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THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

ISSUE #67A, SPRING 2016

[A message from Charles Hatfield, curator of the CSU Northridge exhibition *Comic Book Apocalypse: The Graphic World of Jack Kirby* and moderator of the CSUN panel discussion that appeared in *The Jack Kirby Collector* #67:]

Due to editorial mistakes on my part, the version of the panel transcript that ran in the print edition of *TJKC* #67 was not approved by the other panelists, Scott Bukatman, Doug Harvey, Adam McGovern, Andrei Molotiu, Steve Roden, and Ben Saunders. Further, it contained a number of mistaken names, mis-attributed statements, and mis-heard lines. The responsibility for these errors is mine, and I apologize to my fellow panelists for rushing into print an unapproved and faulty transcript that did not reflect their input.

Fortunately, John Morrow has graciously made it possible for us to include this revised, corrected transcript in the digital edition, and as this *free* downloadable supplement to the issue. My thanks to my co-panelists for their patience, understanding, and revisions. I am proud to have been part of this stellar conversation!

Jack poses with the Yellow Kid award he received during his 1976 trip to Lucca, Italy. Photo by Shel Dorf.

The following originally appeared in unedited form in The Jack Kirby Collector, Vol. 23, No. 67, Spring 2016. Published as often as possible by and © TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614, USA. 919-449-0344. John Morrow, Editor/Publisher. Single issues: $14 postpaid US ($18 elsewhere). Four-issue subscriptions: $45 US, $61 Canada, $66 elsewhere. Editorial package © TwoMorrows Publishing, a division of TwoMorrows Inc. All characters are trademarks of their respective companies. All artwork is © Jack Kirby Estate unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter is © the respective authors.

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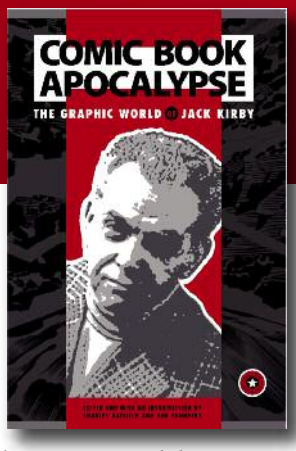
CSUN Kirby Panel

With opening commentary by Charles Hatfield



For a closer look at the CSUN exhibition itself, be sure to check out last issue's feature.

For a video of this panel, go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vixR0CNrz1o

(right) The companion catalog to the exhibition features scholarly essays about Jack's work by Glen David Gold, Diana Schutz, Howard Chaykin, Carla Speed McNeil, and others. It was published by and is available through IDW.

The exhibition *Comic Book Apocalypse: The Graphic World of Jack Kirby* ran from August 24 through October 10, 2015 at the California State University, Northridge Art Galleries in Los Angeles. This show, the largest solo Kirby exhibition yet mounted in the United States, incorporated 107 originals and filled the Main Gallery space, which consists of three rooms, about 3000 square feet, and 300 linear wall feet. *Comic Book Apocalypse* has the distinction of being the best-attended art exhibition in the history of CSU Northridge, drawing some 6200 visitors in its seven weeks. The opening reception, on Saturday, August 29, drew more than 600 people; the gallery talk on the following Monday morning, featuring Mark Evanier, was filled to capacity at about 150; and the show's last big public event, a panel discussion and catalog signing on Saturday, September 26, drew more than 300. On its final afternoon, Saturday, October 10—a period of just four hours—the show drew an additional 350-plus. The Gallery led a record number of tours through the exhibition (more than forty, totaling about 1350 people). I cannot count the number of times I found myself in the Gallery, serving as *de facto* docent or hearing stories full of love and admiration from fans, friends, and colleagues of Jack Kirby—and from people who had never looked at his work before!

I'm not surprised by any of this. Or, rather, I'm surprised and proud that I was able to do my part, but not at all surprised by the sheer enthusiasm for Kirby's art and the big numbers racked up at the Gallery. I think the Gallery team may have been surprised, and that many of my CSUN colleagues were surprised, but to me the idea that people should want to come see a hundred-plus Kirby originals is a no-brainer.

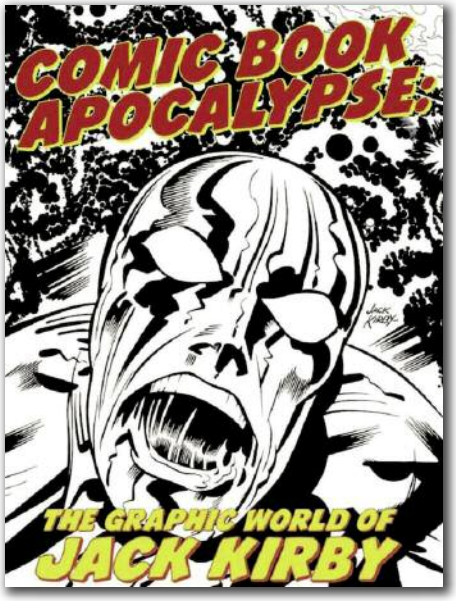
(above) One of Jack's collages which was on display at CSUN.

(right) The promotional postcard for the exhibit. This Silver Surfer *#18 image was also used for a giant mural in the gallery.*

For me, curating this show fulfilled a lifelong dream, that of acknowledging publicly, somehow, my fascination with, and never-repayable imaginative debt to, the art of Kirby. Ten-year-old me and fifty-year-old, professorial me were arm-in-arm on this one, and delirious with joy to be doing it.

Comic Book Apocalypse was an idea whose time had already past come. During my preparation for the show, I talked or exchanged emails with several other scholars who also wanted to do Kirby shows at their institutions. I got lucky. On the heels of my book, *Hand of Fire: The Comic Art of Jack Kirby* (2011), I got the opportunity to be the first person to curate a Kirby show at a university. This all came about because CSUN Galleries Director Jim Sweeters—a savvy, interested, and generous man—invited me to do it.

What happened was that Jim and I met during the Gallery's big Robert Williams exhibition about six years ago. On the night Williams—of *Zap Comix* and *Juxtapoz* fame—did the Hans Burkhardt Lecture (named for the abstract expressionist painter and former CSUN teacher) and a signing in the Gallery, I was somehow introduced to Jim. That event got me into the Gallery after too many years away—I should have come long before—and that's how we began to strike up a conversation about doing a comic art show. For the record, that was on March 10, 2010. And then, five days later, incredibly, I ran into Jim again at Pasadena City College, where esteemed artist (and Kirbyphile) Gary Panter was doing a weeklong residency, facilitated by my colleague, PCC Gallery Director Brian Tucker. Serendipity! From then on Jim and I were talking seriously about a comics exhibition. I waffled for a while about what theme to do—Los Angeles cartoonists? Alternative comics? Fantasy comics?—but when *Hand of Fire* bowed at the end of 2011 to good reviews, I allowed myself, finally, to see the obvious: *What I really want to do is a full-on Kirby show*.



