

pentimenti
presents

HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS



A LESLIE BUCHBINDER FILM

2014 | 105 MIN. | 16:9 | HD

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HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS

LOGLINE (50 words):

A lavishly-illustrated romp through Chicago Imagist art: the Second City scene that challenged Pop Art's status quo in the 1960s, then faded from view. Forty years later, its funk and grit inspires artists from Jeff Koons to Chris Ware, making the Imagists the most famous artists you never knew.

SHORT SYNOPSIS (125 words):

Chicago-Style Modern Art With Everything: In the mid 1960s, the city of Chicago was an incubator for an iconoclastic group of young artists. Collectively known as the Imagists, they showed in successive waves of exhibitions with monikers that might have been psychedelic rock bands of the era - Hairy Who, Nonplussed Some, False Image, Marriage Chicago Style. Kissing cousins to the contemporaneous international phenomenon of Pop Art, Chicago Imagism took its own weird, wondrous, in-your-face tack. Various pugnacious, puerile, scatological, graphic, comical, and absurd, it celebrated a very different version of 'popular' from the detached cool of New York, London and Los Angeles. *Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists* is the first film to tell their wild, woolly, utterly irreverent story.

MEDIUM SYNOPSIS (300 words):

In the mid 1960s, the city of Chicago was an incubator for an iconoclastic group of young artists. Collectively known as the Imagists, they showed in successive waves of exhibitions with monikers that might have been psychedelic rock bands of the era - Hairy Who, Nonplussed Some, False Image, Marriage Chicago Style. Kissing cousins to the contemporaneous international phenomenon of Pop Art, Chicago Imagism took its own weird, wondrous, in-your-face tack. Various pugnacious, puerile, scatological, graphic, comical, and absurd, it celebrated a very different version of 'popular' from the detached cool of New York, London and Los Angeles. From Jim Nutt's cigar-chomping, amputated women to Christina Ramberg's studies of corsetry and bondage; from Barbara Rossi's bejeweled dot paintings to Roger Brown's secretive, silhouetted figures in windows - Chicago's diverse artists followed no trend, preferring a path they ferociously cleared for themselves. *Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists* is the first film to tell their wild, woolly, utterly irreverent story. Over forty interviews with the artists and a prominent group of critics, curators, collectors, and contemporary artists are featured, intertwined with a wealth of re-discovered archival footage and photographs. The film is narrated by Chicago theater legend Cheryl Lynn Bruce, and propelled by an original score for cello and voice by composer Tomeka Reid. This is the story of the artists that emerged from the catalyzing exhibitions at the Hyde Park Art Center from 1966-1973, starting with the Hairy Who, who would come to be known as the Chicago Imagists. It brings to life the milieu of Chicago in the 1960s, and also showcases the legacy of the Imagists' work in contemporary art production today, from Jeff Koons to Chris Ware. Themes in the narrative include the Imagists' emergence within the national context of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, the rise and fall of taste within art history, and the uncharacteristic equality afforded to women artists among this Chicago group.

HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS

DIRECTOR & CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Leslie Buchbinder (*Director*) began her career as a professional dancer with companies in Chicago and San Francisco. She then worked as an Account Executive for an arts public relations firm in New York City, before establishing her own arts communications company in Chicago. LB-PR specialized in communications for art museums locally and internationally for over ten years. In 2011, Leslie was nominated to the Committee on Prints and Drawings of The Art Institute of Chicago. Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists is her first film.

Brian Ashby and Ben Kolak (*Producers-Cinematographers-Editors*) are Chicago-based filmmakers, and Co-Directors of the award-winning documentary feature *Scrapsters* (Roger Ebert's Best Documentaries, 2010), set in Chicago's scrap-metal scavenging community. *Scrapsters* participated in the Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers; screened theatrically, including at the Gene Siskel Film Center (Chicago) and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco); and was acquired for distribution by Cinetic FilmBuff. Ashby and Kolak are the co-creators of the documentary web series *Central Standard* and *The Grid*, released through PBS Digital Studios and Gapers's Block, respectively.

