



THE
ART
OF

DANIEL CLOWES

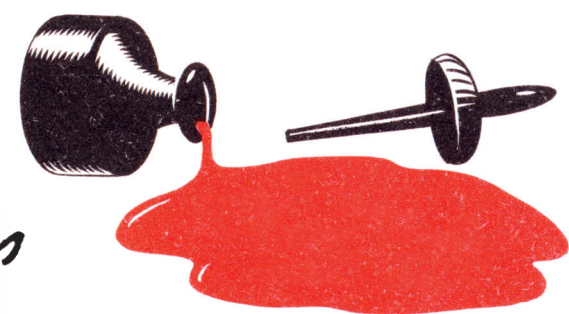
MODERN CARTOONIST

EDITED BY ALVIN BUENAVENTURA





Daniel Clowes





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ABRAMS, NEW YORK

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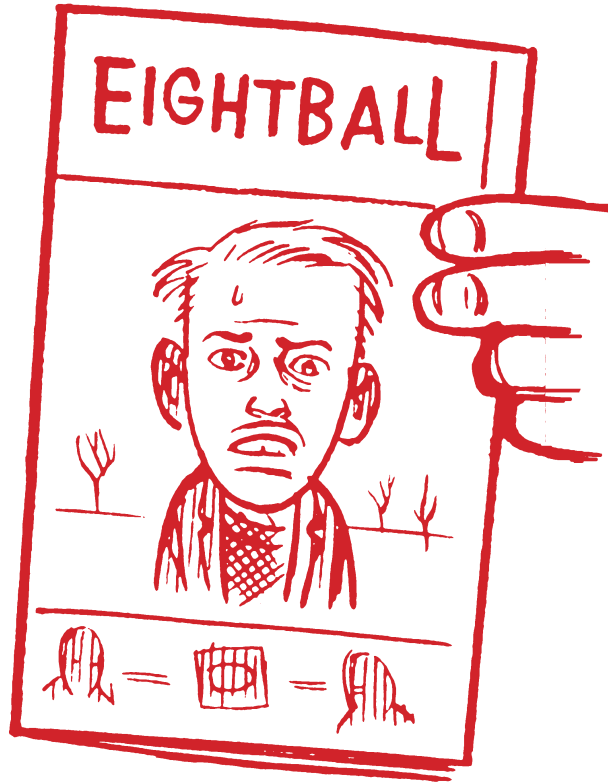
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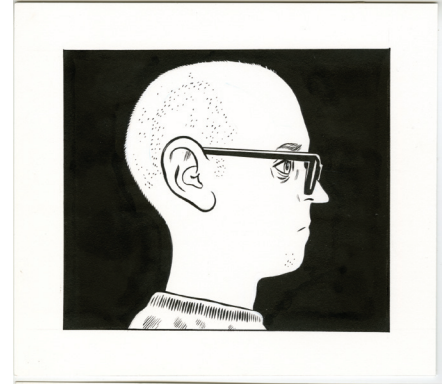
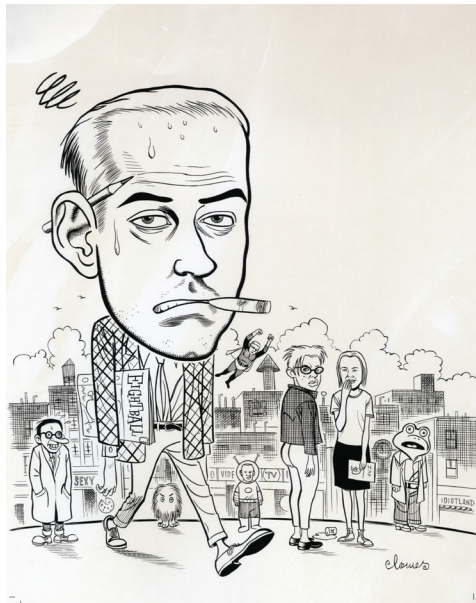
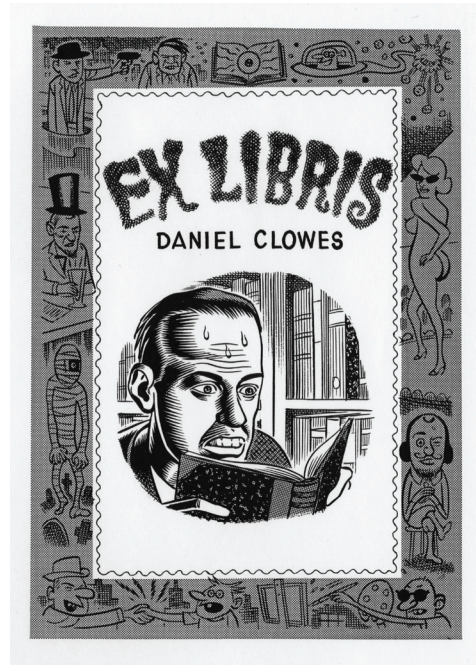
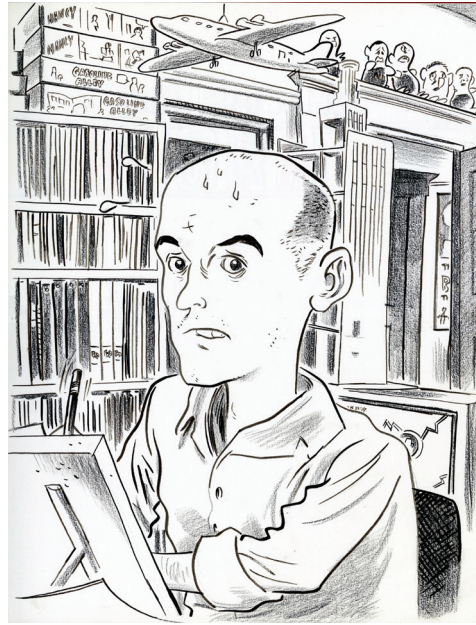
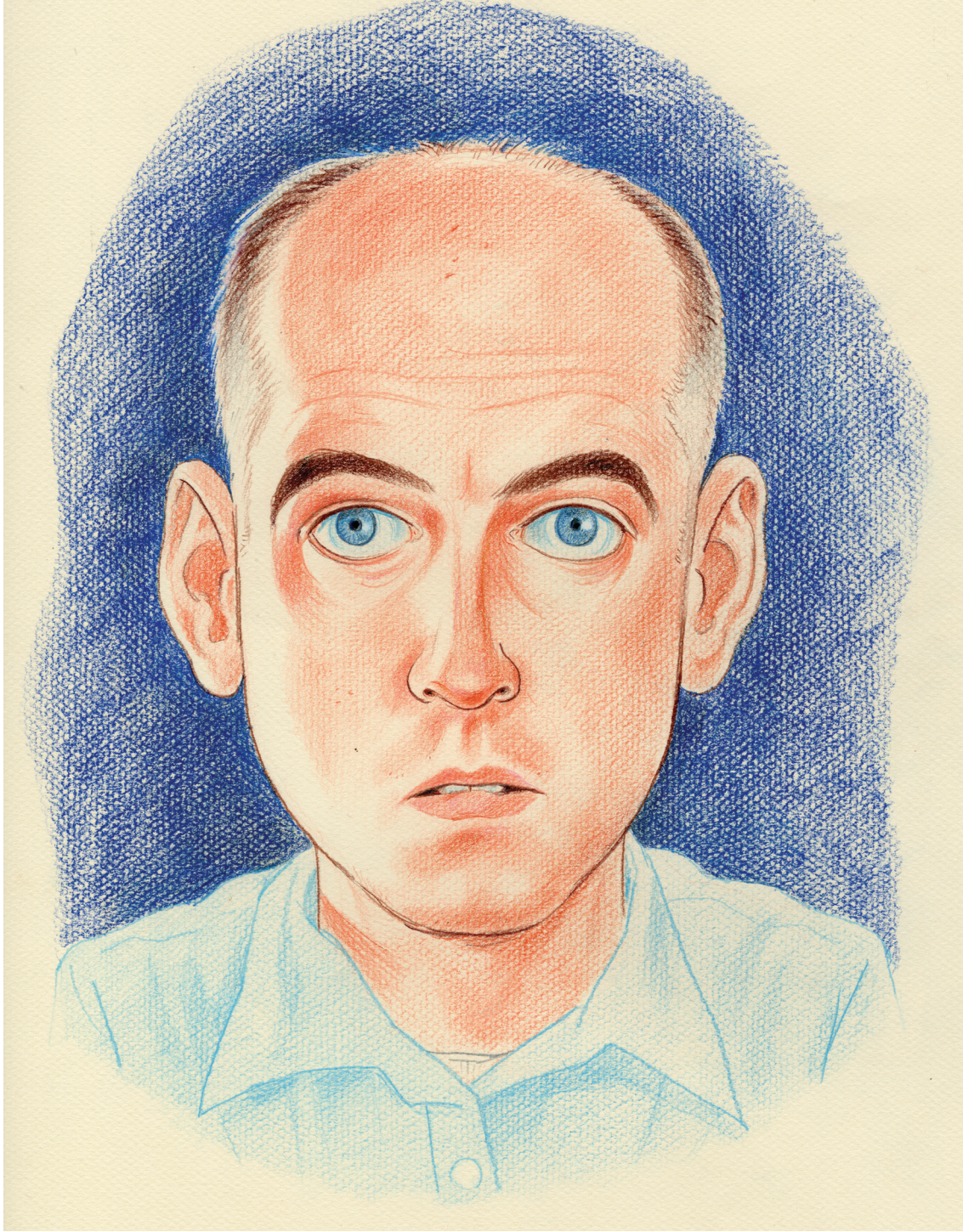
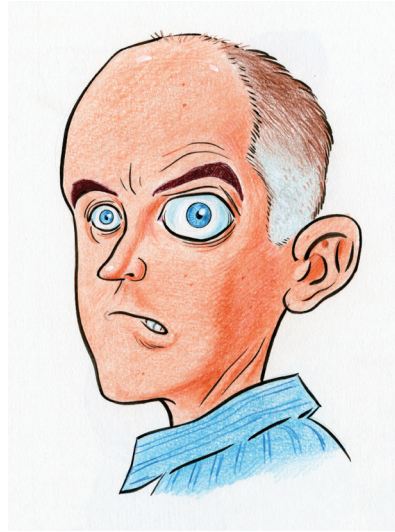
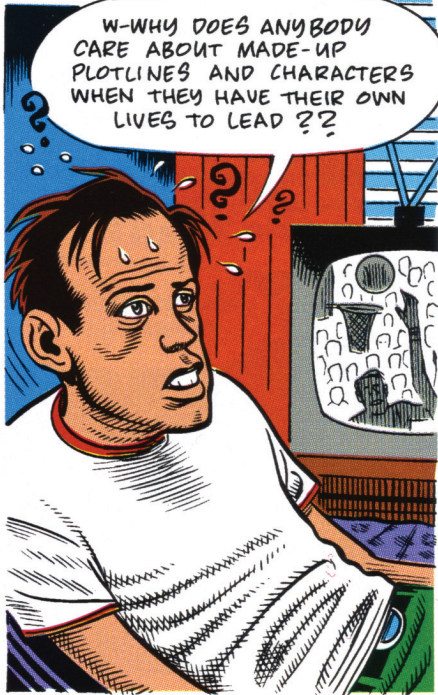
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ABRAMS, NEW YORK

Sometimes I'll wake up from a nap and in a moment of cosmic revelation I'll be struck by how truly strange and ludicrous this is.

