

The Billy Ireland Museum, CXC 2017 and a Motley Crew of Comic Art Hooligans

By Jeff Singh



The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum is located at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio and is celebrating its 40th Anniversary this year. It all began in 1977 with a donation by Milton Caniff of a large number of original art pieces, documents, photographs and other material. In the 40 years it has grown to include over 300,000 original art pieces, 45,000 books, 67,000 comics and serials, 2.5 million comic strip clippings and over 3000 linear feet of manuscript material. Among the collection is most of the original art from *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson and all of the original art work by Jeff Smith for his series *BONE*. The museum has changed names and locations several times moving into their current location in 2009.

I have known about the museum for years and was always looking for an opportunity or excuse to visit. Last year I heard about the Crossroads Comic Con (CXC) that was founded by Jeff Smith taking place in Columbus and having ties to the museum. It is very much a small press convention and right up my alley of interest in comic reading. I don't know if I have mentioned it before but even if I have, I can safely say my favorite comic show every year is the Toronto Comic Arts Festival (TCAF) and I will have to take the time to write an



article on that convention in the future. Anyway, I now had my excuse to visit the museum and so the wheels were in motion to finally get me to Columbus.

Columbus is only a 6 hour drive from Toronto and when I looked at flights, most were over 6 hours as there are very few direct flights and so you to fly to a hub that is further away than the final destination just to get there. So I drove and stopped in Cleveland to visit with artist and buddy Joe Dragunas (look for a future article on him too). We hung out for the day and went to the fine art gallery in Cleveland which has a fairly impressive collection. The next morning we set off Columbus and spent the day at the Billy Ireland Museum. Joe went back that evening and I spent the next day at the Museum again and doing a few Crossroads Comic Con (CXC) related activities including attending a talk/interview with Chris Ware. On my last day I went to the main venue for CXC which was in the main downtown library in Columbus to see artists and publishers. As always, I managed to find some art to bring home. I drove home that evening with a head full of strip art, a phone full of pictures, some art and a relatively empty wallet. If that doesn't sound like successful trip...we must define success in different ways.

Now for the details...

The Billy Ireland Museum is a large part of a much larger arts faculty building. The outside façade is very impressive and stately with a grand entrance that



opens into a large open area. At this time there was a desk set up with greeters but I suspect that was only there to help with the increased

attendance they were expecting from the CXC. On display in that foyer is the original working desk of famed Ohio artist Billy Ireland. Behind the desk are large stairs



leading up. The Museum business office and administrative offices are off to the left and occupy a large space. To the right as you walk in is the entrance to the Library and Reading Room. There is a



large stained glass window made up several panels of reproductions of Billy Irelands works that were part of the original museums design. Within the reading



room is a large desk with attendants and seven or eight large tables with chairs to sit at. The walls are lined with displays and books. Everyone is welcome to come in and look at the displays, take down books to read and search the online archives on the computers. Being there on the Thursday I was allowed to request a few items from the archives. As you are all painfully aware of, I collect the hand colored strips by Milton Caniff and there are still a few I believe exist but I have not seen. They had many really nice Miss Lace prints which I also have in my collection but only one or two prints I had not seen before. A small mystery was solved for me as I

have the bottom third of a hand colored print with just the feet and the legs of a character I thought was Connie but it turns out is Big Stoop. On the Friday, the Library was having an open house and so no materials could be pulled for showing so I got my fill in on the Thursday.



At the open house and 40th Anniversary celebration the museum staff had selected about another 100 pieces of artwork to take out of the archives and to display on all the reading room

tables. There were also hourly tours that included a very rare opportunity to visit the archives themselves. Pictures were allowed of most things and so I will share with you my experience through photographs. All material from the archives also was photographable but one needed to get permission first. The only thing we were not allowed to photograph was one table of original art that included the last *Calvin and Hobbes* Sunday.

Upstairs is the Will Eisner Conference Room and the Billy Ireland Museum.