Jim said yes, and that's when our roughly three years of concerted work really began. It turned out that we had bit off a lot. For a first-time Main Gallery show devoted to original comic art—and a first-time curatorial effort by yours truly, an English prof—we aimed high. How high,

I didn't realize until I began seeking out and courting collectors of the original art. The world of comic art collecting is a culture unto itself, and back then I was not very familiar with it, despite having studied comics as reading matter for a good chunk of my life. Fortunately, certain collectors, such as Glen David Gold and Mark Evanier, and certain colleagues, such as my friend Ben Saunders (an experienced curator himself), could act as my Virgils in this underworld, so that I could eventually feel at home. What I've learned about collectors and about the history of comic art during this experience, I can't possibly tell in just a few paragraphs, but suffice to say that gathering the works for this show was a prolonged, sometimes suspenseful, and ultimately very *social* process. I asked for a lot of work because I could not overcome my worry that many of the works we asked for would not materialize. But I was wrong: we got a great many works, a trove really, and then in Summer 2015, with just weeks left until our opening, Jim and I set about figuring out to put all those works into the framework I had envisioned long, long ago.

It was then that I learned that one's existing ideas and arguments must inevitably yield to the sheer visual power of the artworks once you have them—*so many* of them, in house, in hand, and clamoring for space. Certain ideas I loved and pushed for almost from the start, such as creating a reading corner with books in it to stress the readability of comic art, got pushed aside due to the challenge of showing so much Kirby work to advantage in a space that people, we hoped, would enjoy moving through. To take my interests and make them work within a space that visitors could navigate—to make a livelier, more interactive space—that was the trick.

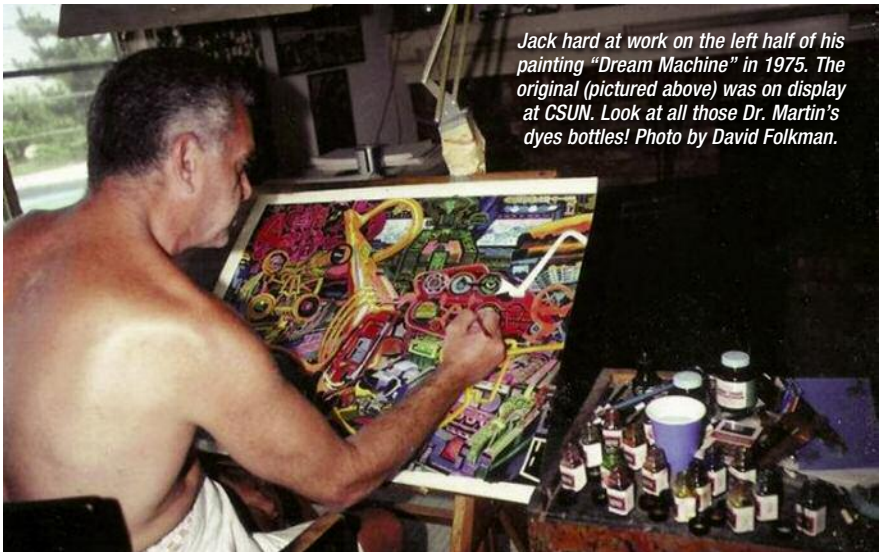
Comic Book Apocalypse benefited a great deal from the help of the Jack Kirby Museum and Research Center, which provided us many images and several crucial design elements, including interactive iPad displays. Thanks to the Museum's leaders, Tom Kraft and Rand Hoppe, our show became much stronger. We also owe many thanks to designer Louis Solis, who adapted a vintage Kirby/Herb Trimpe splash (from *Silver Surfer* #18, 1970) to create the show's branding image, which became the template for the design of the whole space; to David Folkman, for the many wonderful photos; and to mural designer Geoff Grogan, a terrific comics artist and teacher, whose staggering "New Gods" mural inspired me to rethink just where and how many of the works were going to go into the space. Also, the CSUN Galleries team, including exhibition coordinator Michelle Giacopuzzi and assistants Jack Castellanos and Janet Solval, did a tremendous amount of work to get the art on the walls, matted and framed, shown to advantage, and properly documented.

Sixteen lenders—a far cry from the mere handful I originally promised Jim—made the show possible. Without them, we would have had nothing. It was Jim himself, though, who taught me the way to do things in the gallery world, even as I taught him about Kirby. Jim understood the challenge of enlivening a space filled with many objects of nearly the same size and shape, of bringing in color to energize the scene, of taking an intimate form known for its hand feel, the comic book, and blowing it up to gallery scale. Jim's hands-on creativity helped make the show spectacular. It's one thing to sit in your study and spin out arguments about an artist on your laptop; it's quite another to build arguments in three dimensions while making sure not to get in the way of the viewer's pleasure. Having learned so much through this experience, I'm frankly dying to do more shows.

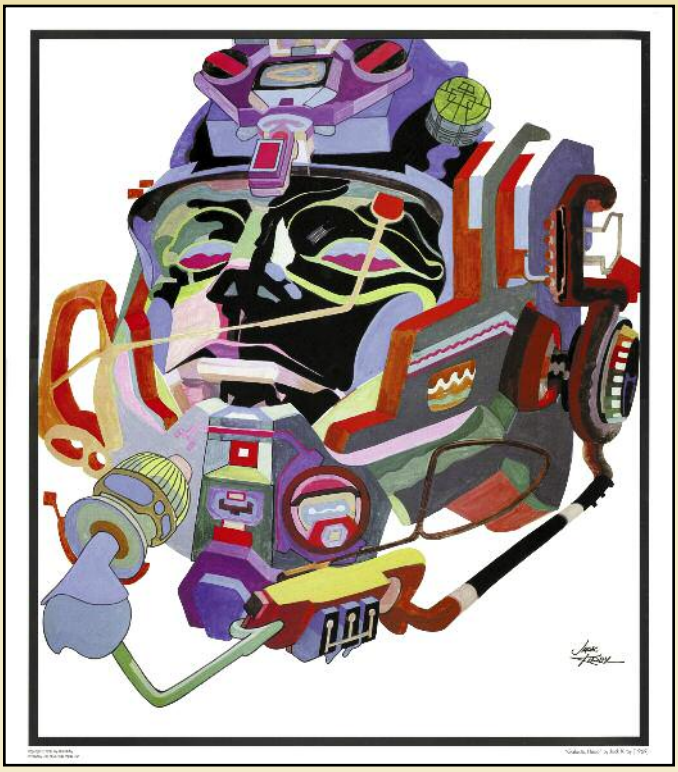
You'll see in the accompanying transcript of our Sept. 26 panel that the status of comic art as *readable*, handheld art, as opposed to spectacular gallery art, was one of my abiding concerns when it came to putting on this show. I wanted *story* to be highlighted as well as art. Fortunately, we were able to fulfill one of my earliest ambitions for the show by displaying all of the originals for a whole issue of *Kamandi* (#14, 1973) in one of the rear galleries, alongside Tom Kraft's brilliant pencils-to-inks iPad display of this same issue; moreover, we were able to display all the originals for *Thor* #155 (1968) in an adjoining gallery. This one-two punch turned out even better than I had hoped, because the differences in style and production between the *Kamandi*, inked and lettered by Mike Royer, and the *Thor*, largely inked by Vince Colletta and lettered by Artie Simek, proved to be very instructive to gallery visitors. To show one story edited by Kirby himself, and another edited by Stan Lee, and to highlight certain features of the original boards that were artifacts of the production process, turned out to be a real coup, for which I am very grateful.