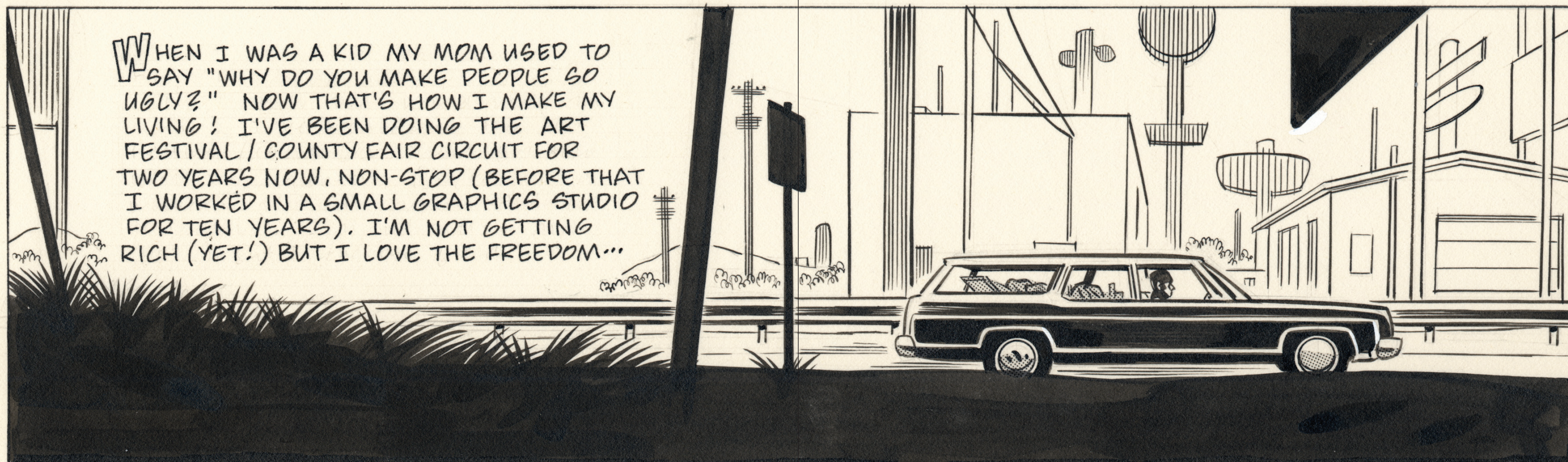


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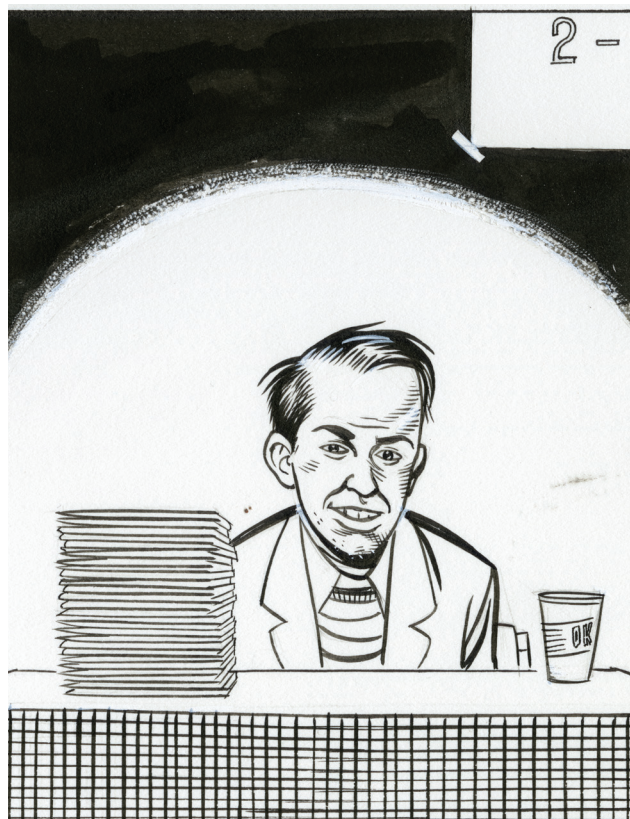
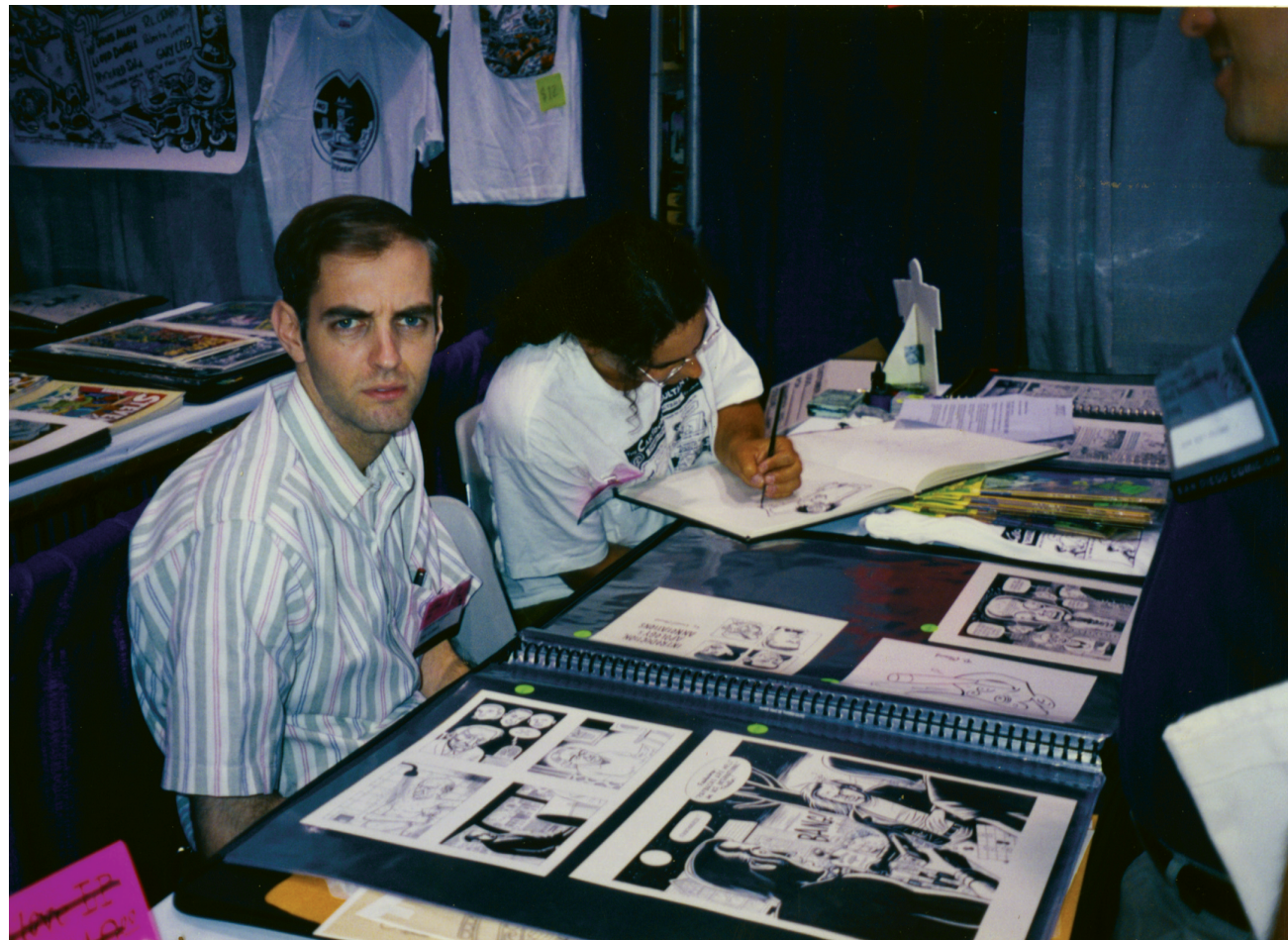


WHEN I WAS A KID MY MOM USED TO SAY "WHY DO YOU MAKE PEOPLE SO UGLY?" NOW THAT'S HOW I MAKE MY LIVING! I'VE BEEN DOING THE ART FESTIVAL / COUNTY FAIR CIRCUIT FOR TWO YEARS NOW, NON-STOP (BEFORE THAT I WORKED IN A SMALL GRAPHICS STUDIO FOR TEN YEARS). I'M NOT GETTING RICH (YET!) BUT I LOVE THE FREEDOM...



I DON'T REALLY HAVE A HOME ANYMORE (UNLESS YOU COUNT MOTEL 6) ... MY MOM'S STILL ALIVE BUT SHE LIVES IN A NURSING HOME. I FEEL BAD THAT I NEVER GET TO SEE HER (SHE MAKES SURE OF THAT!) BUT I CAN'T AFFORD TO STOP WORKING RIGHT NOW...

IN SCHOOL I WAS A SCRAWNY, QUIET KID SO I STAYED AT HOME A LOT AND WORKED ON MY ART... AFTER A WHILE IT PAID OFF AND KIDS STARTED ASKING ME TO DO FUNNY DRAWINGS OF THE TEACHERS AND STUFF... THAT'S HOW IT ALL BEGAN...



INTRODUCTION

by GEORGE MEYER

I've never been interested in introductions. I always want to get right to the book, without a lot of blab. But when I was asked to write this introduction, I began to see the value of this timeless literary tradition.

Prefaces are stupid. But a good introduction can invigorate a dry, lifeless monograph like this one. It's preparation for the hard slog ahead. You wouldn't go for a drive without driving gloves, would you?

Hell no! So let's light this cracker!

Okay . . . introduction . . . introduction...

Oh, man... Why do I agree to these things? I always end up bitterly resenting the person who asked me. Then I start berating myself:

You're a writer; someone asked you to write. Now you want to burn his house down.

Stop it! Quit stalling and just slap something together. Anything is better than this torture. And it is, it's torture.

Let's see . . .

For some reason, the early nineties saw an explosion of hilarious, disturbing "alternative" comics. No heroes, no arch-villains, just twisted stories of tormented misfits. Even their titles made me happy: *Peepshow*. *Schizo*. *Love and Rockets*. *Optic Nerve*. *Black Hole*. *Angry Youth Comix*. *Hate*. *Real Stuff*. *Weirdo*. *Naughty Bits*. *American Splendor*. *Real Deal*. *Stickboy*. And my all-time favorite, *Eightball*.

Eightball had it all. Spellbinding dreamscapes, pervy drifters, riotous cultural satire, blistering hippie abuse. The creator was not only a dazzling artist, but a startling and fearless writer. I decided I should meet this talented freak. So I took the train down from L.A. to the San Diego Comic-Con, in search of Daniel Clowes.

