

A History of

WALT DISNEY *Comics*

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

REMEMBER

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'?

by
**MARK
JAMES
ESTREN**



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A.C. 10/72

A History of Underground Comics

by Mark J. Estren

A Preview

Seriously funny! Seriously! More than 1,000 illustrations—many unique to this book! Where the underground comics came from—how they developed—where they went—who created them—who tried to destroy them! First-person comments by cartoonists including Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Art Spiegelman, S. Clay Wilson, Trina Robbins, Jay Lynch and many others! Sex! Drugs! Rock ‘n’ roll! Politics! Feminism! Violence! Censorship! Ecology! Plus some stuff that isn’t funny! The 20th-anniversary edition of *A History of Underground Comics* is “the only serious attempt so far to chronicle this bizarre period in comic history” —*San Jose Mercury*

“Estren’s book is one of the best studies of comic art in print.”

— *Seattle Times*

“A long, loving, yet still perceptive look at the artwork, the philosophies and the satire.” — *Santa Barbara News-Press*

“A generous genealogy of this warped genre.” — *Swank*

Mark James Estren, depicted in the Denis Kitchen strip to the right, won the Pulitzer for *A History of Underground Comics* while still a graduate student. Dr. Estren (he holds two PhDs) has worked as a journalist for *CBS* and *ABC News*, the *Washington Post*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Miami Herald*, and ran *Financial News Network*. He was editor of *High Technology Business* magazine and of the books *In Tune with America* and *Professionally Speaking*, and was a major contributor to *In a Word: A Dictionary of Words That Don’t Exist, but Ought To*. Estren has been a venture capitalist, orchestra conductor, psychologist and herpetologist. *Fortune* magazine named Estren one of its “People to Watch.”



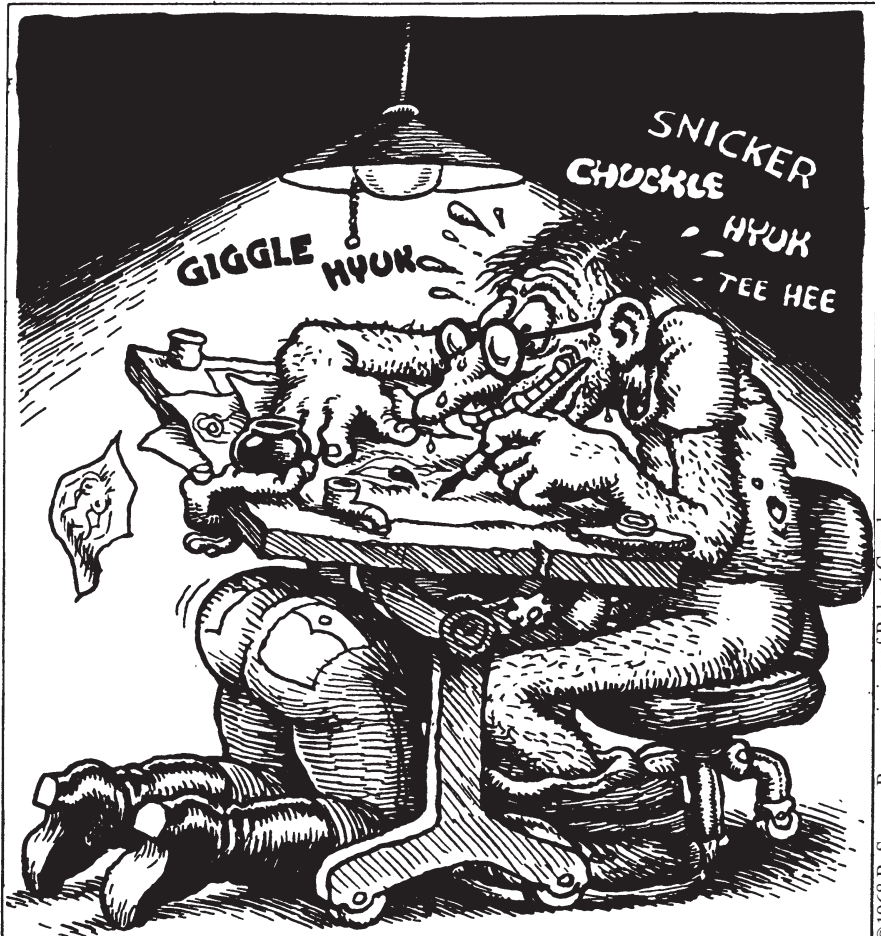
by Denis Kitchen

Sexy!