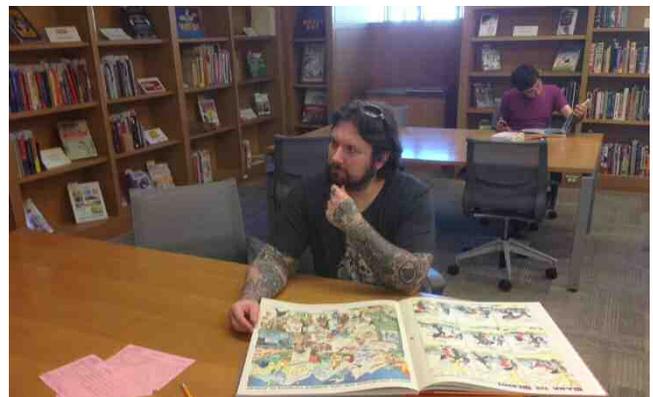
We attended a lecture in the Conference room which was modern and nicely set up for its purpose. It later served as the bar and food area for the Museum party on Friday afternoon.



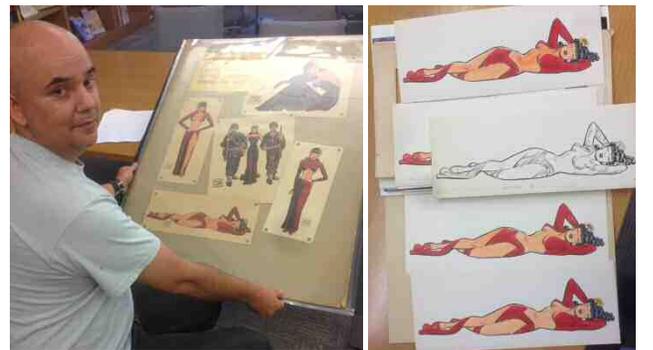
The Museum is a large, well-lit and airy space with multiple rooms. They have what I believe is their

permanent exhibit which includes many gems, pull out drawers and wall shelves that hide some incredible finds. The rest of the gallery space is for rotating exhibits and I was most fortunate to be here for this one. It was entitled The Vault and was a selection 40 displays of the highlights of the museums 40 years of collecting with some interesting stories to go along with some of the art.

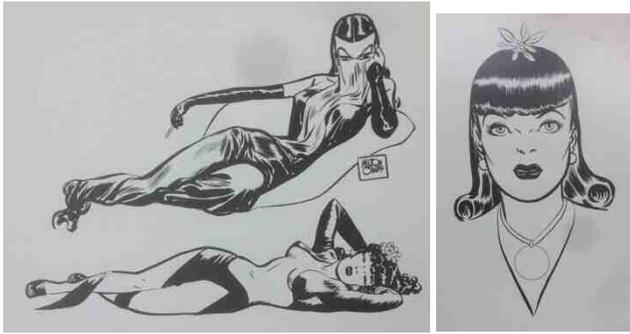
Pictures from the Library and Reading Room



Reading room and contemplative Joe with book.



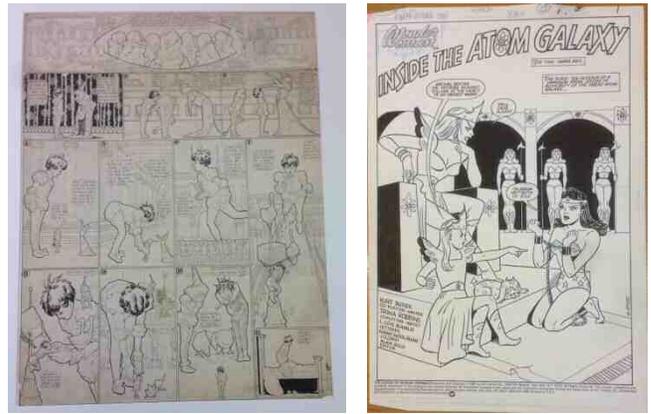
Did some one say Miss Lace?



Below are picture from the Open House with art displayed on the tables.



More treasures from the archives! Awards below.



