

Tributes to John Byrne and George Perez

by Jeff Singh

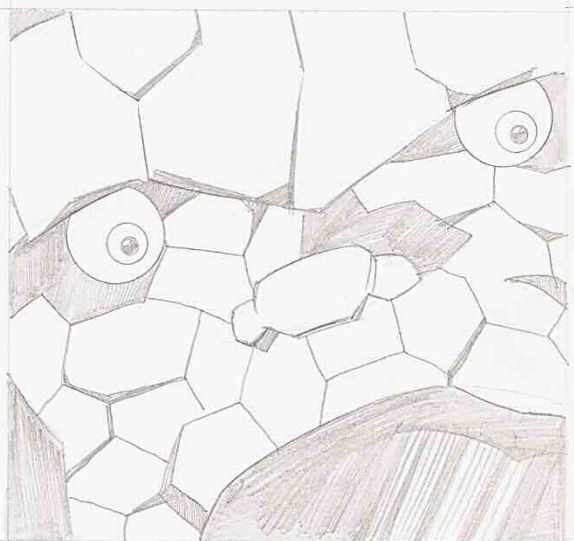
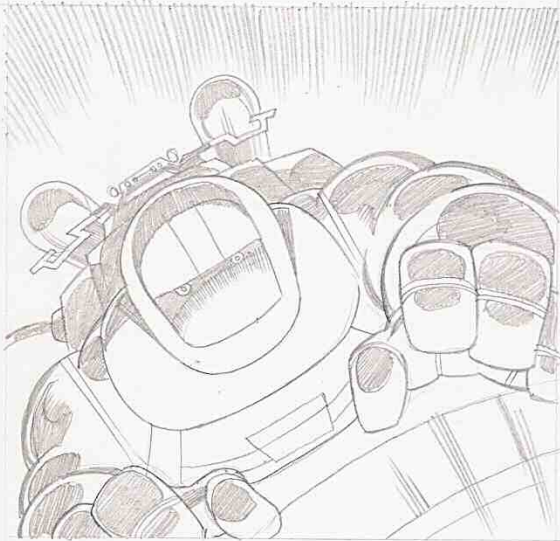
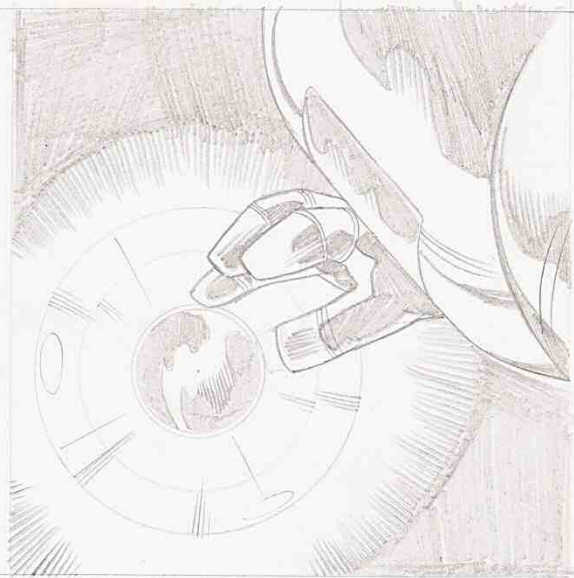
This is not a topic that comes naturally to me. I decided it was time to commit some thoughts to paper on this, the day we received the expected, inevitable yet still soul dampening news that George Perez has passed away at home, on his own terms with his family at this side. I took a moment to reflect on George's career, his art, his legacy and the few interactions I have had with him at comic conventions. George's passing comes on the heels of news that Neal Adams had died too. A deity among giants. I'll leave Neal for another write up in the future.

As a former comic collector (now only a reader), I fondly remember many comics with art by John Byrne and George Perez. They were the "It" artists at that time along with a few of their contemporaries like Miller and Grell and had loyal and devout followers. Anything they touched seemed to turn to gold, Neal I considered a cohort or two older but perhaps not a whole generation. Although they both worked for both publishers, in my mind Byrne was more the Marvel guy and Perez more of the DC guy. I was bathed in the Marvel milieu as I formed into a comic reader and so I knew Byrne better. The first two comics I bought when I started collecting comics were Daredevil 200 and Alpha Flight #3. Both have cover art by Byrne and both would define my comic collecting for the next decade and influence my preferences going forward. A little more later about George, but first John Byrne, to whom this issue is dedicated.

Being Canadian, it was serendipitous that among my first comics I collected was an early issue of Alpha Flight. What's this, a Canadian super team? I later learned that John went to art school in Calgary, Alberta and so had ties to Canada. He depicted Canada both as having modern cities but also fantastic landscape and colder Northern environments. Although still somewhat typical stereotypes, at least not the hard line of the Canadian border where you went from a spring jacket to snow shoes as many I have met thought of Canada at the time. So, I suspect national pride played in to me first being drawn to John's work and Alpha Flight. It was not long before I had the first issue and I was well on my way to filling my first long box of comics. I never got into his earlier work like X-men. I did enjoy Namor and that might be it for me. His art was immediately accessible and he had a style suited for action/mutant comics. I have never met John Byrne but from some of the stories I have heard I might be OK with that. In my early original art career I did collect Alpha Flight pages along with Daredevil pages by various artists. I have learned to appreciate the Byrne/Austin X-men art and have long wanted a page but they were always too expensive. I don't have those nostalgic connections that would allow me to rationalize crazy prices as rational ones. When they were \$5k each, I couldn't get there. 20 years later there is another zero and I still can't get there. I often joke that my plan is to outlive all the other Byrne fans and anyone else that cares and then I'll get my page.

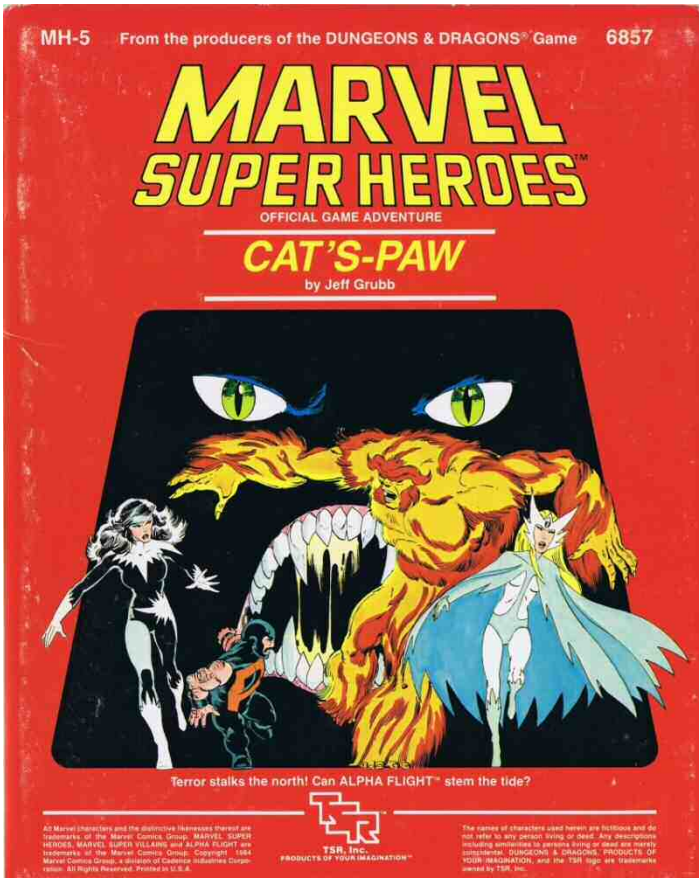
I'll share with you the Byrne art I still currently have in my collection. I've owned another dozen pieces by Byrne over the years but these are the ones that stuck.