Back then, I wasn't even sure how to pronounce his last name. For the record, "Clowes" rhymes with "ploughs." (And "ploughs" rhymes with "ciaos.") *

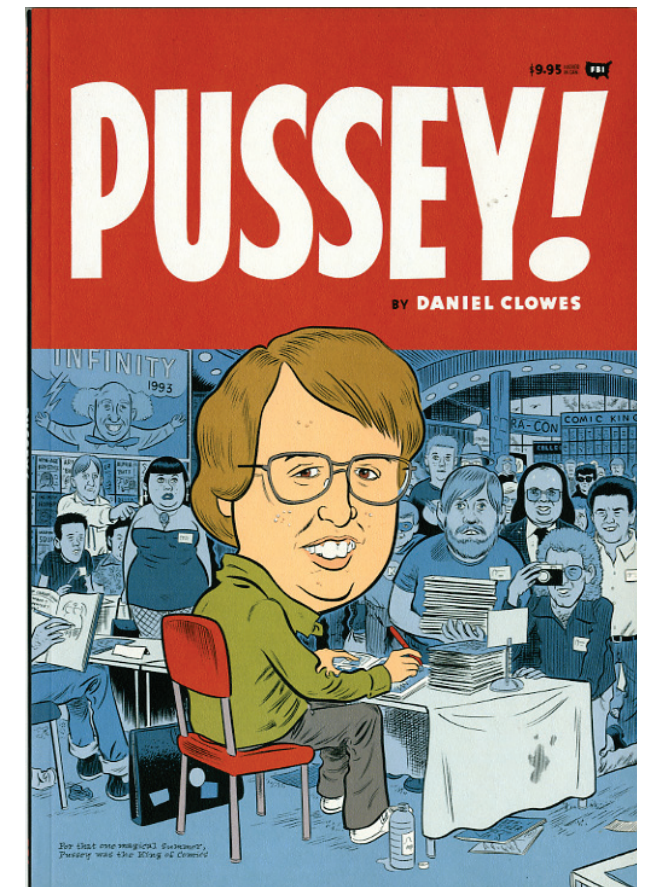
Comic-Con was packed with doughy reality-dodgers. My sister Margo said it smelled like "bongs and farts." At a long row of tables, hung-over drop-outs were listlessly drawing Super Heroes Flying At You Punching. Another row was for Super Heroes Swinging At You Kicking. I reeled away, dizzy with boredom.

Finally I tracked down the Fantagraphics booth. It was manned by a couple of seedy creeps. They might have been the Hernandez Bros. "You're looking for Dan? He was here, but I think he had to go somewhere."

I came back twice, but the magic *Eightball* guy wasn't around. Maybe he was parasailing. The next day I gave it one last shot, and there sat a gaunt figure in a windbreaker. He looked alert but dispirited, like a falcon trotted out for third graders.

Mr. Clowes and I chatted briefly. He signed a comic or two. It seemed that the ice had been broken.

Every summer after that I would seek out Dan at the Con. Sometimes he was wary, other times stand-offish. Once he was aloof. Another time, distant. Our friendship grew. Eventually I came to realize that his chilly reserve was just his way of saying, "Leave me alone."



I'd like to leave him alone, but I can't. Dan's work is just too compelling, and I have to know his secret. He's been wildly successful for decades without dinging his integrity. Is it a Jimmy Page devil pact?

Yes, but there's more. Dan is somehow able to dip bucket after shimmering bucket from the roiling depths of his unconscious. Add talent and hard work and courage, and you create blazingly original art like Wilson. The book is heartbreaking, wistful, and joltingly funny. I've read it nine times.

So get to know the Farrago from Chicago. Daniel Clowes will bend your mind into a bird feeder. And no comics artist of our time is more deserving of this totally bitchin' monograph. 🍷

GEORGE MEYER wrote for *Late Night with David Letterman*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Simpsons*. He's now working on his first novel, *Kick Me 1,000,000 Times Or I'll Die*.

* "Ciaos" rhymes with "sows." **

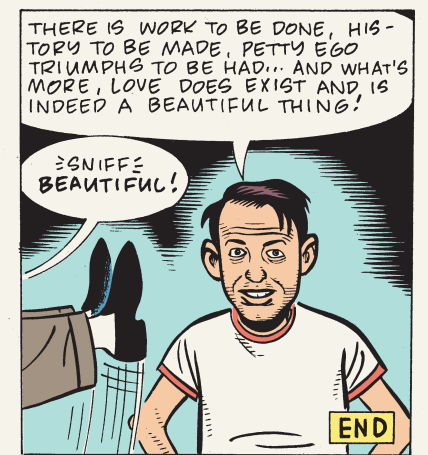
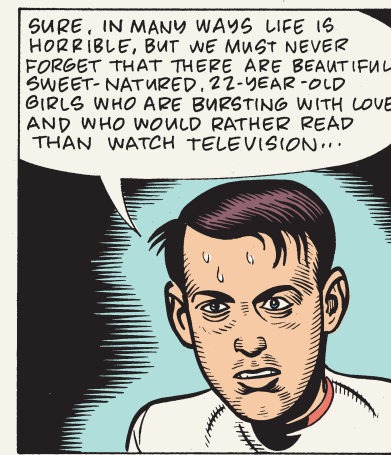
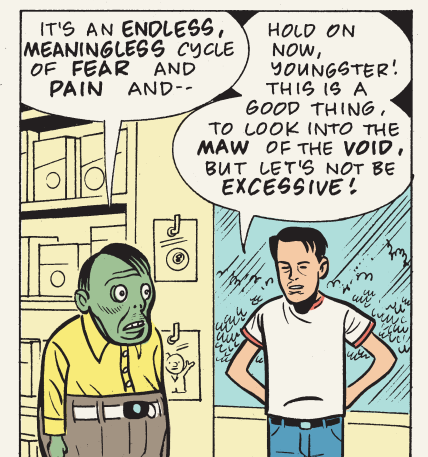
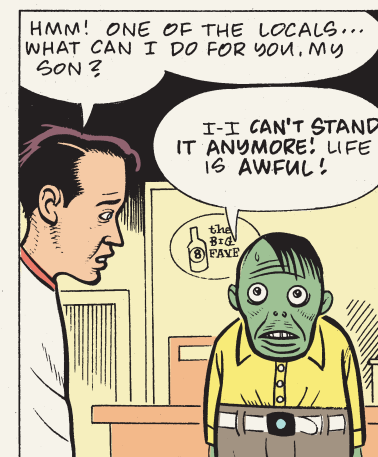
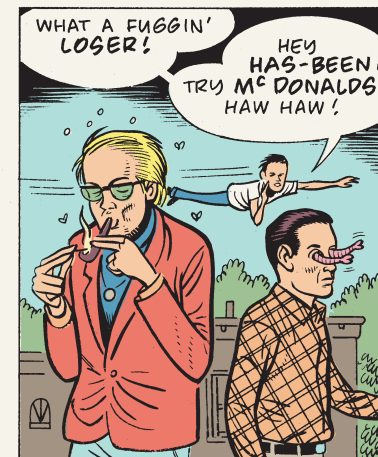
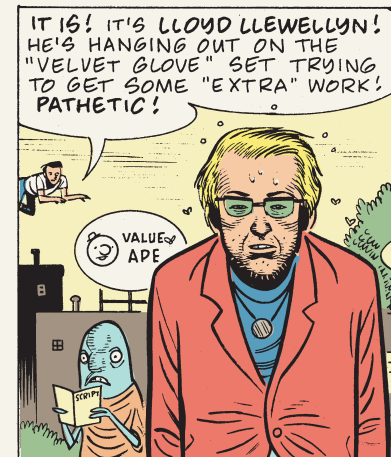
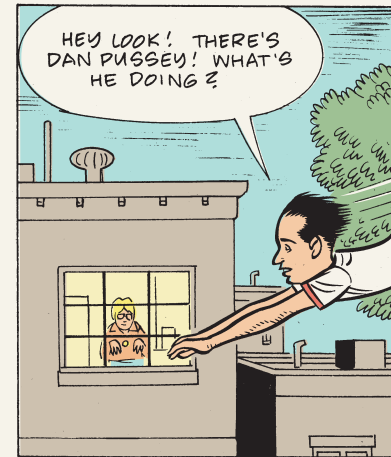
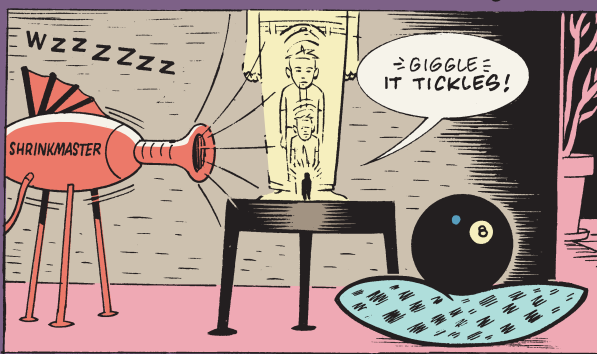
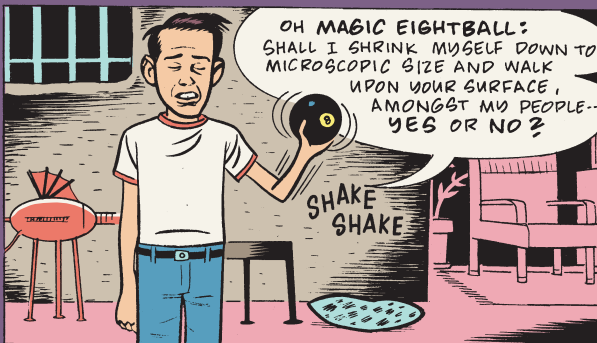
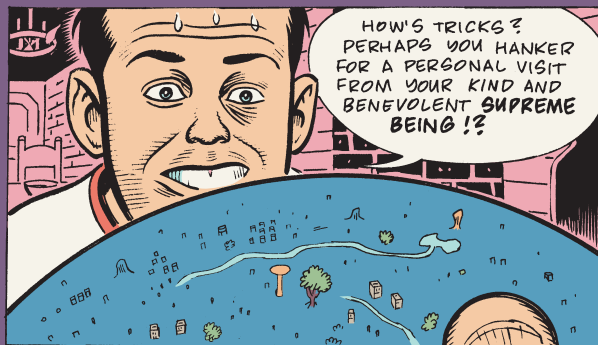
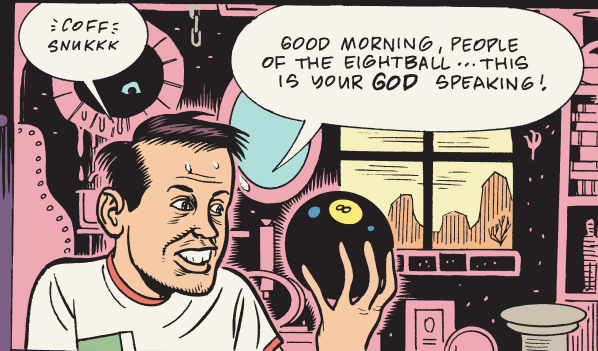
** Not "sows" the verb, meaning "scatters seeds." "Sows" the noun, meaning "girl pigs."

