

CAR TOON POLY MATHS

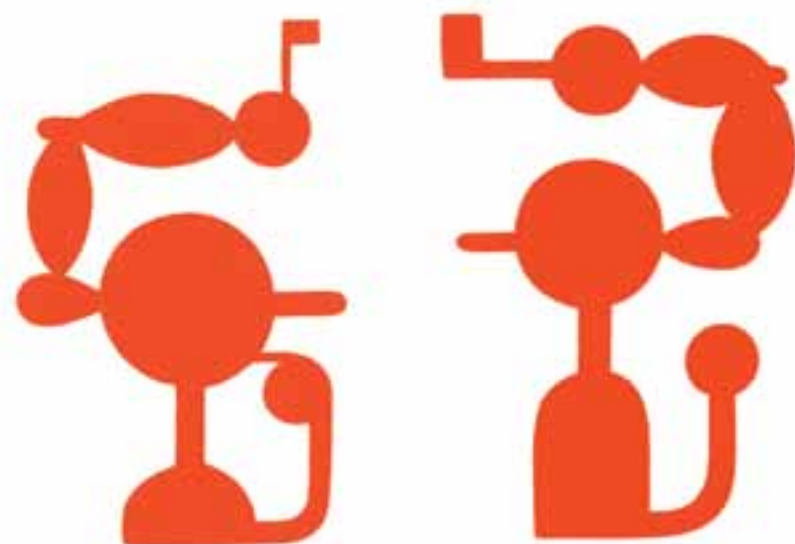
FEB 4–APR 15, 2011
ANNA-MARIA &
STEPHEN KELLEN GALLERY

OPEN DAILY 12–6PM
UNTIL 8PM ON THURSDAYS
ADMISSION IS FREE

What a magical thing is the simple line. It bends, curves, and loops, to moor words to the ground, to make art, to make buildings, and to connect the words, shapes, and space that make our world. In the hands of the ingenious artists who are in the Cartoon Polymaths exhibition, the line flows across formats and media to create singular and distinct stylistic experiences. The exhibition also follows the eye of curator Bill Kartalopoulos, member of the Illustration faculty at Parsons, who cuts a broad historic swathe in his organization, placing stalwarts of cartooning history alongside present-day artists in a multi-media presentation.

As we are daily exposed to cutting-edge media and to increasingly specialized training, the exhibition is a reminder of the immeasurable possibilities of the most basic technology and of the inexhaustible inventiveness of our minds. With this show, the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center invites you to return to that indelible and enchanting first encounter between pencil and possibility – and to follow its tracks in the imagination of these cartoon polymaths.

—Radhika Subramaniam



CARTOON POLYMATHS

The original cartoon was the 15th century Italian *cartone*, referring to the preliminary sketch drawing produced by a painter or muralist in order to map out a finished work. This preliminary drawing omits details of texture and color, but provides a comprehensible schematic for a final image. In the cartoon, line describes form, and foregrounds relational information over surface detail.



The word acquired a different meaning in the nineteenth century. An 1843 drawing in *Punch Magazine* by John Leech, captioned “Substance and Shadow” and labeled “Cartoon No. 1,” mocked an exhibition of literal cartoons – in the traditional sense – for paintings proposed to adorn the new Houses of Parliament. *Punch* continued to use the term to describe its humorous captioned drawings, and the word “cartoon” became forever associated with humorous line drawing within the English-language tradition.

The word “cartoon” has since frequently been used interchangeably with the word “caricature,” but the two terms have opposite meanings. Caricature derives from another Italian term, *caricato*, meaning “loaded, charged, given weight.” Although the two strategies can operate simultaneously within the same image, caricature is essentially a process of exaggeration and amplification, whereas cartooning is a process of schematization and abstraction.

The first theorist of the cartoon was the Genevan polymath Rodolphe Töpffer (1799 – 1846). Töpffer had wanted to follow his father into the fine arts, but was constrained by poor eyesight. He became, instead, a schoolmaster and a writer of fiction and criticism. Töpffer continued to doodle, for his amusement and for that of his students, and became fascinated with the way that simplified, even incomplete line drawing could suggest recognizable forms. He theorized his work in his 1845 “Essay on Physiognomy.” He emphasized line drawing’s synthetic, conventional properties, and noted that no matter how incomplete a simplified image might be, “the least practiced eye fills in the rest of the image with an ease and, especially, a veracity that works wholly to the draughtsman’s advantage.” Töpffer compared line drawing to language, and proceeded to become the first seminal figure in the history of comics. Between 1827 and the time of his death, he produced seven early graphic novels, placing his abbreviated figures into abbreviated compositions that syntactically referred to, qualified, and amplified one another to convey fantastic, satirical narratives.