The first one is an earlier piece by John. It is from the famous try out art he submitted to Marvel to get the Fantastic Four gig. Very much Kirby influenced but you can see so much raw talent and insight even at this early stage in his career. It is no wonder he got the job. The page regular 11 x 17 inches. It appears to have been a 30 page story circa 1974. Heritage archives has 6 pages (including mine) in reference images and comicartfans seems to have roughly the same number of images but not necessarily the same ones as on Heritage. If anyone is interested in seeing more of these early tryout pages, there are some resources. I think it is really cool to see pure pencils by John from this stage in his career where he has already moved from fan artist to professional and is about to transition into his role as a major comic artist at the big two publishers. The entire story was published in David Anthony Kraft's Comics Interview #25 in black and white. It is also available online on Facebook on one of the John Byrne fan sites. A youtube video also exists about the art. The art would later be repurposed for Fantastic Four #238 with some character changes.



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The second page ties up a lot of things for me in terms of Byrne and it's connection to my childhood. I was a Dungeons and Dragons fanatic and played a few times a week for almost a decade with my friends or sisters. I loved the role playing game concept and many of its iterations. I do remember Marvel's trial at this and do recall playing a few of their modules as a respite from the mind-flayers and the eye of the beholder. Although I don't recall playing the Alpha Flight module, I do remember seeing the module in comic shops around that time. Here is the cover art. It is an interesting piece as it features most of the team but with no Guardian present. Those that recall Alpha Flight will recall that they killed off Guardian (formerly Vindicator) in issue 12. This module came out around Alpha Flight 7 or 8 and no one knew the future story arc although perhaps one could have guessed by the absence of the main character, something must have happened. TSR did this to not include a dead character in its game series. This would have been published in 1983, about 4 years after the Guardian and team appeared in X-men. This piece is perfect for me and because it is essentially a one and done piece, I have not had much of a desire to add other Byrne pieces.





Lastly, a nice, finished drawing of the Hulk. The tape stain at the bottom suggests a copyright indicia that has fallen off which leads me to believe it was likely published somewhere but I have not been able to verify this. Regardless, a great piece with all of John's vintage style and energy. I think John's ability to capture scale gives the Hulk his massiveness which comes through on this piece.

Sadly, the only pieces of art I own by George Perez are convention sketches he did for me in 2006 and 2012. My favorite published work by George was his Wonder Woman relaunch and I had always fancied getting one of those covers but so far that has eluded me. I look at convention sketches as more than the doodle that is the end result but rather as a

memento of an interaction with an artist. This couldn't be truer with these two pieces. Although they might not be much to look at, they represent spending 15 -20 minutes chatting with George and getting a sense of how funny, inviting and big his personality was. He was always laughing and had a smile and I imagined those that were around him more found him to be an amazing and inspirational figure. I am thankful for the short time I spent with him and it left an everlasting impression.



Now to return to the topic at hand, John Byrne. Although I don't collect heavily, some of my best friends in this hobby have not been so fortunate and have fallen hook, line and sinker under his spell. They are two very different collectors with extensive collections. The first is our dear Editor in Chief David Applegate who will inform us about his collecting and collection of Byrne art. Having had the privilege of visiting with David in his home and getting to see the incredible collection he has on his wall but also in his portfolios was quite something. My other friend is a very private collector who lives about 45 minutes away from me. We have been good friends for over 15 years and I have known him another 3 or 4 years before that. I believe I am only one of fewer than a dozen people that have seen his collection. So, I will not be outing any pieces he has that he does not want to share. Although private, he does post in online groups on occasion and participates in John Byrne fan groups. Rob works for a large national airline. Working for an airline put him in the unique situation to travel often to cons and to meet up with artists and collectors for essentially no costs. It was often cheaper for him to take an afternoon he was off and fly to somewhere in the US to pick up the art in person rather than have it shipped to him. Rob agreed to talk to me about collecting John Byrne art. Some of the interview occurred via email/text on or around May 22nd but the majority happened on a visit with him on May 25th, 2022.

What is your favorite era of Byrne work?

Obviously, John and Terry's run on Uncanny X-Men has to be my favorite. The Hellfire Club run, the Weapon Alpha/Alpha Flight appearances and the Dark Phoenix stories are my favorite. X-Men#141 is probably my favorite cover of all time. Days of Future Past was one of the best stories for me growing up. Still is. After X-Men, Alpha Flight is probably my favorite, then FF, Avengers and Captain America. For me growing up in the early 80's, going to stores looking for comics... I'd buy anything Byrne, I was collecting FF off the spinner racks, but Alpha Flight holds a special place for me. Probably because I'm Canadian. Obviously, AF#12 is a favorite, AF#13 was pretty cool, and the X-Men flashback issue from AF#17 was cool as well. My favorite FF stories would be from the various Galactus sagas. Art from those issues are very hard to find.

How did you get your first piece of John Byrne original art? What was it?

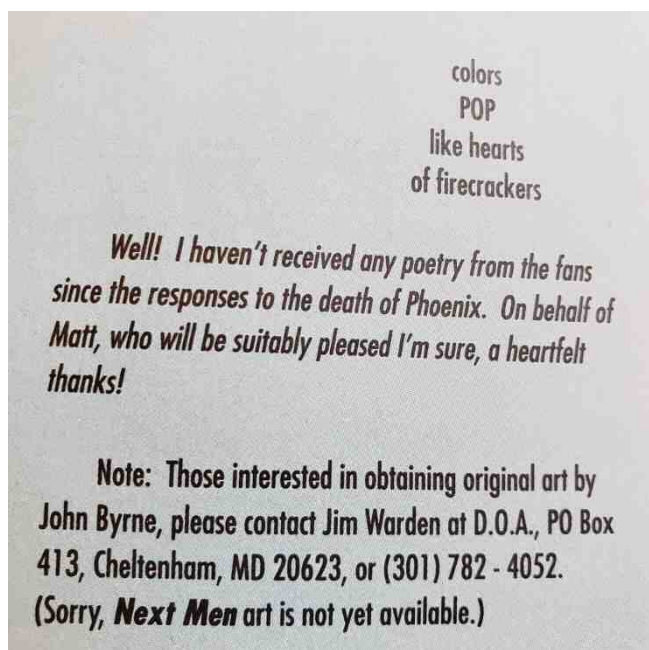


I was always a comic book collector. It wasn't till the 90's that I started looking at buying original comic art. I told you this before, but the first art I ever purchased happened at a local Toronto show. I bought two pencil sketches from Rick Taylor. Nothing special, but it was the first time I bought art. One was a sketch of Orroro from the X-Men in the Savage Land, the other Dark Phoenix. I was hooked. I still have those two sketches... Fast forward to John Byrne's Next Men. It was coming out monthly in the early 90's, and I was following him from title to title. Things changed when I read his letters column in JBNM#13. In the back was an announcement for sale of his original art. Up to this point in my life, I was only buying comics, and getting autographs at comic cons. I never even noticed or was interested in original comic book art. The blurb said... "Those interested in obtaining original comic art by John Byrne, please contact Jim Warden at DOA." This was pre Internet days, so it was phone, or write a letter. I didn't think too hard about it, and I wrote Jim a letter. In the letter, I basically wrote that I wanted to get some art by John Byrne. My favorites were Uncanny X-Men, Alpha Flight, Fantastic Four and probably Superman. I waited and a few weeks go by and Jim sends me a letter back. Basically, in his letter he states that all the X-Men art, Captain America, Marvel Two in One & Team Up, Avengers and Iron Fist are gone. Prices were as following... panel pages were \$125, splashes \$200, and covers were around \$250-\$350. Complete issues were starting at \$2K. I don't think a

lot of them were sold with the cover. Jim basically sent a few pages of what was available from each title. Pages from FF were still available, Alpha Flight, Superman/Action Comics/Man of Steel, lots of She Hulk/Incredible Hulk. Funny enough, the blurb in JBNM stated that no Next Men art was available.