In fact "grateful" describes my entire experience of curating the show and co-editing, with Ben Saunders, its accompanying catalog (co-published by CSUN and IDW under the supervision of Scott Dunbier). To have done these things—to have had the opportunity, and seen the joy that the results brought so many—fills me with thanks and wonder. I only hope it won't be long before the next big Kirby exhibition in the States. We need more, and there is so much more to show.

[The following panel discussion was conducted on September 26, 2015, at California State University, Northridge. It was transcribed by Sean Dulaney, edited by John Morrow, and revised by the panel.]



Jack hard at work on the left half of his painting "Dream Machine" in 1975. The original (pictured above) was on display at CSUN. Look at all those Dr. Martin's dyes bottles! Photo by David Folkman.



JIM SWEETERS: I'm the gallery director here at the CSUN Galleries. Thank you for coming to our panel discussion on Jack Kirby—*Comic Book Apocalypse: The Graphic World of Jack Kirby*. Charles Hatfield, professor of English here on campus, will lead the discussion and curated the exhibition. [*applause*] He teaches popular culture, graphic novel classes, and comics classes and, as I said, is in the English Department. So, I'm going to let him introduce the panelist—and thank you, panelists, for coming. Thank you all for coming, and we will see you later in the Gallery. [*applause*]

CHARLES HATFIELD: So, we're flying by the seat of our pants this afternoon. That seems appropriate somehow, given the energy and sense of release or escape that you so often see in the work of the great Jack Kirby. We're grateful to be able to mount an exhibition of Jack's work here at Cal State Northridge, and indeed to mount the largest exhibition of Kirby that this country has yet seen. It seems unlikely that Cal State Northridge should be the place, but why not? [*laughter*] And the answer as to how that came about has to do with the generosity of Jim Sweeters, our gallery director, who five years ago—just after meeting me—said, "Hey, how about a comics show?" I don't think Jim knew what he was in for, necessarily. But since that time, we've worked together to bring the *Comic Book Apocalypse* show into our Gallery space.

We have a jam-packed panel of Kirby experts—Kirby *thinkers*: artists and scholars and creators of all stripes. And we're just going to toss back and forth a few broad and, we hope, generative questions this afternoon. Many of the panelists are contributors to the catalog. I hope to introduce them quickly, succinctly. So I'll just start over here on my far left with L.A.-based artist Steve Roden. [*applause*] Steve is a painter. He's a maker of spaces, of installations. He's a sound artist. He has an exhibition ongoing now at the Pasadena Museum of California Art. He can be found online at *inbetweennoise.com*. He's also an avid collector of comics art.

Sitting next to Steve is artist, curator, writer, critic, experimental musician—you name it, Doug Harvey, who can be found online at *dougharvey.la*. [*applause*] Doug was, for more than a dozen years, the lead art critic at *L.A. Weekly*, and it was his writing about Jack Kirby's Fourth World that really brought him onto my radar perhaps 15 years ago, and we're pleased to have him among our catalog contributors.

Sitting next to Doug is my colleague and good friend, Ben Saunders from the University of Oregon. [*applause*] Ben is the founder of the Comics and Cartoon Studies program at the University of Oregon, which is this country's first undergraduate liberal arts degree program in comics studies—a first, and a program like no other. He's also a renaissance literature scholar, a pop music scholar, a scholar of comic books and of the superhero narrative, and the co-editor of our catalog, without whom I could do nothing. So, thank you to Ben. [*applause*]

To my immediate left, Adam McGovern, a prolific writer of cultural criticism and of comic books. You may have seen him at *hilowbrow.com* or other online critical venues. Among his comic book creations is a deliriously Kirby-esque collaboration with Paolo Leandri on the recent comic book published by Image called *Nightworld*, which is really funky and head-turning and great, so you should check that out. [*applause*]

To my right, from Indiana University-Bloomington is the art historian and artist, Andrei Molotiu, who is the founder of the newly formed center at IU for the study of comics and sequential art. His publications include *Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, which is the companion to his Getty exhibition he curated here in L.A. some years ago, and also the mind-boggling anthology called *Abstract Comics*. Andrei is the foremost authority and proponent of the abstract comic genre, or movement, and an incredible maker of sequential art in his own right. [*applause*]

And finally, on the far right of the table, from Stanford University, professor of film and media studies, Scott Bukatman: a fellow comics teacher, and, like so many here on the panel, another catalog contributor. Scott is the author of *The Poetics of Slumberland*, *Terminal Identity*, *Matters of Gravity*, the BFI Film Classics book on *Blade Runner*, and, forthcoming from the University of California Press, an amazing book called *Hellboy's World*. Scott Bukatman. [*applause*]

So let the record show Steve, Doug, Ben, Adam, myself, Andrei and Scott. More panelists than you can shake a stick at. So I want to start out with a brief question for every panelist, and I'll ask you (though I'm springing this on you all unexpectedly) to answer this as succinctly as you can: [tell us] about your first Kirby comics or Kirby art memory, or an early formative one that sticks in your brain. Whether it was delightful or confounding, whether you loved it or were troubled by it. If there's just something like that early in your experience that you can relate to us. Steve?