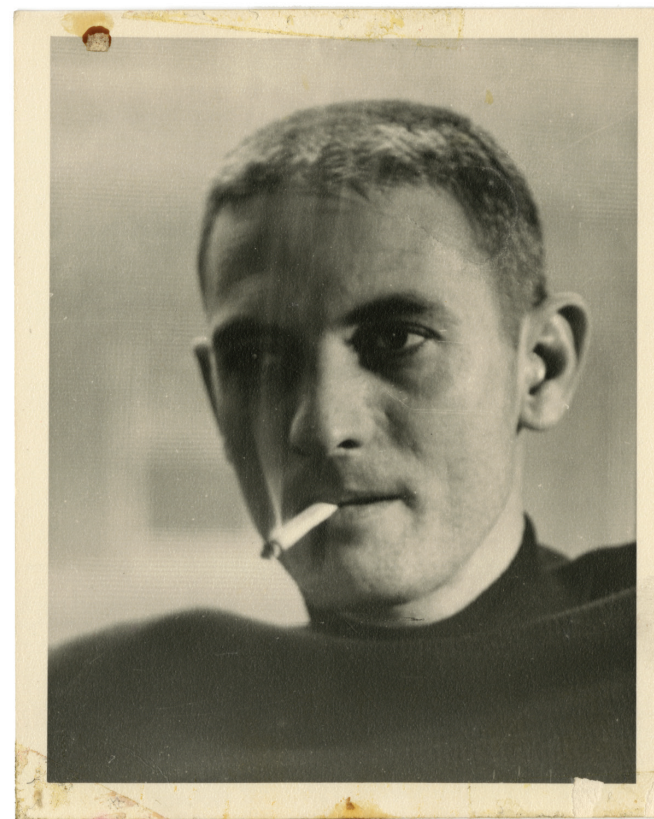
Eightball

"Greco turned to the Old Man who was now leaning uncomfortably on the pool table. 'You are not an artist, Mr. Greco,' he croaked. 'In fact, you know nothing about the subject.' He grabbed the eight-ball and held it reverently in his palm."

Daniel Clowes

"To create art is to create a New World; a tiny planet, living and fertile which, once it is set into motion, becomes independent of the artist and goes forth, careening and spinning in accordance with the laws of physics. Mine is a dark, malignant, obscene world; black and mysterious." He recklessly tossed the eight-ball onto the table, loudly scattering the other balls."





INTERVIEW, 2011

by KRISTINE MCKENNA

In 2010, Daniel Clowes moved into a 1912 Craftsman house in Oakland, California, and it's like something out of a dream. As is typical of the Craftsman style, the house is a simply laid out series of large rooms with high ceilings, and the interior is bathed in beautiful, soft light that's filtered by the trees outside. It's a peaceful, idyllic spot, and Clowes has worked very hard to get there. A perennial leitmotif in Clowes's work has been loneliness, but that's a state of being that no longer applies to him: he really took to fatherhood, and he, his wife Erika, his son Charlie, and his beagle, Ella, seem to be a happy family. What a remarkable achievement.

Born in Chicago on April 14, 1961, Clowes is fifty now, but there's still something boyish about him. A slender, circumspect man who's always meticulously dressed, Clowes gives the impression that he's a bit surprised by all he's achieved. He's written two films and published several well-received and bestselling books. He's done comic strips for the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times* and won various awards. He was nominated for an Academy Award, and there are people who want his autograph. One would assume all that acclaim might have had some effect on him, but he seems to be essentially the same guy, with the same concerns, who wrote *Lloyd Llewellyn*, his first comic book, back in 1986. Clowes's contempt for pretension has been central to his work from the start, and he continues to loathe the fatheaded behavior success tends to breed. He still has a sense of righteous indignation at the injustices of life, and still rages at the bullies who make life even harder than it already is. These are the things that make Clowes's work brilliant and allow it to transcend what's traditionally been regarded as the lowbrow art form of comics. The themes in his work—longing, shame, loneliness, cruelty, and compassion—are profound, and he handles them with a very light touch. That's the great art part.



What's your earliest memory?

I remember the wallpaper and the layout of the room in an apartment my mother had, and I remember being there with a babysitter. I asked her when my mother was coming home, and when she said "an hour" I remember thinking that was disastrous and was much too long. My earliest memory is of anxiety! My parents divorced when I was two, and I have one memory of them together: I remember my mom saying, "Daddy's home!" and I ran out on the porch and saw my dad. When he and my mom divorced, he moved across the street, which was really odd because they weren't friends. It was awkward because I'd be at his house and we'd go out to play football in the park, and we'd see my mom and her boyfriend. As to how that affected me, I think I learned how to be diplomatic at an unusually early age. I was always trying to soften one parent's anger toward the other one, and lying, and not telling them things that I knew would piss them off. When I see people get divorced and treat it casually in regards to their kids, it infuriates me, because although it may seem like the kid's handling it fine, it's not nothing.

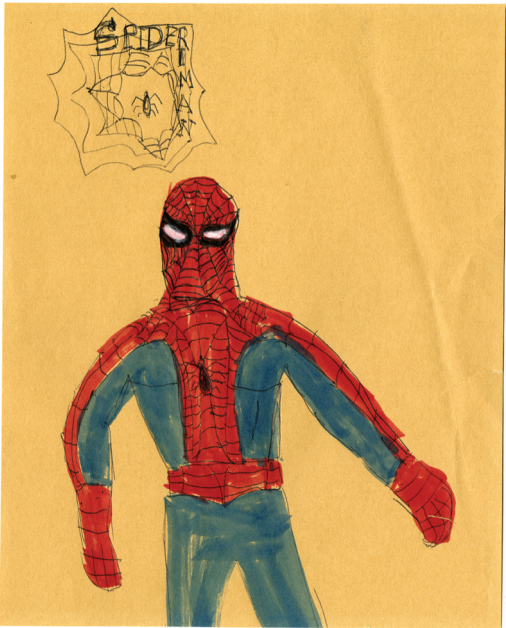
You had a really unusual childhood in terms of its mix of high and low culture. Your grandfather was an academic, your father was a craftsman, your stepfather was a race car driver, your brother was a hippie who spent time in prison, and your mother runs an auto shop and repairs cars. How do you think you were affected by being exposed to so many different realities?

I think it allowed me to develop an ability to jump into different fields. Whatever I was doing at a given time when I was a child, I was always aware of the other side of things. If I was hanging around my mom's shop watching her fix cars, I'd think of my grandfather at home writing some academic article at his typewriter. My mother was educated, too, by the way—she dropped out of the University of Chicago. She was raised in the academic world, but she got tired of academic arguments that have no absolutes, and the fact that it's impossible to really achieve anything concrete in that world—you're always just discussing things, and nothing ever really happens. My dad was a mechanical genius, and she'd watch my uncle and my dad working on cars, and see how they'd set out to make something happen, then do it, and it would be done. That really appealed to her. I have a brother ten years older than me who's a really smart guy, but he got caught up in that kind of post-hippie druggy biker world. My mother was just eighteen when she had him, so he and my mother are really close because they kind of grew up together. My parents got divorced when he was twelve, and after that all this crazy stuff happened. He was out of the house by the time I was seven, so he really wasn't around during most of the time I was growing up. I grew up like an only child, and he was more like an uncle. He's over sixty and my mom's eighty, so they seem like the same generation now. They work together rehabbing houses in Chicago now.

It sounds as if you had fairly laissez-faire parents.

I grew up in a different world. I used to run around my mom's shop, which was way out on the South Side of Chicago. I would go there at noon after preschool and run around with the kids in the neighborhood, and I walked to school by myself starting in first grade. Most parents would never let their kid do things like that now, and that's kind of sad. It was a good thing for me having so little supervision, but I really think the world is more dangerous now.

Your stepfather was killed in a car accident when



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you were five years old; how were you affected by that?

I'd only known him for a few years, and didn't live with him too much, and at the time it didn't seem to mean much to me. I must've been affected by it, though. I definitely remember the day he died. I was at my dad's and he got a phone call, then after he hung up he told me what happened. I was in a goofy mood and was laughing and sort of not getting it, then my dad said, "This is serious." It was the first time he'd spoken to me that way. When I went home my mom didn't want to see me, she was just crushed. I think I repressed that memory.

What were you like as a child?

I was into really complicated worlds and stories, and when kids came over and just wanted to shoot toy guns, I was bored. I had friends, and lots of family friends, but I was deeply shy, which I think was a purely hereditary thing—both of my parents were extremely shy. It's a horrible thing to be shy, and my shyness got worse when I was a teenager.

How do you explain the fact that you didn't want to be like other kids when you were growing up? You consistently made choices that rejected the norm that surrounded you.

It probably had something to do with the fact that the kids around me didn't want me in their world, so I made choices that excluded them. I definitely didn't share the same taste as most of the kids I knew. I was really a square kid, and just wasn't into that seventies post-hippie scene, even though I knew all the hip stuff. Because of my brother I had Jefferson Airplane records when I was six or seven, but I was much more into the TV show *Dragnet*. I related with incredible intensity to Jack Webb, probably because he was this no-nonsense guy. The whole hippie thing really creeped me out as a kid because it was chaotic, and it brought chaos into my life. I'd be in my room trying to draw *Spider-Man* comics and some naked hippie would walk by my door to get a towel in the bathroom. My brother's friends would be over walking around smoking dope, and there would be drug deals going on. I didn't know how messed up some of it was until much later, but even then, I knew something wrong was going on.

Can you recall the first time you responded to a work of art?

When my older brother moved out, he left a stack of

comics that I sort of inherited, and I spent all day looking at them because we didn't have a television when I was little. The cover of one of the comics had a drawing of a nuclear family that really bothered me. The kid in the drawing is trying to drink out of a water fountain but the water's frozen solid, and there's a blazing sun overhead, so everybody's sweating; it's super-hot, yet the water is frozen. I can remember looking at that image and getting so frustrated by it that I started pounding my head against the wall. I just couldn't take it! I've tried to analyze why that image affected me the way it did, and it obviously has something to do with the fact that I really wanted to have a family like that: there was a little boy, a little girl, and two perfect parents. It made such an impression on me that many years later I tracked down a copy of it. That's the first visual image I remember feeling strongly about.

How about the first work of fine art you responded to?

I was taken to the Chicago Art Institute as a child, but going there felt like a chore. The thing they had that I loved the most was a collection of miniature dollhouses—I remember really getting lost in those, and almost feeling like I was actually in the rooms. I saw them



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last summer for the first time in many years, and they were even cooler than I'd remembered them. Other than that, none of the stuff at the Art Institute spoke to me. It was my grandparents who took me to the museum, and they had an attitude of "This is culture," which didn't make it fun at all. My grandmother liked artists like Monet, but anything beyond that she had trouble with—she wouldn't say, "This is stupid," but she wouldn't talk about it or engage with it. She dutifully looked at it, though, because she believed that was what a cultured person did. They were sort of disdainful of Pop Art and comics and the things I was excited about. I was also taken to the opera as a kid, and I wanted to kill myself every time I had to go. It was just torture. I probably would've ended up an academic if my parents had made those things seem like more fun, but they mostly felt like remote things that I didn't understand.