Despite praise from Goethe and a brief vogue for books in the Töpfferian mode among artists including Gustave Doré, Töpffer’s theoretical approach to the cartoon form was eclipsed by generic associations of humor. A rapidly accumulating body of material in the *Punch* mode and, later, newspaper comic strips and animated cartoons bore comedic expectations and retained a stigma of frivolity well into the twentieth century, despite their aesthetic qualities. The cartoon was seen as degraded by the most vocal theorists of Modern Art (if not always its practitioners), and was pre-

sented merely as source material by the most well known of the Pop Artists. But the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s nurtured a generation of underground cartoonists, independent animators, and other graphic artists who dedicatedly recovered popular forms for the purposes of personal expression.

Art Spiegelman addressed various aspects of the comics form in the introduction to his 1977 anthology book *Breakdowns*, which collected his experimental and autobiographical underground comics. He quoted Töpffer on image-text relationships, and proceeded to address the image-making form that provides the visual vocabulary for his own complexly structured comics pages and narratives:

The word CARTOONS implies humorous intent – a desire to amuse and entertain. I’m not necessarily interested in entertainment – in creating diversions. Better than CARTOONS is the word DRAWINGS; or better still ... DIAGRAMS.

Spiegelman separates the cartoon as a form from its content associations by pinpointing and foregrounding the diagrammatic quality of cartoon drawing. In other words, as he told a 1999 interviewer, “no matter what you do in a comic book, [a picture of a cow is] always going to look like a very small cow. And, therefore, you’re better off just getting its cowness across.”

As subsequent artists in succeeding generations have repeatedly proven, the modern cartoon is more than a genre: it is a kind of image making that functions as its own end, rather than as a phase in a larger process. It is an abstraction, a theoretical blueprint. In its most basic articulation, the cartoon is more closely allied with the concept than the expressive gesture. The visual units of cartooning, like the verbal units of language, can be manipulated and syntactically combined to visually express complex ideas and profound observations.

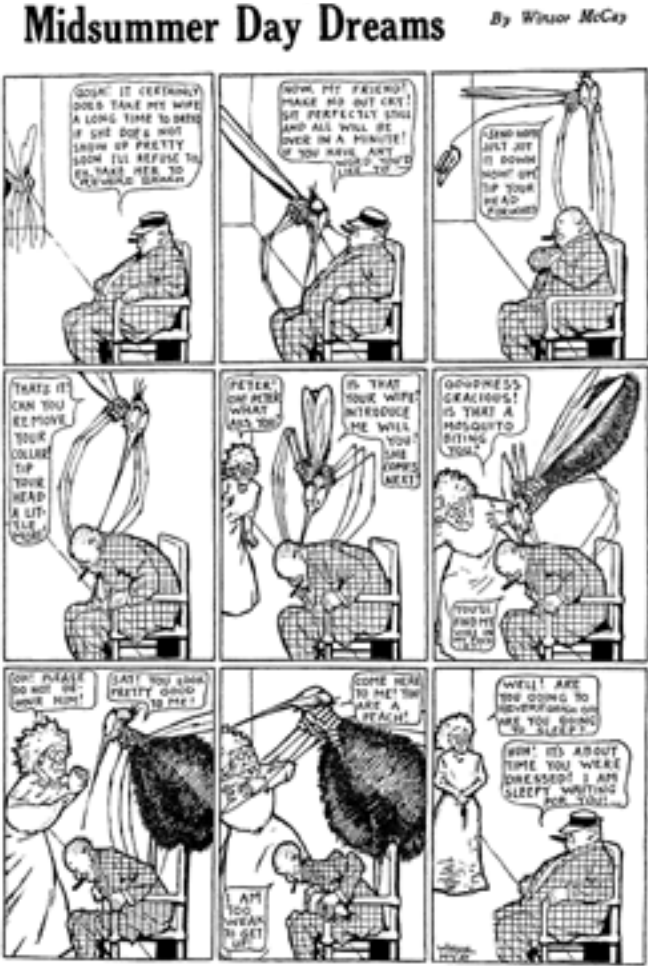
In cartooning, a line describes a form while asserting its own formal integrity. Like handwriting, it is further inflected by the style in which it is rendered. The history of cartooning is populated with the work of individuals who each developed a signature balance between the abstracted understructure of cartoon imagery and a surface style that can be variably realistic, exaggerated, stylized, or simplified.