John Corbett (*Writer*) has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1988 in the departments of Painting/Drawing and Sound. He is the Co-Owner of Corbett vs. Dempsey Gallery, Chicago. Exhibitions co-curated by Corbett include *Painting on the Möve: Chicago Imagists 1966-1973* (Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 2011); *Christina Ramberg: Corset Urns and Other Inventions* (David Nolan Gallery, New York, 2011); *Touch & Go: Ray Yoshida & His Spheres of Influence* (SAIC Sullivan Galleries, 2010); and *Big Picture: A New View of Painting in Chicago* (Chicago History Museum, 2007).

Lilli Carré (*Animator*) is an artist and illustrator in Chicago, working primarily in the forms of experimental animation, comics, and print. Her animated films have shown throughout the U.S. and abroad, including at the Sundance Film Festival and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Her work has appeared in the Believer, the New Yorker, the New York Times, Best American Comics and Best American Nonrequired Reading.

Tomeka Reid (*Composer*) is a Chicago-based cellist, composer and educator, who has been commissioned by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), the Chicago Jazz Festival, and the Chicago Jazz Ensemble, and has showcased her work abroad at festivals such as Umbria Jazz, An Insolent Noise, and Vignola Jazz. Ms. Reid has been nominated and awarded residencies for composition with the Ragdale Foundation and the Herb Alpert Foundation.

Cheryl Lynne Bruce (*Narrator & Script Consultant*) is an actress and director who has performed on prestigious stages across the country and internationally over the course of her 30+ year career in theater, film, and television. She is a member of Chicago's Teatro Vista, and has appeared in Jeff- and Tony-award-winning productions at the Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Court Theatre, and many others. Among the distinctions she has received are the 2010 Jane Addams Hull House Association Woman of Valor Award and a 2011 3Arts Award. Her film credits include *Prison Break*, *There Are No Children Here*, *Separate But Equal*, *To Sir, With Love Part 2*, *Stranger than Fiction*, *Daughters of the Dust* and *The Fugitive*.

HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS

FILM QUOTES & MORE

In 1966, an enigmatic exhibition in Chicago bore the title: Hairy Who. The first gathering of a loose group of artists known subsequently as the “Chicago Imagists”, the Hairy Who mounted several shows before the end of the ‘60s, as did two other exhibition groups, the False Image and the Nonplussed Some. With a wildly exuberant and eccentric sensibility, the Imagists created paintings and objects that explored the deepest and darkest niches of the human psychosexual experience, drawing on commercial and “outsider” art, Surrealism, Pop, and something else completely original and totally weird. The id runs rampant over the super-ego, and the high-brow tangos with the low-brow. The Imagists were most widely known in the 1970s and 1980s, and they have continued working, forging divergent paths from a common ancestry.