I didn't want any JBNM art anyways... so I get out my comics and start going through them, examining pages from my favorite stories, and sent him my list of what my choices were from what Jim said was available. I think I sent around 20 choices, thinking I had to get a few of them. I was an Alpha Flight guy, hooked on those characters from the X-Men days. I forgot about it and went on with my daily life. One day out of the blue, I get a phone call from Jim. That was pretty cool. Jim was a very polite guy, had this cool demeanor, and introduced himself to me. He called because he wanted to know which page I wanted. I wasn't sure what would be available so I gave him a lot of choices. The kicker was, and I think Jim was pretty surprised too... that all the pages I was asking about, were still available! The phone went silent. Jim patiently asked me which ones I wanted. That was the moment I dove in, and started collecting John Byrne original comic art. At those prices, who wouldn't? Jim was pretty cool about time payments, and that's how it started. Now to this day, I'm not a cover guy, so that was a mistake that I still regret.

Lots of covers available... of the titles available, my favorite books were Alpha Flight, FF and Superman. I'm a "Marvel first page



title/credits splash" guy. Something about opening up the comic and seeing that first splash always did it for me. So I grabbed a lot of title/credit pages. Secondly, I grabbed pages from my favorite issues... all still available! In order to get Jim to break up a book,

you had to buy multiple pages, so that's what I did. In the end, I think I got all my favorite Alpha Flight pages, some pretty decent Superman/MOS pages, and a few FF pages. So After a few months of giving Jim all my money, I was a pretty happy guy.



So the next lesson I had to learn about collecting original art, was shipping art to Canada... I learned some lessons there too. The thing I learned was, DON'T DO IT! After a hard lesson of issues crossing the border, I never did that again. So I asked Jim to stop sending me art. Back in those days, I was self-employed and one of the things I did was drive cars down to Florida. It was a fun gig, and I usually got a vacation out of it. Jim lived in Washington DC, so that gave me an opportunity to drive by his house and pick up art. Now that was a trip. On my way down to Florida, I go down the 195 through Washington DC. I timed it so I would meet Jim after work, and we could watch the Blue Jays play in the World Series at his house. Sounds like a great plan. The only problem happens when I get lost looking for his house. Now keep in mind, I'm driving a Mercedes-Benz 560 SEL. In the back seat I have clothes and stuff for the client to take down to his condo. I get lost in the part of Washington DC, that you don't want to get lost in. Funny enough I stop at a Subway and use their payphone. Jim says I'm close, and he'll come and get me. He tells me to go across the street and sit in the Roy Rogers restaurant. It's safe, LOL!

After a few tense moments Jim comes and picks me up and has a pretty good laugh at my expense. I followed him back to his house and relaxed with him and his dad. If I recall, Jim's daughter was just born, so we had to hang out in

the basement. I remember Jim telling his wife that it was okay, telling her, "He's Canadian". Jim showed me a lot of his collection. He was also really good friend's with Mike Zeck, so he had a lot of his art too. Jim obviously had a lot of great art from the FF run and MOS. Also, I remember he had this great Wildey Race Bannon portrait. It was amazing. Jim had this ping pong table down in his basement which had all this art, and my stuff spread over it. I looked at a lot of cool stuff including Walt Kelly and Ploog art. Actually, I remember now that he got John to sign some comics for me, so that was there for pick up too. We ordered a pizza and watched the game with his dad. It was a memorable day. Jim also had this pet snake that was pretty cool. He would sit watching the game and this snake would drape over his arms and relax on him. The Jays ended up winning the game, and his dad drove me over to a hotel where I spent the night. I left there with a pretty good stash! Jim's a solid guy. Plain and simple. My Byrne collection wouldn't be what it is without his help.

I've been to a few Mid-Ohio con shows and hung out with him there too. We had some really good times in Columbus with Bob Jewell and Wayne Osbourne. We would always go out to this Rib restaurant called Damon's Ribs. I picked up even more art at these shows. At one show I picked up a great Galactus page from FF#244. Unfortunately, I traded that one away. I also picked up another Alpha Flight cover that no one seemed to want. I remember Dick Giordano and Byrne were both at this show, so Bob would get all my pages signed by them. I recently traded one of those pages for an Al Williamson Blade Runner splash!

Rob would tell me this is the only time he visited with Jim at his house. He bought about a dozen of those 20 pages in the first purchase and over the next few years ended up with all 20 pages from Jim at conventions.

Who was your biggest source of Byrne art, next to Jim?

That's a good question. I'm sure, it's a toss-up between Will Gabri-El and Albert Moy. Over the years, I've gotten a lot of good art from the two of these guys. Will is another guy I would hang out with for the day. I used to fly down and hang out with him in Philadelphia. There were lots of great restaurants to eat at. We'd talk about Byrne for hours. Will had a lot of great Byrne art. He was another guy who discovered Jim early on. He went the FF way. He had a lot of covers. I think I got two of my covers from him.

Albert is Albert. I don't have to say much that you don't already know! He figured out early on that I loved Byrne Alpha Flight. He used to call me the "Alpha Flight guy!" He has called me a lot of things... lol. I got some good FF pages from him too. Actually, we could do a whole article on art that he's helped me with. My Sienkiewicz art collection, is what it is because of him. I got a complete Byrne issue from him. Traded him lot's of art for that Watchmen piece... Most of the Byrne pages you see in his stock section came from me. Albert is a fun guy to trade art with. One of my biggest friends in the hobby. I can't wait to hang out with him again during con season.

Who are your favorite inkers on Byrne?

Well, it would be sacrilegious to say anything but Terry Austin... but I do love Byrne's own inks on FF. For about the first third of FF, I loved his inking, but then he had to cut corners because he was doing so many monthly books. He lacked detailed backgrounds as he did more and more books. I still liked the comics, the stories, but you can see the desirability of have the perfect page. There's a lot of that going on right now in comic art. People like to find something wrong with every piece of art. Inkers are usually a target. Look at Bob Layton. I didn't mind him on Hulk and Team-Up, but Byrne tends to downplay his inking on his stuff. Rubenstein on Cap was pretty good. I also loved Dan Green on his Avengers run... Janson on Byrne? Not so much... LOL.

Pet peeves on Byrne art.

Probably the most annoying thing about later era Byrne was that he used a lot of marker to fill in blacks. I get it, it's all about doing these pages fast, but with time, these marker inks look terrible. It is what it is. Even Terry used some bad markers sometimes, and it shows when it fades or turns purple. It's all in the process, and I've gotten used to it. But as I've said before, people like to complain about stuff. You could have the perfect page, from the perfect story, with the best characters... and someone will point out the crappy markers. I guess it really comes down to whatever you like, whatever is important to you in a page. Reality is that these pages are part of a story, done however the artist did them. I guess lack of backgrounds would be a pet peeve on his later runs. But that is also expected when doing more than one title.