STEVE RODEN: Thanks. The first comic book I ever had as a child was from a babysitter named George Levitt, who was completely insane. When my parents left the house and left me alone with him, all kinds of crazy stuff happened. One of the things he gave me that first babysitting night was *Jimmy Olsen*... I think it was #145. It still has, for me, everything that I'm interested in in Kirby's work. It begins with three crazy monsters in the first three pages, and on the fourth page is a monster called "Angry Charlie", who looked like he was made of bubble gum. The images, for an 8-year-old, were so

Photos by John Morrow

dynamic, I had no idea what to do with them. I didn't read comics as a kid. I just tried to copy the pictures, but I did it terribly... That's how I became an artist. [*laughter*]

DOUG HARVEY: Yeah, *Jimmy Olsen*. Me too. I probably had seen Kirby's work before. I read... I definitely read *Silver Surfer* and *Fantastic Four*, but the first thing that hit me consciously was when Kirby took over *Jimmy Olsen*. It blew my mind because it was so strange. The clone of Don Rickles [*laughter*], hippies living in trees, and flying cars, and so on and so on. It was like suddenly someone was doing something with comics that was a whole world beyond what was already going on. It just seemed to open up... and then close down. [*laughter*]

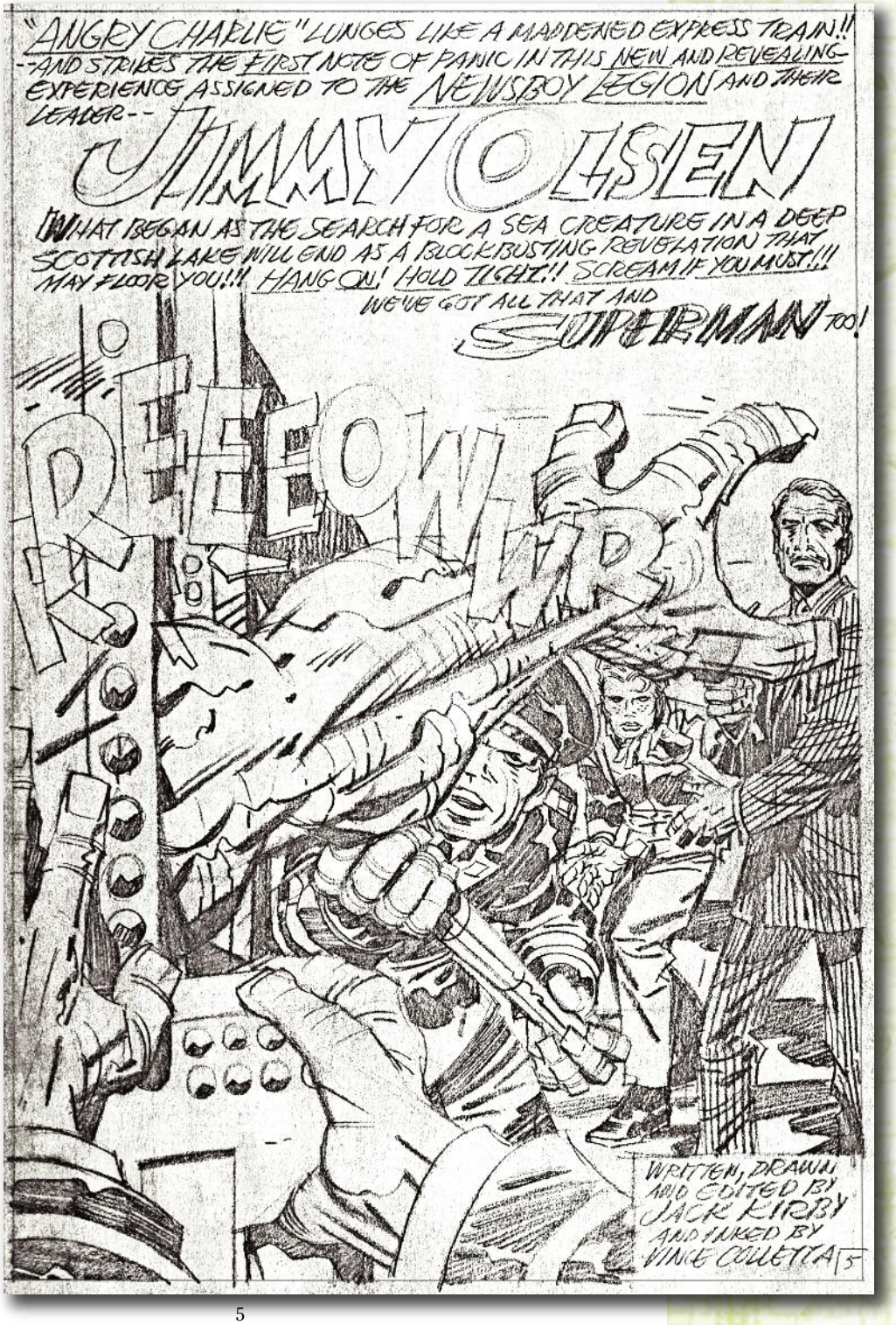
BEN SAUNDERS: I grew up in the U.K., so there was no access to American comics, or it was irregular and haphazard. But there was our British Marvel [magazines] and they were reprinting the '60s stuff. So, I couldn't tell you which particular story it was, but it would've been the *Fantastic Four*. The British comics were cheaper and produced in black-&-white, so my early memories of Kirby—and I think this is important in terms of my own connection to him—were that I was seeing the work at a larger size than the American comics, and always without color. There was something about the handling of the ink that made it very easy to fall into the page. So that would be it. I was very young. I'm thinking back to memories of Doctor Doom stealing the Silver Surfer's powers—those kinds of stories. That's probably my first Kirby encounter that I can remember.

ADAM McGOVERN: I think I was conscious of Kirby before I was acquainted with him. By which I mean, his style is so pervasive that it was instantly recognizable, and *definitive* of comics style. I remember, only now—I have a memory for the first time in like 46 years of envisioning a comic that I wanted to do that I know was patterned on the compositions of Kirby. You know, some hero kicking in the faces of some strangely arranged colonnade of Nazis, this kind of weirdly set up action. And I think... I'm not sure. I must have become aware of who he was—which guy was doing this stuff—with the Fourth World. And the things that stand out to me are, really, kind of like a civic education. I'm a writer, so I approach Kirby from a textual direction and it was kind of like my civic education. Like when Izaya talks about, "Where is Izaya, the servant of those he leads?" You know, all of [these] Nixon-era yearnings for a truer democracy. Or, like when Richard, I think it is, in "The Glory Boat" says, "I'm a conscientious objector, I'm opposed to all killing and violence," and Lightray says, "I know a place where everyone's like that." Kirby was showing me—*that's* the kind of future I liked Kirby showing me. A little afield of your question, but that was what made an impact on me.

HATFIELD: I can't remember when I wasn't reading Kirby. I used to say that *Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth* #32, which was a double-sized issue, was the first one I bought with my own money, my allowance money—which I didn't really earn, but my parents, bless them, gave me. Although I now realize I had a lot of Kirby memories prior to that and I don't know how that's possible. For example, there's a page in the exhibition from *The Demon* #14 which I can remember reading in front of the television at my grandmother's house. I

(previous page) The poster "Galactic Head" is available with your membership to the Jack Kirby Museum: www.kirbymuseum.org.

(below) Page 5 pencils from Jimmy Olsen *#145 (1972). This mag's editor thinks Angry Charlie is Jack's best monster design ever, and worthy of his own book (by Mike Mignola, maybe?).*



learned the word "doppelganger" from that page. [*laughter*] "Dopple-gang-er," sounding it out. So it seems like that stuff was always there, but became a particular passion of mine when I was old enough to run around, riding my bike, to go buy comics at the age of 10, and it became sort of a quartz vein in my head that stayed there from then on. Andrei?

