Gladys Nilsson in conversation with Dan Nadel, August 2014.

Dan Nadel: *You were born in Chicago and your parents were Swedish immigrants. Tell me what part of Chicago did you grow up in and what were your earliest memories of the city.*

Gladys Nilsson: I grew up on the north side of Chicago and went Lakeview High School, the school where *My Bodyguard* was filmed. In my mid-teens my family moved a little further north in Chicago when I was in High School. We lived first right near the hospital I was born in, Illinois Masonic Hospital. I went to the grammar school that was literally out my backyard, in an apartment building complex that had a huge cement back lot that all the people and the kids played in, and there were clothes poles and all the women hung their clothes up on good, windy drying days, which was kind of fun. But they had a big chain link fence stretching the length of the property and that was butting up to the grade school I went to with the playground, the girl's playground and the boy's playground. I and the other kids that lived in the complex could just crawl under the fence because you could pull it sort of, you know, go home for lunch, crawl under the fence back and forth and so on, so that was always kind of a strange phenomena to me when I think back on it, you know, crawling under the fence to go to grade school, if you didn't get caught. I think if you got caught, you were chastised; and the other thing that stays in my memory was the smell of the stockyards. Even though the stockyards were south, when the wind was blowing a certain direction, the odor from the stockyards would permeate the entire north and south-east sides that we lived on and sometimes, if there was a sporting goods show at the amphitheater attached to the stockyards, my dad and I would take the streetcar down to the stockyards. That was one odor; then maybe a mile or half a mile west of where we lived was the Reed's Root Beer candy factory, so you could be caught either between the root beer smell or the cattle smell and it was very interesting. So those are two big memories of smells, olfactory memories of Chicago, early on.

What did your parents do?

My mom ended up waiting tables at a variety of places. She worked at a Swedish restaurant not all that far from where we lived and then my dad was a factory foreman at Sunbeam on the south side and he would get up astronomically early in the morning to be able to get to work by whatever time he had to work.

He would take the train all the way down on the south side?

Yeah, the El. So I have a very strict blue collar background in terms of sensibilities and exposures. It was not necessarily filled with cultural activities, though oddly enough I do have memories of my grandfather, my mom's dad, listening to opera on his Victrola, and that was very strange because that was the only cultural exposure and it wasn't really exposure. It would just be little snippets, but that's a distinct memory because there wasn't anything of that sort going on in my house.

When did you first manifest an interest in art?

Oh, always. It seemed like I was always doing drawing. I was allowed to set up a little card table and keep all kinds of stuff on it: crayons and papers and scissors, and one thing that does relate to what I'm doing now, the collage drawings that you're gonna talk about, is that I just loved paper dolls. I had a lot of those paper doll books and I would cut them out. Maybe I would fold the tabs down and put the dresses on them once, but it was buying new ones and then cutting them out. I loved to cut out. Just like now. There's an enormous amount of old art history in art books I have that I've been cutting out. I'm up to the challenge, no matter how small the different pieces to put together. I'm sure that my fascination with cutting things out comes from cutting out paper dolls. So I was drawing all the time, and in grade school I had a friend and she also liked to draw, so if

there was any big project, like a mural on dairy farming or something like that, we would be selected to draw and I can remember first she and I drawing cows.

Did your parents encourage you?

Well, they didn't necessarily encourage me. Because of the blue-collar sensibilities and hardships of going through the Depression and all of that kind of thing, they were both extremely worried about how one was going to make a living. My mom's favorite thing to tell me was that I should be a beautician because everybody wants to have their hair done. You know, that's a constant. No matter how much money one doesn't have or has, that a woman will always wanna go to the beauty parlor. Either that or be a secretary because somebody was always going to need somebody to take notes and type letters and of course, neither of those things was I remotely interested in doing. Looking back on it now, it's really amazing to me that I ever went to art school – that I just plowed ahead.

How did you do that?

I wasn't gonna take any distractions or any, well you know, I don't know how you're gonna make a living. Didn't make any difference. I was going to art school.

Were you rebellious as a teenager?

No. I always did what I was told, except for wanting to go to art school.