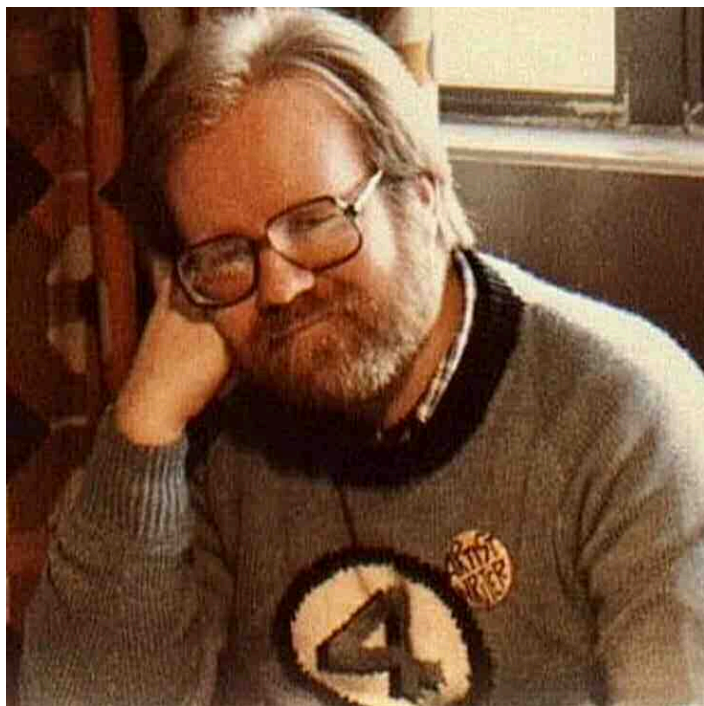
Conversation with rob 26/5/22

Are there any projects you would like to see John Byrne work on now.

No. I can't stand John Byrne art now. As much as I love John Byrne and I tried to get into Elsewhen (Fan Fiction X-men). I have come close to buying Elsewhen pencil pages. I thought some of them were pretty good. At one point he has Avengers, X-men and the Fantastic Four all teaming up to fight the sentinels. I contacted Jim about buying a page here and there. They were... I don't want to say overpriced...but the John Byrne art I like best is from the late 70's to mid 80's. Even art in the 90's I bought because I like John Byrne art and storytelling but I don't really have any pages past his Superman.

That is sort of your cut off point?

There was still good John Byrne art but then there was that whole thing where Giordano was supposed to be inking him and it ended up getting farmed out. It was farmed out to Frank McLaughlin for Man of Steel and some of the Action Comics. This really pissed Byrne off too.



Did the credits say Giordano inks.

Yes, Basically Giordano got paid for the inking and farmed it out to others to do it for him. His art, as good as it was, it could have been better if Dick had done the actual inking. Dick would be working just on faces and his assistant would ink everything else. As soon as Byrne got the pages back, he knew right away. He specifically asked Dick not to have others do the inking. Dick said he would ink the art himself but that didn't happen. That is around 1986-1987. It was like the end of an era.

Our conversation wandered into Jim Shooter's reign at Marvel and how things changed when he left. We did talk about how Jim ran a very tight ship and was controlling at Marvel while Dick had a much looser hand in controlling DC.

John Byrne had said the best thing that could have happened would be for Jim to move over to DC and Dick to Marvel to balance out the two extremes. The editorial style would have gelled more with creators at the time. Jim Shooter was Jim Shooter so of course Frank Miller is going to butt heads with him. Of course Walt Simonson is going to butt heads with him and the same for John Byrne. Meanwhile at DC they had the creative freedom to do more of what they wanted. So Frank Miller goes over and does Dark Knight and Ronin. John Byrne goes over to DC and revamps Superman. It was an interesting period and I did try hard to like the DC universe but after the end of the Byrne run on Superman, it just didn't do anything for me.

What is different about John Byrne's art now?

The detail. Byrne also started doing this weird point of views. He would often do a bird's point of view so literally from the top looking down at the top of characters heads



heads down to the feet. Interesting camera angles and a different way to tell the story. He was constantly evolving and changing his art style. He was also evolving in his storytelling using different techniques. That is one of the beauties of comic books, you can tell the story 100 different ways. You could give the script to Miller, Simonson and Byrne and they would do 3 completely different stories with their own styles. As much as Byrne was interesting with the new ideas and approaches you don't want to be a robot. You don't want to draw the same thing over and over again. The collectors who like the Byrne art from the 70's and 80's like that same style over and over again and wished he hadn't evolved. It was very flashy and great looking art at that time. From a price point in collecting, it is the most expensive period for his art.

It is like that with a lot of artist. They evolve and as an artist they grow it is the older stuff the fans want. It is like with Bill Sienkiewicz. Fans always ask him to draw like he used to draw.

Byrne had that phase too. People that ask him to do commissions don't just want a commission. They want a commission as his style was in 1980... and can you ink it like Terry Austin. Or, can you ink it like you used to when you were inking your own art on Fantastic Four?



It must be frustrating for the artists.

I am sure it drives him nuts. That is good thing about John Byrne's Next Men. He always had a column where he would talk about that sort of thing. It was called "**A Flame This High**". Byrne is the type of guy that gets into a lot of arguments with people because he can't stand stupid questions. Someone would ask him why don't you draw like you used to and Byrne would just pick the guy apart. Artists evolve and they don't want to draw like they used to.

I've heard on one of the fan lists he runs, it doesn't take much to get kicked off.

That is a whole other story. If you do like Byrne, you do want to read that stuff. It is so difficult to get on as you need to have an email that is unique and you need to identify yourself. My yahoo.com email was not acceptable. He wants to know everyone's identity and no one can hide behind their keyboard. You can't troll or hide. Am I missing anything?...not really. The Byrne Facebook chats and groups are good enough as there is often discussions of what goes on the fan site anyways. I find the message boards on these so interesting and fascinating how people are always attacking each other. No one wants to admit they are wrong and that other people's opinions are valid. It is like they want to believe they know more than the next guy and trying to outdo each other. If you post anything, you are almost guaranteed to have someone disagree with you. I collect Byrne Alpha Flight art and am pretty knowledgeable about that. The worst thing you can do is correct someone on a forum.

Betty or Veronica?

Jeez...uhhh. I guess Betty.

I am definitely Veronica.

I have a DeCarlo cover with both of them in bikinis. I guess I never thought about it before.

Does John Byrne still do public appearances?

He does. Not as frequently. He came back a few years ago. He did a few FanExpos. Ironically he came here to Toronto and I didn't go. I have met him a number of times and I didn't really need to get anything for signing. FanExpo has all their rules around signatures. A number of the Toronto guys went and got things signed. There was a time when he wasn't doing conventions and was more of a hermit for years. I don't want to say he dislikes fans but he hates the convention experience. He would often get sick after a convention because no one washes their hands...and they all want to shake his. He refuses to shake hands at conventions and that can turn some people off. I think as he got older, he just didn't need the fandom experience. Nothing good can come of meeting your fans in Byrne's world.

He is from a different generation. The older generation like Eisner, Kubert, Colan and the likes were always grateful for their fans and treated them well. They knew where their paycheques were coming from. In the 80's you had your "rock star" guys like Miller and Byrne. They sometimes took their fans and success more for granted.