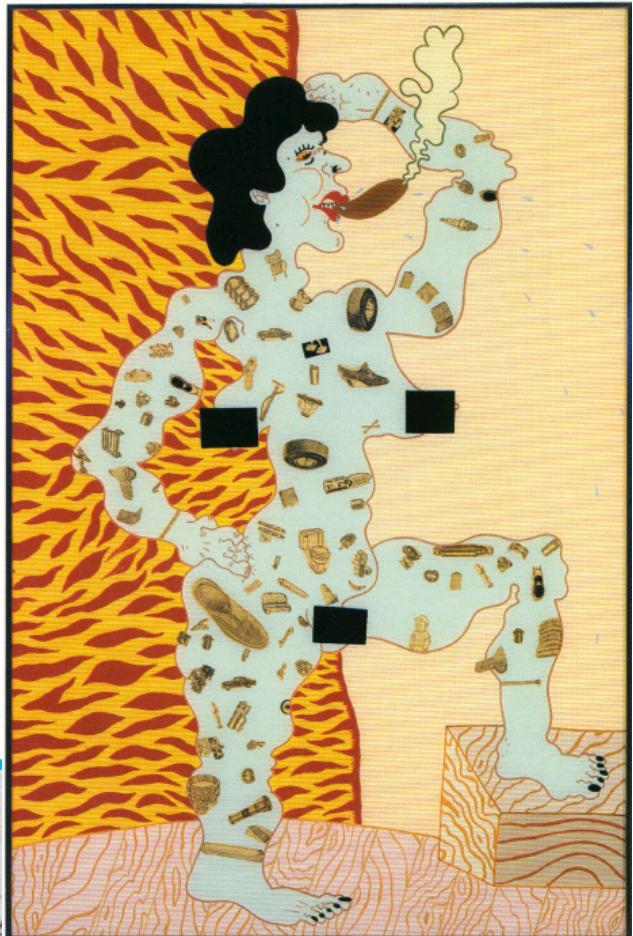
Hairy Who exhibition, 1966



“I don’t know that an artist like Andy Warhol has the same ability to leave us feeling shocked and unresolved, today, the way that Nutt and Ramberg do. The humor, the grotesque, the ribald, the caricature, the overt sexuality. The potency of that transcends the limits of a Chicago story.”

JAMES RONDEAU

Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art - The Art Institute of Chicago

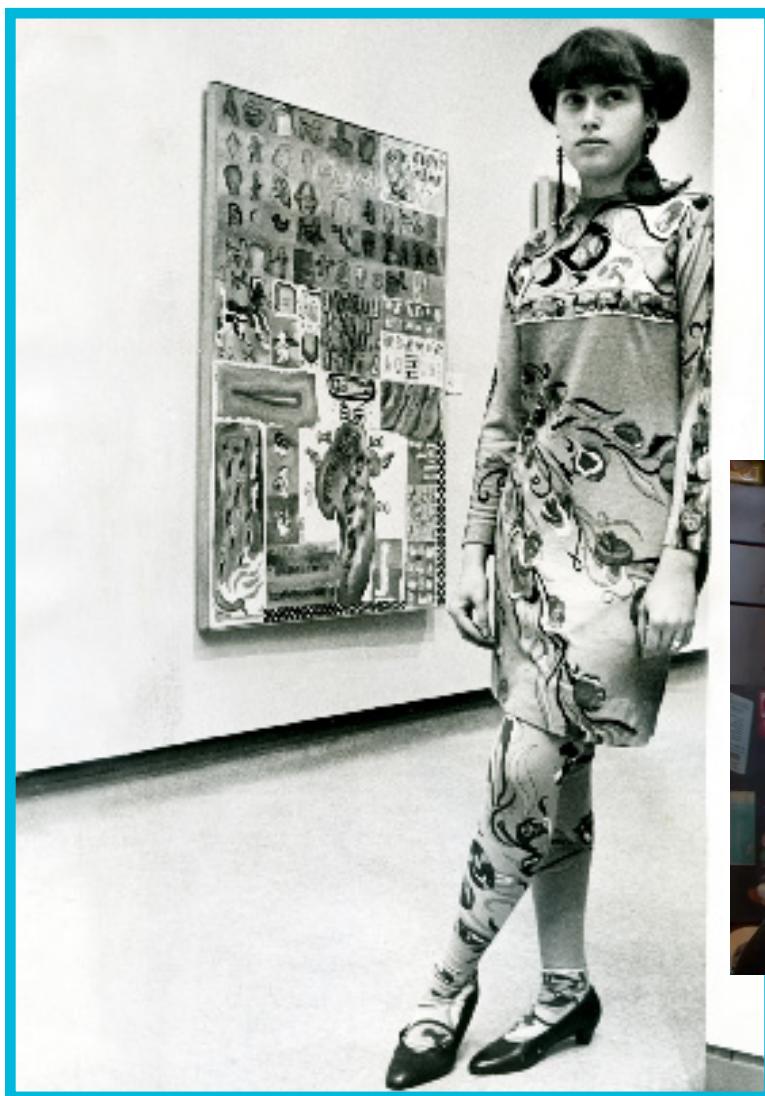


Jim Nutt, Flame, 1966

Chicago remains a city globally known for its architecture and its theater, but less so for its visual artists. The work of the Chicago Imagists – a loosely-affiliated group of a few dozen artists, sharing influences, attitudes, and approaches – is of a magnitude deserving a place in the canon of 20th century painting, alongside the household names of American art. Yet to many, they remain obscure.