Was music important to you when you were a child?

I listened to it, but it wasn't until I was much older that I really got into it. When I was a kid all my friends had all the Beatles records and I remember thinking, "Where did they get them?" I didn't even know where you got a record.



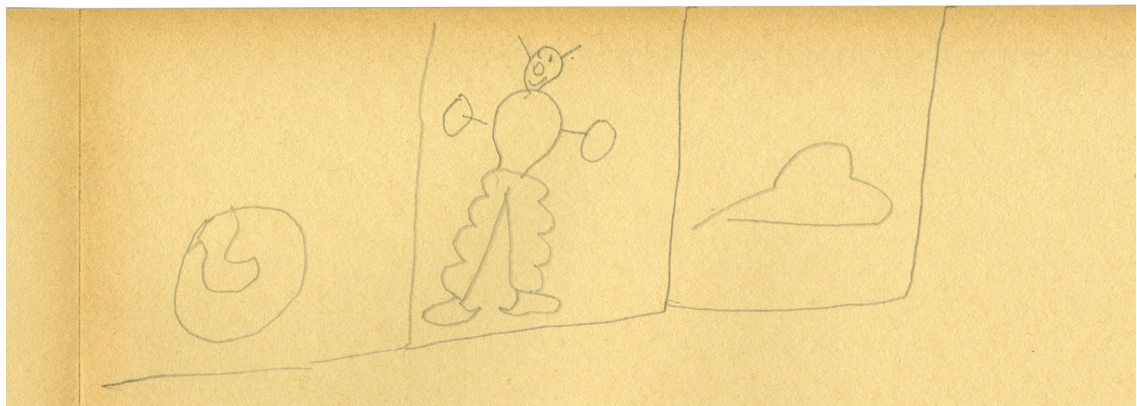
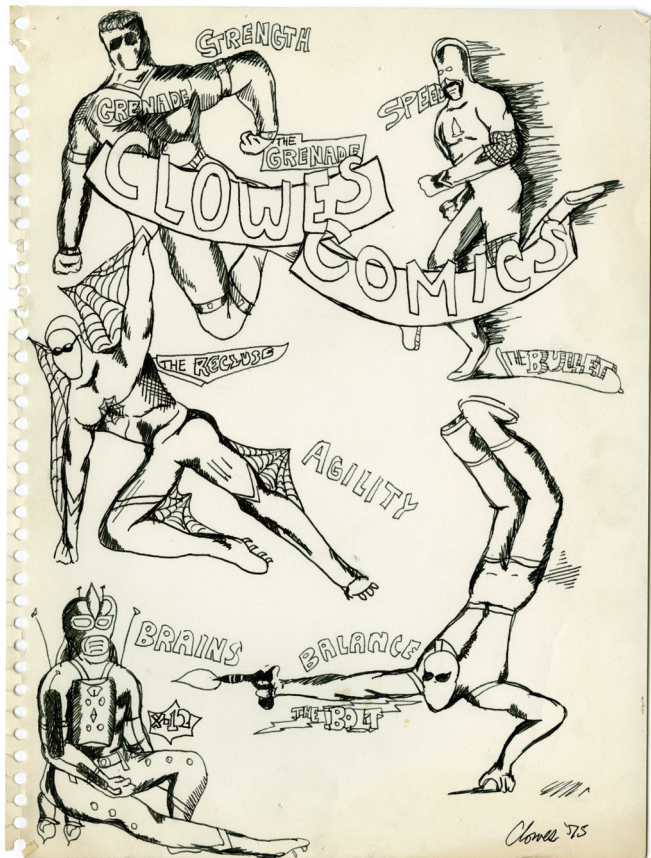
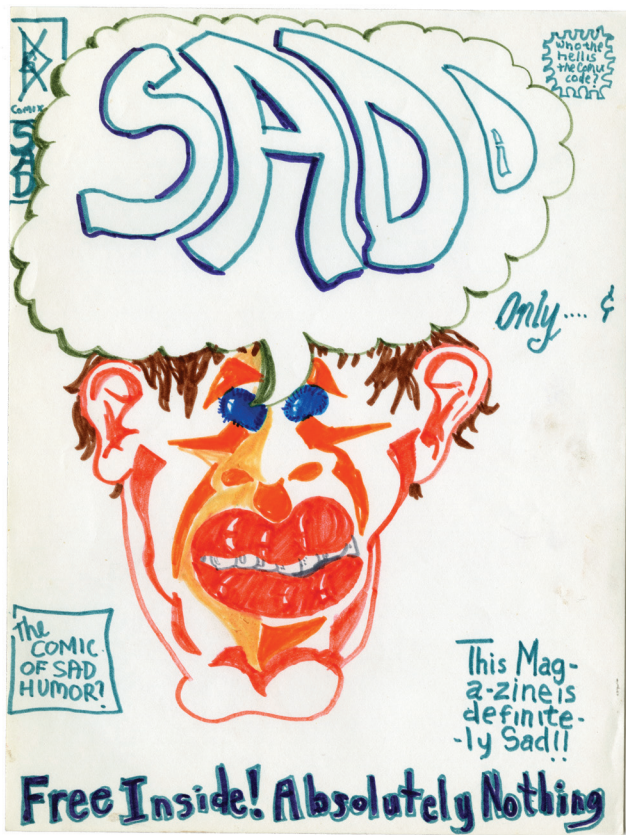
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The only reason I had comics is because I got them from my brother, and the drugstore on the corner of the street where I lived had a vending machine that sold comics. For years nobody I knew had ever heard of such a thing, then I finally met a guy who grew up in my neighborhood and he said, "Hey, remember that vending machine that sold comics?" I said, "Thank god! I didn't imagine it!" There was a cylinder inside the machine that sort of shot the comic out, and it had this great feel as you pulled the comic out of the machine—you felt like the machine had produced it just for you. The only reason I don't have one those vending machines is because I've been unable to find one! You'd get three comics at once, and you never knew what you'd get, but it was usually two cool ones on the outside, and a horrible one in the middle. They cost twelve cents each. This was around 1968, which was right when Crumb started publishing *Zap*, and those comics cost fifty cents, which seemed outrageous at the time.

Were you depressed as a child?

Not as a child—I got to that later. I had a period of being depressed after I graduated from Pratt and had to actually try to get a job as an artist, which was impossible. I felt I had no future for a couple of years, and although it was





really depressing, I don't think I was clinically depressed. I've been around clinically depressed people and I've never been like that.

Where do you stand on the nature versus nurture question?

That's an interesting question, and I think about it a lot. With my son I can see that there's a lot of stuff he just came in with. For instance, he walks the same way I do in a way that couldn't possibly be anything but genetic. I used to think all kids were just amorphous blobs when they were born and were totally shaped by their surroundings and their family, like a blank piece of paper. With my son I can see that you can only affect maybe ten percent, which is like nothing, but it can also be huge. It can be the dividing line between taking a horrible route or a great one. Ultimately, however, nature is the dominant force. Growing up, I had my parents, my grandparents, and some stepparents—and they all had their failings and their strengths. I think it worked out fairly well.

When did you first fall in love?

I fell in love several times in high school and college, but they were all fairly shallow and one-sided.

You attended the Pratt Institute from 1979 through

1984, then lived in New York for two more years after you graduated; can you recall your first day in New York?

My first day in New York was a year before I started at Pratt, when I went there to look at art schools. I stayed with my grandmother, who lived on Long Island, and I remember taking the train into the city and getting off at 34th Street, then walking down to St. Marks Place. I felt like I was home and couldn't wait to move there. It was 1979 when I moved to New York, and it was really great then. You could walk for blocks through Soho and not see another person, and I went out and saw music all the time. The only reason I left New York was because rents started going up just as I was running out of money. I needed to live more cheaply, so I moved to Chicago and lived in a little apartment for a year, then I lived with my grandmother for another year. In 1989, when I was twenty-eight, I got married, but I didn't take it very seriously and I don't think she did either. We divorced in 1991.

How were your years at Pratt?

I loved it at first. Before I went to Pratt, I'd gone to school with the same eighty-five kids from first grade until the end of high school, and you can't really reinvent yourself in a situation like that. People would show up in ninth grade with a new look and everybody told them they were

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pathetic. I always felt that I wasn't what I appeared to be when I was growing up, and I wanted a chance to be the guy I imagined myself to be. As to who that guy was, I was definitely into the punk thing—I had the perfect look for it, too. I weighed around a hundred and twenty pounds and was six feet tall, so I was truly like a stick. Despite the way I looked, I wasn't doing drugs or drinking, though. I never went through a drug phase because I saw that whole world firsthand when I was growing up. I did get into drinking, though, during a period when I was taking my portfolio around New York trying to get work. I'd get home by eleven in the morning and have nothing to do for the rest of the day but wait for somebody to call. Then I'd go back the next day to pick up my portfolio and they'd say, "Oh it's great—we'll give you a call," but I never once got work by showing my portfolio to someone. I put all these little things in my portfolio—pieces of paper that would fall if you opened the book—so I'd be able to tell if anyone had actually looked at it, and nine times out of ten it hadn't even been looked at. My great-grandparents had started a college fund for me when I was a baby, and I went to Pratt on a scholarship, so after I graduated I had enough money to last me for a year. I figured that in a year I'd be getting work, but getting work was incredibly hard.

Did you ever consider doing something else with your life?

I definitely considered other things when I was a teenager, because I was having a lot of trouble with drawing. I wanted my drawings to look a certain way—I basically wanted to be able to draw like Robert Crumb or the early DC Comics artists—and I just didn't have the skills to achieve that. I was fourteen when I started drawing actual comic strips, and had no training at all, so I went down all sorts of blind alleys and tried every stupid thing. It was very, very frustrating. I recently read an interview with Bobby Fischer, and he said that the real thing behind genius is an intense passion for something so that you do it repeatedly until you're good at it. I'm not claiming I have genius, but that started really young for me and I think I had that. I loved drawing comics and always felt like every blank page was a new opportunity to attempt to draw something good—"Maybe this will be the one." When I got to Pratt, I decided to get rid of all that stylistic technique I'd been struggling to master and started from scratch with a Rapidograph. At first I was practically drawing stick figures, but the minute I made that change everything started to feel right, and people started responding to my work. No-

body had been into the overworked stuff I'd been doing, and when I switched to something simple and direct everybody liked it.

You once commented that your work "grows out of inconsequential thoughts"; what's an inconsequential thought?

Inconsequential isn't the right word for it—it's better described as a passing thought. Like, I'll be walking along and see somebody on a cell phone, which I always find really irritating, and I'll ask myself "Why is that bad?" Is it because I'm threatened by changing technology, or because that person on the phone isn't connecting to the world? That's what I meant by "inconsequential thought."

A subtext in *Eightball*, the series of comics you began in 1989, is the fantasy lives of the central characters, most of whom have fantasies of paranoia, sex, and revenge. One can't help but trace those fantasies back to the author, i.e., you. Has your fantasy life changed now that you've experienced a good deal of success?

