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KILLER TEXT ON ART

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Jim Nutt, *Pin*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 23 3/8 x 23 3/8 inches

Jim Nutt, “Trim and Other Works: 1967–2010”

David Nolan Gallery

By Chris Bors

JIM NUTT, part of a large number of artists known as the Imagists, who exhibited at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago in the 1960s and '70s in show curated by the artist Don Baum, is perhaps best known for his affiliation with the Hairy Who. While definitely not outsider artists, the group of six graduates from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago who made up the informal group that exhibited under the Hairy Who moniker in the late 1960s – James Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca and Karl Wirsum – unconsciously bucked the trends that were most prevalent in the art world at the time. The Hairy Who's work displayed a strong graphic quality, comic- and cartoon-inspired drawing, and an interest in pattern, while influenced by African and American Indian art. In a 2002 interview with Dan Nadel published in Issue 3 of *The Ganzfeld*, Nutt states that their connection with the Art Institute of Chicago's museum, school and faculty had a more profound impact on the group than anything else and that, “Basically we were individual artists who saw an opportunity to make an impact and have fun with what we produced by exhibiting together.”

“Trim and Other Works: 1966-2010” at David Nolan Gallery features drawings and paintings from the 1960s through today. In the back room are examples of Nutt's work, mainly from the '60s and '70s, that resembles cartoon illustration or cels from animated cartoons. *Broad Jumper* (1969) in fact, a somewhat grotesque rendering of a woman leaping through the air with cartoon motion lines around her, is painted on the reverse of a shaped piece of Plexiglas, a technique that is employed in traditional cel animation.

While Nutt has remained true to his Hairy Who roots, in his more recent work he has refined his aesthetic into a highly personal visual language that is more about process and introspection than it is about an obvious graphic narrative. The painstakingly rendered paintings in hand-crafted frames and graphite drawings that make up the newer work, all portraits of anonymous women, are tightly focused and display an obsession with pattern, surface and line quality. Because it takes Nutt about two years to complete a painting, there are only three on view. While not as flat as Takashi Murakami's Superflat aesthetic, which resembles an industrialized product, Nutt's work nevertheless borders on obsessiveness. Each painting exudes its own personality, partially because the artist's hand is evident in its making. Subtle gradations of color play off hard-edge outlines, flat backgrounds and intricate patterns, as seen in the crisscross shapes of the woman's blouse in *Plumb* (2004). Nutt pays particular attention to the nose on these faces, and fills the women's significant proboscises with stripes, spots and lines, which resemble camouflage.

Nutt's graphite on paper works, all untitled, further cement the artist's standing as a master manipulator of line. Pairing these drawings with Picasso's psychological portraits of women would make for a fascinating juxtaposition, especially since Picasso used his friends and family as subjects, while Nutt is deliberately elusive about the background of his imaginative females. – *Chris Bors*