Byrne was certainly a rock star in the 80's. There are a lot of stories about Byrne going to shows and then refusing to sign X-men material or refusing to do X-men sketches because he was working on Fantastic Four at the time. He came across as wanting to alienate his fans but I think it was more because he was just tired of it all. There are lots of fan stories of bad interactions with John Byrne. He is entitled to do what he wants at shows.



Tell me about John's set up at a convention. How was he set up? What were the lines like? Did he sell things at the table?

Byrne always had this set up. He has a high chair and a high table. He had this special briefcase that folded out into a table. He still had the convention table but would set up his table on top of that. He would also sit higher up. He liked to be at eye level of the



people he talked to. Normally an artist sitting at a convention table is lower than the standing fan and so they would have to look up at the fan. He didn't like that. He signed and sketched on that elevated platform. Back in the day, he didn't care about what he would sign, but as time went on and he returned to the convention scene that changed. At one point he would only sign IDW Star Trek when he was working on it at that time. He might have has some books on his table. At one of the last shows he was promoting the IDW Artifact editions. He did not have assistants, he was always by himself. At the more recent shows there is probably a handler to prevent people getting too many signatures. If you showed up with original art, John would sign all that stuff. He is a very personable guy.

If you showed up with art, did you have a bit of a conversation or was it just him signing the art and giving it back.

Oh for sure! He would tell you blurbs about it. I remember there is a famous collaboration he did with George Perez. It was an Action Comics with Superman and Wonder Woman. I want to say issue 600. There was a splash of them fighting together. I remember me and Rob Jewell brought the page over from Jim Warden to Byrne to get signed. It was the page where the character was

upside down. The text is opposite of how the character is oriented. I remember talking with John about what was the best way to sign this. Should the page be flipped over and signed oriented with the Superman? John was pretty adamant about having it signed as it was published. Jim was always at his booth and myself, Rob Jewell and Wayne Osborne would hang around and sometimes would watch the booth for Jim or run favors for him like getting pages signed by John on a piece that was being sold by Jim. We could just circumvent the line. Jim and John did not set up together. At all these shows there were a group of regular collectors of art that would be around. Beta Ray Benny was always around too. Most of these were Mid-Ohio cons. John lived in Chicago and so he did a lot of Chicago shows. In the mid 90's, Mid-Ohio seemed to be his favorite show. He did a few San Diego shows in there too. He was really good friends with Roger Price who ran the Mid-Ohio con and so he just seemed to show up. There was a time that we went to Mid-Ohio con just based on a rumor that John might be there but was not scheduled. He did not show up. Mid-Ohio was a very well run show. Nice restaurants nearby. Columbus was a nice city to be in. I prefer smaller conventions to bigger ones.



Action Comics #600



same way. They always had the same faces and the same haircuts. Someone told him he had to start drawing his characters more differently. From there he got his Marvel gig. It might have been Iron Fist, I forget.

Did his FF tryout story for which I own a page come before he did his first work at Marvel or after. It was from 1974.

It was probably done before his work at Marvel but I don't recall the exact dates. Off the top of my head, I don't recall chronologically if it was Iron Fist and Marvel Premieres and even before that he did a Dracula story. On Iron Fist is where he met Chris Claremont. They had a good working relationship and that led to them working on Marvel Team Up and eventually X-men.

Aside Grand Comic Database has Byrne inking at Marvel in 1973 and pencilling in 1974. Iron Fist was in 1975 as was Dracula. X-men in 1977 and Fantastic Four in 1979. Many other credits in between. Interesting, Doomsday +1 was 1978.

Back to the earlier art. Did you ever collect that material.

No. I collected the back issues but as for original art goes, that material didn't do anything for me.

Did John interact with fans off of the con floor? Did he go to dinner with fans?

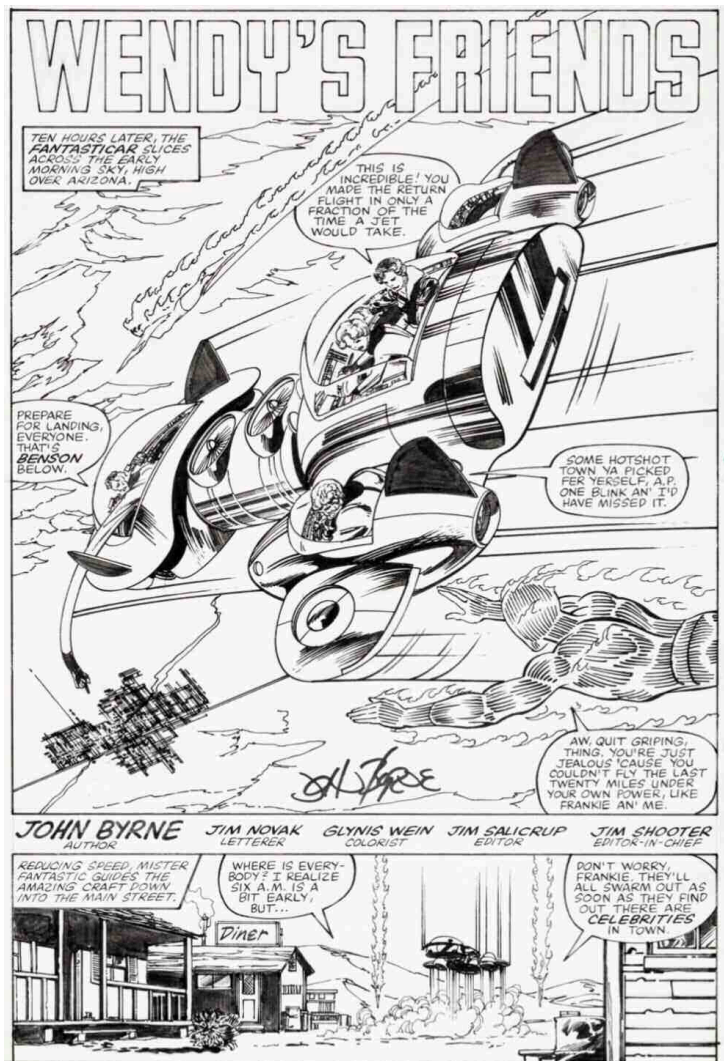
I am sure he did. He wasn't very keen on hanging out with most fans. I remember many times he would be signing for people and they wanted to shake his hand and he refused. Not to be impolite but he didn't want to pick up germs from them. That can turn people off. I think he even had a sign at one point saying he doesn't shake hands.

Did he pose for pictures with fans?

I don't remember. Back in the day, it was not a common request. Now in the day of social media and posting it is much more common. He just did what he did at shows. Signed books and some pages art. After the show you would not see him around. He often had lots of friends at the show like Roger Stern who was the writer on Captain America.

We have not talked about his early art. He started as a fanzine artist.

Yep. He did a lot of work with Bob Layton on fanzines. Then he started with Charlton comics. Space 1999, Emergency, Doomsday +1. Those might have been his first ones. Also Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch. There was some good art and you could always tell it was John Byrne art. I guess the knock on him at the time was that he drew his women the



So, the earliest Byrne art you would have is from Iron Fist?

I don't have any Iron Fist art. I am not a big fan of the first run FF with Joe Sinnott. I am a fan of the second run where he penciled and inked himself. Before that he did some work on the Champions which I do have art from that. For me as I was collecting art, I would try really hard to get examples from John Byrne. It would be X-men, MTU, FF, Cap and Alpha Flight. I have some tail end art from Man of Steel.