FILM QUOTES & MORE

The creativity and ingenuity of Imagist art is larger than any narrow conceptions of its time - the "radical" 1960s; of its place - the city of Chicago; or of its style - figure-based, surrealist-oriented painting. It can't be neatly summarized as a school or a movement. Much of what has held Chicago Imagism back from broader audiences are the official narratives of art history. As these linear stories were drawn, the Imagists - and many other scenes like theirs - twice fell on the wrong side. When the young Imagists hit the scene out of school, Abstract Expressionism dominated, and all painting with forms drawn from life was seen as 'finished'. When the New York Pop Artists arose, the Chicago Imagists took a keen interest in their contemporaries who were also bringing content back. Yet the history of that period often chooses the mechanical reproductions of Warhol, Lichtenstein, and company as the only representatives.



"Everything that was invented in the 60s could be co-opted, immediately. There was no problem co-opting Op Art, Hippie Art, anything. But the Hairy Who couldn't be co-opted. It had embraced insanity and psychosis. And... you don't necessarily sell toothbrushes with that."



GARY PANTER,
Legendary underground artist & musician
Art Director of Pee-wee's Playhouse

"Both the work in New York and Chicago was very much about popular culture, but the New York work tried to be very objective and impersonal, and the work here was very subjective, very personal. So I say New York was cool, and we were hot."

SUELLEN ROCCA, Chicago Imagist artist - on Pop Art
Member of "Hairy Who"

FILM QUOTES & MORE

Imagist artists gleefully plundered the city of Chicago for their inspiration and source materials, day in and day out. Bits of the violent, trash-strewn, boisterous city of Studs Terkel, Nelson Algren, and Carl Sandburg can be found chewed up and flung across their canvases as if by an enormous garbage compactor. From Ed Paschke, who kept company with the strippers and pimps of his Uptown neighborhood; to Roger Brown, who twisted and anthropomorphized Chicago architecture; and Ed Flood, who in his miniature Plexiglas worlds re-recreated the obsessiveness of traditional sign-painting – each artist found deep meaning in the city's pungent physical jumble, and preserved its spirit for future generations.

Ed Paschke, Red Ball, 1971



"Most of my work has always been urban, it's mostly been nocturnal."

"I'm both sympathetic to and curious about these people."

"It's like some kind of a street fight or something - anything that's nearby, anything that you can use, it's fair."

ED PASCHKE

Chicago Imagist artist

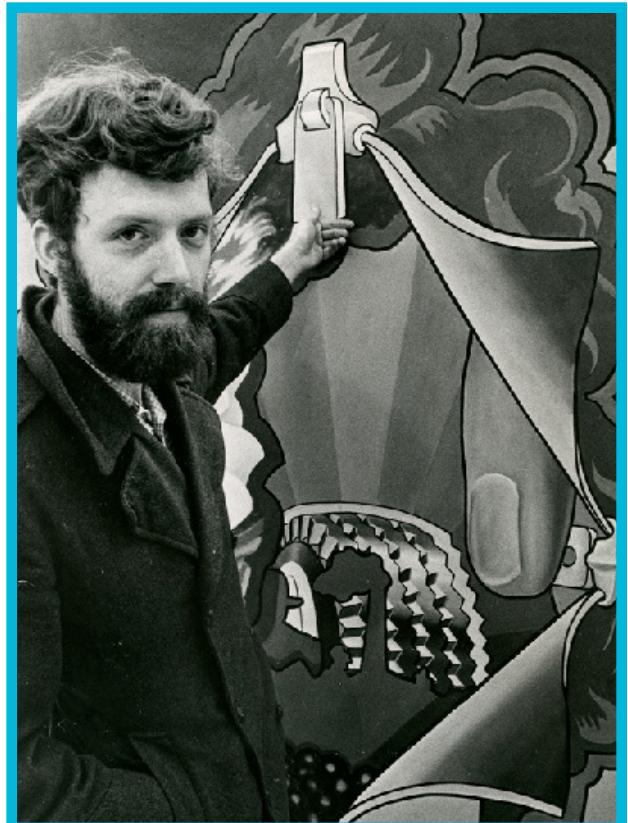
Member of "Nonplussed Some"

"I wanted to do paintings that would express the urgency of the situation. And I felt that the situation was urgent – I didn't even need a war to think the situation was urgent. I came pre-equipped with an urgent situation."

