

ARTS



A real wino, authentic scenery and a bit of fantasy serve to highlight, among other things, the contrast between classical and modern art. By Bob Armstrong, from "Arcade" #4.

by Jens Andersen

The first underground comic I ever saw appeared in, of all places, Hurtig's Books (now Audrey's) circa 1971. Just how that lone issue of *Mother's Oats Comix* got onto the shelves of a respectable store like Hurtig's is something of a mystery; it was the single solitary comic in the store and there have been no others since. Perhaps some drug fiend slipped it in among the books, hoping an arteriosclerotic businessman would stumble on it and have a coronary.

Mother's Oats captivated me immediately. On its back cover was a character reading something called *Far Out Funnies*, whose contents had somehow caused the gentleman's brain to erupt from his skull in a cloud of smoke and fire, while his tongue lolled out of his mouth four or five feet, and his body extremities exploded all over the landscape like psychedelic Roman candles. The notice accompanying the picture stated, "If this is what happened to your old man's head when he finally read one of the comics he caught you with as a kid, buy this and, since you're big enough to throw him down the stairs, take it home and show him what kind of comics you're reading now!"

The contents lived up to the implied promise: the mind popping adventures of Dealer McDope, an explicit depiction of two faucets copulating, a vignette of Richard Nixon deciding that the Presidency was "just a bunch of fucking hassles" (three years later the world discovered that this was really how Nixon talked), and some downright twisted advertisements (e.g. "Become a human waterpipe - be the life of the party.")

A hiatus of about three years followed this purchase till I discovered a better

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supplier: Bullwinkle's General Store, in its old grubby location on the east side of 101 St.

There, on the racks between the rolling papers and used record albums, I plunged headlong into the underworld of Mr. Natural and Flakey Foont, the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, Barefootz, Arnold Peck the Human Wreck, Wonder Warthog and all the other weird and wonderful characters dreamed up by various graphic art outlaws. In addition I purchased Mark James Estren's somewhat pedantic *History of Underground Comix* which helped put them into perspective and aided in intelligent collecting.

Gradually I came to the conclusion that, leaving aside a lot of juvenile exhibitionism and recycled Tolkien SF pap, much of what was in the underground comix was not only hilarious and enjoyable, but devastatingly intelligent; that I was dealing with *literature* - the sort of thing our children will be studying 25 years from now (if the human race survives that long) in freshman English courses alongside *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Lenny Bruce's *How To Talk Dirty and Influence People*.

The prime artist among the cartoonists studied will undoubtedly be the maligned, misunderstood, persecuted, and

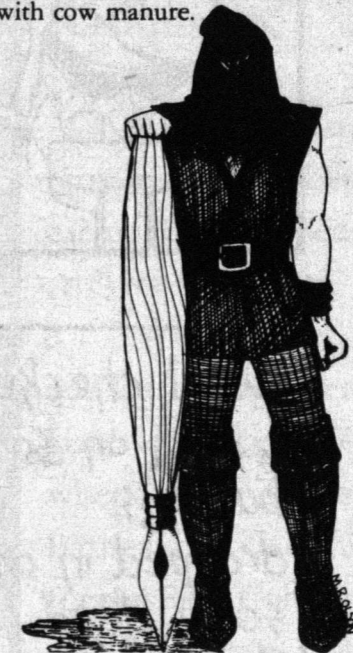


Sharon Kahn Rudahl is a cartoonist whose presence was missed (as was Shary Flenniken's) at the "Pork Roasts" exhibit at the Ring House Gallery (see opposite page). This excerpt is from "Wimmen's Comix" #5.



Bullwinkle's no longer carries underground comix. Too many hassles with Customs it seems.

It will be a while yet, it seems, before Crumb's "Joe Blow" strip, which once brought down the wrath of the smuthounds, gains the respectability of, say, Voltaire's satire of the Biblical passage where God forces Ezekiel to eat bread buttered with cow manure.



persevering Robert Crumb, whose sharp satires of American life will someday rate, I believe, with those of his spiritual predecessors Voltaire and Sinclair Lewis.

Many underground comix are literature, the sort of thing that will be studied in freshman English by your children 25 years from now.

But this is the subject of a longer essay, which hopefully I will have time to write later this year when I get a respite from (among other things) the onerous task of opening 514 bushels of junk mail every day publicizing artists who aren't fit to fill Crumb's inkwell.

Let me close by mentioning the sad news that last Friday I discovered that

BLIMEY BROOMSTEAD By AL CAPP



A favourite undertaking of the undergrounds is the deflation of their aboveground counterparts. The parodies above and below are both by the late Willy Murphy from "Flamed Out Funnies"



A fairly typical Robert Crumb social commentary, from the unfortunately short-lived "Arcade" comic revue, issue #2. Crumb is generally considered the granddaddy of underground cartoonists.