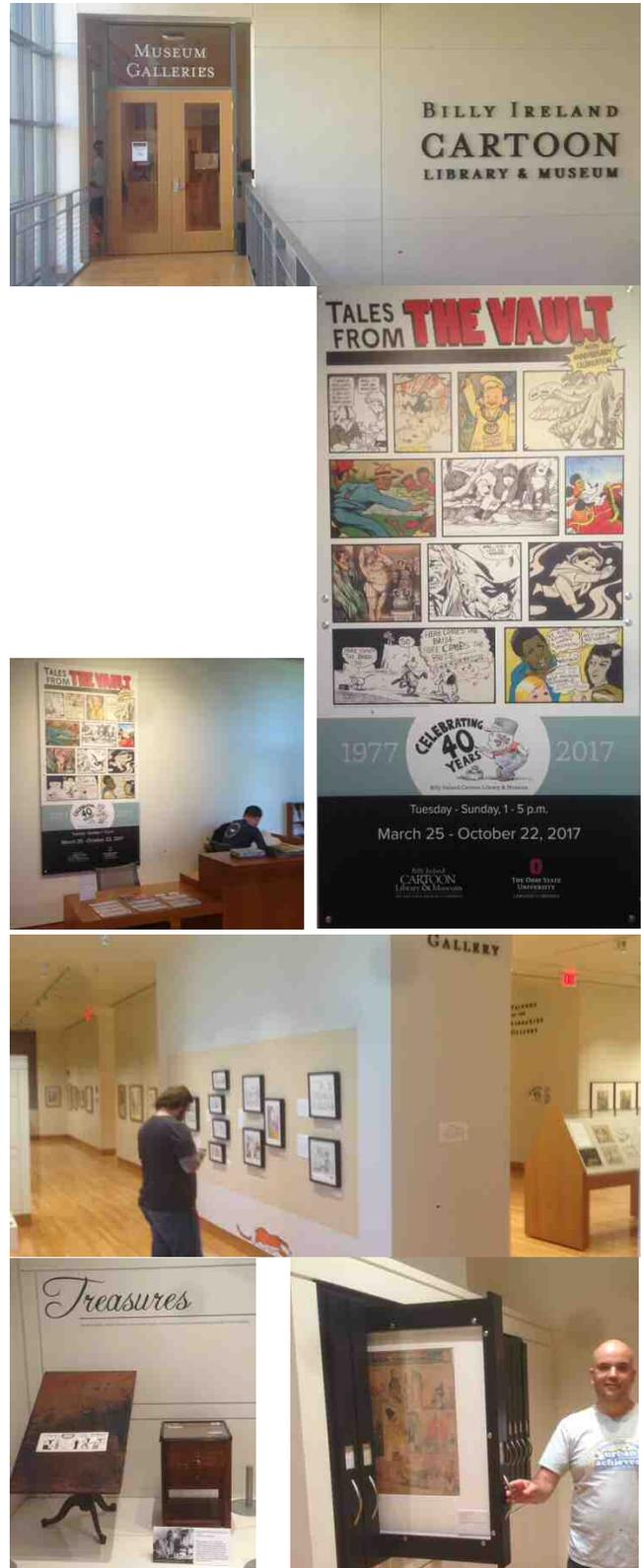
The Vaults

The archives were a huge area with a very sophisticated security system and a large temperature and moisture controlled environment. In the third picture you see flat files, the first 2 towers were just Steve Canyon Sundays. The archive area is at least as deep as it is wide. The office area had the room where they scan and catalog all the art and archives but I missed taking a picture of that area. They had a few display tables out within the archive with treasures on display including a table of the extensive and rare Manga collection the library owns.