It's a lot more middle-aged than it used to be, and middle-aged fantasies have a lot to do with trying to come to grips with the fact that you're no longer young. When you're young, something that happened ten years earlier actually feels like something that happened ten years earlier. When you're middle-aged, things that happened thirty years ago seem like they happened three weeks ago. You think about all the stuff between what happened thirty years ago and where you are now, and you have to figure out how to navigate that space full of memories.

Are our fantasy lives overshadowed by our memories in middle age?

I don't know. When you're twenty-three you're not sure how things will work out, and you play out lots of different scenarios in your head. By middle-age you have some idea of how things are working out, and you tend to go back and think about what could've been. You know—"If I hadn't done this one little thing, my whole life would've been different." I do that a lot. For instance, meeting my wife, Erika, was completely miraculous. In 1992 I'd just broken up with my first wife and I decided to do a book signing tour of the West Coast so I could get out of Chicago. I was doing a signing at a comic store in Berkeley, and Erika came up to me with a pair of underwear she wanted me to sign. She didn't seem all that interested in



me—she just wanted me to sign this underwear—but it was the first time anything like that had happened to me, and I turned beet red. I asked her what her name was, and she said, “It’s not for me—it’s for this guy I know,” and I said, “Well, that’s disappointing.” She actually wanted to stop seeing the guy, and she came back later and gave me her phone number. We started talking a lot on the phone, then she visited me in Chicago, and I knew then that I wanted to stay with her, and we got married in 1995. If she hadn’t had a boyfriend who read *Eightball*—which is why she came to the signing—we never would’ve met. I don’t believe in fate, but I guess I should.

If you don’t believe in fate, then I assume you believe we have the capacity to completely shape our own lives?
No, I don’t think we’re in control—I think it’s mostly random. The fact that I was drawn to the medium of comics and stuck with it isn’t necessarily fate.

Does everyone have a vivid fantasy life?

No, some people don’t seem to need a fantasy life, and sitting in a room thinking about stuff isn’t something they ever spend time doing. It’s not so much that they don’t fantasize because real life is enough for them; it’s more that they’re the kind of people who feel better when they’re actually doing something. My mom is like that. She’s a very literate person, but she really enjoys working on cars, and isn’t someone who would sit and think up a story. Having a fantasy life isn’t about intelligence and creativity—it’s about something else, although intelligence certainly helps.

Do you consider yourself a nostalgic person?
I used to be more than I am now—going through heart surgery snapped me out of that. I was always amused and baffled by the fact that when you talk to old people and show them something from the thirties or forties, they’re never interested and don’t want to hear about it. They want the new thing. I always thought that was odd, and thought they should be happy that I was showing them this cool thing from when they were kids. Now I



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understand why they didn’t want to be dragged into the past. You can get stuck in the past, and it’s not good to get trapped in a distant memory—it’s better to get rid of stuff and keep moving.

Many of your comics, the early ones in particular, are infused with an acute sensitivity to injustice; are you aware of that?

I guess. I still have intense feelings about that, and it’s easy to become overwhelmed by them. Life is much easier when you’re only aware of your own little orbit and the injustices in that. Once you become aware of the global situation, as far as injustice, it’s almost too much. You just can’t function, especially as an artist. Being too aware of all that can be completely debilitating.

Do you believe in the law of karma, or do some people get away with murder?

I believe some people get away with murder. There are people who’ve done terrible things and I’ve never seen any evidence that they had to pay for them. You like to think that

the wrong things they’ve done nag at them deep down, but I don’t believe that’s the case. It’s terrible. You mentioned that my comics are filled with vengeful fantasies, and I think that’s where that comes from. The Wall Street guys did horrible things, for instance, and they got away with it completely—nothing’s going to happen to them.

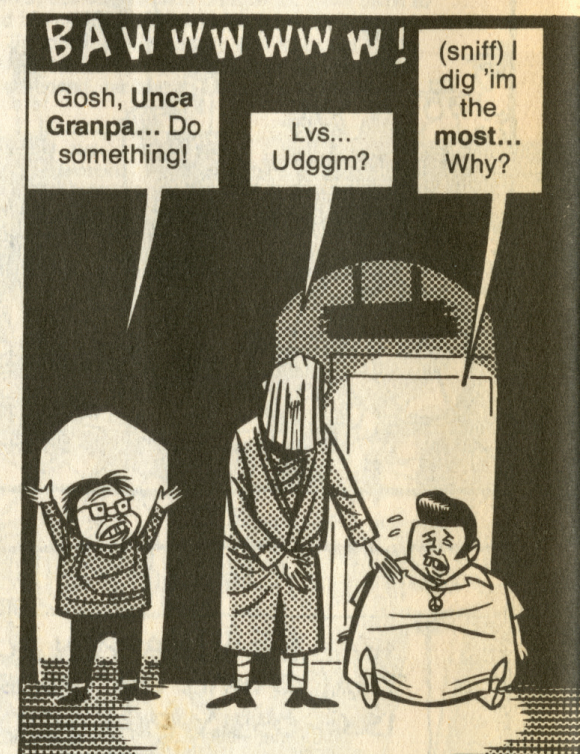
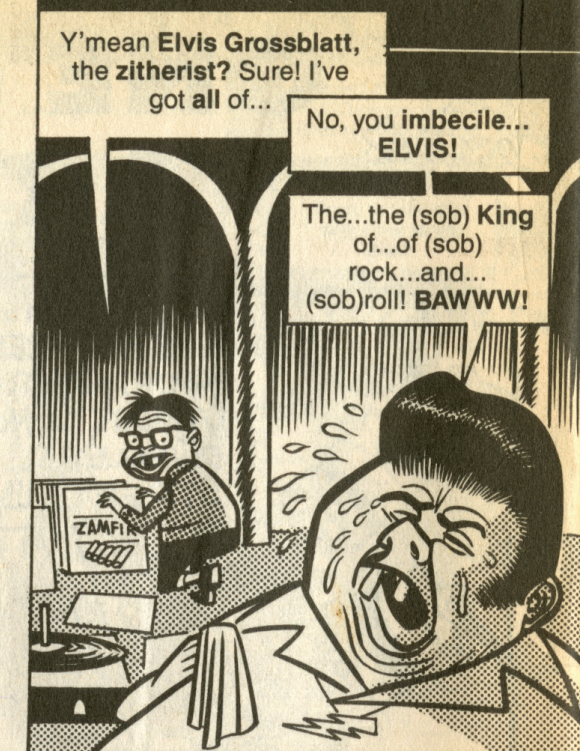
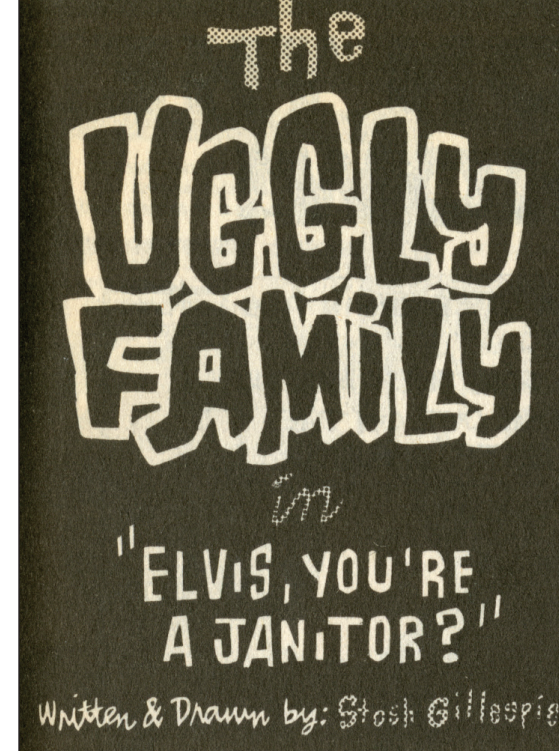
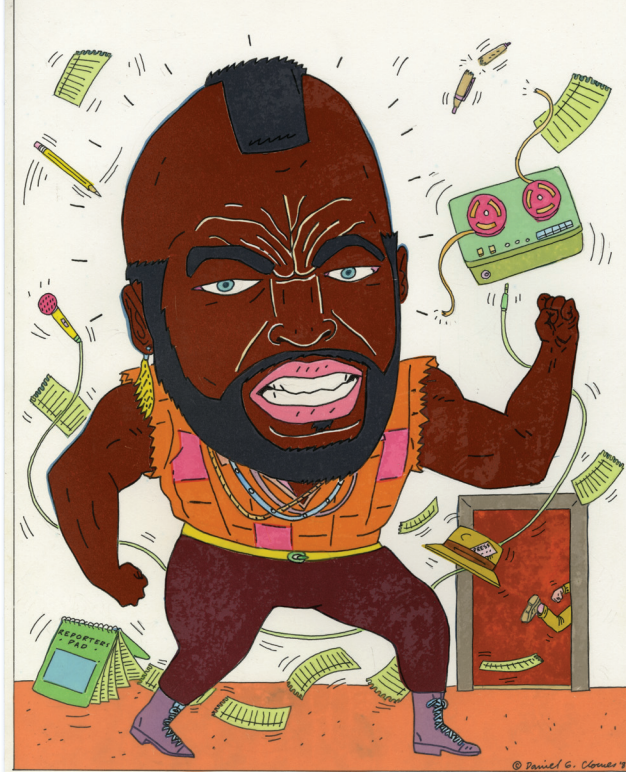
You once made the comment, “Basically, I think we’re all repulsed by each other.” Do you really feel that way?

In a certain context, yes, I do think that’s true. You don’t want to look too closely.

I’m surprised to hear you say that because many of your strips—“Like a Weed, Joe” for instance—have a tremendous amount of empathy. Your depictions of elderly people are also very tender. Really? They may be beautiful from a conceptual point of view, but you wouldn’t want to lick the faces of those characters. I’m trying to be a more forgiving person, and some days are better than others.



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ART @ 6470

UGLY IS IN! It started in the CABBAGE PATCH, went to the GARBAGE PAIL and now we have everything from MADBALLS and PET MONSTERS to FOOD described as "GOOD & UGLY"! What will it be like when EVERYONE thinks...

GROSS

If the trend continues MISS AMERICA might win for other than physical reasons.



SHAMPOO would be chosen for the most damage it causes.



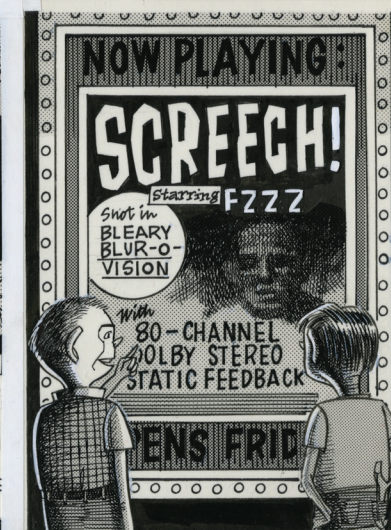
MCDONALD'S will cash in on the extreme inedibility of their new product, McGlop!



SODA WARS and CANDY BATTLES will be waged as companies try to come out with the most disgusting flavors possible.



NEW MOVIES would be judged on the blurriness of the picture and the inaudibility of the soundtrack.



ROCK BANDS would be... wait, they already are pretty ugly and an earsore!