ART GREEN

Chicago Imagist artist

Member of "Hairy Who"

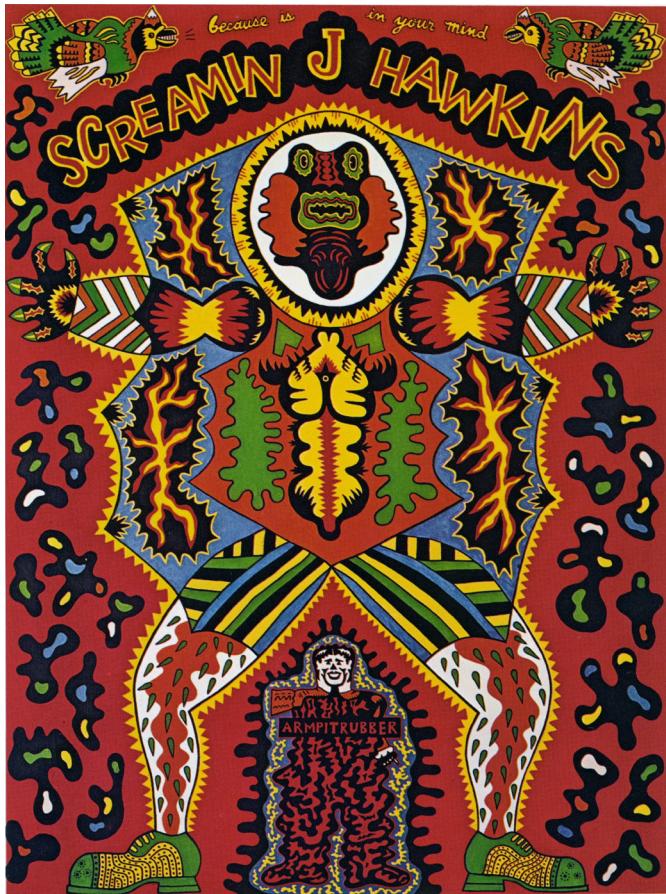


FILM QUOTES & MORE

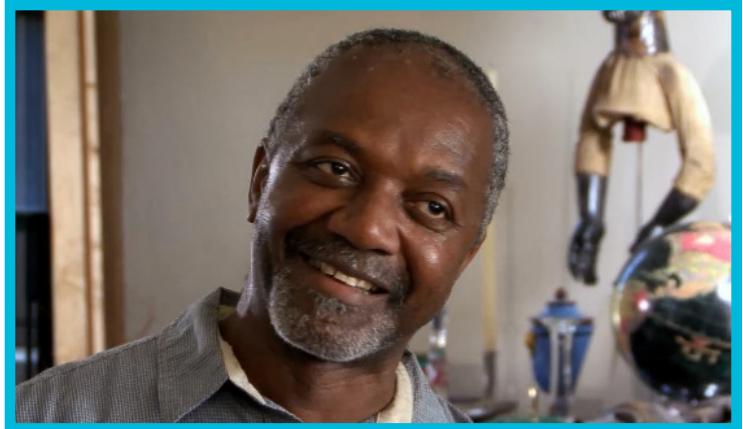
During the conceptual art heyday of the 1980s through the 2000s, appreciation for the work of the Imagists essentially went 'underground'. This film aims to bring these vital artists back into the eye of the general public today, at a time when both the art world and the broader culture are again hungry for intimately personal and graphic-based artwork. Particularly in our digital age, the virtuosic craftsmanship and fetishistic sheen of Imagist works are a marvel to behold.

"I think Karl Wirsum is one of the most important artists of the 20th century."

CHRIS WARE
Cartoonist



Karl Wirsum, *Screamin' Jay Hawkins*, 1968



"I never recognized this crisis in painting that people keep talking about. What I do recognize is that from time to time, the critical interest in the art world seems to focus its attention on one area or another. But it doesn't in any way erase the activity of what other people are doing. You take an artist like Ed Paschke - he's never not been an important artist. I'm not one of those people who frets about the possibilities of things, or the endings of things, because I just know that good work will out. It always does."