Really?

I was a very good little girl. Oh yeah. I was an only child, so there was a great deal of… I think the phrase is "smother love", going on. My mom was very cautious about how to

proceed in life and she was very nervous about a good number of things. My dad was a tall, stoic, silent, Swede, so he didn't have much to say. He'd rattle his newspapers every once in a while.

At the grade school and at all the public schools in Chicago, they would offer for kids that had the ability and could get there, to go downtown for these little classes at The Art Institute, so I and my friend that drew cows got a couple of these a couple of times and we would go downtown. There was something that was held in the big Fullerton Hall at the front of the museum, which is where the big survey art history classes were held, and there were all these kids that would gather there and somebody would show slides.

You would get assignments, you would go home, you would draw whatever the assignment was, bring it back and they would hang them up on the front of the stage and talk about them. I don't really remember too much about that aspect of it other than just having to carry drawings downtown. My friend and I would stop by Marshall Field's in the basement cafeteria and have a bowl of chili before going to the museum. That was a ritual that we did every time. So in any case, that was early exposure and actually, by the time I got to high school, I was really so busy with doing all of the high school kind of stuff that I really didn't get to the museum, but I was determined. I majored in art and had a very encouraging art teacher that was really very supportive of me going on to art school. By the time I got into the Art Institute, the museum had undergone a change, going from a 19th century building into a 20th century building with restructures of various components of it, so it was kind of an interesting phenomena to have been witness to both museum sensibilities, 19th century and 20th century.

Was it rare for women to go to the Art Institute in 1958?

Oh no. There were a lot of women there and actually, if you look back on archival photos of the school at the beginning, there were women attending art school. It wasn't

only men that were going there, so no. I don't know what the proportion was per class, though.

So when you were there, I know your big influences were Whitney Halsted and Katherine Blackshear, and you were taken with James Ensor, George Grosz, and also the encyclopedic nature of the museum. But what other artists were of particular interest?

Yeah, well the German Expressionists struck a chord with me, and then odd things. I mean not that Seurat is odd, but you know, like the Grande Jatte just because of its magnitude and difference from the Expressionists, but I think mainly it would be the Germans. And then by that point, becoming familiar with people like Paul Klee, John Marin, Burchfield. When I started doing watercolor, which was very late in my going to school, I became more aware of works on paper, but I think on the whole, it would have been the German Expressionists and then going back, thinking of 15th century Italian painting or certain aspects of the Renaissance, Egyptian tomb murals and things of that nature. Always more interested, I think in looking backward at what had been done and having inspirations and source materials and things from that, rather than to be looking forward at stuff that was being done. Well, not forward 'cause you can't see forward, but you know what I mean.

That brings up a question: So it's 1958. Abstract Expressionism has already boomed. It's just a little bit before Pop, but Rauschenberg and Johns are starting to show. So that was that work discussed at all in the Art Institute, or was that too current?

No, it wasn't too current. I don't remember getting into discussions about it. I and other friends of mine in classes were very well aware of it because probably Whitney would have covered some of the very current things. I'm very bad on dates, but until I graduated in '62 I think probably what was most looked at would have been things like whatever the Pollocks were that might have been exhibited or Twombly, older Guston,

so I think generally everybody was thinking of going away from figurative painting; it would have been going into more abstract.

And yet you were working on the figure.

Yeah. Well there were other people that were too. It's really strange to try to figure out why people do what they do, why you have a penchant for being a figurative painter, a landscape painter, abstraction and so on, what is it about your mind and your creative sensibilities that point you in that direction. Never works out. Never feels good, never looks good and it's like, well, you just do what it is you do.

You do what you do.

I do like paper. I honed in on paper very early on in terms of material. Have done some canvas work, but that's few and far between. It's the paper stuff. I just love paper.

I wondered about that because looking at your work in the mid-60s, it's on paper and then you moved into plexi.

For that brief period, but very successfully, and some of that plexi work incorporated collage elements.

Where did that come from, that collage? Is that the first time you were mixing hand imagery with collage?