ANDREI MOLOTIU: Actually I was hoping that Ben would rescue me from this because I seem to have come in a little later than everyone else to Kirby. I grew up reading French comics, and only by coming to America and only when I was about 18, 19, did I even deign to begin reading American comics when *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* and all that came out. I realized, my God, everybody's right. Before that, maybe I had seen one issue of *Spider-Man* and thought, "What's that compared to French comics?" My path took me circuitous ways, and I think I truly only began to appreciate Kirby at about age 30, or maybe a little later—my early thirties. So, I don't know if I have a single memory... perhaps *Sandman* #1, which has that amazing silent page? [*below*] It has five panels and was scripted by Joe Simon. Kirby rarely was that silent, but Simon wrote the silence for him. And five beautiful silent panels, and all of a sudden that is what struck me as "this is what comics can be," and it was amazing.

SCOTT BUKATMAN: It occurs to me that, while this probably isn't the first instance of it, I'm now noticeably the oldest guy on the panel. So my memories of Kirby go back a bit further. I was buying the *Fantastic Four* back not only in the 1960s, but around the #60s in the run of the series. And I bought quite a few comics at that time, as many as I could afford—there weren't as many comics then—and most religiously I bought the *Fantastic Four* and the Stan Lee/John Romita *Amazing Spider-Man* comics. At some point I became very aware of the fact that I was constantly re-reading the *FF*s in a way I was *not* re-reading the *Spider-Man*s, as much as I liked them. There wasn't as much for me on a second go-around on the *Spider-Man*s, but there was always something new in encountering the Kirby pages again. There was something inexhaustible about what was being opened up there, and that's been my primary engagement from that time on.

A more specific memory: When I was younger I went to comics conventions—I don't do that too much anymore—and in my teens my father wanted to know what they were about, so he came with me. He was dumbfounded by the whole experience, but there was a room where Kirby was exhibiting some of his recent DC work. This was just before *The Demon* came out. And I was walking around the room mesmerized by the artwork, but my father and Kirby, who were the same age, began telling war stories to each other. I don't remember any specific stories that they told. But Kirby was so happy to have a grown-up in the room. [*laughter*] I felt so glad that I could've provided that experience by proxy. [*laughter and applause*]

HATFIELD: So, I want to pitch a question and start with you first, Andrei, given the fact that your writing has been inspirational for the question—but I want to take the question to everyone.

From the point of view of the curator putting this show together, there's always been this tug-of-war between the comic *book* as a kind of hand-sized or intimate object—an object designed for reading—and comic *art*, as something that can fill a gallery and that can shape or define a gallery space, that can be spectacular. That can be on the walls, that seems to get a different kind of attention. You walk through a gallery; you may pay a different kind of attention than you would if the 7" x 10" comic book, for example, were in your hands. So, we're really dealing in our exhibition with work that was designed for comic books or comic strips. The great majority of pieces across the street in the exhibition were made for that purpose, so it's production art. It's not art that was primarily made for exhibition. It's production art, and there's some debate over what that means when you take production art and sort of wrench it from its original purpose or context and transpose it into a different context. So, I've thought about that productive tension between spectacle, or what I hope will be a spectacular gallery experience, and the *readability* of comics. And that's a question we face increasingly as comic strip and comic book art finds its way into galleries and into museums, the way it hasn't before. Now Andrei, you have written about this more often and more productively I think than other scholars of late, and Andrei has an essay entitled "Permanent Ink" that's available online that really speaks to these issues.* What is gained, and/or lost, by transposing comic books from the readable hand-sized form to the gallery wall?

MOLOTIU: Well, I've written about this so much and thought about it so much, I'll be very brief so that other people can talk about this. But two points I want to make. If you've ever seen a Michelangelo drawing in a museum, that was "production art." People did not begin appreciating *drawings* in their own right until the late 17th/early 18th century when people began collecting them. Actually, literally the collector market—the same as the collector market in original comic art—had a lot to do with that. And we can discuss the historical transformation, but it does begin transforming. I think we are at a point where what once was considered to be purely production art, as we know it—by it being given away or [discarded] in the production process or storage process and so on—begins bringing in a lot of money. Of course, when something starts bringing in a lot of money, it becomes much more valued. But there are a lot of other considerations. For example, there are more and more museum shows of comics. As comics are getting respectability, and therefore cultural institutions are taking notice and wanting to put on shows, a piece of comics art—a one-and-a-half or especially a twice-up of comic art—tends to have a wall presence that a comic book doesn't have. And also you have sort of the autographed hand of the artist, or at least the inker, on there, and therefore you can somehow relate to that work of art as if seeing the motion of the hand, rather than seeing it reduced in the printed comic. But I think from that point of view, in my mind, you end up focusing so much more on the visual and not seeing the creation of the comic as a consumable thing that provides a little quantum of merit, and then you move onto the next one, and the next one. In a way, it forces you to stand there and look at it. I was trying to read the comics in the gallery, and it's much harder to read a comic on the wall than to actually read it again in printed form.

And the last thing I was going to say is that, currently, there are more and more alternative and art comics creators who basically create as much for the wall as for the book. So I think that it goes hand-in-hand with this,

* *http://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2010/10/permanent-ink-by-andrei-molotiu/*

(previous page, bottom) The "silent" page from Sandman *#1 (1974).*

(previous page, top) This mag's editor also learned the word "Doppelganger" from Jack's Demon. *Wonder how many other kids out there did likewise?*

(above) Jack's storyboards for the Fantastic Four *1978 cartoon episode "Menace of Magneto." These are technically production art, since animators would take these and only use them as a guide when creating the final, more simplified cels that made the animation move.*

And Jack didn't spend as much time on these as on his normal comics pages—but he spent more time than he did when doing only layouts for other Marvel artists to finish in the 1960s. Does that make one any more or less "art" than the others?

At TJKC, *we feel that if Jack's hand touched the work, it's art—and it's all good. Comments, readers?*

you know. Gary Panter, the people at Fort Thunder, and so on. You know, Paper Rad [the art collective], who are creating comics with the intent of them being as much "museum comics"— "gallery comics"—as of them being book comics. From this point of view, comics is going [through] yet another transformation, same ways as maybe it went with the graphic novel.

HATFIELD: Doug and Steve, I'd like to toss this question over in your direction, given your experience, and then we'll have other people field the question as well.

RODEN: For me, it's a tough question. I think, you know, we are all talking about this as original art, or production art. [Should we be] calling it "production junk" or "production stuff?" But they're things that were drawn by human beings. Sure, seeing a single panel on a wall is not the same as reading/seeing a complete story. But as a visual object these pages can offer multiple stories or meanings.