How about She-Hulk?

No. If I collected She-Hulk it would have been as part of the FF books. The later issues in the second run of FF.

Namor?

No. It is the same thing. I would collector Namor when he appeared in FF, but not the solo book. He has been in so many issues. You have to remember when John started on Namor he was using new material and evolving as an artist. He was experimenting with duo-shade board. It was kind of a neat experiment. He didn't do a lot of that going forward. It is what it is. It is different art. Smaller boards. He was learning to use new tools. There were some really great pages that he did but I prefer his other style when he pencils and inks himself. There was that whole period on second run FF where he did a lot of his own really detailed inking. He was doing more than one title at a time and so he had to start to crank out the work. He would do layouts and ink directly on top of those as opposed to giving someone detailed pencils to ink.

If your house was on fire, and you could only grab one piece. Would it be a Byrne piece?

As you know I have got a lot of good stuff. I would literally have to go back into the fire and risk my life several times. That first piece would probably be a Byrne. First would be Byrne and then Sienkiewicz art. A lot of my really high end art is in portfolios now with copies in the frames. So it is not that I planned it, it is no longer about grabbing one piece but perhaps a few portfolios.

Would you be grabbing the most valuable?

Oh no. My most valuable art is not my favorite. I'd be going for sentimental pages. Those pages are worth more to me personally than their value. As stupid as it sounds, it could be Alpha Flight art. I still remember getting certain pages at certain times. That brings back memories of seeing the comic on the spinner rack and bringing the book home and reading it multiple times. For me that is the stronger memory and more important than the actual original art sometimes.

We talked a bit about our editor's collection and how it is probably the largest Byrne collection. Other big holders of Byrne art would include Terry Austin and perhaps some other inkers who got art back. Rob's collection is quite large but no further details are making it to print.

I don't have to post my art. I am happy to show you and anyone I decide to invite over to my house. I will bring out the portfolio and show you my gallery. That is one thing. Do I want to post it online and show everyone? No. It is similar to the conversation we had with Bill Cox when we visited and why I don't have a CAF gallery.



You can probably count the number of art collectors who have seen your collection at your home on the fingers of one hand and for sure on two.

That is true. I do bring a portfolio to your art gatherings so some of what I own is known a bit wider. Sometimes when I have had people over, I only show them a portfolio or two and they might not be interested in seeing the Byrne stuff, so I don't even bother. I do have too much Byrne. I have tried to trade up into other artists. It is not always easy. I prefer to start collecting high end examples, so I don't need multiple pieces. When you are talking about art from your favorite stories, it is hard to part with any page when it is your favorite. As far as John Byrne X-men art goes one would like to have a page from the Dark Phoenix Saga, the Hellfire Club storyline and Days of Future Past. Those are my favorite storylines. The Alpha Flight stories and X-men 109 with weapon Alpha storyline are too. You really can't go wrong with John Byrne X-men! With Marvel Team-up there are some great Spider-man stories. Within Marvel Two-in-One, there was the Pegasus storyline which was fun. Having on decent example is good enough for me.

When talking quality over quantity would you trade 10 sentimental Alpha Flight pages for a favorite higher end piece by Byrne?

I don't know. Laughs. I have so many good pages from Alpha Flight that I don't need to get one more great page because I already own most of them. It would be different trading Alpha Flight pages for a good X-men page or a great FF page.

Would you make that trade?

I really don't think so. I already have great pages from great storylines. I like the Alpha Flight storylines the best and those are tied to memories of buying complete storylines at the store. Those are the first comics I collected and read monthly. Before that comics came in sporadically. I wasn't buying X-men off the rack, it was at conventions and where ever I could find them. Do I hold them higher than Alpha Flight? For sure...who wouldn't hold them higher?

What is going to happen to your art one day?

Oh God! (Laughs) You are going to have to dig up my grave when that time comes. I really don't know. What I always thought would be interesting would be to gift art to friends if that ever happened. For me it is obviously going to go to relatives and they will do whatever they are going to do with it. I would rather give a sentimental page to friends as opposed to letting a kid sell it for market value. No one is keeping it for their sentimental value; it is just a cash grab for them. So I don't even want to think about that. I've been lucky to this point in my life never having to sell art due to financial needs. It would actually be scary to sell art. As you know, once it is gone, it is gone. A lot of these really nice pages end up in black hole collections and you will never see them again. You spend an eternity or it seems like an eternity searching for a page and collecting this stuff. You find the page you have been looking for for almost 30 years. You can't just sell it. Some people can. If you get a really, really great page, you can't sell it for monetary value. You will never get a page of that caliber again.

John is really good at handling action scenes. What do you think about his work on talking heads pages and relationships?

I would argue John Byrne is a storyteller first. He can draw whatever he wants. If he is doing talking heads, it is done really well too. If he is doing action, it is what we all want to see, but the most important part is telling a story. In some of his really early works you can see how he is learning how to craft a story. He just keeps



getting better and better. In X-men you can see he was getting the hang of it but by the time Fantastic Four came around he had mastered it. Also remember that at the time of FF he was working on two or three books at the same time. There are stories of him getting mixed up with characters. It is like playing 3 chess games at the same time with three different people and keeping everything in the right order. There is some skill to that. Most people have a hard time finishing one book a month and he is doing three and sometimes doing everything including inking and lettering.

Have you seen copies of his pencils from throughout his career?

For sure! They exist. He usually made copies of everything. There is the famous story of an issue of Avengers that got lost in the mail where they had to redo it to make printing deadlines. So they inked on vellum over the copies of the pencil photocopies. I am not sure if those pages ever turned up. It was from the Absorbing man story in Avengers. There were pages inked by Jansen, others by Austin and Green.



Did he pencil differently for different inkers?

Early on I would say no. Later, if he knew Terry was going to add extra detail he could leave stuff out. What was he doing for Joe Rubenstein? I can't tell you. There was that one issue printed from pencils. That should tell you that his pencils were so detailed that they could shoot directly from the pencils. Every inker adds what he has to add so it might afford Byrne the ability to cut certain corners knowing he has a good inker.

I wasn't sure how tight his pencils were.

They were tight. Very tight. There are pages from X-men 137 that were not used as part of the comic was rewritten. You could see how detailed they were even back then.

For pages that he would be inking himself, did he make copies of the pencils?

No. He went from layouts to inking. There are pencil lines on the pages but not as detailed as he did on other books. By the time he got to Alpha Flight they were loose layouts and squiggly lines. He was so good by that time that he left out details in the faces and went straight to inks. Imagine doing the 3 books at once, you have to cut some corners. The complaints from fans were the lack of backgrounds. When he did rubble from battle scenes in early FF, he would literally draw every rock and by the end he was using squiggles and shapes for rocks and debris. He also used a thick black marker to ink backgrounds

which makes people cringe. You could use a brush with good inks but he used the marker. A lot of that stuff has faded and you can see the marker lines. Terry Austin was guilty of using markers sometimes too. Some of the really nice pages from the Dark Phoenix storyline there is faded purple ink and that adds to the art. Who knows in 30 years it might fade all together. Later on, Byrne started to letter his own comics. You can tell that it didn't always work as there is a lot of white out and corrections on some art. Byrne was never a skilled letterer when it came to placing balloons and how to position text within them.

Do you think Byrne brought any big innovations to comic art?