Well there were a few bits and pieces in school and I think probably, it would have come from the art history classes that I took and work that I was exposed to through Whitney's class. The cubists used collage in a very obvious and evident way, and I would have been exposed to that and maybe we would have had an assignment like do something in

collage. There is one thing that I unearthed that I think I had given to my mom that I did probably just after I got out of school, using the *Life* magazine cover of Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra, although there's no Elizabeth Taylor left in there, but Cleopatra's very much in there. That kind of incongruity, that kind of juxtaposition of surface, which is what, moving ahead, was what I got interested in in the early ’90s – utilizing magazine or book paper along with the watercolor because of the surface differences. One just hit you in the face and other one invited you in. Then I was using strictly *Vogue* magazine; that shiny surface needed to have something else along with the watercolor, so I added gouache. Each one has a different physical surface.

Following that line of thought, what was so interesting to me about the most recent work, A Girl In The Arbor*, is that, indeed, the surfaces are incredibly layered. There's collage, there's watercolor, there's gouache, but there's also colored pencil.*

Yeah, they required a lot of density to make the surface get the visual lushness that I like. The watercolors that I stared to do in the late 2000s started to get very layered in terms of strokes and blobs and things until the transparent aspect of them almost disappeared. They were still watercolor and you could still look through the layers to get the information that was being presented in the passages below, but they became so opaque that the paper disappeared. Gouache sits on the surface, does not let any of the paper bounce through and it becomes flat, whereas the watercolor, you just dive into the paper, no pun intended.

These are the first works in a while in which the viewer is privy to your gesture in a way that I haven't been before, seeing your drawing marks and the vividness of those marks is very on the surface, which is wonderful.

That's the difference between these drawings and the previous watercolors. I would start the drawing out, per se, in pencil and I would draw rough – scribble draw – get all kinds

of things – and then I would just rub the heck out of them to erase the line just by rubbing it. It would still be there, and then with my lightest pen I would draw something, and then I would go slightly darker, slightly darker, so that all of those lines are still really there and really viewable. That part really interested me as to how much of my hand was in there, how much correction was there, and as long as I'm intrigued, I don't care what anybody else thinks. There is a lot of gesture that goes on in there and in looking at the very background, the arbors, the big blue poles and then there are leaves and blobs of one thing and another and then there's scribble marks and so on. I have enjoyed making those gestures that that kind of drawing in a variety of weights and tools, from a crayon to a sharp pencil, pen, etc... that explore the joy of moving.

Well, they're the most outwardly joyous works of yours that I've seen in. By that I mean the very complicated intermingling of the single large woman with these trees, and you're using a specific language for the leaves and bursts of foliage from the trunks. And then I found it so interesting that you were using collage to create a ground, to build up a place where this woman is integrating herself into an environment. It also made me think about theater sets in the sense that you're employing much the same background in each drawing.

She changes, but it's always she. It's the same person who goes through a variety of guises and she's in the same place, but it does undergo a variety of shifts and changes for whatever reason. I have no idea, but it's certain consistencies that I alter in some way. It continue to fascinate me that you have the ground where she's, which is mainly white and has things from a snake book that make up the tiles or brick work or whatever...

Things from a what book? Sorry?

A book on snakes. I didn't have too much of the illustrational thing, but I finally decided, "Well, I've got this big book, I may as well rip it up and use the images for that kind of

thing". Then she has a chair and there are the blue beams and those are the consistent things. Then the challenge is how much it can change. What kind of situation using those components can I make? The series of 12 x 12 inch collage drawings that precede *A Girl in the Arbor* by a couple of years are mainly pencil with collage and pen work and the consistency of those is the woman in a room and a potted plant. Those three things had to be in every one.

Gladys, who is she?

Oh, she's any, she's every woman.

No. Who is she?

Yes she is. No, she has no identity. She's every woman, she's every woman I've ever met and contact with, she's every woman that I'm related to and actually, the older I get, the more memories I have thinking back of being a little girl with all of these Swedish women milling about because the men were always in one room and the women were always in the other room, so she has no specific identity, truly.

Tell me more about the Swedish women you remember.