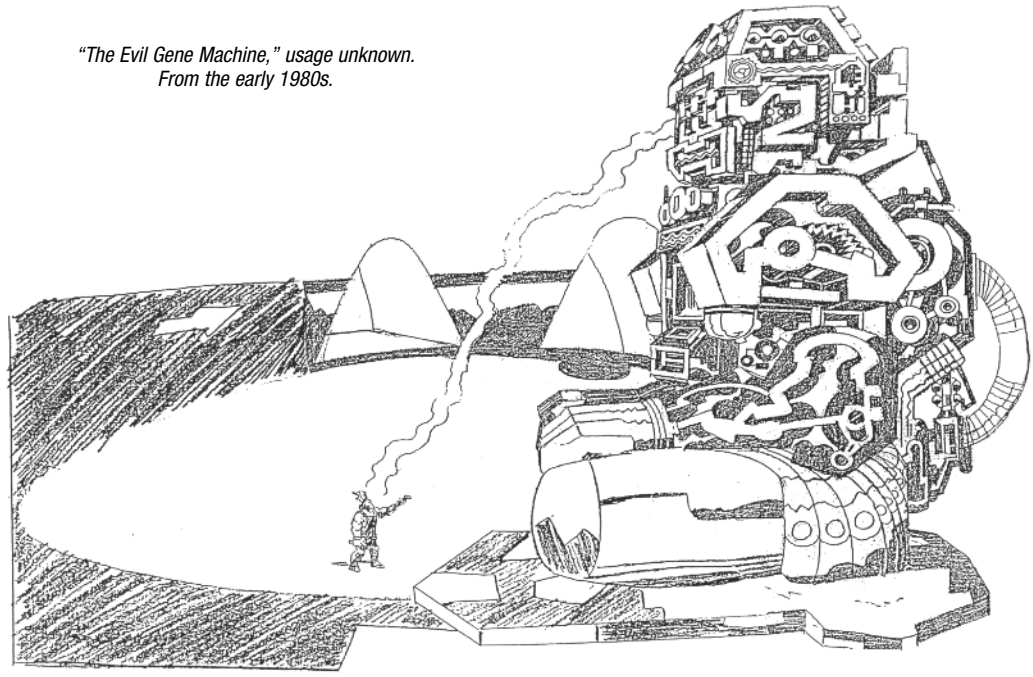
Certainly you'll have questions while you experience a lot of unbelievable views of the world, language, architecture... I mean, there is just so much going on in these things that they don't seem to be anything but art... I collect comic art, so obviously I'm invested in these objects, but they are also meaningful on their own. Like I said, I didn't read comics when I was a kid. So, obviously, even a single page evoked a lot of visual experiences...!

HATFIELD: Would you say that the gazing came before the reading for you?

RODEN: Absolutely. I didn't know much about comics when I was reading them as a kid, and I didn't know there were different inkers. I didn't know why certain characters looked different in different books in different people's hands. It's kind of a mess in a way for a kid. Like, Silver Surfer... [seeing] Kirby's Silver Surfer and then seeing John Buscema's Silver Surfer. They look so different. Who did this? Why is this like this? I didn't know any of that stuff until I was probably in my thirties—when I went back to childhood books and realized who the artists were that I responded to as a child. I am a person who has collected junk my entire life, and the value of something is the relationship I have with that object. I don't want to be hoity-toity, but [Walter] Benjamin talks about book collecting in that way, when he talks about the owner of an object having a deep relationship to that object. He says that a person lives in the object, and you know that relationship's tight. So when I pull out some of this art and look at it, I notice different things every time.

You know, we don't want to get into a definition of "art." Maybe Doug does [*laughter*], but I'm not going to touch that. But I don't see the difference. These are things that people made. Either you like what they made or you don't. They resonate or they don't. You know, they're objects, and you have to have some kind of relationship with them in some way. It's not just nostalgia. I have pages from books I never read; whatever hits you, just like music.

HARVEY: [To Roden] I like your last point on having pages from books you haven't read. I really don't like shows of text on the wall. I don't like [poster artist] Raymond Pettibon shows, comic art shows... I mean, I like them, but I'd rather read a comic book than see the art on a wall. But I think when the narrative gets fragmented and you have pages pulled from here and there, grouped together thematically, it allows you to shift your attention to the art rather than the narrative. Because I find reading comics, I often overlook the art. Even though I'm primarily a visual person, I'll get sucked into the story and sort of jump ahead without appreciating the subtleties of the artwork. I think that putting it in this kind of context where, except for that *Kamandi* story, everything else is pretty much chopped up...



"The Evil Gene Machine," usage unknown. From the early 1980s.

HATFIELD: We have two complete stories in the show. That might be me, the English professor who wants to encourage reading. [*laughter*] Although I myself can't read those stories in the gallery without my feet hurting, because it takes so long to stand and read them. But I wanted them to be there, so...

Ben has curated several comic art shows at the University of Oregon. He's curating one on EC Comics now. He's also an English prof like me but has curatorial experience that I lean on very heavily. Ben?

SAUNDERS: I think one of the interesting things about your question is that there is this tension between looking and reading inherent in the form. So it becomes aggravated by the gallery circumstance. But actually, and this is a point that in some respects I owe to Scott's work on *Hellboy*—a book I would recommend to everybody—one of the things that Scott points out in that book is when you see... you actually pointed this out in a lecture, where you had a comparison between a *Hellboy* battle scene and then a sequence from one of the movies. And the point was not to say the movies were not as good, but that they do... comics are essentially *about* tableau. Even when you're looking at a very dramatic action scene—you might be looking at one of these double-page Kirby spreads, or even a single-page spread like the opening of *New Gods*, which is in this show—you're looking at these massed ranks of armies that are *about to* engage in extraordinary battle. But if you turn the page too quickly to find out what is happening next, in some ways... Kirby wants you to *stop*, even at moments of high action, to absorb the action. I think it's something unique about the form. It's one of the things I really love about the form, and it's why—I've got nothing against superhero movies for example, but it's why I'd rather read comics than go to see films a lot of the time. Because the experience is different. Action happens in a different kind of way. It's the temporal unfolding. I think the gallery experience can actually show us that, and teach us something about what it means to read comics. We can learn that

when we read comics, we're *not* looking a lot of the time because of the way we're being dragged through the narrative.

Another piece about this—I just have to say this because it makes me mad—I think it's really a *crime* that it's taken this long for someone like Kirby to get the due that he's finally getting, and there's a lot more work that could be done and an awful lot more celebration that could be done. And this person gave us not only a visual storytelling vocabulary that has influenced hundreds of people, but he gave us what is a version of the 21st Century imagination. You can't walk into Walmart without finding Kirby images embossed on every imaginable surface. This isn't going to go away, folks. This stuff that mattered to people who read the comics—maybe these comics weren't even selling that well, like Fourth World in the '70s—the things you're exposed to when you're five, we've got a whole generation that is now being exposed to this stuff on a daily basis in a different format and they are going to want to know about the source. And they're going to realize the source for much of this is Jack. I think this is just the beginning, and if the big museums in the culture had invested in comic art a long time ago, there would have already have been a Kirby show at the MOMA. But because they don't own any of this stuff themselves—these institutions are frankly too corrupt to invest in artists they don't own. So, good for university museums. [*applause*]

HARVEY: I just want to add that I think that what you are saying is more an indictment of the art world and its claim to having some kind of authority to validate what Jack Kirby did, or any comic artist. It doesn't really carry through that way, and it's kind of an indication of the waning legitimacy of art world institutions rather than their taking time to catch up. I don't think there's any catching up to do. That's on its way out as a model of validating art.