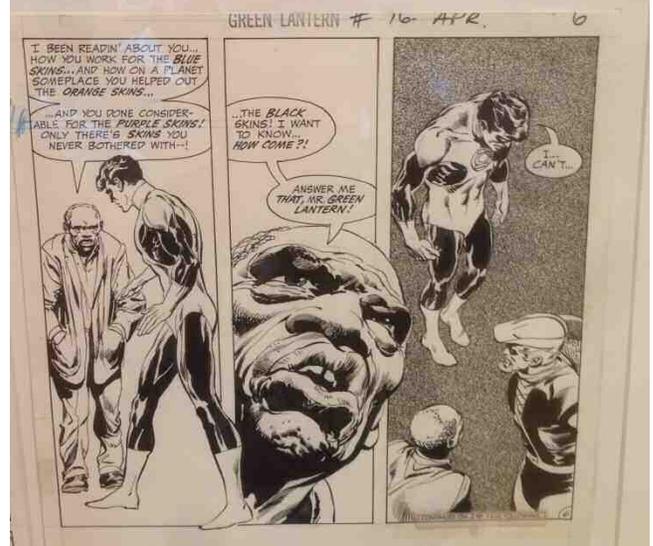
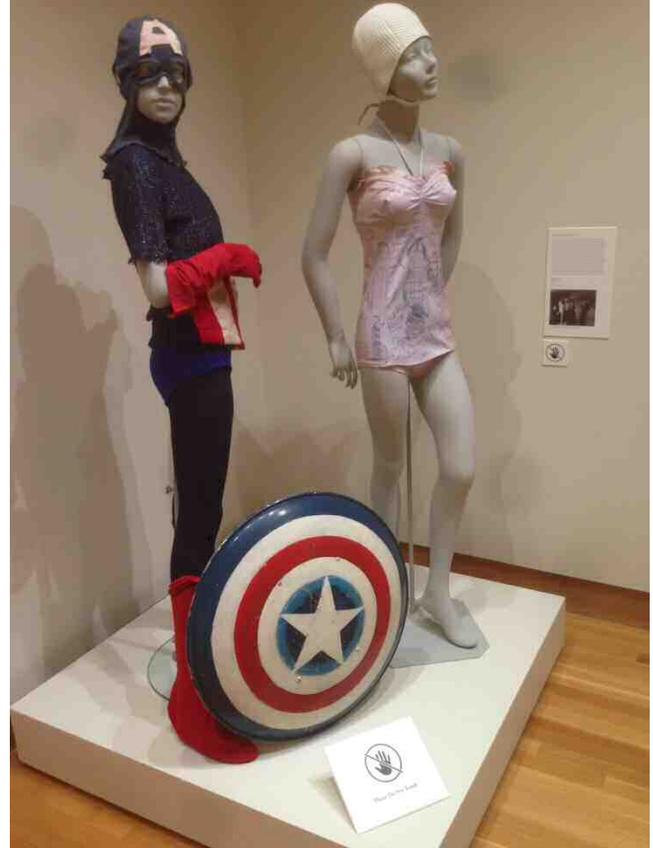
The Musuem

The Museum was made up of several rooms which includes the permanent exhibition and the special 40th anniversary exhibition entitled Tales From the Vault.





A plane model used by Caniff as well as an original *Terry and the Pirates* daily featuring the plane. There is a story that when Caniff came to Billy Ireland the cartoonist and told him that he wanted his job, Ireland told him to create a cartoon that would make him jump out of his seat. Here is that cartoon.



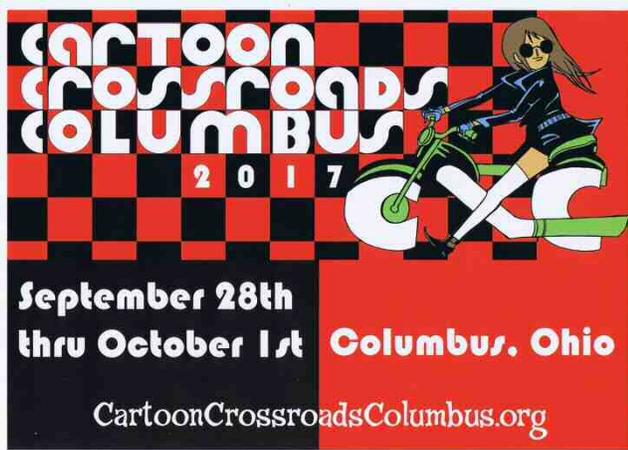


Here are a few of the highlights including the famous *we have met the enemy Pogo*, the death of Farley *For Better or for Worse*, classic *Calvin and Hobbes* Sundays, ground breaking Neal Adams work and the original ink drawing for the most famous of Caniff prints. That is Chester Gould's desk with an original *Dick Tracy* on it earlier in the picture sequence. Another picture above is of 2 costumes, one is an early fan made costume from the 40's and the second is a swimsuit signed by many artists at a Cartoonist Society conference. There were many pieces by McCay, Caniff, Foster, Schulz, Watterson and just about anyone else you could name with the

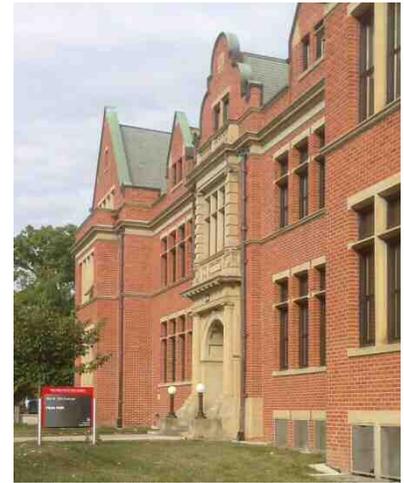
odd exception of Alex Raymond. I didn't get a chance to ask why there were not Raymonds on display but with such a wealth of source material, perhaps it was just an oversight.