I remember it going down to visit my grandma, I think down in southern Illinois or mid-southern Illinois and you know, it would be usually Summer and it'd be usually hot and of course, there was no air conditioning. Maybe there might be an electric fan somewhere. I can't remember if anybody put a bucket of ice water in front of the fan, but could have been. And I just remember changing clothes and being in a big bedroom and we'd be maybe changing to go to the beach or something like that and old fashioned white petticoats and slips and things of that nature. People had to work very hard in those days. The men had to work hard, well, at any point. That doesn't only change that

nobody works hard anymore, but you know, to make a living and the women had to work extra hard because it's just the way it was because they had to do everything plus do more.

Are there body types that you remember?

Oh, all my relatives are full-bodied Swedish women. Very full-bodied Swedish woman. Sturdy stock. When I was younger, a lot of the woman, well some of the women in my work were skinny, and men too were roly-poly and then they got real skinny, but as I've gotten older, the women have become more zaftig and their hair's gotten grayer 'cause they're getting older and it's like, ah, what the hell.

It's funny, the Arbor woman seems to be sometimes struggling with her environment, but always tangled, whereas the wonderful smaller drawings, A Walk… *are just that.*

Yeah. She's going through an area and she's just having a nice little walk like Little Red Riding Hood, but there's always something lurking. The wolf is always lurking behind. There are things that are lurking, sort of like reading a Shirley Jackson book. You have to do double takes 'cause there's always something more than what meets the eye, and that fascinates me. The possibilities of what else is out there, you know, sort of like *The Twilight Zone*. Not that far, but a walk has things… she's just, you know, could have been in a structured arboretum. It could have been something where it's all very well planned, but there's something else going along with you and you maybe privy to it and you may not be privy to it.

They're also single colors, which I thought was interesting.

Yeah. Actually, I found a pad of old, not real old, but pastel papers. Charcoal papers, a small pad, and I would from time to time in the past pick up some toned water color

paper and do some things keyed to whatever color I was using and that was quite fun. See, I like to have fun and I like to challenge myself in terms of what can I do within the boundaries I've set up for myself. That's ongoing, but in any case, those particular drawings*, A Walk…*, was utilizing the paper that I'd found. Well, I'm glad you like that because I've had a great deal of fun exploring on a larger scale, but I really like the intimacy of something that's small. The large works are like a private conversation, and the more people get involved the larger it hits, but when you do something small it's kind of like sitting down and nattering with a friend and maybe sharing a secret something or other.

Why do you think collage came back after all these years?

The plexiglas pieces and some drawings did use collage in '67, '68, '69 very very briefly. Then I did some canvas work, watercolor work. It probably was about a 20-year hiatus because I started revisiting collage in the early ’90s where there were aspects of playing with things on a smaller scale or doing some mirror image kind of idea. Then in 2003, I started to let myself do some things in the summer that I'd always wanted to do, but never allowed myself. You know, take a break from doing my norm, which is the watercolor on paper, and I started fooling around with altering snapshots, and that was a great deal of fun in the summer doing that. I can't remember what I did the next summer, the next summer after that, but I revisited the collage snapshot work.

And then I began playing with that work, really started altering what was going on inside the image with little bits and pieces from collage and then using certain aspects of *Vogue* in terms of foliage or draperies or something on that order. Then I started cutting up some art history books, picking up a few volumes that had some small images; so I did several groups of those things and then took a rest and was going back to doing the straight watercolor and gouache. Last summer was designated ahead of time to work on big, as I call 'em, sloppy drawings, but big. I like the idea of working big, but in a loose manner and I had the hip replacement, so I didn't get up into the studio until

mid-July because I just couldn't do it. It was too hard to stand and they were easel pieces. So I did a group and they were developing in a way I really liked and it was so much fun. I told myself that I didn't have to stop because summer was over, and it just kept going. That cohesive group was 13 pieces because I wanted some big paper and I couldn't find exactly what I wanted. Jim had some paper left over from some big drawings he did in 1967 that he was never going to use again and he said, “Oh here, take this” and I said “Okay, I will go the distance with whatever pieces of paper there is”, and there were 13, which is why the series is 13. I mean it's not a magic number, like “Ooh, 13” or anything like that. It just was what was left over from him in 1967.

