes, furniture, and found objects. The intimate experience of the RBSC influenced the decision to exhibit *The Chicago Show* in a brownstone in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, as opposed to the traditional, white-wall gallery setting. The pieces in the show are not organized by artist or time period, but rather are curated like a personal collection, arranged around the townhouse to facilitate a dialogue between Chicago artists of the past and present.

In presenting the works this way, *The Chicago Show* exposes New York audiences to the work of some lesser known Chicago artists and secures the Imagists their rightful place in twentieth century art history, all while staying true to the movement's intimate, hometown origins.

Art History enthusiast and 23-year-old Chicago artist Darius Airo's painting style was largely influenced by his father, a comic artist. Childhood exposure to comic book art led Airo to find inspiration from other forms of lowbrow art and pop culture, including graffiti, cartoons, and obscure commercial imagery. These aesthetic interests lead him to the work of the Chicago Imagists, where he found an art historical precedent for the pictorial language he still works in today.

Jenn Smith, a recent MFA graduate from SAIC, uses religious imagery gathered from Christian children's books, basement-made HTML websites, and low-grade educational materials to create flat, cartoonish, satirical works that are comedic and outlandish—the humor both masking and exposing the spectacle that distracts from the sinister underbelly of extreme religious fervor. Similar to the Imagists, Smith is interested in and inspired by imagery outside of the institutional lexicon, sharing inspiration with The Imagists in the form commercial and alternative illustrations, outsider and folk art, and low culture, universally known visual symbols.

Creating works in a similar vein of drawing and rough cartoon style, Anwar Mahdi is another emerging artist in Chicago who fuses mythology and queer theory to create his own aesthetic narrative. In his grandiose scenes, Mahdi mocks patriarchal gender norms in an attempt to arm the power of the feminine by reimagining its archetypal expressions in history. His work is heavily illustrative, grounded in drawing with mural-like, narratives unfolding as the eye moves across the scene.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“The Imagists” is an umbrella term that refers to a few groups of representational artists associated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago at this time. Their style is recognizable for its grotesque surrealism that shirks the effortless chicness of New York and L.A. in favor of lowbrow, small town charm. Often bundled together, The Monster Roster, The Hairy Who, and the Chicago Imagists are three distinct groups that comprised the Imagist movement.

The Monster Roster was a group of WWII veterans who attended SAIC on the G.I. bill. Mentored by surrealist printmaker Vera Berdich, their work was heavily existential, and were given the name “Monster Roster” by critic Franz Schulze, in reference to the gruesome, mystical nature of their figurative paintings.

The Hairy Who was made up of six artists who exhibited at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago in 1966 through 1968. The three annual exhibitions were entitled "Hairy Who?", based on an incident in which artist Karl Wirsum became confused when asked about Chicago art critic Harry Bouras. "Hairy Who?" was the perfect title for the Imagists to stick it to the self-important art world. While exhibits in New York were all vying for the most elusively cool title they could muster, The Hairy Who leaned into their lowbrow humor and irreverence for the art world at large. While often compared to the Pop Art movement going on in NYC at the same time, Chicago art critic Karen Lennox noted that the Imagists "sourced surrealism, art brut, comics....", whereas New York Pop Art sourced "commercial advertisement and popular illustration... One was personal, the other, anti-personal."

If New York Pop Artists were concerned with the hard, shiny, plastic world of advertising and the relationship between commodity and consumer, The Chicago Imagists and the Hairy Who turned their attention instead to the intimate relationship between humans and the material world around them. They were more interested in using objects to dive into the deep dark recesses of the human psyche than co-opting corporate advertising techniques.

Catalogue designed by Troy Lehman with original comics by the artists, front cover art by Darius Airo, with an essay by Richard Hull.

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