Just in case you were wondering, I would recommend the pilgrimage to the museum to all members of CFA-APA. It was a great way to spend 2 days in Columbus.

Crossroads Comic Con



The convention is billed as a comic festival much like TCAF is. From my experience it is in a very similar vein to TCAF as well only about 8 times smaller but this is only the third year it is running and so there is lots of room to grow.



The festival is free and takes place in 6 venues around the city including the Billy Ireland Museum, Wexner Art Centre on OSU campus, Hale Hall on OSU campus, the main Columbus Library, the Museum of Art and at the College of Art and Design. The first 2 days are at the OSU sites with small dealer/publisher

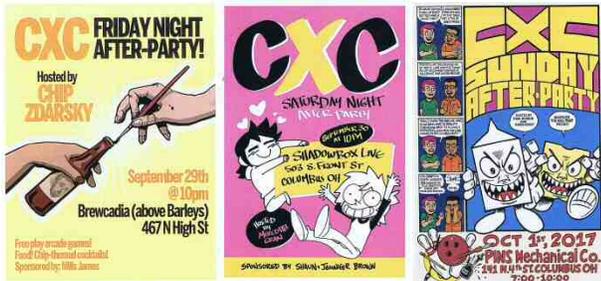
venue set up that is independent but associated with CXC called Sol Con which focuses on Black and Hispanic creators, books and publishers. The first day



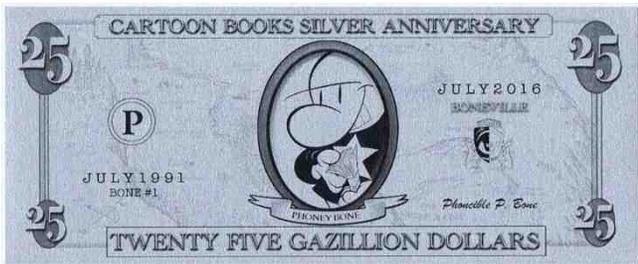
of Sol Con was at Hale Hall and there were about 20 booths set up and then they moved to the main library on the weekend to join the rest of the CXC artists and publishers. There were a total of 93 booths at the main venue.



At the main art gallery they had an exhibit of comic art by Laura Park which I was unable to make it to. There were also CXC related events at several other venues and nightly parties open to everyone and in keeping with the festival spirit they are trying to create.



Below is a give-away depicting how much I value the experience I had at the Museum.



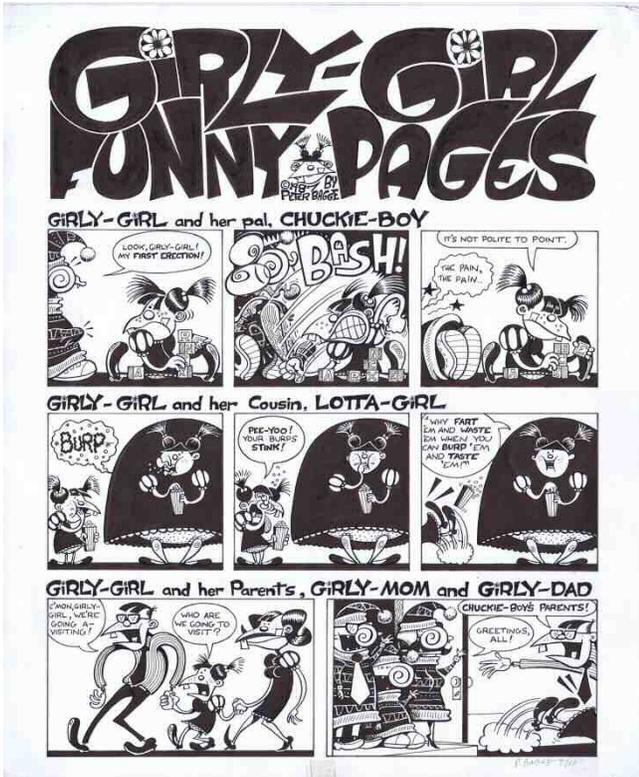
Original Art

Almost without exception, I manage to find some comic art on every trip I take and so it would be unexpected for me not to come home from an comic art related trip without a few things.