McGOVERN: I, like perhaps many of us—at least who got hand-me-down comics from older siblings—I "read" comics as visuals before I had the ability to read text. And I remember imposing narrative and extracting meaning from, specifically, Kirby comics: *Captain America*s, *Thor*s. Even today—certainly Ben raises a great example of the opening panel of the *New Gods* where—and there's some artists today that I'll do this with as well, like when Erik Larsen did a recent issue of *Savage Dragon* that was all in double-page spreads—and there was not a lot of text, but I found my eye reading the details of the imagery because it was packed with incident. Yet there's kind of like a wavering partition for me between that looking and watching and the *reading* and watching. Interestingly enough, I find that for the stories that are complete in the gallery, I'm just picking out little details and phrases, like the *Kamandi* thing: there's this great scene where he's beating up this gladiatorial foe, and he goes—instead of cursing at him—he's going, "Stupid! Arrogant! Pampered, brutal little tyrant!" Which of course is all of Kirby's rage at the people who abused and exploited him, or who would not see him fulfilled—in the same way that people like Lichtenstein would just extract single definitive statements from comics. You know, the way that certain slogans or ideas will stick in our consciousness out of the stream of media.

To me, comics, even when I'm reading them in my hand, that kind of Pop Art headline is what sticks in my mind. I was quoting some of them in my previous answer. And the monumentality—I don't know. I think that intimacy places you in the scale of the monumental. I mean, when you're holding a comic in your hand it's filling up the world. You're immersed in it. And of course the trend in entertainment is [toward] smaller and smaller frames for things. So I don't think things are necessarily lost or gained because... I'm kind of reliving the monumental experience I felt from a Kirby panorama, whether I see it as a tiny panel in a page on the wall or blown up like the [gallery] murals are.

BUKATMAN: I think everybody on the panel has made really good points. What I want to talk about touches on a number of them. One thing you might get from the gallery wall and the original artwork is a sense of size and scale. Kirby drew big things. And to see the artwork at its original size is a little more overwhelming, more striking. In working on the *Hellboy* book, the question I asked myself was, "Can comics do the sublime?" Large-scale paintings by Church or Turner do the sublime really well—the overwhelming power of nature on a museum wall. Cinema does the sublime really well. *2001* and *Pacific Rim* do the sublime quite well. Comics though, to use Adam's word, are an intimate medium. You hold them in your hands. They don't seem to have that power to overwhelm that other media do. But the bottom line is that my first experience of the sublime *was* Jack Kirby—the *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* comics where concepts like "Ego, The Living Planet" and "Negative Zone" and "The Inhumans" were being unleashed on me, not to mention those photo collages where we go into another dimension and another realm of representation. Charles has written beautifully about the subject matter of Kirby's work and how it ties into the technological sublime, but it's also in the form: the way that Kirby would move from a six-panel page to a three-panel page to a full page to a double-page, and just really use the fixed scale of the comic, but vary the size of the panels in a way that opened up onto larger experience. So comics create a really unique experience of intimate sublimity. Not all do, but when the sublime is being deployed, it's a very intimate sublimity and quite unique. So there's something to seeing the art on a wall when it has breathing room and appears outside of its narrative context. But then there's also that extraordinary experience of reading. I'm very fond of both experiences.

MOLOTIU: Can I say something on this? Just one or two comments about this. One, it struck me from what Scott said, it's true that you

1960s fanzine illo.

need a kind of size [for the sublime], but another place we got the sublime from in the Romantic period was poetry. And again, poetry was found in tiny books in your hand.

BUKATMAN: [*snaps fingers*] Damn. Now I'll have to go back and edit my book.

MOLOTIU: [*laughter*] Sorry. [*laughter*] But secondly, I was trying to read the two stories on the wall. I was able to get through the *Kamandi* pretty well, but I was not able to get through the *Thor* one. And that had to do *a lot* with Stan Lee's words, which were so many of them on the page. And what struck me is that Kirby—even when he writes—he writes, so to speak, visually. I don't know that this makes sense, but somehow his words are of a piece with the visual progression of the comic itself. And while there's kind of a separation when reading the *Fantastic Four* or *Thor* or whatever, and you actually try to read the heavy captions—I counted one panel had twelve balloons—and you try to get all through that, and it really slows you down. Kirby usually uses fewer words, especially in the word balloons, and actually you get the speed of really going through the panels. And somehow, because you're moving so much faster, it almost becomes animated. You sort of see one visual composition where there's another visual composition, and so on, proceeding in the context of the page. And you have a very different graphic reading experience, in reading things that Kirby wrote and drew himself, rather than things he drew but were scripted or had dialogue by someone else.

HATFIELD: The way I would put this is that Kirby might draw up a story on the boards and have a character like Thor say, "Let's go!" and the end comic might say something like, "Tarry we here no longer, but let us leave forthwith!" [*laughter*] And that's cool in a way, but it also thickens the reading experience. I mean, one thing that's implicit in the exhibition, because there's a complete story from *Thor* in 1968 and then there's a complete story from the *Kamandi* series about five years later, is you can see how those different comics were produced. *Thor* was produced at Marvel through the office and under the editorship of Stan Lee, through a process that involved many more hands getting on the work, whereas *Kamandi* was produced in a relatively streamlined manner. And if you get a chance, look at those pages and compare and contrast them, see how much marginalia and how much, kind of, "dirt" there is "under the fingernails" of the *Thor* pages and the Marvel comics and how many hands have touched those, and then compare them to some of the ones that, as Andrei mentioned, were more nearly written or entirely written by Kirby himself. It's not to denigrate one or elevate the other, but they were made in different ways. You kind of see this in the exhibition.

BUKATMAN: I have a rejoinder to Andrei. It took me a couple of minutes to think of it. [*laughter*] Yeah, poetry and the sublime. Yes, check. But the language in comics rarely aspires to sublimity, to the evocation of the sublime, whereas the visual imagery of comics often does. I think it's on the visual level that comics most often aspire to the sublime. And one would think they might be hampered by their size and limitation of scale, and yet, as I was saying... [*laughter*]

McGOVERN: I much appreciated what Andrei was saying about

there being a visual character to Kirby's writing. And it really is true. It's an aestheticized text in, of course, his infamous overuse of quotation marks—hyphens—you know, he's wrestling with how to describe things, which he's only becoming aware of himself—these kind of fifth-dimensional concepts. And even with the deployment of text; the way that all of the Fourth World stuff and *Kamandi* chapters would start with this, you know, floating text over the first panel, like this kind of proscenium for the story. [*Editor's Note: See example above from* Kamandi *#6.*] But I also think Kirby was attempting the sublime in this kind of wording too, because he was grappling with a language for something we have no way to process yet.