Since American society has always placed particular emphasis on the nature of sex as something personal, private, eminently concealable, and of course not to be suggested or shown to children; since the most strictly enforced taboos of the Comics Code of America, and of the Motion Picture Censorship Board, are against sex; since whatever illicit presentations of sex have existed in this country have appeared in plain wrappers, often (as in the case of sexploitation movies) with heavily moralizing narration to compensate, in some perverse way, for the clinical description of sex inside those wrappers—for all those reasons, the underground cartoonists absolutely revel in sex and sexuality.

In some cases, the cartoonists' satire focuses on the typically American, puritanical view of sex. Joel Beck's parodies of this attitude are particularly telling. In fact, all the best underground sex strips treat the whole sexual thing on a satirical or frankly humorous level. Their reduction of sex to just another animal activity is the breaking of a greater taboo than the portrayal of human genitals in clinical detail.

In his superb study of Love and Death (Breaking Point, 1949), G. Legman writes: "The censor's unequivocal 'You must not!' is seldom answered with an equally uncompromising 'I



THE PLEASURE IS OURS, FOLKS!

WE REALLY LIKE DRAWING DIRTY CARTOONS! IT HELPS US GET RID OF PENT-UP ANXIETIES AND REPRESSIONS AND ALL THAT KINDA STUFF... WE HOPE YOU ENJOY LOOKIN' AT 'EM AS MUCH AS WE ENJOY DRAWIN' EM !!

"WHAT THIS WORLD NEEDS IS MORE SATISFIED CUSTOMERS!"

Robert Crumb. Snatch Comics No. 2. © 1968 R. Serum. By permission of Robert Crumb.

Robert Crumb, *XYZ Comics*.
©1972 R. Crumb. By permission of Robert Crumb.



Outrageous



Robert Crumb's infamous center spread from *Snatch*
Comics No. 1. ©1968 R. Crumb. By permission of Robert Crumb.

will!' Ashamed to oppose the censor's morality, and afraid to contravene his authority, the writer's first reaction is to evade the censorship, to see what can be sneaked through, what can be gotten away with, what can be disguised just enough to assuage the censor but not so much as to escape the audience." Legman's statement has applied from time immemorial, or at least from time Shakespearian. In Act II, Scene 5 of *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio has this speech: "By my life, this is my lady's hand: these be her very C's, her U's and her T's; and thus she makes her great P's" (lines 96-99). Anyone needing assistance in reading this speech, which critics pass over in puz-

zled or outraged silence, should read the line as it would be spoken: "her C's, her U's, 'n' her T's." If Shakespeare had to spell out his sexual terms, what are we to expect from lesser men?

Whatever we might expect, we have gotten much from the underground cartoonists. They have found it unnecessary to meet the censor uncompromisingly; instead, they have merely ignored him. This has led to occasional obscenity busts of some dealers in underground comics (see Chapter 10); but in general, legal hassles have been avoided by the production of overtly sexual comics in very small numbers and for very limited (and rapid) distribution.

Sex in the underground comics is best approached by looking first at Robert Crumb's sex comics. A number of these were produced: three issues of *Snatch*, one issue each of *Jiz* and *Cunt* ("the only comic you can eat"), and several other titles. The sex comics came into being soon after Crumb began his association with S. Clay Wilson in 1968. Mike Barrier reports, in *Funnyworld* No. 10, that "the focus of Crumb's work shifted to the Forbidden, to all the words and things and activities that have been off limits to everyone but hard-core pornographers in the past. Sex and elimination, in other words." And for readers who haven't yet guessed,



Robert Crumb. *Snatch*
Comics No. 2. ©1968
R. Scrum. By permission
of Robert Crumb.

Rob
Scrum '68

Irreverent

Barrier adds that *Snatch* “is at least as raunchy as you think it is.” This first *Snatch*, which was unlike anything in comic-book form since the days of the old *Eight-Pagers* (see Chapter 2), caused more furor than any other underground sex comic. Crumb printed the comic in an edition of eight hundred copies, all of

one thing, contains the center spread, “The Family That Lays Together Stays Together” (see Chapter 7), a drawing which is both funnier and more sarcastic than “The Great Intercontinental Fuck-In and Orgy-Riot” which is the center of *Snatch* No. 1. And *Jiz* contains a truly classic sex strip, by far the funniest of

under another alias), Rory Hayes, Jim Osborne, Victor Moscoso, and others. The comics amount to a working out of personal hangups on paper, being more of a free-for-all for the artists involved than trenchant attempts at social satire – with the few exceptions (such as the “Dicknose” strip) invariably done by Crumb himself. Crumb has been quoted as saying, “If taboos were broken by *Snatch* – groovy! Then

The family that LAYS together STAYS together!



. Above: Robert Crumb. The center spread from *Snatch* Comics No. 2. ©1968 R. Crumb. By permission of Robert Crumb. Compare with the center spread of *Snatch* Comics No. 1, pg. 117

which quickly sold out in San Francisco, where they originated. *Snatch* No. 1 quickly became a collector’s item, and copies were commanding prices of twenty-five dollars apiece and more less than two years after they were published.