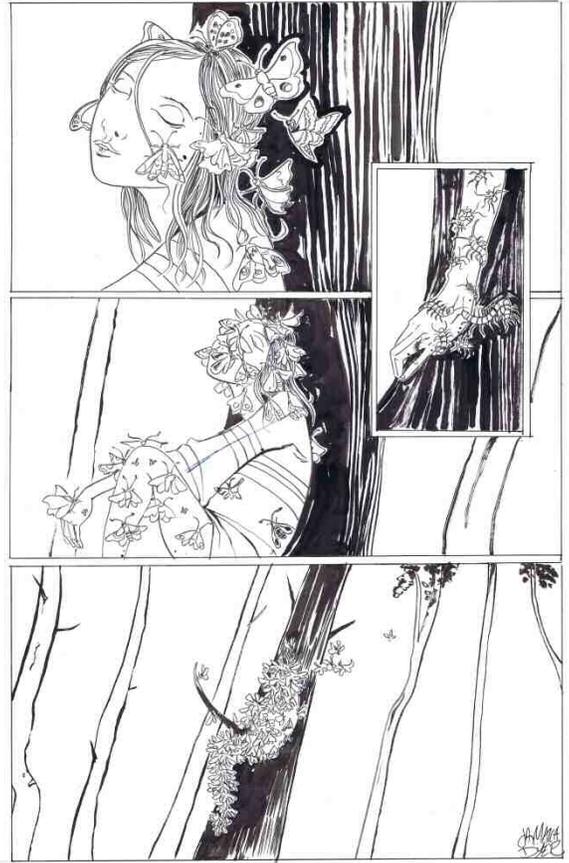
First up is a page from *Punk Rock and Trailer Parks* by Derf Backderf of *My Friend Dahmer* fame. He was at CXC as his comic was made into a feature length movie and it was screened on the Friday night. Tickets (free) were sold out weeks in advance so I missed out on that but not on the chance to get a page of art from an artist who rarely sells anything. I also got a copy of his book in which he did a nice illustration.



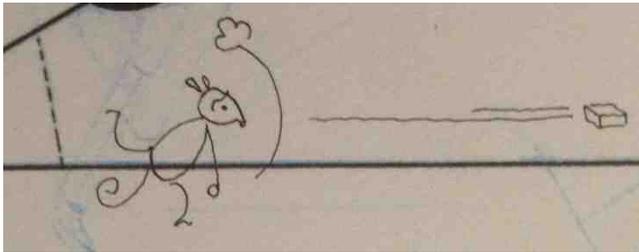
I also had the chance to meet Peter Bagge for the first time and was surprised to find a nice vintage *Neat Stuff* page among the items he had for sale. This was an easy choice for me.



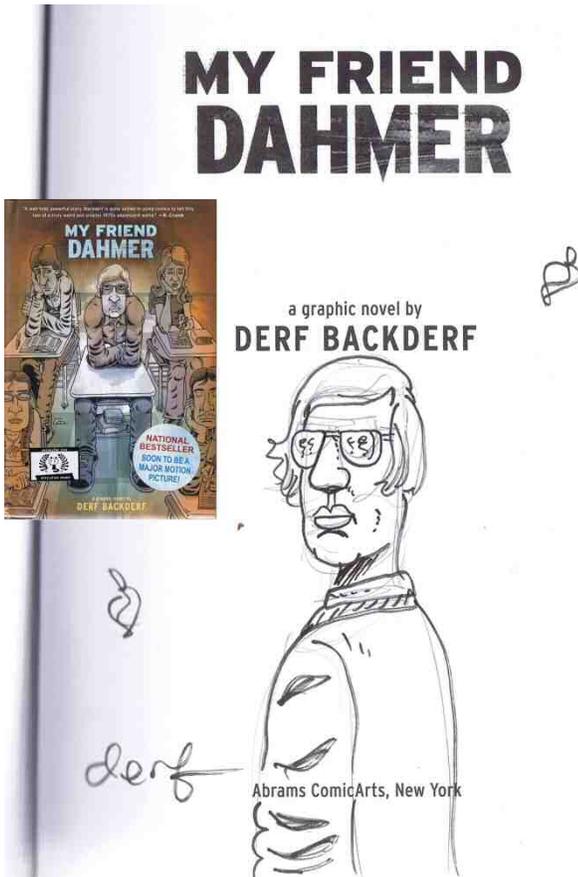
I met Jamaica Dyer for the first time at the show as well. I knew she had given a lecture the day before which I missed standing in the Chris Ware signing line. I said hello and looked through her art. I really liked a few things and picked up a cool page from *Heavy Metal Magazine* and a second from her self published book *Lake Imago*. The Heavy Metal piece has a color component to it that was done separately.