You have to remember Byrne got his influence from Neal Adams and Kirby. His biggest innovation may have been in him being a huge influence on the next generation of comic artists who emulate him. Would Jim Lee be Jim Lee without growing up on John Byrne comics? There is something about John Byrne that people really do love. It is just his storytelling ability and he can draw really, really well. He drew female superheroes really well. She-Hulk, Sue Storm and the X-men characters.

Rob is also a big fan of works by Alan Moore and so our conversation drifted over there for a while.

Talking about if Byrne and Moore would have been able to work together.

No. Alan Moore would be too controlling. He needed artists that would follow direction. Alan Moore has an idea. Look at Watchmen, it is what it is because basically Alan Moore told David Gibbons this is the way every panel is supposed to be.

The same with Eddie Campbell. Guys like Sienkiewicz couldn't work like that on Big Numbers and so it didn't work out like that.

Yes, because it time consuming. You look at some of the shit they are asked to do. Look at Watchmen. Part of what makes Watchmen so good is the detail. The "attention" to detail. You could look at a panel and see something that is in the background of the background, something that is the key to the story and was placed there for a reason. It has to be put in on this panel, in this part of the story. People would think it wasn't important to the story and just part of the background. Look at the beginning of Watchmen. The first page begins with a close up of a button and zooms out. In one of those panels you see Rorschach walk by. Imagine someone reading Watchmen for the first time and realizing, holy f%#@, they introduced Rorschach in the third panel. You don't realize he is an important character until later. You see this same guy walking through different parts of the story carrying the sign and you don't realize how important he is to the overall story. You give that script to someone who doesn't care, they might not put Rorschach on that first page.

This issue has a tribute to George Perez as well. Did you know George Perez well?

No, but I have had my fair share of encounters with him. I have a really nice Avengers splash he signed. He was always at a lot of conventions. A fan favorite. He was often in Ohio and Pittsburg comic cons. He always did the charity auctions. He was very entertaining and friendly. He was good friends with many of the artists. I miss his early Avengers run. That was always my favorite. I didn't love his DC stuff. His early work is in some ways what got me into superhero comic collecting. That early Avengers material is in some ways just as nostalgic as my love for John Byrne art.

Although we talked about other things comic related, this concludes that interview. The original art shown in the interview are all pieces Rob had owned in the past but they have moved on to other collectors. The cover images are there for illustrative purposes only.

On May 31st over lunch, I added a few more interview questions with Rob. The focus was on collecting art, including John Byrne art, in the pre-internet days which was meant to be part of the original conversation before we got sidetracked.

Other than the dealers like Jim, Albert and Will, where did you find art in the pre-internet days?

Usually the best way to find art would be to get the Comic Buyer's Guide. I read it in the 80's and 90's.

Was it monthly or weekly?

I guess it came out a couple times a month. I usually got the CBGs at conventions. At every convention the Thompsons were giving them away for free.

The Thompsons?

Don and Maggie Thompson did the Comic Buyer's guide. They were the editors. They would set up at conventions and would hand out free issues. I often got them at my local comic shop. Nobody was ever interested in buying them so by the time the end of the month came around, they would either give them away for free or rip off the cover and give them away. I am not sure if the shops



got a return on unsold magazines. I usually got them for free. Others had subscriptions and got them in the mail. It wasn't until years later I heard about collectors paying for special courier services to be able to get the magazines early. There were always classifieds in the CBG. They were in the back and it was always interesting as it was very niche. Guys would look for specific things or specific pages like "art wanted". You could get to know collectors and what they were looking for. Back then there was a good chance that if someone knew you were looking for a specific page, they would tell you where it was. As opposed to today and someone knows you want something they prevent you from getting it by buying it themselves or get it so they could ransom it off. It was different back then, people actually tried to help each other and collect art. They had advertisements as well. Albert had ads. Conrad Eschenberg, the Donnellys and Mitch Ikwitz did as well. There were some other dealers like Hans at Tri-State and Tom Horowitz. They were often full page ads. The problem with the CBG is that by the time I saw the book, it was 2 months old and 99% of the time the art was gone. I never managed to get anything from CBG. I was always too late.

Did you ever meet anyone through the CBG?

No. I don't think so. I would meet them later at a convention and recognize their name for the classifieds. It would lead to conversations about the art and collecting.

It was mostly at conventions that you got the rest of your art from?

Yeah...pretty much. There were no websites. Conventions were the big way and working for an airline was a big help being able to fly to every second show.



Once dealers knew you, did they approach you or call you with art?

About once a year I'd get a call from Conrad. He usually tried to buy back pages that he sold me. Albert does that as well.

Did dealers used to publish lists of what they had?

Yeah. What they would do is they would take 10 or 12 double sided copies and stapled together to make an art catalog. If you were on their mailing list they would send it to you. It probably got expensive over time so depending on how much art you were buying might determine if they kept mailing you free catalogs. They might do one every couple months.

Carsten still does that in Germany. He puts out a nice quality glossy cover catalog every few months.

Mitch used to do that. Often by the time I got it, anything I wanted was long gone. I was always too late after getting it by third class mail from across the continent and a border.

Were you on any of the early online message boards?

No.

How about eBay? Were you an early member?

eBay near the middle. Early eBay I was not involved. I did get a lot of good art. As eBay got worse and worse with the corporate approach and collectors falsely advertising what they had, I used it less often. It just became easier and safer to see the art you were going to buy in person at conventions so you knew what you were getting. Another thing I didn't like about eBay is there were groups of collectors who would try and get auctions to end early. So you could be patient and wait for a last second snipe but then you found out it ended early as some collector in California made an offer to end it.

How about Comicartfans.com? Did you get art from there? I know you don't have a gallery.

Not so much anymore. A few pieces in the past. The collecting hobby has changed. It is so hard to get art now. A lot of people don't like being approached.

I have also bought from auctions houses like Heritage and Comiclinc.

Going back now, would you do it any differently?

Well. Knowing what we know now, I would have gotten in on eBay earlier. I'd have bought more art when it was still cheap. I would have bought more covers. I do have a lot of covers but that was not intentional. I was always a first page title/credit splash collector. I'd probably make a point of getting to know the big dealer early on.

More networking?

Networking is the biggest key. Meeting a dealer or collector was the best way.

I think networking was the most important thing back in the day. Knowing people and they people they knew could lead to art. I remember when I started it was very much an old boy's club.

For sure. You had to go to Chicago Comic con and you had to go to San Diego Comic con. Those were the big shows and everyone was there. The odd New York show too. This is where you met people and networked.

In the early internet days you could search all the sites in about an hour each day. Now it is like a full time job.

End of Interview

In March, Rob and I went down to Ohio to visit with our buddy Joe Dragunas and to visit the Billy Ireland art museum at Ohio State University. I had been once before but it had been a number of years. I wrote pretty extensively about it in a previous APA so I won't revisit that. Part of the reason I went down is I wanted to donate some material to them. I had about 150 photograph negatives from Jack Kent who a photographer Caniff used a lot in the mid to late 40's and into the early 50's. These were professional negatives often 4 x 6 inches in size. The content was a lot of publicity shots for magazine and included some of his models. I have owned them for almost a decade and came as part of the Jack Kemp estate which I bought through Mark Hays years ago. They are really neat items but I really didn't know what to do with them nor how to take care of them. I thought they would be well suited for their archives so I brought them down. I also brought an extra copy of the APA supplement I did for issue #100 which featured all the prints by Milton Caniff. Of course I have discovered more since then but I knew OSU didn't have a great selection of the prints in its archives, the book might fill a niche until I eventually send all my prints to them. The curators looked at the material and thought it would be something they would love to add to the archives and so I signed over possession of the items and that was done. We had a great visit to the reading room and pulled art by Caniff, Watterson and Jeff Smith to see and handle in person. They pulled out a scrap book of clippings from the late 30's and early 40's that Caniff had kept of newspaper articles and it was fascinating. Some 300 photos later it was getting close to the noon hour and the Reading Room closes for a few hours. Later, after a lunch break we went through the museum. It is such a great space and so great to see something like this set up for comic art. I hope to visit again soon. It wasn't until we were almost back in Mentor that we were told about the Marvel Show going on in Columbus. It was too late to turn back and so another return trip is imminent.