And just as the cartoon may lie at the heart of a more elaborated visual surface, it may also support a variety of media. There is a notable group of artists whose polymorphous careers include cartooning, and extend to media including comics, animation, book arts, sculpture, collage, printmaking, architecture, interactive media, and product design. Fundamentally rooted in abstraction and fundamentally self-aware, the cartoon is, for these artists, both a blueprint for translation and a blueprint of itself.

Spanning a century in time, the artists represented in this exhibit each reveal an ability to distinctively apply their signature visual approaches across multiple media. Each of these artists successfully re-articulates an individual aesthetic sensibility across many iterations of form to delineate complete and meaningful conceptual worlds. Today’s cultural landscape is characterized by the instability of media forms, and challenges artists both to respond and to adapt to constantly changing conditions without losing their aesthetic identities. Proceeding from an abstracted approach to style and form, each of these **Cartoon Polymaths** manifests a conceptual dexterity that may come to be a hallmark of creative production in the current century.

—Bill Kartalopoulos

Images:
John Leech’s 1843 *Punch* cartoon “Substance and Shadow”; An example of line drawing from Töpffer’s 1845 *Essay on Physiognomy*; Excerpt from the introduction to Art Spiegelman’s *Breakdowns* (1977, 2008), used with permission.



WINSOR
McCAY

Winsor McCay (ca. 1867 –1934) was a prolific and prodigious draftsman and a landmark innovator in two new media forms of his time: American newspaper comics and animated cartoons. His achievements derived from his uncanny ability to quickly and fluidly render images of continuous movement and transformation. McCay began his career as a quick-sketch artist in carnival-like dime museums before entering the bustling turn-of-the-century newspaper industry.

In 1903, he produced a series of full-color *Tales of the Jungle Imps* pages written by George Randolph Chester, which only imply the kind of panel-to-panel continuity that had begun to flourish in early American newspaper comic strips. By 1904, he began to produce several comic strip series including *Little Sammy Sneeze*, which foregrounds subtle shifts in facial expression that anticipate his later animation, and *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend*, which established his thematic interest in the surreal and anxious life of dreams. In 1905 he launched his formal masterpiece *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (later called *In the Land of Wonderful Dreams*). This full-page Sunday confection featured Nemo’s weekly journeys to a Wonderland-like Slumberland. Here, McCay expanded upon the form’s conventions to build a grammar of visual units that changed shape and size as part of his strip’s fantastic narrative shifts, while maintaining the architectural integrity of each page.

By 1911, McCay entered the fledgling field of animated cartoons with *Little Nemo*, transferring his distinctive drawing style entirely to the new form. McCay went on to produce several animated films, including *How a Mosquito Operates* (1912), adapting the frame-by-frame progression of his *Rarebit Fiend* comics, and his pioneering 1914 example of subtle character animation, *Gertie the Dinosaur*, with which he interacted live in vaudeville performances. He went on to produce several more animated shorts, including his longest film, *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918). Later in his career, McCay’s newspaper bosses discouraged his comics and animation work and redirected him back toward single-image illustrations, in which he lavished his inclination toward compulsive drawing on detailed visual accompaniments to editorial essays by Arthur Brisbane.

Top:
“Midsummer Day Dreams” (ca. October 1911).

Bottom:
“Little Nemo in Slumberland” (January 26, 1908).

TONY SARG

Tony Sarg (1880–1942) was born in Guatemala, raised in Germany, and moved to England in 1905 where he launched his illustration career. His lush and highly visible promotional posters for the London Underground rendered bustling urban crowd scenes from a dramatic overhead perspective. While in London he also developed a lifelong interest in marionette puppetry. Sarg moved his family to the United States when World War I rendered England inhospitable to ethnic Germans, and reestablished his career, both as an illustrator and as the creative force of what would ultimately become a robust, nationally known touring marionette company.

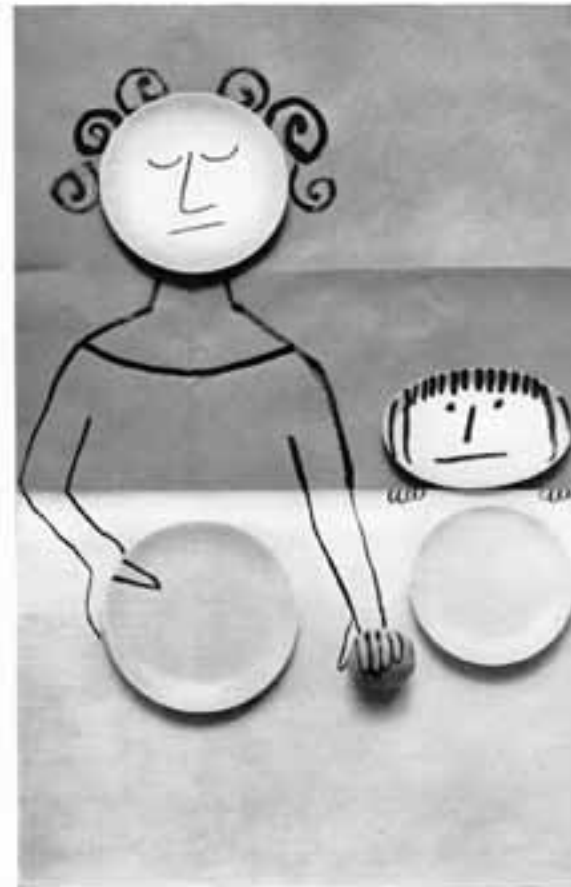
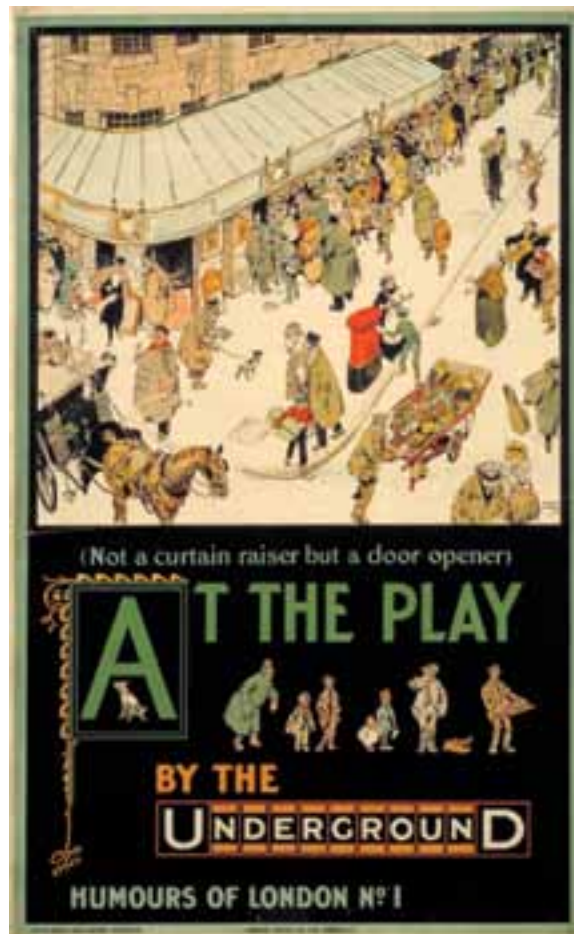
In addition to designing and performing theatrical productions, Sarg frequently published “how to” articles about puppetry in magazines, produced toy theaters, and is generally credited with popularizing the marionette form in the U.S. In 1925, Sarg designed the first mechanically animated window displays for Macy’s department store, and designed the first Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade balloons in 1927, and continued to do so for several years afterwards. These were described by a collaborator as “upside-down marionettes.”