At the signing of his soon to be publically available art book, **Monograph**, Chris did a little Quimby Mouse throwing a brick sketch for me.

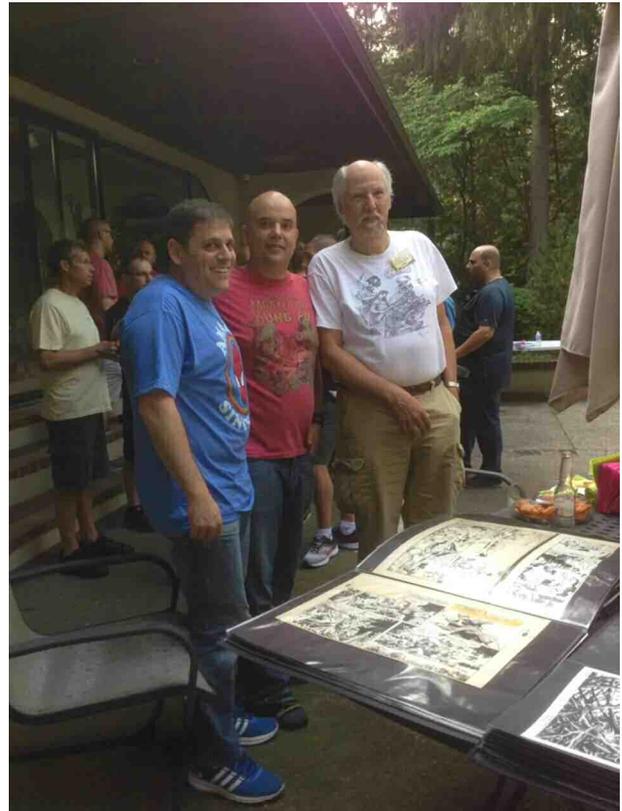


Derf Backdorf sketch inside **My Friend Dahmer** and a Connor Willumsen sketch with his book.



Toronto Area Comic Art Gathering

Every year I host an evening where I invite local comic collectors over to have a night hanging out with other collectors sharing stories and art. The event grows a bit each year and this year we had 30 people in attendance. Like at every good comic art related event there were a few CFA-APA members present including myself, George and Bob.



George is the first international attendee we have had but we do get a few from out of province and several who drive several hours to get here. We usually start outside with some beers and snacks as I start the barbeque and my annual tradition of trying to burn the house down. After dinner we mingle around the house on two of the floors and people check out my art gallery in the basement. As it gets later and my family goes to bed we move into the basement and things usually wrap up around 2 am. My mailing list for the event includes about 60 local collectors which demonstrates how large a comic art collecting community we have in the area. I know there are still quite a few collectors I have not met in the area. An invitation is open to all CFA-APA

members to attend any time in the future. Although I did not end up making any deals this night, there are a few things in the works coming up.



Selective Mailing Comments #102 Kirby

I think this is one of my favorite issues of all time. **David Applegate** – a superb issue under your leadership. A very professional and enjoyable final product.

Ray Cuthbert – I enjoyed seeing the originals you posted from Bruce's collection. Although I am not a huge fan of recreations, Bruce certainly knows his Kirby and does a great job on them.

Hal Turner – Like you and **Ben Friedman**, I don't know Jack but I am fixing that. Since this issue came out, I have added a nice Kirby/Everett page to my collection from TTA #82.



Nicolas Waldmann – great to see all those cool European Kirby Covers. Great Eternals cover..WOW!