The next day we schedule to meet Bill Cox of Comcartfans.com at this house. It turned out to be only about a 15 minute drive from Joe's and the hotel we were staying at (Alan, this one was even sketchier than the one we shared in San Diego with chop shops). We met up with Bill and hung around at his place talking and looking at art for almost 3 hours and then we went out to have brunch together before Rob and I headed home. Below are some pictures from the visit with Bill. The first is with Bill, myself, Rob and Joe in front of the famous CAF youtube backgrounds.



Mailing Comment APA 115 – Swipes – an issue I enjoyed thoroughly. Thank you to every one for your contributions.

David Applegate – another great issue under your watch. Thoughtful article and although I can't define when a homage turns into a swipe, I certainly can identify it when I see it.

Lee Banaka – Nice and timely piece on Perez.

Satya Chetri – In my books, Pratt is allowed to swipe Caniff any time he wants. Cool find on the Breccia swipe in the Phantom...I'd almost call that more of a homage as the style is different and so spot on Breccia that there is no mistaking it.

Ray Cuthbert – you showed me a number of swipes or references I had not seen before. Great stuff.

Alan Dion – "thanks again for ensuring that Prince Valiant Fosters will be forever out of my price range." Huh! How quickly the tide turns, who know, perhaps you will be thanking me for help in getting a Prince Valiant one day ☺ Great Modesty by Stuart.

Michael Finn – So many great commissions. It is great patronage to the hobby you pay while keeping artists gainfully employed.

George Hagenauer – Interesting to see the Stan Drake re-used panels. I've heard about this for years but had not seen a good example until now. Sigh, could he ever draw women. Interesting thoughts on slabbing and art collecting. Hoping to host a Sept 2022 gathering at my place after two years of no travel and scaled down versions.

Wally Harrington – Honey or Pagan? Is that even a question? It is



Mary Ann, Ronnie and Pagan for me without a moment's hesitation or doubt. You have such a great collection of Rip Kirby art to showcase Raymond's abilities at drawing all the girls. I still hope to persuade you to part with August 1952 pair of dailies one day. As far swipes goes, oooh that Don Sherwood shaking my fist in the air.

Roger Hill – Great story about HOTS #1 cover and its acquisition.

Michael Hranek – That is a pretty cool DD page you have and I agree, the Munoz influence is certainly there. After years of searching, I just added my first Munoz page too. Alec Sinner which can be seen on the previous page. I appreciate your comments on your concept of art and on some of your collecting philosophies.

Jason Hussa – Those Cerebus homages are great. I don't think I have seen them before. I appreciate your overview on how comics have moved more in the mainstream and into acceptability. Now we just need to do something about the art.

Michael Kenyon – Very cool Zeck piece you have there and a fun story to make it that much more special.

Chad Kolean – Nice to see a take on this subject through the lens of a Jeffrey Jones aficionado.

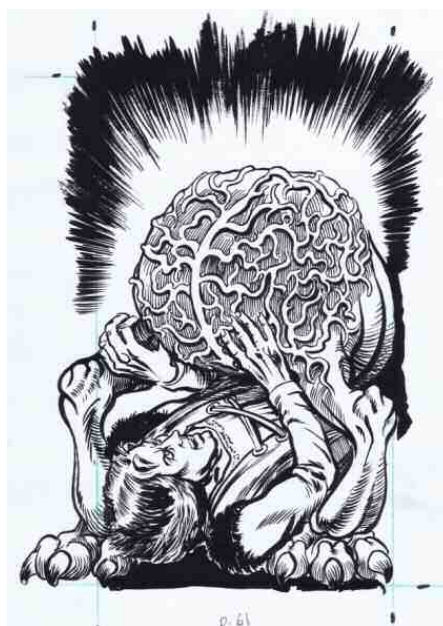
Jared Michalski – Unless you are Will Eisner, I think the Spirit is an impossible character to approach. There were valiant and respectful efforts made that held their own for a while but it is a different time and tastes and sensibilities are different. I did like the Spirit reboots and appreciated the talents that worked on the series. I did collect and read them as they came out and as fun as they were, they never held a candle to what Will had done a half century before. I won't mention how bad the movie reboot was.



Dave Karlen – Mark Trail was always a favorite growing up. I was a budding zoologist and learned so much from Dodd's Sundays. Here is a dandy early daily I own. It wasn't until I started collecting the art that I realized there was a storyline to the dailies.

Steve Nam – If you come across any cool vintage Dungeons & Dragons art that is being undervalued or is at auction and is not getting the attention it needs, please let me know. I would be able to quit collecting art if I had the original first edition art for the Mind Flayer or Intellect Devourer on my wall. I do have this fun piece from a D&D choose your own adventure book from back in the day but not quite the same. I owned that Yeates page for many years and happy to see it with you.

Mark Nevins – Great article and well thought out argument. I have always loved Lichtenstein's work and never thought of it as stealing from comics or other creators. The thought never entered my mind and as soon as I heard others on the other side of the topic I just thought they didn't understand art. I love his work but at the same time never wanted to own it or a print or a litho. The same for Warhol. I did get a chance to see Duchamp's *Fountain* in person in Paris just before the pandemic hit. It



is one of my favorite pieces and I'd be among those that support it as the 20th Centuries most influential pieces. It would be hard to argue against that.

Michael O'Connell – such a neat piece of history. I am reading Steve Canyon very slowly. I am about 12 years in. I am not sure how far I'll get but I love it so far. I suspect that from what others have told me that it will wain once I get into the mid to late 1960's. I'll make up my own mind when I get to that point.

Michael Quilligan – I enjoyed your thoughts and examples for this topic. Well written.

Rob Reiner – that picture of Gaines by Williamson is priceless. Thanks for sharing.

Benno Rothschild – Thank you for such a great and fitting tribute to Bob Murphy. It made me tear up.

Stuart Sayger – interesting thoughts on swipes from the other side of the equation.

Steve Smith – Sorry to hear that your project with Kaluta didn't work. I look forward to seeing what you and Justin produce.

Ron Sonenthal – I love the Peanuts swipe. Amazing story you picked up by Marie Severin.

Steve Stein – I am with you, a splash is a first page of a story with the title or a single panel page. Nice selection you have.

Tom Vincent – I collected Wrightson Horror covers when I was in my teens collecting comics. He was one of the few artists I could identify early. A vintage cover or a Frankenstein plate would be dream pieces for me but those ships have sailed some time ago.

In the interest of no blank space or pages, here are two pieces I have added to my collection from the collection of my friend Bob Murphy and a great Scorchy Smith daily. The single panel Twin Earths and the 5th Terry Daily are items I admired in Bob's collection. On the next page, a Tezuka cover from 1958, a Peyo page and a Mizuki page and some art Junji Ito that did not come from Bob!