In fact, though, Crumb’s work in *Snatch* No. 1 does not match his later efforts in *Snatch* No. 2 and *Jiz*. *Snatch* No. 2, for

its type to appear in any underground comic: “The Adventures of Dicknose.” The “Dicknose” strip lasts a full eight pages, making it also the longest continuous strip in any of Crumb’s sex comics.

All the Crumb sex comics contain drawings by artists other than Crumb himself: S. Clay Wilson (usually under the pseudonym “Crank Collingwood,” or

we can move on to something else.” And Crumb has moved on (though how far and to where is a debatable point – see pages 127-138), though not all his collaborators have.

Since the sex comics, Crumb has been particularly successful in perfecting the character of Angelfood McSpade, who represents all white men’s repressed sexual desires. An



Clearly, Crumb has moved beyond the overt, enjoyable, but finally pointless sexuality of his sex comics. This is not to say that readers invariably found these comics enjoyable in any sense. Writing in *Funnyworld* No. 10, Mike Barrier comments, "A detailed physical description of a sex act doesn't convey what's really going on, any more than a detailed physical description of eating conveys how it feels to consume a fine meal, and a detailed physical description is all that smut provides... [Crumb's sex comics are] relaxed

and funny, but still...a dead end for a talent as great as his." Crumb seems to have proved Barrier wrong by finding new ways to use the overt sexual expressions of his sex comics; but not all the artists in those comics have been able (or willing) to go on to new things. S. Clay Wilson, for one, is still doing comics similar to those in the sex books.

Joel Beck. *The Profit*. ©1966
Joel Beck. By permission of Joel Beck.

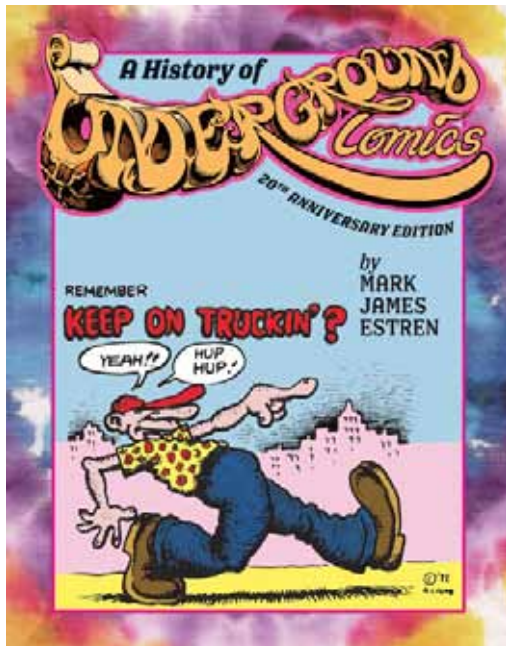


extensive piece on Angelfood in *Zap Comix* No. 2 explains: "For one thing, she's illegal. And she has been confined to the wilds of darkest Africa, the official excuse being that civilization would be threatened if she were allowed to do whatever she pleased. ...Men would quit their jobs if they got a chance to see ol' Angelfood shake that thing! The overwhelming smell of her...er... ah...THINGIE tends to disrupt clear thinking. The stockmarket would take a nose-dive!"





Barney Steel. *Armageddon* No. 2. ©1973 Barney Steel and Last Gasp Eco-Funnies, Inc. By permission of Barney Steel and Last Gasp Eco-Funnies, Inc. by Ron Turner.



A History of Underground Comics

by Mark J. Estren

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“Lively and provocative.” – *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“A far-reaching sampler full of exuberance and irreverent fun.” – *San Francisco Examiner*

“A loving monograph, a paean to the men and women who kept the counter-culture’s sense of humor alive during one of the most humorless times in this nation’s history.” – *Chicago Sun-Times*

“An industry ‘bible’ and an invaluable reference.” – *Midwest Review of Books*

“You’ve got a winner! Really a fine book.” – Harvey Kurtzman, *Mad* editor

“I thought it was great and an important contribution to the comics library shelf.”

– Will Eisner

“I am in your fan club.” – Fred W. Friendly, CBS *Edward R. Murrow’s* producer

“It’s beautiful!” – William M. Gaines
Mad publisher

“Lively and provocative.”
– *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“Seems to me you’ve displayed plenty of affectionate respect for even the lowliest just for being part of a movement, but kept a clear eye on their actual achievements, and organized the whole with clarity and style. How’s that for a rave?”
– Bill Pearson, *Witzend*



Robert Crumb. *Snatch Comics* No. 1. ©1968 R. Crumb. By permission of Robert Crumb.