Little **Benno** in Kirby Land is brilliant. I liked reviewing you Kirby Kontroversy section as well. Good article.

John Butler – two great submissions. I loved the Tokyo article as it mimics my first trip there last year with many of the same experiences. I am going back again this year (and every year for the foreseeable future) to do comic related things. I plan on taking one of my kids with me each year starting this year where my eldest will be along for the trip.

George Hagenauer – it was great seeing you again, I hope it becomes more of a regular occurrence. Your experiences with restoration and the situation that led to you needing resotations being done are certainly food for thought for all collectors. Thanks for sharing.

Lee Banaka – here is a page you might like that I saw at the Billy Ireland Museum.



Randy Saitta – Great splashes and pictures. My favorite is your Cap 103 page. Syd's inks are brilliant.

Alan Dion – I enjoyed your article. As for Modesty Blaise, I thought Romero made her too sexy and took away a bit of the dangerous allure which Holdaway had captured. Burns is my second favorite artist after Holdaway on the series.

Steve Smith – great pictures of Kirby. I wish I had the chance to meet the man.

Scott Stewart – I liked the Faux Kirby section. Seeing how strongly people referenced and paid homage to Kirby is fun stuff!

Bob Kopman – it was good seeing you again. I got to meet your hero Peter Bagge last weekend but forgot to mention I knew you.

Bill Leach - Great, fun pictures. I think we need to start having more CFA-APA parties with dancers. Just sayin...

Erik Nelson – I was introduced to Mondo posters when visiting my friend Joe Dragunas. He has over a dozen and they are really something in person.

Ron Sonenthal – a truly epic and well curated Kirby Kollection. I agree with you, Kirby splashes are a unique art form on to themselves.

Tom Vincent – I enjoyed the correspondence and a peak behind the artist I only knew through his art. I am sorry you lost a friend.

Marcelo Anciano – you are doing fine work here showcasing the incredible works of Gary Gianni. His painted work is amazing but I think his strength still lies in his brush and ink work.

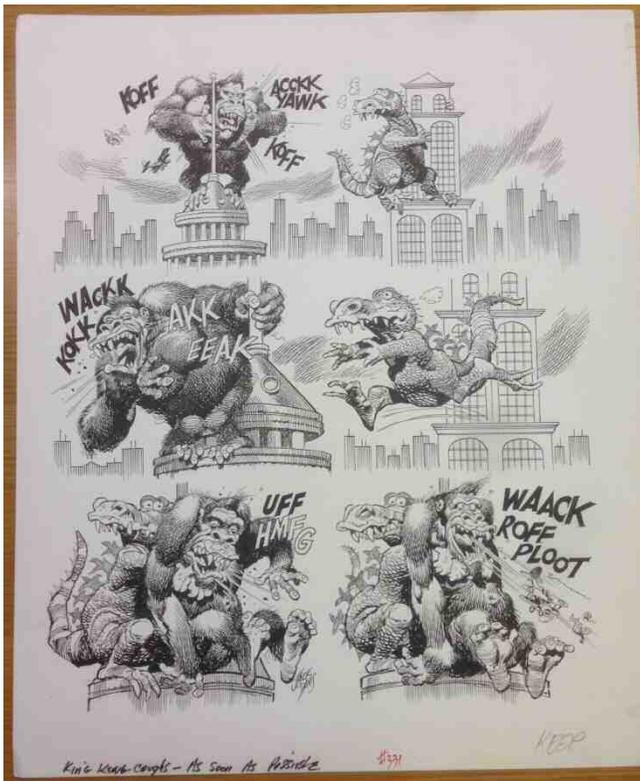
Chad Kolean – Those are some beautiful Jeff Jones paintings and it is great to see the reference material used. Jones didn't use it as a crutch but rather as a spring board for great things.

Gary Land – those golden age hero pages you have managed to ferret out are all such gems. I'd love to see them all in person one day.

Wally Harrington – I love the Nyoka stuff as you already know. I would love to find out who the models were to see more of their pictures too. I have a friend in Chicago who is crazy for Irish McCalla. She was gorgeous but I prefer quieter brunettes, Mary Ann over Ginger, Betty over Wilma sort of guy.

Here to fill up the empty pages, more art from Columbus. Most need no description.





A page for John and Steve. Below, later Sickels.