When you came out of school, you can see kind of a George Grosz influence on your work: they're not observational drawings, but they could have been. They’re people and then you moved into creatures with the Star Trek drawings and then in the ’70s, they become humanoid again and that kind of stays with you and I just wondered: Do these characters have interior lives for you? Are they speaking to you?

Oh yeah. It's like the relationship that one develops with one's work as one's going about it, that it tells you what needs to be done, so in that sense, yeah, they do speak to me and they do relate to me. These big drawings have one big main character and then the auxiliary and support cast are all of these little bits and pieces and snippets, which I've always had in my work, that kind of scale change where you do all of this big stuff to get down to the little teeny stuff and they're really like, “ooh, what are they doing,” so those become kind of like going “tee hee” behind my hand or something like that. Used to be in the watercolors. Now the “tee hee” depends on what kind of images I can find that are already existing, but I like – and this comes from going back to art history and Whitney Halstead's Surrealism class – the confrontation of the incongruous, where you do have these foils, one pitted against another, one enhancing another, one taking away from, you know, that kind of shift between one thing and another thing which has always fascinated me and has continued on.

Do you imagine stories? Do you imagine lives? Or is it more like "give me a pearl earring?" "Where's my chair?" Because there's a difference between those two things.

Yeah, I think because of the kind of figure work that I do, the narration and the narrative aspect of it is definitely there. I know thinking back on when I was doing the Star Trek series, I was so besotted with the TV show. It was just such fun to groan at and watch and laugh and so on and so forth, that there I did envision carrying on, 'cause that was only on for 3 years. I never did get into any of the spin-offs of the series, it was just the initial series in the late '60s. There I did imagine that they would have other adventures going on and I would try to, in my own mind, satisfy, "oh, I need another program" or something on that order.

Do you ever dream about the figures in your work?

No.

Do you remember your dreams?

Jim dreams. Oh my god, the dreams he has. Some people retain the memory of what's going on and I don't, unless I wake up suddenly, in the middle of the night and I realize, "Oh, wait a minute, I think I had a dream. No, I didn't. I couldn't have, I don't dream." No. I might think about them without looking at the piece of paper and thinking, well I'm not sure how this is going, let's see what the palette is like. I mean I might think about certain technical aspects of things and then the visual needs, necessities, that a piece has, but I don't suddenly find myself dreaming about them.

With you and Jim, both, you worked in the same house for a number of years and then he moved out. Was there a back and forth at all between you?

Not really. I mean people always assume that we do chat on about the work in a critical sense, that kind of thing, but we don't and that's probably why we've been married for 53 years. We really don't operate in a critical fashion. We like each other's work and that also helps. I mean sincerely and we might comment like, “Oh, I really like the way that drawing is going” or “Oh, I like the way you painted that” or “What in the hell is going on in that corner in your watercolor?” “Whoa. What's this?” Or “I like the new shirt you've given your women, Jim.” Just little asides like that, but nothing on a critical venture. It's harder for me now since his studio is outside the house to see exactly what's going on over there. My life, of course, is open.

But he, he's stashed away. I wanted to go back a bit again. So you're in Chicago at the Art Institute. You met Jim and married him in 1961 and you have Claude in 1963. So you and Jim have a child and you are both artists, but you were slightly older than the hippies that came along in the later ’60s, so did you watch the cultural shift happen? Because it's always assumed incorrectly that you and Jim and Karl Wirsum and whoever else were like these wild hippies, but you weren't.

No. We really weren't. I think, as a group, we were so straight laced it probably would be shocking to a lot of people how conservative we were in things.

But was that stuff of interest to you?

No. Not at all.

I mean the artwork, the music? None of it?

Well, the music, yeah. Loved the things that were happening in terms of the segue in the mid to late ’50s, you know, rock-n-roll kind of stuff into the ’60s, thinking of what

happened to rock ‘n roll. I'll use that phrase with The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and so on and folk music and that aspect of things and what was happening there, yeah. But we were just in our studios and the outside world really didn't impact that much. Obviously, when you watch the news, you read the newspapers and you're very well aware of what's going on politically, but it didn't really have any ramification in terms of what I was doing. Someone like Roger Brown, there would be a headline of some horrible disaster and a couple of days later, a big painting dealing with that would come into the gallery and I was so intrigued by where his mind was in terms of using that kind of situation in his artwork.

Whereas I was always… I'm small scale. I watched little things that happened during the day and on all levels. You're seeing people make it from morning to night and then get up the next day and do the same stuff. That's always interested me and maybe that goes all the way back to my upbringing and my dad getting up, getting on the El, going down, getting up and so on and I can remember one period of time when they were laying people off or they were doing stuff at Sunbeam, and he obviously needed to keep his job, so he worked the night shift and if you live in a four-room apartment, it’s very crowded. Having a dad that has to sleep during the day to get up and go at night to work the night shift – that was tough, so I deal with the day to day, the celebration of making it through the day. I love to observe people, so it never bothers me if I'm someplace early. I'll just sit and watch the exchanges that go on; you know, social intercourse, such as it is; people at airports being stressed, people at airports falling asleep, waiting, people waiting for people and it's just that kind of personal emotion that goes on that I'm just fascinated with and tthat's the grist that I have in my mill.

That makes sense. Moving into the ’60s, I've wondered sometimes if it was a bit of a blessing and a curse being part of the Hairy Who and becoming well known for a particular era and then a collector base that's primarily mid-western or Chicago. I wondered if you ever felt boxed in by the Chicago Imagist label and all that?

Well it does pigeon hole you, but you know, artists throughout history, have been pigeon holed by whomever is dealing with them. Artists don't label themselves. Well, some of them do where they had specific movements and wrote manifestos and so on and so forth to explain what they were doing, but most of them didn't and it was mainly critics and art historians and people writing and looking that have to have something to call them so that they know what they're looking at. I think for us, things started to get really active by the time the third Harry Who show rolled around. Things were going on and it seemed to be very active, so that you couldn't catch your breath and it was at that point when Jim got the offer to teach at Sac State in Sacramento, California. We thought, "This'll be really good for us to withdraw from the area, make a living, concentrate on the individual, rather than the group." I think we were all thinking about how there's more to life other than being part of a group. "Oh just another banana show," that kind of thing, where you're one of the bunch. So that was very, very good for us to move out to California, to be involved with earning a very regular paycheck that involved things like health insurance, stuff like that, you know.

Q: Yeah. Good stuff.

A: That was very good and also gave you a time to reflect on what had gone on before and to really concentrate in each of our individual studios to become individual artists, rather than the collective art, not that any of us were doing collective art, but we were always part of the group, rather than functioning as individuals. So that was very important to us ,and we were only gonna be out there for like two years, but we ended up being out there almost for 8 years and became a part of certain things going on out there, certainly friends and art shows and this and that.

You showed at The Candy Store, which is interesting because that's the one place where you cross over with the artists that were labeled as Funk and I wondered about that intersection. Were they of interest to you, Wiley and Arneson?

A: Oh yeah. We were very well aware of those people, not so much the comics, except R. Crumb and Mr. Natural and so on and so forth. The comics were, I think, coming along, so we were aware of him and then maybe through some of the other broader based comics, but it was mainly knowing Arneson's work and knowing Wiley's work and knowing De Forest's work. But we never thought of relationships until we got out there and people were talking about relationships that may or may not exist between Imagist painting and the Hairy Who with their work. Funk. Certain aspects of Funk were messier and we were a little more craft-oriented, to use that phrase, in terms of how things were constructed, how things were built.

Did you find common ground with De Forest and Wiley and Arneson and Saul and those guys?