ART @ 6470

is GREAT

written by:
EEL O'BRIEN
drawn by:
STOSH GILLESPIE

FASHION always reflects public taste and repulsiveness will be the new chic.



Fortunately MAKE UP could be marketed for those unlucky people born beautiful.



POLITICIANS will fare better with voters if they adopt a different Hollywood image.

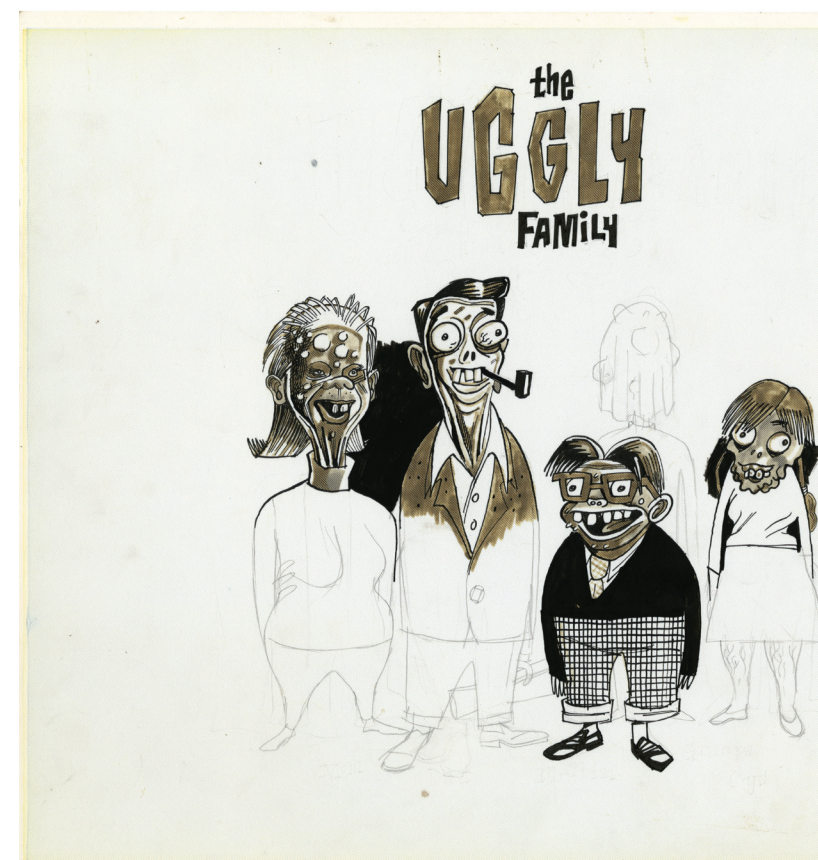


SUPER-HEROES will be out unless they're ugly. The bad guys will win public support.



And after the "Ugly Fad" is over, CRACKED could jump on the bandwagon... but just how, we're not sure yet!





Robert Crumb was obviously a source of inspiration for you early on; when did you finally meet him?

In 1991, [Fantagraphics founder] Gary Groth organized an exhibition in Seattle called *Misfit Lit*, and I met him there. Although I was intimidated by [Crumb], he was very nice to me—I guess he saw me as a kindred ectomorph. I'd done a story for *Weirdo* that Peter Bagge wrote called "Life in These United States" about two families that get together for a dinner party, and you see what each person is thinking. All I did was transcribe it visually—Peter did all the work—but Crumb really liked it, and that may've had something to do with why he was nice to me. I don't think he would've responded to most of the work I was doing then.

A few years ago Crumb published an illustrated version of *The Book of Genesis*; do you ever think of doing something like that?

I've thought about it, but getting an existing text into comic form is tough. Ten pages of text would probably require forty pages of comics in order to break everything down and get through it, so it would be a ton of work. I considered doing a graphic novel about Hollywood, but after finishing the first six pages I felt so much like I was trying to do the Great Graphic Novel—which I kind of was—that I just hated myself for doing it. So I stopped. Lots of people are trying to do Great Graphic Novels right now, and I hate them all. I'm just really disgusted by them. Chris Ware isn't trying to do great graphic novels—for some reason he's just able to do them, and if you really immerse yourself in his work it's incredibly rich. Joe Sacco is amazing, too—he's sort of in a class by himself. I don't know which horrible hellhole he's writing about right now.

You've commented previously about the lackluster reception Lloyd Llewellyn, your first published comic, received when it came out in 1986; it's great that Fantagraphics believed in it enough to stand by it until it found its audience. I'm not quite sure about how much they believed in it. They were really excited about it when I initially sent them a sample, but once they published it they didn't seem into it anymore, and once the sales started going down they canceled the series. It was very weird. After it was

canceled, I didn't publish anything for a few years, even though I was always working on stuff. When I came up with the concept for *Eightball*, I never thought Fantagraphics would be interested in publishing it. In fact, I showed it to a couple of other publishers before I even showed it to them. I was surprised when they said, "Sure, why not?" They weren't too excited about it, but they were willing to put it out. Fantagraphics is a social democracy in that everybody gets an equal amount of attention and neglect.

At what point did you feel successful?

I felt successful as soon as I was able to make a living with my work—it just seemed like a miracle when that happened. It didn't happen because of *Eightball*, though; it was through doing illustrations, and selling original artwork.

You recently made the observation that comics have evolved to a point where something that was regarded as a failure in 1985 would be considered a hit today. This suggests that the golden age of graphic novels has crested; has it?

It crested in 1950 in terms of sales figures. I don't know much about the market because I've lost interest in all that, but I know that Japanese *manga* is selling in enormous amounts. I make it a point not to look at that stuff, though, and I'm not interested in a lot of stuff. I'm not into *Harry Potter*, for instance, but the fact that millions of kids are into reading those books is good.

The major heart surgery you had in 2006 was a turning point in your life; could you talk about that a bit?

It all started in 2005, when Charlie was a year old. In retrospect I can see that I'd been having symptoms for at least three or four years prior to that, but at first it wasn't so bad. I didn't know what was wrong, and just thought I was getting old and was out of shape. I'd take the dog for a walk and if I went uphill I'd have to sit down on the sidewalk. I'd try to work, but I knew I wasn't doing good work. I did a couple things right before I had the surgery, and when I came home and saw them they looked really

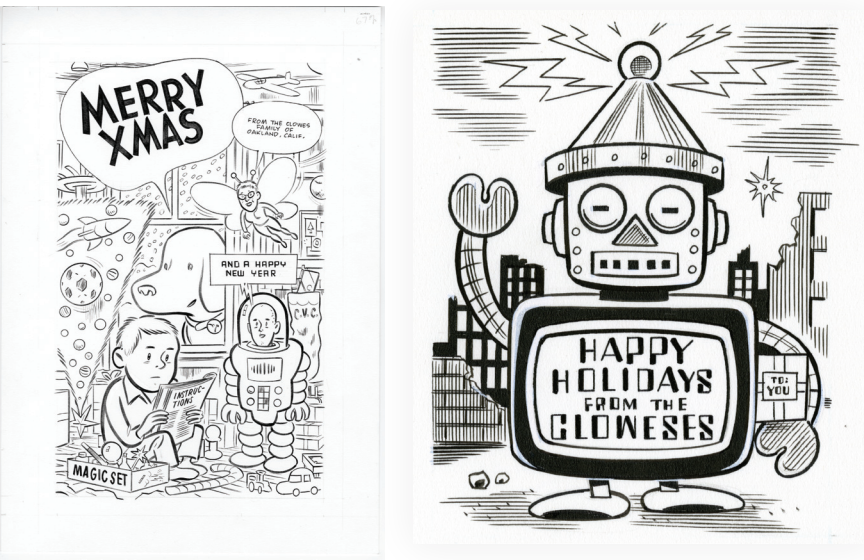
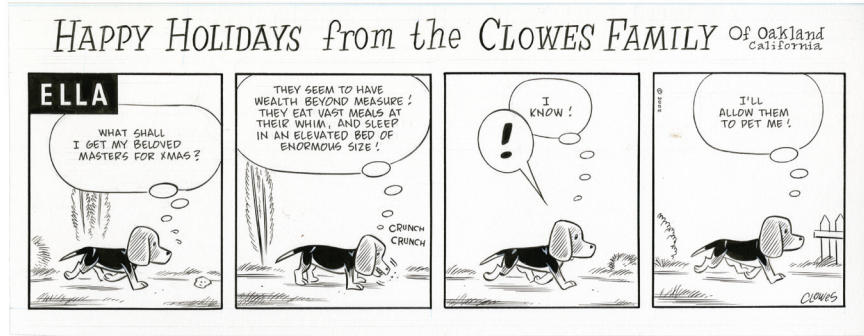
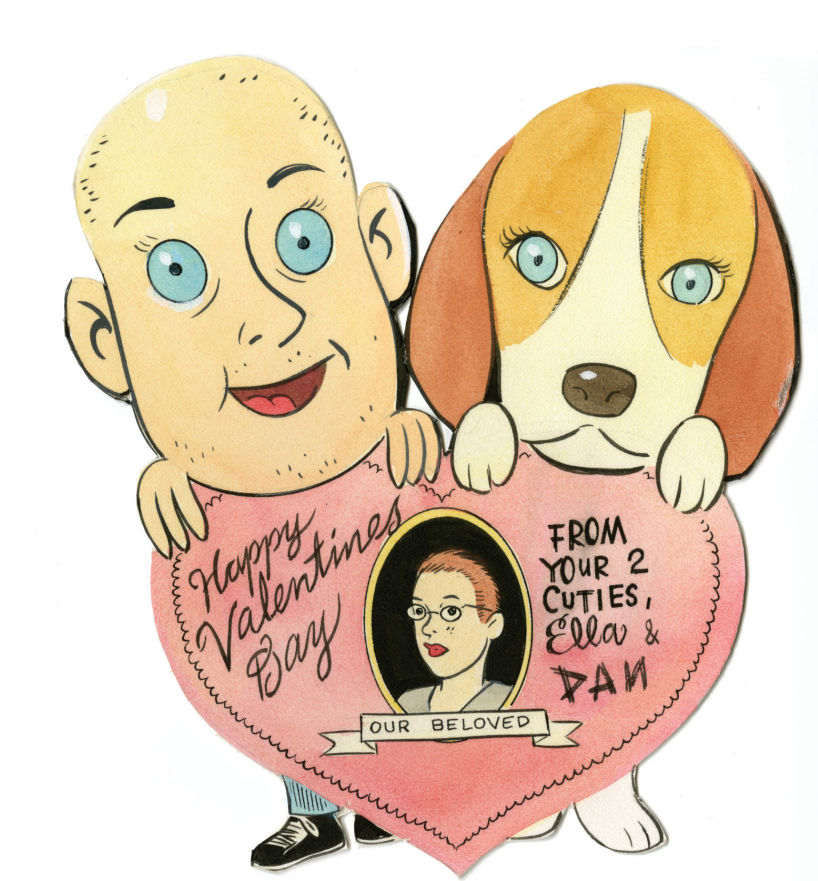
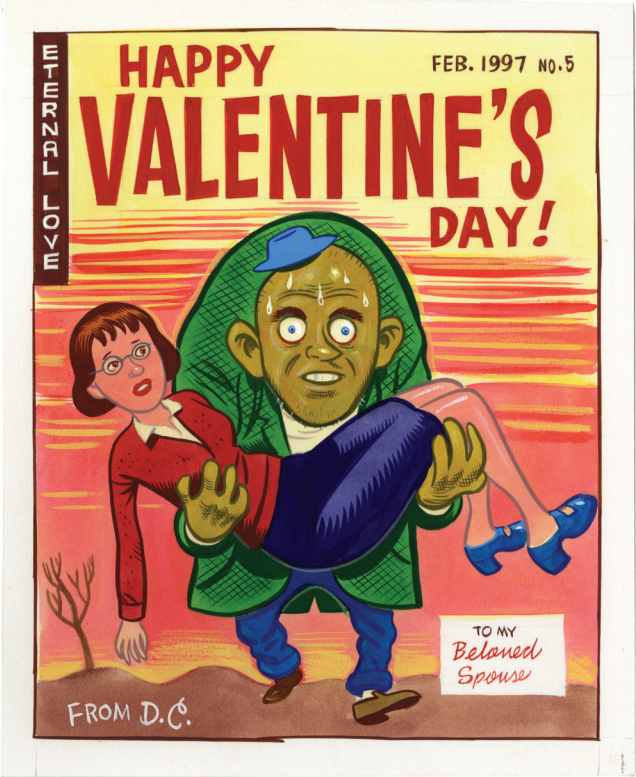
weird to me.

We were living in L.A., shooting *Art School Confidential*, when Charlie was born, and it was then that I started feeling really weak. I figured I was just stressed out from having a baby, living in a new place, and shooting the film, and I figured once we got back home I'd get back into the swing of things, but that didn't happen. I finally went to the doctor, and he told me I had a strange heartbeat, and that I should go to a cardiologist. I thought that would be a waste of money, but the doctor said that I had good insurance and should get it checked out. If he hadn't said that to me, I never would've gone to a cardiologist. Had it gone untreated, I would've needed a heart transplant.



The cardiologist discovered that my heart was twice as big as it should've been, and I had a mitral valve that was weirdly deformed, leaking badly, and basically not functioning. The cardiologist said we should keep an eye on it, and that ten years down the line I'd probably need some kind of surgery. Then they gave me one last test, and when the doctor got the results from it, she said, "You need to get this done now—like tomorrow." There was one doctor on the West Coast who was the guy for this particular surgery, and I had to wait four months to get it scheduled with him. Those four months were awful, and by the time I had the operation, I'd become incredibly weak.

There were three degrees of success possible with this surgery. The best-case scenario was that they'd make the repair and my heart would be in good shape for the rest of my life. The second possibility—which is much more common—is that they put in a mechanical replacement



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valve that clicks, and has to be replaced every fifteen or twenty years. The third possibility is that your heart is so fucked up that you need a heart transplant. As I was going under the anesthetic, I told my wife that as soon as I woke up she had to tell me immediately what they did. The surgery is supposed to take an hour and a half, but mine took seven hours, and when I woke up and my wife told me they did the repair, I was ecstatic. I was in the hospital for two weeks, and I was super-elated the whole time I was there. Even though I had a thirteen-inch incision in my chest, I already felt better than I had in years.

For many of us, creative work functions as a kind of firewall that protects us from the dark parts of ourselves. Drawing has always been central to your sense of yourself, and you weren't able to work for two years; how did that affect you?

That was very depressing, and there were many days when I felt like I wasn't ever going to feel like myself again. I was on heavy-duty painkillers for quite a while, and I'd just lie there thinking "This is not good." For several months after the surgery it felt like I had a big potato in my chest—just this rock—and it was weird and scary. I got a real taste of what it's like to get old and die, and I saw how it works. You can't get up the energy to do anything, and you're so beat that half of you just feels "Fuck it, I don't mind going." I had many weeks where all I did was sit on a daybed with a portable DVD player, watch DVDs all day long, and eat soup.

How did having a child change you?
To some degree I was a child until I had a child, and I'm

an adult now. I really identify with the dad role, and in a way I always have. As I said, when I was a kid I was into Jack Webb, who was a take-charge, no-nonsense authority figure who wasn't going to be swayed by the whims of others, and I fell into that identity very comfortably. I don't relate to being a child anymore. Being a parent is a big responsibility, and I resent people who approach it carelessly or are cavalier about the decision of whether or not to have a child. Raising a child is a difficult thing to do, and nobody notices how good a job you've done unless you fail. I now look back and see with complete clarity how my parents were as parents, both the good and bad things.

When did you start doing work for the New Yorker?

I did my first illustration for them in 1995, and I couldn't have been more excited about it, because it certainly wasn't something I ever thought I'd get to do. That's the one magazine that both sets of my parents subscribed to, and when I did my first cover for them in 2008, it seemed to be very important to them. The first one came at a weird time, because my dad was in the hospital dying when I got the assignment, and I really wanted him to see it before he died. I was coloring it to send it in the night he died, and was planning to fly to see him the next morning. Doing that cover was loaded with meaning for me. Most illustration assignments I've gotten have involved endless nit-picking, but the *New Yorker* doesn't do that.

In 1994 you met director Terry Zwigoff, and you made two films together (*Ghost World* and *Art School Confidential*). You've subsequently had

several adventures in the movie business, and spent a good deal of time on film projects that wound up being aborted; what's that been like for you?

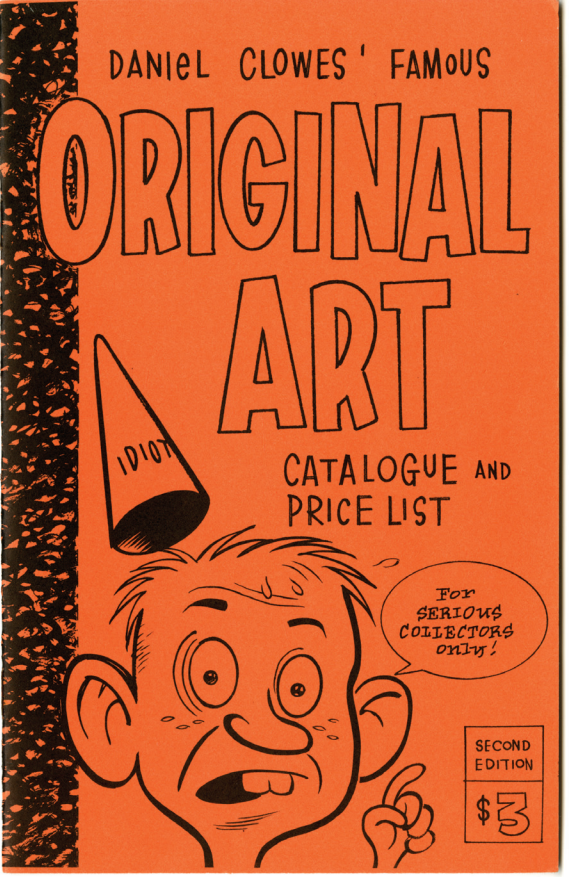
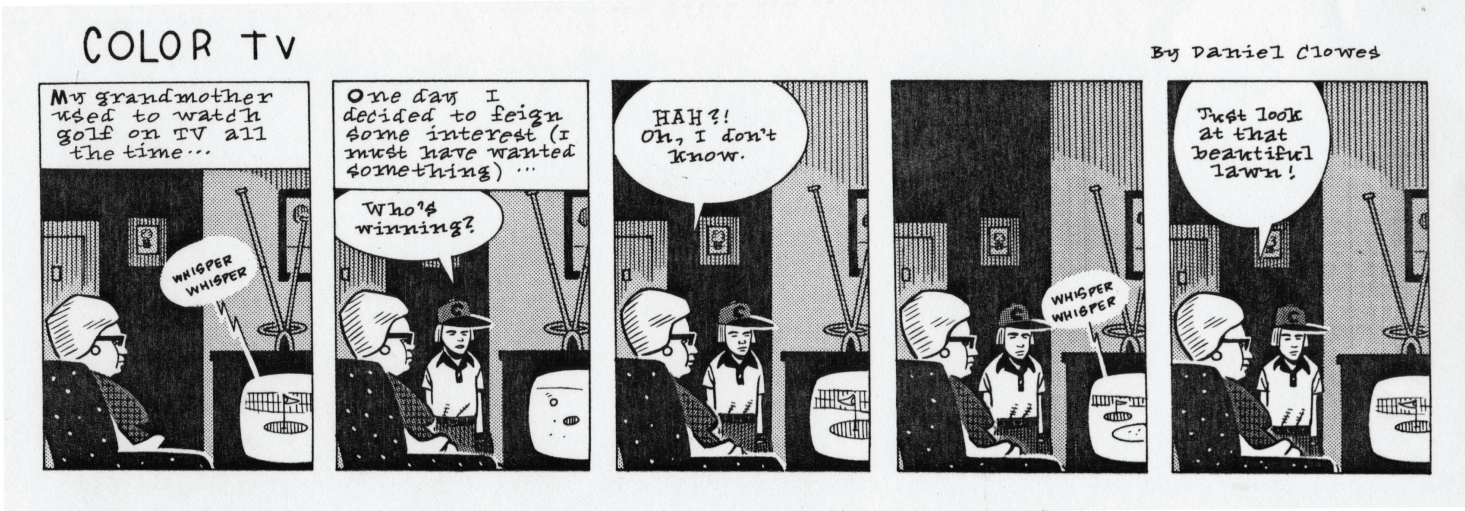
My first film was *Ghost World*, and although it took years to get it made, we did get it made and it was nominated for an Oscar, so I thought making films was easy. I'd hear writers say, "I worked ten years on this script then the director didn't make it because of some stupid reason," and I didn't understand what they were talking about. Now I know. There are so many things that can go wrong.

Lianne Halfon [producer of Clowes's films] and I tried to do an HBO pilot in 2003, and I thought it was the best thing I'd ever written. I really believed it was going to be great, but all of our dealings with HBO were based on a misunderstanding. When we first pitched the project, it was about two girls in the same age range as the girls in *Ghost World*, but HBO said, "We have a problem with the girls' ages." I thought that meant they didn't want them to be the same ages as the *Ghost World* girls, and I told them that wouldn't be a problem because they'd be a little younger. What they actually meant is that HBO perceives

their audience as being around thirty years old, so they wanted our characters to be around twenty-four—which is an entirely different world from the project we pitched. They kept asking for rewrites, but nothing we did was "quite right" for them, and eventually it all just fizzled away. That was my first real taste of the "movie business" experience.

Are you still excited about the movie business?

Having several disappointments certainly makes it less exciting. When we did *Ghost World*, the world of independent film was just getting rolling, and people were really interested in making unusual films, but that phase is definitely over. It's very tough to do an unusual film now, because everybody's always going on about having no money and the need for really saleable plots. I do still have a few things I'm interested in doing, though. I thought about trying to direct something, but I don't think it's right for me. Getting actors to do stuff is not something I want to do. It seemed very appealing for a while, but I realized that would not be a fun life for me. Dealing with all the people involved would be a huge challenge, despite the fact that



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