

BREAKING BARRIERS...

MAUS: A SURVIVOR'S TALE (ART SPIEGELMAN, 1972)

MAUS, A BIOGRAPHY OF SPIEGELMAN'S FATHER AS A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR, IS ONE OF THE FIRST ALTERNATIVE COMICS TO BREAK INTO THE MAINSTREAM AFTER WINNING A SPECIAL PULITZER IN 1992. THIS BOOK, REISSUED SEVERAL TIMES SINCE IT FIRST APPEARED IN THE UNDERGROUND *RAW*, HELPED TO RATIFY COMIC ART AS A LITERARY FORM AND TO BRING THE BOOK-LENGTH COMIC TO PUBLIC ATTENTION. *MAUS* IS A KEY MOMENT IN COMICS HISTORY, BUT IT'S ALSO A MOVING STORY, MASTERFULLY CRAFTED AND BEAUTIFULLY DRAWN.

An International Perspective

OUTSIDE NORTH AMERICA, WHAT WE CALL "ALTERNATIVE COMICS" ARE THE NORM. MEXICAN *HISTORIETAS* ARE SET IN THE FAMILIAR EVERYDAY, JAPANESE MANGA (FROM SCHOOL STORIES TO EPIC FANTASY TO PORNOGRAPHY) ARE ACCEPTABLE FOR ADULTS TO READ IN PUBLIC, AND IN WESTERN EUROPE COMICS ARE A Highbrow ART FORM. OFTEN COMICS ARE USED TO CHALLENGE OPPRESSIVE AUTHORITIES OR CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS. INTERESTED READERS WILL APPRECIATE SOME OF THESE MORE INNOVATIVE AND CHALLENGING FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TITLES FROM AROUND THE WORLD. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COLLECTION INCLUDE:

LE AVVENTURE AFRICANE DI GIUSEPPE BERGMAN (MILO MANARA, 1990).

LITERARY AND EROTIC HIGH ART; A META-EXAMINATION OF THE COMICS FORM, WHERE THE MAIN CHARACTER OFTEN INTERACTS WITH THE NARRATOR AS HIS STORY PLAYS OUT. THE ITALIAN MASTER'S MASTERWORK, IT SURPASSES ANY OTHER MANARA TITLE.

PERAK DAUL KARTUN (ZUNAR, 2009).

COLLECTING *GEDUNG KARTUNG*, BANNED FOR SEDITIONOUSNESS. VALUABLE INSIGHT INTO SUPPRESSED MALAYSIAN CULTURE.

BITTERKOMIX (KNNEMERER AND BOTES, 1992).

A SAVAGE CRITIQUE OF APARTHEID AND POST-APARTHEID RACISM, DEcriED AS PORNOGRAPHIC FOR ITS ADULT THEMES ON INITIAL PUBLICATION, BUT CONTINUES TO SURVIVE AND PROVIDE A BLACK PERSPECTIVE ON A CULTURE STILL AFFECTED BY WHITE POLITICS.

**FOR THE COMPLETE
READING GUIDE AND COL-
LECTION PROFILE, PLEASE
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Alternative Comics

**A READER'S
GUIDE
THROUGH THE
HISTORY OF
THE GRAPHIC
NOVEL**



BRANDON WEIGEL

Alternative Comics: Defined

FOR MOST OF THEIR HISTORY, "COMIC BOOKS" MEANT CHEAP 32-PAGE PULP STORIES WHOSE EXAGGERATED HEROES, SIMPLISTIC PLOTS, AND ASSEMBLY-LINE ARTWORK APPEALED MAINLY TO CHILDREN. ONLY RECENTLY HAVE COMICS GEARED TOWARD ADULTS COME TO THE ATTENTION OF POPULAR CULTURE. "GRAPHIC NOVELS" LIKE MAUS, WATCHMEN, AND PERSEPOLIS ARE CELEBRATED AS GREAT LITERATURE AND HIGH ART. BUT SERIOUS, ARTISTIC COMICS HAVE A MUCH LONGER HISTORY THAT IS OVERLOOKED BY A CULTURE THAT HAD TO INVENT A NEW TERM BEFORE IT COULD TAKE COMICS SERIOUSLY.