A: No. For the Hairy Who show at the San Francisco Art Institute in the spring of ’68, Karl, Lori and Jim and I went out there to install the show and just to be there. We met those artists and I think a lot of the current cartoonists or comic artists, Crumb and Wilson and others. But it became apparent that we were worlds apart and oddly enough, the only thing that was a common ground were the things that we all might have pinned up on our studio walls because we were all looking at the same stuff, like ads from the backs of magazines maybe some of the same Renaissance paintings. The things that you collect and look at throughout your studio lifetime – that was the same. It was interesting that that could be the same but we were so different and had absolutely no relationship.

Who of your contemporaries do you feel most aesthetically kin to or who was most important to you as you were coming up?

Well, you know the answer to that.

Jim's not allowed to be included.

Aside from Jim? Well that's the only one. I didn't look at anybody. I didn't think about anybody except Jim. Jim, Jim, Jim.

No. I don't believe it.

Well, you know, that period of time when we were in California, there were a lot of things going on in Chicago that we wouldn't really catch sight of, like we missed all of those other shows at the Hyde Park Art Center. We only would hear about those after the fact and wouldn't see all of the work that was going on there, although Whitney would do his best to maybe provide a snapshot of something or other. It was really strange because we'd come back here, after we moved back and we walk into the gallery and see a Brown or something and say, "Well, gee, I don't remember that." But actually, I really didn't spend any time thinking about any work except the work that interested me in art history.

Maybe the most contemporary person that I would think about a lot would have been H.C. Westermann, and he wasn't exactly a contemporary, being the older generation, but his work was just absolutely fascinating. The possibilities he was presenting you to ponder. It was how he put things together and pulled from his mind to make these things and when he made them, they were so beautifully crafted, but not overboard. He loved the materials he was using, loved the wood; everything was just smooth and wonderful, so his work we both really liked a lot. I liked what Karl was doing, I liked was Roger was doing, liked what Christina was doing and so on, but what I needed to have was always located further back in time. Those were the things that really fed into that. And watching people at the supermarket, bending over the frozen food section, etc...

You've mentioned John Graham to me a few times over the years. And you and Jim are the only two people who ever John Graham to me.

Actually, one of my favorite corners to stand in at the Art Institute is up in the 20th century area in the Rice Wing. You're in a gallery that has two doorways. You come in one doorway and immediately to your left is a John Graham portrait of a woman maybe mildly cross-eyed and it's everything you want in a Graham. Whatever's going on in her face is just wonderful, and then on the wall next to it, which is a small wall because there's a doorway and the other wall is a portrait of Dorian Gray by Ivan Albright. With Graham, there is something going on in his people that's again like something that's behind the door, and they're wonderful. They have an aspect to them that is not of this world and I love that. In the Bergman collection at the museum, there's a drawing or two of his that are really nice, and I think one of them has a slice cut out of the neck. No rhyme or reason. It's just a slice cut out of the neck.

So you went to Sacramento and came back, and what I've wondered is two-fold: Do you feel connected to the Chicago of art history, of the Ivan Albrights? And then going forward, you and Jim, in a way, have been caretakers of Chicago Imagism in a sense, particularly the Hairy Who shows – the central archive of it. So do you feel responsibility to your own history, now that it is *history?*

A: Oh god. What a question. Well obviously, yes, we are connected to the history of Chicago because of what went on before us and then what went on during that particular period of time, which was a phenomenon that happened and then after, I know we are firmly connected with the history of Chicago art, but you know, neither of us really think about that because it takes up too much time to have to think about that. You know, you go home to your studio and you work and that's the most important thing. As far as being a care taker, we've ended up with a lot of ephemera and Jim's memory on things is so great that he remembers just about everything that's gone on in life. I don't. I don't know,

but that's just too much to put on one person that's trying to be their own person, too much responsibility, and we don't want that. There's no room for thinking about those kinds of things when I'm trying to decide what value I want to make a brick.

What value you want to make a brick?

You know, I've got this drawing of a wall I'm looking at now. It's dry so I'm gonna take off all of the things that I put on it before you called and I'm gonna turn it around to look at it. It was part of my notes: Make the edge of this one place darker. So I don't know how it looks. So what's foremost in my mind is how my current piece of paper looking and what do I need to do. Selfish. An artist has to be selfish. It's screw you and the rest of the world. It's me, it's me.