Sarg also applied the principles of puppetry to animation and produced *Tony Sarg’s Almanack*, a series of animated cartoons featuring jointed silhouette puppets filmed in stop motion. Sarg’s elaborately engineered children’s books turned the book into a mechanical toy for young readers. *Tony Sarg’s Surprise Book* included a pocket with a real penny in it and “playable” fiddle strings, while *Tony Sarg’s Magic Movie Book* included special glasses that mechanically activated two-frame animations. He also produced and designed a variety of products, including wallpaper, trading cards, decorative objects, and musical blocks. A brand name of American culture across multiple media, Sarg applied the mechanical ingenuity and birds-eye perspective of a master puppeteer to his cartoon drawings, large-scale balloons, animated cartoons, children’s books, and other projects.

Clockwise from top:
Street scene of Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (c. 1930s). Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.

At the play; humours no.1, Tony Sarg, 1912, 2000/9397, ©TfL from the London Transport Museum collection.

Tony Sarg operating a marionette (undated). Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.



SAUL STEINBERG

Saul Steinberg (1914–1999) was born in Romania and studied architecture in Italy where he launched his career as a cartoonist for humor newspapers. Escaping Fascism and anti-Semitism, he eventually immigrated to the United States in 1942, thanks in part to sponsorship by *The New Yorker*, one of several American publications to which he had begun contributing from overseas. Steinberg quickly found a number of additional American clients, including the intellectual, left wing New York newspaper *PM*, for which he drew political cartoons and a series of comic strips satirizing Hitler, Mussolini, and the Fascist war against the Allies. Steinberg, preoccupied with ideas and self-conceits, would continue to employ thought and word balloons as conceptual icons throughout his work. His postwar artwork shed the stylistic conventions of commercial cartooning to evolve into a career-long meditation on the dynamic relationship between line, style, and form.

Steinberg’s early advertising art displays several of his formal inclinations, particularly the incorporation of photographed objects and other media into his world of line. A witty and incisive conceptualist, his urban and pastoral landscapes presented not an idea about a place, but rather sketched out the location of an idea, as in his famous “View of the World from 9th Avenue.” Steinberg extended his investigation of linear abstraction to include text as image, isolating the stylistic surface of handwriting through the production of illegible calligraphy, and presenting words and letterforms as objects and even personalities. His spare but flexible line regularly encountered the material world through the incorporation of found objects and rubber stamps, and entered the three-dimensional world in a series of photographs first published in *Flair*. His work evolved to include collages, prints, paintings, sculptures, and paper masks that proceeded from his world of mixed-media drawing. Steinberg’s approach to expressive line and abstracted form demonstrates—on paper—the conceptual flexibility that permits migration between media.

Top:
Saul Steinberg, *Portraits by Steinberg*, one in a series from *Flair*, March 1950, p. 84.
The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Bottom:
Saul Steinberg, cover of *The New Yorker*, July 31, 1971
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation /Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Cover reprinted with permission of *The New Yorker* magazine. All rights reserved.



MARISCAL

Javier Mariscal (b. 1950) was born in Valencia, and went to Barcelona where he flourished in the 1970s during Spain's cultural upheavals. Mariscal began producing lively, vibrant, life-affirming underground comics in his signature gestural, calligraphic style. By the early 1980s, he had already begun to translate his aesthetic to projects in other media, including sculpture, painting, furniture, and interior design. His early furniture was exhibited along with work by the Memphis Group in 1981, and his early comics were introduced to American audiences in Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's *RAW Magazine* throughout the 1980s.

Already a design legend in Barcelona, Mariscal gained international fame when he designed Cobi, the mascot for the 1992 Olympic Games. In order to successfully develop his cartoon character into the multimedia icon required by an international event, Mariscal opened the Estudio Mariscal. He has since directed a prolific studio that has designed and produced animation, corporate identities, interior design, luxury furniture, toys, interactive media, children's books, and a variety of other work, all of which bear the stamp of their origin in Mariscal's expressive, notational cartooning.

Mariscal is also a type designer who has produced several typefaces that mimic his energetic hand lettering. His illustrations continue to appear periodically on the cover of *The New Yorker* magazine and in other venues, and he recently completed his first feature-length animated film, *Chico y Rita*, which premiered this year. The various productions of Javier Mariscal and the Estudio Mariscal create a robust doodled world of images, objects, and design, both in miniature and at the scale of life.

Clockwise from top
 "Una Historia Muy Negra" (1976).
 "BAR CEL ONA," poster (1995).
 "Vespa," sculpture (undated).

Images courtesy of Estudio Mariscal



RICHARD MC GUIRE

Richard McGuire (b. 1957) has produced an enormously diverse body of work in multiple media, characterized throughout by intelligence, wit, conceptual integrity, and the use of elegant, minimal design to communicate complicated ideas about human experience. McGuire first gained notice in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the founding bassist for the seminal, avant-garde No Wave band Liquid Liquid, for which he also designed all of the album artwork.

Emerging from a downtown New York scene where gallery art, street art, and music co-mingled, McGuire has remained thoroughly multidisciplinary in his artistic practice. He has produced a small but important body of comics work, including the short story "Here" which appeared in Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's *RAW Magazine* in 1989. This piece, inspired by emergent multimedia, reconfigured the way that comics depict time in space, and has radically influenced the work of countless subsequent cartoonists.

McGuire is also an active illustrator. He has contributed several covers and interior illustrations to venues such as *The New Yorker* magazine, including an inventive 1993/1994 New Year's cover intended to be read both right-side-up and then upside-down after the year had turned. He has also authored several imaginative children's books, designed toys and other products, created interactive media, and has, more recently, directed and designed animation, including the short film *Micro-Loup* (2002) and the closing segment for the animated anthology film *Fear(s) of the Dark* (2006). All of his work shares a simplified aesthetic, built out of minimal forms, often combined in dizzying ways. His approach to diagrammatic abstraction remains mindful of the relationship between line, shape, and form, and permits seamless shifts in scale and perspective even as it moves from medium to medium. McGuire's work reorganizes perception to suggest larger connections between time, people, and places.

Clockwise from top:
 Cover of *The New Yorker*, April 3, 1995.
What's Wrong With This Book? (1997).
 Page from "Here" (1989).

Images courtesy of Richard McGuire



PAPER RAD

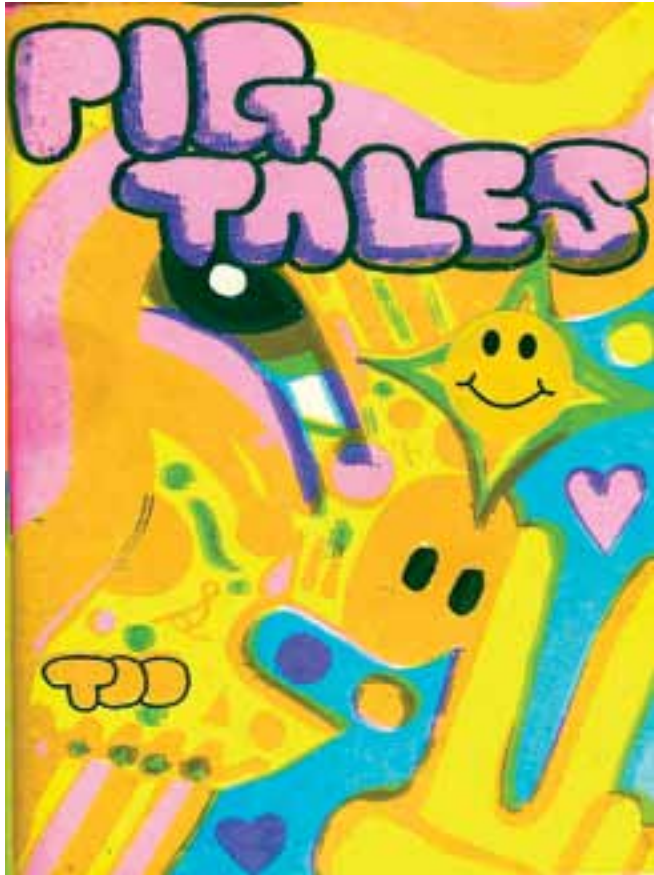
Jacob Ciocci (b. 1977), Jessica Ciocci (b. 1976), and Ben Jones (b. 1977) produced a variety of intensely collaborative projects under the name Paper Rad between 2001 and 2008. Paper Rad’s work is characterized by a marriage of pop culture-influenced appropriative cartoon doodling and psychedelic, low-fi computer art. Their multimedia body of work derives inspiration from the graffiti art and sampling that came from hip hop culture, while acknowledging and responding to the ways in which authentic culture is packaged and commodified.