AROUND THE 1960S, "ALTERNATIVE" OR "UNDERGROUND COMIX" REBELLED AGAINST THE SUPERHERO-DOMINATED KID-FRIENDLY MAINSTREAM, WHERE THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY PROHIBITED ADULT THEMES AND AMBIGUOUS MORALS. ALTERNATIVE COMICS EXPERIMENTED ARTISTICALLY, QUESTIONED SOCIAL NORMS, AND EXPLORED EVERYTHING THE CODE AVOIDED. THEY ARE THE FORERUNNERS TO MORE COMPLEX STORIES IN MODERN SUPERHERO COMICS, AND THE HIGH-ART GRAPHIC NOVELS THAT PROLIFERATE TODAY.

THE COLLECTION OUTLINED HERE SELECTS FROM THE HISTORY OF COMICS THE MOST CULTURALLY INFLUENTIAL, ARTISTICALLY INSPIRING, AND CONTROVERSIAL WORKS FROM NORTH AMERICA AND AROUND THE WORLD. IT PROVIDES A COUNTER TO THE DOMINANCE OF SUPERHEROES THAT STILL EXISTS ON LIBRARY SHELVES, AND OFFERS READERS

A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMICS WORLD—AND A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF STORIES TO EXPLORE.

Some Comics Code Rules:

- STORIES MAY NOT PROVOKE SYMPATHY FOR CRIMINALS, OR DISTRUST IN LAW ENFORCEMENT
- GOOD MUST ALWAYS TRIUMPH OVER EVIL, CRIMINALS ALWAYS PUNISHED
- NO NUDITY, SEX, OR SUGGESTIVE POSITURES IN ILLUSTRATIONS
- NO USE OF WORDS "HORROR" OR "TERROR" IN TITLES. NO HORROR THEMES ALLOWED
- IF CRIME IS DEPICTED IT SHALL BE AS A SORDID AND UNPLEASANT ACTIVITY.

Selected Titles

IN THE BEGINNING...

ZAP COMIX (R. CRUMB, 1968-2005)

THE FIRST TRUE UNDERGROUND COMIX SERIES, A SUBVERSIVE APPROPRIATION OF THE SHOP-ASSEMBLED MASS-MARKET COMIC BOOK FORMAT. STORIES IN ZAP CONTAINED SATIRICAL, POLITICAL, SEXUALLY VIOLENT AND RACIAL CONTENT THAT COULD NOT BE SOLD ON MAINSTREAM NEWSSTANDS. BEARING THE LABEL, "FOR ADULT INTELLECTUALS ONLY," THE BOOK CHALLENGED THE ENFORCED CHILD-FRIENDLY FORM OF MAINSTREAM COMICS AND BIRTHED THE UNDERGROUND COMIX MOVEMENT.

CHALLENGING SOCIETY...

INNER CITY ROMANCE (GUY COLWELL, 1972)

A GHETTO DRAMA THAT ACTIVELY ATTACKED RACIAL DIVIDES. SEX AND DRUGS AND SOCIAL DEBATE FROM A RARE AFRICAN-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE PLACE THIS BOOK IN THE MIDST OF A MAJOR SOCIAL QUESTION.

IT AIN'T ME BABE (IT AIN'T ME BABE COLLECTIVE, 1970)

BORN OUT OF A WOMEN'S LIBERATION NEWSPAPER OF THE SAME NAME, THIS WAS THE FIRST COMIC BOOK WRITTEN AND DRAWN ENTIRELY BY WOMEN. WITH FEMINIST-THEMED STORIES, THIS BOOK MARKED THE ENTRY OF WOMEN INTO THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND COMIX, IN REACTION TO THE MISOGYNIST VIOLENCE MASKED AS HUMOUR THAT DOMINATED MALE-CREATED COMIX, AND INSPIRED A NUMBER OF WOMAN-MADE PUBLICATIONS THAT FOCUSED ON GENDER ISSUES AND SEX FROM THE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE.

BREAKING THE MOLD...

PAYING FOR IT: A COMIC-STRIP MEMOIR ABOUT BEING A JOHN (CHESTER BROWN, 2011)

A STARKLY HONEST MEMOIR ABOUT A DEEPLY UNCOMFORTABLE SUBJECT: ABANDONING ROMANTIC LOVE FOR PAID SEX. NOT JUST A LOOK INTO THE WORLD OF PROSTITUTION, *PAYING FOR IT* SERIOUSLY QUESTIONS LOVE, ROMANCE, AND SOCIAL MORES. BROWN'S SIMPLE ARTWORK AND SELF-EXAMINATION LEAD THE READER TO UNEXPECTED CONCLUSIONS, AND SHOW OFF THE RHETORICAL POWER OF THE COMIC MEDIUM. ONE OF FEW BOOKS WHERE THE APPENDICES ARE JUST AS INTERESTING AS THE STORY.