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL
Contemporary Chicago painter, appointee to Barack Obama's Committee on the Arts



"They seemed to look at comics and see it as having something that could viably express something about human life. That's what really appealed to me most about their work."

CHRIS WARE
Chicago cartoonist (*Jimmy Corrigan, Building Stories*) First comics artist invited to participate in the Whitney Biennial

FILM QUOTES & MORE

Speaking about the Hairy Who in art:21 magazine, publisher and curator Dan Nadel asked, "Is it possible that the artists saying the most about being human have often been the most overlooked?" While Imagist art participates in an art historical dialogue – with formal references from the Middle Ages to German Expressionism to the arts of Oceania – it is not primarily 'art about art'. It can inspire without any prerequisites. A new generation of young artists today has come to revere the Chicago Imagists for their direct and whole-hearted vision, their shockingly un-repressed subject matter, and their constant and wicked inventiveness - some according them an almost cult or legendary status. *Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists* addresses the cyclical nature of taste in the art world, and the burgeoning appreciation for "alternative modernisms". The international success and ongoing work of the Imagists has done much to help liberate Chicago from the pernicious "second city complex" it has always grappled with in its cultural realms, and points the way to a strange new horizon. Come into my parlor said the spider to the fly...



GLADYS NILSSON working in her studio, 2013



AARON CURRY

Contemporary sculptor
Public artist at Lincoln
Center Plaza 2013

"I think what the whole idea with the Chicago group was like, find out who you are. And then you just go, 'Fuck you! I'm standing by that.' Right? It took me a long time to do that."



PETER DOIG

Contemporary painter
Subject of Tate Modern retrospective 2008

"You talk about the Chicago Imagists, it's not important to me that they're from Chicago. It transcends that place – place represents many places to other people. I felt that their subjects and the way they made art, was a way in, for me as well."

HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

An extraordinary group of artists - later known as the Chicago Imagists - entered my family's life as I entered my adolescence. While gazing at these artists and their art with pubescent eyes, I was alternately disturbed and relieved, perplexed and enlightened. At the age of 14, I somehow coerced Ed Paschke and Roger Brown to spend an afternoon making holiday tree decorations with me. While we sat together forging ornaments out of flour, salt, and water, I watched Ed's and Roger's agile hands alchemically transforming the slop into fully-painted heads, torsos (and genitalia!), adorned with sparkles & pins. The day was magical - and a recognition that my life would be devoted to finding ways to unleash & manifest the un-adult-erated joy of childhood creating within grownup time.

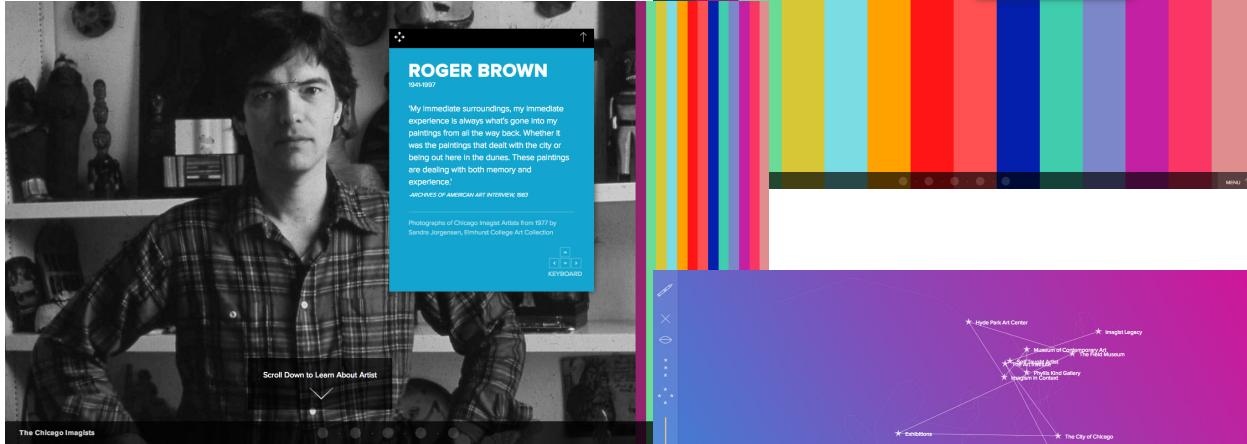
A few years later, as a professional dancer, I kept that memory close. When age forced me to find another vocation, arts public relations beckoned, and allowed me to intimately engage with art again - but not as a 'maker'. Six years ago, I turned to film. With an all-star team of colleagues, I filmed interviews across the country, pulled forgotten gems from international archives, and used animation to sculpt my own testament to the living history of the Chicago Imagists.

Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists celebrates the artist's power to alter our sense of time and space. These artists have informed my life - and the lives of so many others - in ways that I never could fully apprehend until I had the great privilege of making this film. For several decades, Chicago was animated by a thrilling, art-provoked world of exhibitions, festive events, and camaraderie. Today, time seems to be bending yet again: the artists collectively known as the Chicago Imagists are achieving ever-broader recognition among new generations of artists & art-lovers around the world. Through this film, I pass on the gift of an intimate view of their art and lives to creative spirits everywhere.

LESLIE BUCHBINDER

HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS

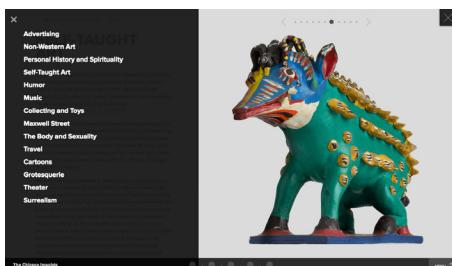
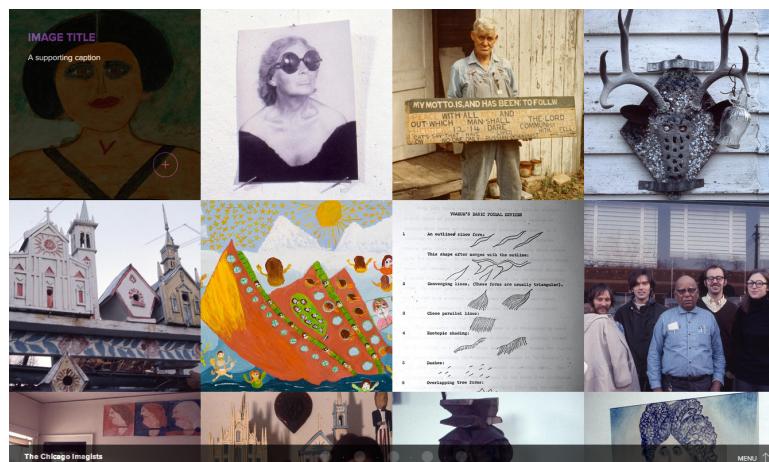
www.chicagoimagists.com
an interactive web archive



ABOUT THE ARCHIVE:

This interactive archive was developed by Pentimenti Productions to provide a freely-accessible resource for students, teachers, artists, researchers, and art enthusiasts who want to learn more about Chicago Imagism. It is designed to share some of the wealth of material uncovered and recorded in the process of producing the Pentimenti film, *Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists*.

Some of the content on this site comes from rarely-seen personal collections of Imagist artists and their friends. Other material has been made available with permission from the collections of museums or other arts institutions around the world. All of the written text on this site and dozens of the interviews were produced by Pentimenti as a new contribution to the historical record. Bibliographic references and links to other relevant sources of information have been compiled in order to assist visitors wishing to continue their research. This website is not intended to replace the experience of viewing *Hairy Who & The Chicago Imagists*, but rather to further the film's educational mission by presenting supplemental material in a format that encourages visitor-directed exploration, engagement, and discovery.



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A LESLIE BUCHBINDER FILM

HAIRY WHO & THE CHICAGO IMAGISTS



Directed by **LESLIE BUCHBINDER**
Produced by **BRIAN ASHBY**
Written by **JOHN CORBETT**
Edited by **BEN KOLAK**
Original music by **TOMEKA REID**
Narrated by **CHERYL LYNN BRUCE**
Animations & Titles by **LILLI CARRÉ**
Motion Graphics by **JULIUS DOBIESZ**
Sound Design by **ALEX INGLIZIAN**

Supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts