

**#MuseumAtHome with the  
Elmhurst Art Museum**

# The Chicago Imagists



**Social Distancing**

This online guide will explore a few works of **The Chicago Imagists** through the lens of today's new social norm, **Social Distancing**.

But first, let's get some background information on **The Chicago Imagists** and their subject matter.

Previous Page: Karl Wirsum, *Ice Pick Nick Fisherman*, 1979, acrylic on wood.

Christina Ramberg, *Glimpsed*, 1975, acrylic on masonite  
Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.





# Who are The Chicago Imagists?

Influenced by such local groups as The Monster Roster, the Chicago Imagists were a collective of artists often featured in exhibitions hosted by the curator Don Baum at the Hyde Park Art Center in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Chicago Imagists were connected by certain commonly held beliefs, rather than a single recognizable style; they rejected Abstract Expressionism, the popular idiom of the day, and produced works that featured imagery, primarily of the human figure.

(detail) Art Green, *Troubled Sleep*, 1974, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.



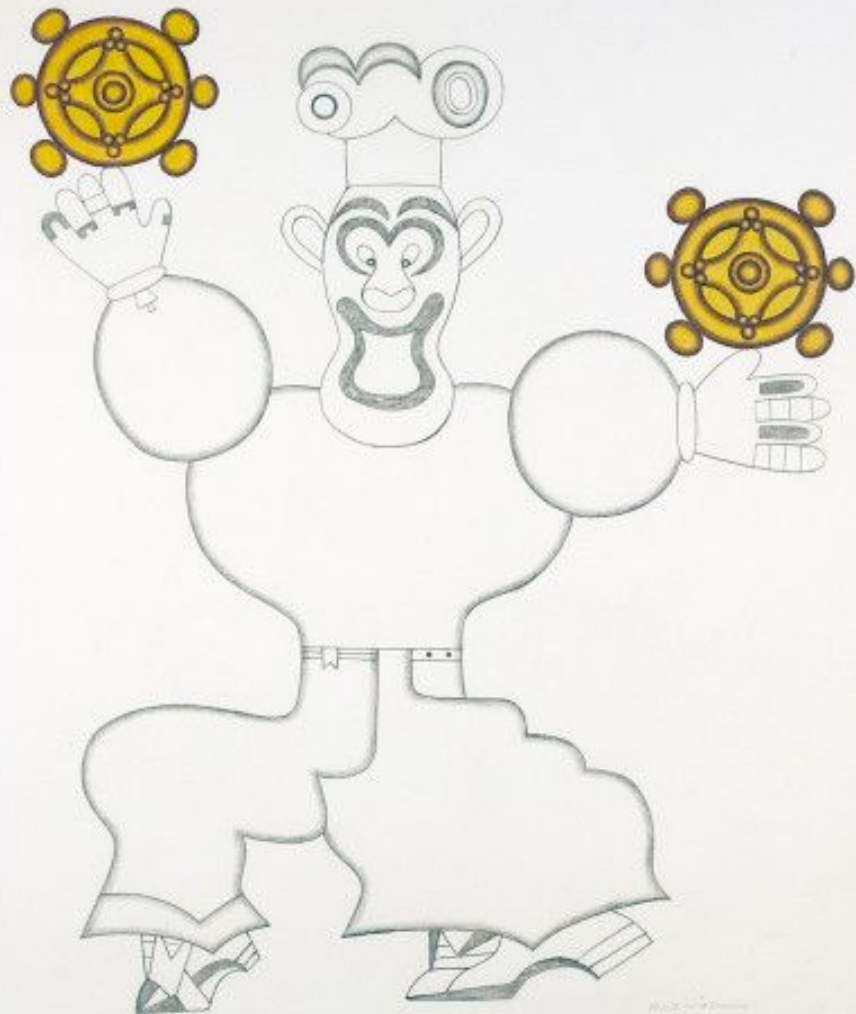
# Why the Human Figure?

The Chicago Imagists' insistence on figuration was neither a celebration of their hometown traditions nor an intentional snub to New York's abstraction.

These works originally were a way of exploring imagery through the human form. The human body was simply an ideal medium for the exploration of many of the governing interests of Imagist art: humor, fear, memory, and the battering of social and cultural norms. Personal, lived experience was a unifying source of inspiration for the Imagists.

While works by **The Chicago Imagists** was not originally intended to be understood this way, we'll be exploring them through today's lens of **Social Distancing** during the global pandemic.

Karl Wirsum, *Baker Boy*, 2001, graphite and colored pencil on paper.  
Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.



# Social Distancing

So what is **Social Distancing**? Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. It has created a new way, we as a society, interact with others during this global health crisis.



Jim Nutt, *Oh! My Goodness! (No No)*, 1977, etching in brown on paper. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

# Practicing Social Distancing

Today, it is recommended we stand six feet apart from others and refrain from attending gatherings of more than ten people.

Yoshida's work, *Arbitrary Approach* captures individuals remaining at a distance while surrounded by constant chaos. Can you relate to this feeling as you try to stay separate from others but also surrounded by the constant threat of this virus?

How are you practicing safe distancing? Do you do a foot 'high five'? Or an elbow 'handshake'?



Ray Yoshida, *Arbitrary Approach*, 1983, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.





# Safe at Home

Home has become not only a place of comfort and rest, it has become our office, our classroom, our recess, our theatre, command center, etc.

How has your home transformed since the 'stay-at-home' order has been in place? How are you balance all the new activities taking place?

Roger Brown, *Standing Around While All are Sinking*, 1977, etching and aquatint on paper. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

# Visiting Family & Friends

Brown's *See Seven Cities*, explores his own memories of growing up in Alabama, returning home late at night from visiting relatives.

Today, as part of our social obligation to limit the spread of COVID-19, we are staying at home to protect ourselves and the ones around us, even close family and friends.

How are you staying in touch with your family and friends? Email? Facetime? Mailing cards?



Roger Brown, *See Seven Cities*, 1971, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

# Staying Connected

Since we are encouraged to stay home, we lose our daily face-to-face conversations. Now more than ever, we are relying on technology to help us communicate with family, friends, and co-workers.

How are you staying connected? Facetime? Zoom? Google Hangouts? Text messages?



Ed Paschke, *Nouvelle*, 1983, oil crayon and pencil on paper.  
Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.



# Faces & Face Masks

In Nilsson's 1984 work *In Vertical Shade*, we have a cast of characters using hand-held masks. While intended differently by the artist, we can concede to a similar vision of society as the CDC strongly encourages the use of face mask or face protection. We now live with obscured views of people faces as we venture out for essential needs or walks around the neighborhood.

Are you joining forces to make your own masks and for family and friends? Do you use a plain mask, or something decorated?

See page 24 for CDC recommendations for face masks.

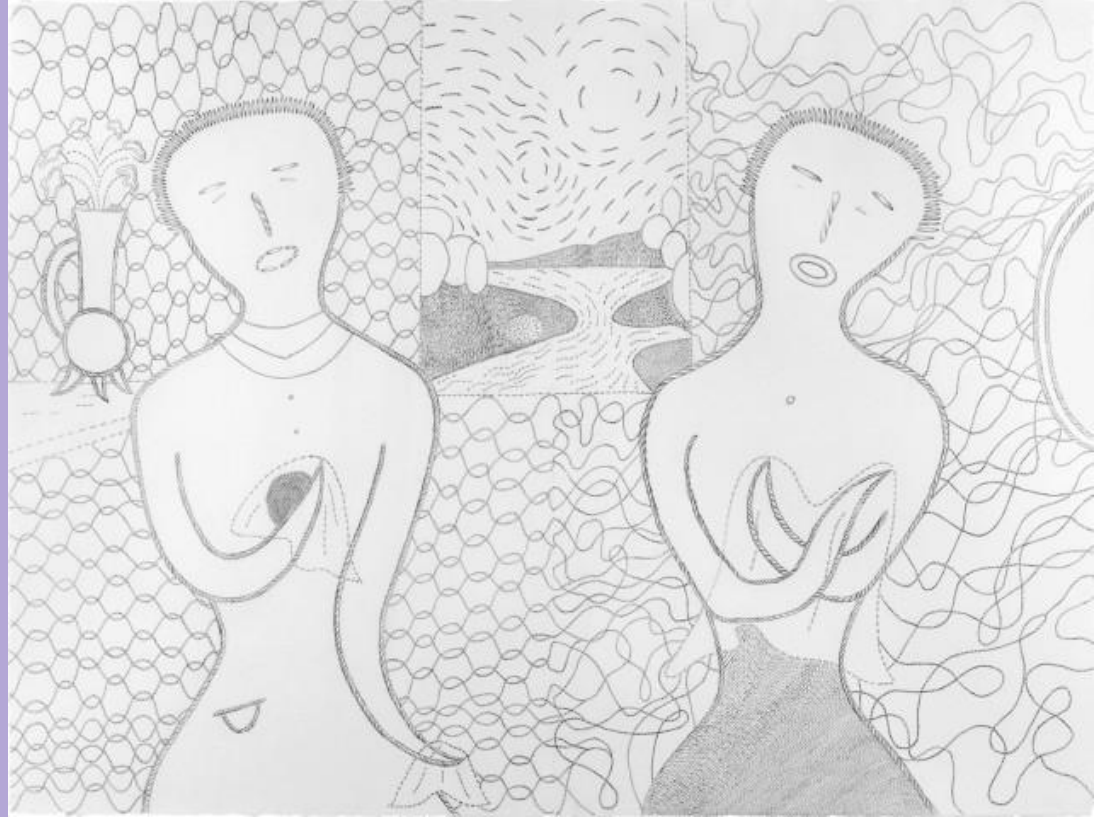
Gladys Nilsson, *In Vertical Shade*, 1984, watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

# New Emotions

With new social rules to follow, comes new emotions. It is part of the human experience to want to reach out and acknowledge your family, friends, co-workers, or new acquaintances with some form of a physical greeting, whether it be a handshake or a hug.

Suellen Rocca's work almost mimics our current feelings of sadness and loneliness as we manage these new social norms.

How do you keep yourself grounded? Do you keep busy? Do you go out for a walk? Do you exercise? Do you meditate?



Suellen Rocca, *Piety*, 1984, pencil on paper.  
Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

[Suellen Rocca tribute available HERE](#)

# Fear & the Unknown

With a global pandemic comes personal worry and anxiety. Art Green's *Troubled Sleep* becomes a relatable images, as we continue to manage our personal feelings through this difficult time, which will sometimes manifest itself in the form of vivid dreams.

How do you relate to this image?  
Do you remember your dreams? Do you dream in color or black and white? Do you keep a dream journal?

Art Green, *Troubled Sleep*, 1974, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.



# Staying Entertained

In Roger Brown's 1971 work, *Performance*, we are faced with our new reality of having to entertain ourselves from the comfort of our own home. With many concerts and performances cancelled or postponed, we look to artists and designers to take the lead and connect us.

How are you keeping yourself entertained at home? Listening to music? Streaming movies and shows? Reading? Games?



Roger Brown, *Performance*, 1971, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

# Awareness

Eventually as a society, we will go back to a new form of normal. We, as an individual, will need to be aware of our surroundings and even our own bodies. We will have ways of protecting ourselves, while also protecting others. It will impact the way we move and operate through the world, particularly in social spaces. What once was a normal day-to-day activity may seem abstract and strange.

What do you find that you need to do a little differently with your body in your daily routine? Do you shop at the grocery a little differently? Do you think twice before you reach out to someone?

Barbara Rossi, *Shed Step II*, 1973, acrylic on plexiglass.  
Courtesy of the Elmhurst College Art Collection.







Enjoy a Hairy  
Who/ Chicago  
Imagist inspired  
At-Home Activity  
[HERE](#)

Share your projects with us on  
social media using the hashtag  
**#EAMatHome** &  
**#museumfromhome**

# The Chicago Imagists at the Elmhurst Art Museum



Installation of *The Figure and the Chicago Imagists: Selections from the Elmhurst College Art Collection*, curated by Suellen Rocca. Fall 2019. Photography by Jim Prinz.

Over the past couple years, the Elmhurst Art Museum has hosted a number of exhibitions featuring the Imagists and related artists. Through generous loans from various private collectors and partners Elmhurst College, we have been fortunate to highlight this important local art movement and share it with our community.

Today, the museum continues to feature The Chicago Imagists in our exhibition *Sandra Jorgensen*.



Sandra Jorgensen was influenced by the Chicago Imagists. She took photographs of the artists to document them in their homes and studios. Jorgensen played an important role in caring for and acquiring of a number of Chicago Imagist works for the Elmhurst College Art Collection.

[Watch Sandra Jorgensen discuss how the collection came together \*\*HERE.\*\*](#)

(left to right) Karl Wirsum, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Phillip Hanson, Christina Ramberg, and Roger Brown. Photographed by Sandra Jorgensen. Courtesy of Elmhurst College Art Collection.