The group’s largest body of work was in the form of prints and hand-made zines that included drawings, comics, writing, collage, and found material. Their most intensive productions were a series of video projects that feature video mash-ups, narrative cartoons, documentation of live performance, and psychedelic loops. Together, individually and in collaboration with others, the group additionally produced comics (including the book collections *Cartoon Workshop/Pig Tales* and *BJ and Da Dogs*), websites, music, performance pieces, and gallery installations including sculptural displays featuring their own signature characters (such as their public domain character Tux Dog).

Paper Rad’s work is peppered with references to pre-existing cartoon characters including the Muppet Babies, Gumby, Garfield, and the Simpsons, and borrows from a range of popular media sources to emphasize that commercial culture is American culture. But while their work subverts the content associated with popular culture, their stance is not ironic. Just as the group’s drawings schematically recombine the component elements of recognizable cartoon characters to tease out and re-inflect their meanings, Paper Rad encouragingly suggests that even the most thoroughly processed commercial productions can be used as building blocks for the development of more nuanced and humane creative statements.

Clockwise from top:
Pig Tales Too, zine (2006).
Cartoon Workshop #2, zine (2006).
P-Unit Mixtape 2005 (2005).

Images © Paper Rad



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CREDITS

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Glenn Ganges in: *The Body of Work* by Kevin Huizenga was specially commissioned for this exhibition.

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Jacob Ciocci
Estudio Mariscal
F. Schumacher & Co.
The London Transport Museum
Peter Maresca
The Nantucket Historical Association
The Saul Steinberg Foundation
Richard McGuire

Media Sources
Winsor McCay video is provided by Milestone Films (milestonefilms.com) and is available on the DVD compilation *Winsor McCay: The Master Edition*.

“In the Orient” featuring Tony Sarg in performance is provided courtesy of Flicker Alley (flickeralley.com) and is available on the DVD compilation *Saved From the Flames*.

“Abel Raises Cain” and “The First Circus” from the Tony Sarg’s Almanack series are provided courtesy of Tom Stathes/Cartoons on Film (cartoonsonfilm.com) and are available on the DVD compilation *Stop Motion Madness*.

Mariscal video is provided courtesy of Estudio Mariscal.

Richard McGuire video and interactive media are provided courtesy of Richard McGuire. *Fear(s) of the Dark* is available on DVD from MPI Home Video (mpihomevideo.com).

Paper Rad video is provided courtesy of Jacob Ciocci. *Trash Talking* is available on DVD from Load Records (loadrecords.com).

An Evening with Richard McGuire

Richard McGuire will discuss his career, and answer questions in this special spot-light event.

Moderated by curator Bill Kartalopoulos.

February 18, 2011, 7pm.
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Auditorium
66 Fifth Avenue, Ground floor

Cartune Xprez with Jacob Ciocci

Jacob Ciocci (Paper Rad, Extreme Animals) will show and discuss his recent video work in this evening complemented by a special installment of *Cartune Xprez*, the experimental cartoon video label and travelling road show co-curated by Peter Burr of Hooliganship, with whom Ciocci frequently collaborates.

Moderated by curator Bill Kartalopoulos.

March 7, 2011, 7pm.
Glass Corner, 25 E. 13th Street, second floor (E 206)
Limited Seating. Please arrive early. Seating is not guaranteed.

Carousel with R. Sikoryak

R. Sikoryak brings an evening of cartoons, projections, slideshows and live performance with fellow talented cartoonists in this special edition of Carousel, his long-running comics performance series. Sikoryak will also discuss the relationship between comics and performance.

Moderated by curator Bill Kartalopoulos.

March 21, 2011, 7pm.
Glass Corner, 25 E. 13th Street, second floor (E 206)
Limited Seating. Please arrive early. Seating is not guaranteed.

Information is subject to change. Please check website (www.newschool.edu/sjdc) for updated information.



THE **CARTOON**
IS AN ABSTRACTION,
A THEORETICAL
BLUEPRINT:

A BLUEPRINT FOR
TRANSLATION, AND
A BLUEPRINT OF
ITSELF.