## **Elmhurst Art Museum Exhibition Pages Related to The Chicago Imagists**

[What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago  
1978-1998](#)

[The Figure and the Chicago Imagists: Selections  
from the Elmhurst College Art Collection](#)

[Kings & Queens: Pinball, Imagists and Chicago](#)

[Sandra Jorgensen](#)

## **Elmhurst College Chicago Imagist Art Collection**

[View the Elmhurst College Art Collection  
Online](#)

[WATCH Suellen Rocca talk about the  
collection at the A.C. Buehler Library at  
Elmhurst College](#)



## WTTW Chicago

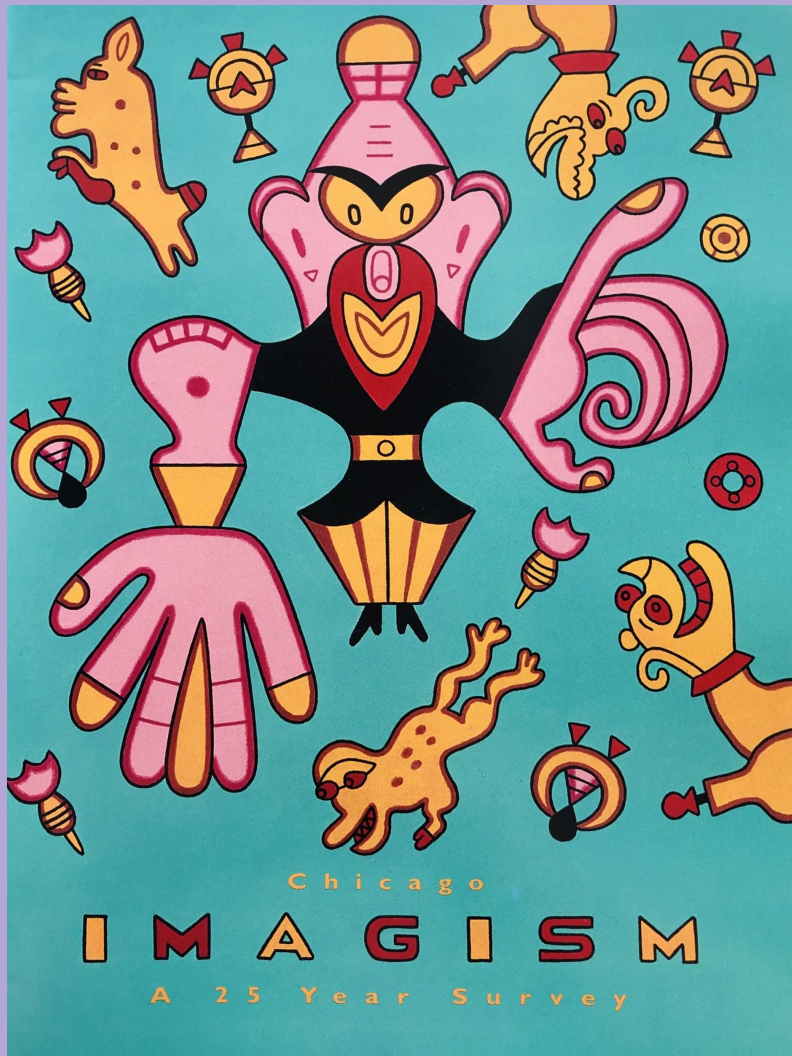
Enjoy this video and interview with the artist/curator Suellen Rocca and others

[The Weird and Fanciful Art of The Hairy Who](#)



Still from the film, *Hairy Who and The Chicago Imagists* (2014)

Watch *Hairy Who and The Chicago Imagists* documentary [HERE](#)



## MUSEUM STORE

### Item of the Week

Catalog to a major Chicago Imagist exhibition at The Davenport Museum of Art, December 3, 1994 - February 12, 1995. Important essay by Dennis Adrian. 38 pages, many b/w and color images. 11"x 8 1/2"- \$30

[Online Museum Store](#)



## More Information on Social Distancing and How You Can Help

[Click Here](#) for the CDC recommended homemade mask design with instructions.

What is Social Distancing? [Click Here](#)

[Click here](#) to learn how to protect yourself, family and friends

[Click here](#) to see how you can help local hospitals and medical facilities.





Online content brought to you by:  
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& Visitor Experience



Thank you to artists and patrons who have lent their work to the museum for these exhibitions, especially Elmhurst College. We are excited to continue our partnership with future exhibitions and programs.