HATFIELD: Adam, read this. This is from the opening first page of *New Gods* #1. It's the start of Doug's essay in the catalog. Just read that.

McGOVERN: "There came a time when the old gods died. The brave died with the cunning. The noble perished, locked in battle with unleashed evil. It was the last day for them. An ancient era was passing in fiery holocaust."

HATFIELD: Thank you. Great stuff I think.

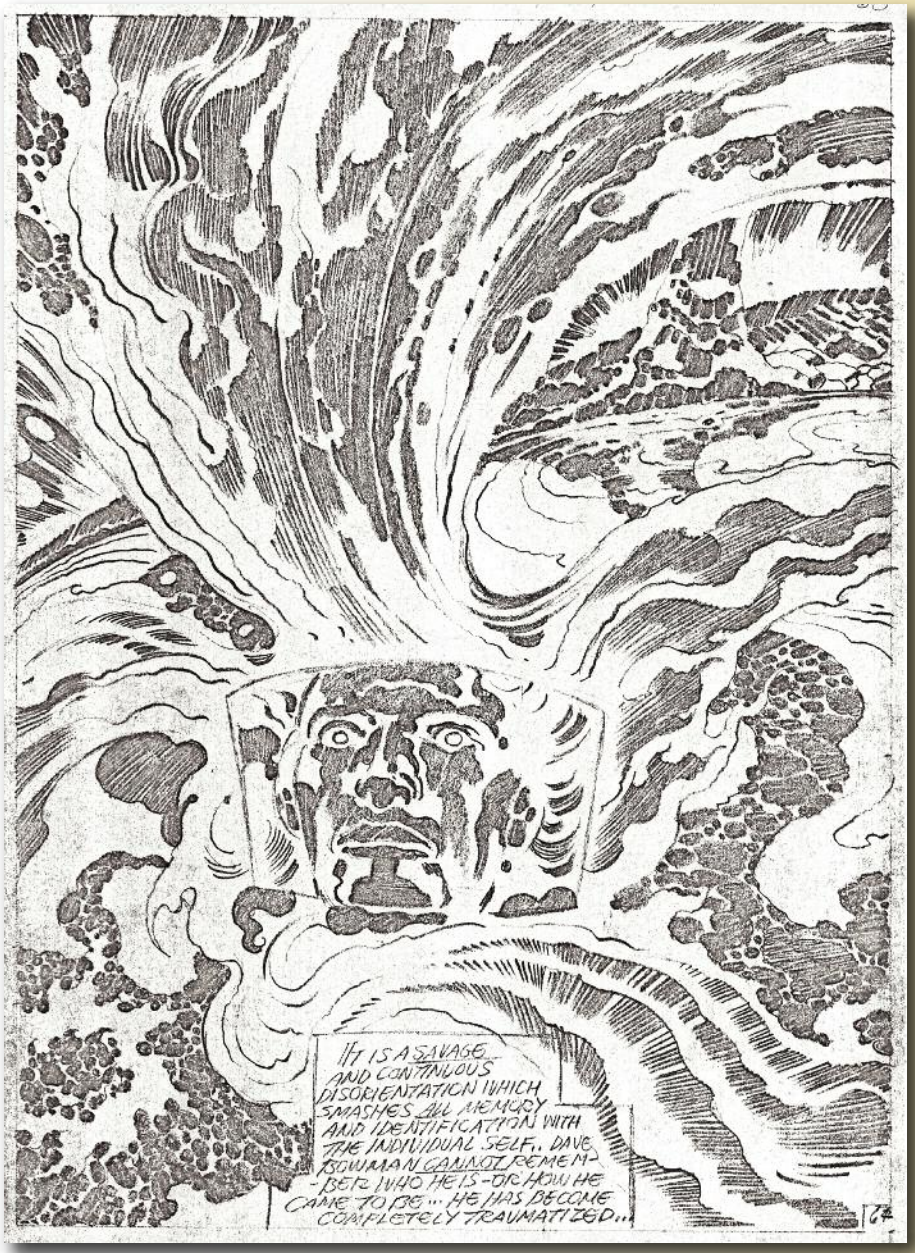
McGOVERN: And, it's the first page and it starts with "Epilogue," which I always loved. [*laughter*]

HATFIELD: Yeah. It's a comic that begins with the word "epilogue" and then everything moves forward from there. [To Scott:] I want to go onto something you mentioned specifically, and it's one of the things we're fortunate to have in the exhibition. We do have five of these collages that Jack Kirby created. Scott has written about them eloquently in the catalog. Steve and I have discussed them at length, because [to Steve] you're a collector and great admirer of those. I was asked by an interviewer if the collages were just a sideshow to the main event, or if I saw something really that was crucial in those. We have five collages on the wall. Four of them are actually, once again, production art. That is, they were used for comic books. One of them is a piece that's never seen publication anywhere, and I was given to understand that Jack Kirby made a lot of these at home in his, what, "copious" spare time? [*laughter*] Drawing and writing 80 to 100 pages of comic book narrative a month was not enough? But he kept a morgue file of clippings around, and as gifts to family or as exercises for himself, he made these things, unbelievably, while he was not working for pay. And I hope that you've had a chance to look at those or will look at them this afternoon. But starting over there with you Steve, I wanted to ask you, what you glean from those—what kind of affinities to other artists, or inspirational elements, do you see in those? Or why those are particularly fascinating. I don't see them as a sideshow; I see them as somehow central, but I'm at pains to explain why.

RODEN: Because they seem to test the visual language of the book. You turn the page, and suddenly everything isn't made up of lines anymore. It's made up of images. I didn't remember seeing those as a kid, but maybe about five years ago I started to look at some of my childhood comic books and looking at stuff on the Internet and I found an image of one of Jack's collages and I was like—well, if I wasn't in this group of people I'd say something else, but "Holy cow!" right? And I didn't remember them, and I hadn't heard anyone talking about them. I didn't know they existed. And so I found an image on the Internet, and then I began to look into the history of the collages and the books. You know some of them were pretty early, and they just got me really excited. I'm really interested in artists who stray—who have a central kind of practice that moves around... well, I'm a painter, but I also work with sound, I collect stuff. I've done all kinds of different things and I think to see someone like Jack stepping away from what his audience knew... My discovery of these experiments meant a lot. And he was such an experimental draftsman, and then to see him experimenting... I mean the collages are very complex and there are tons of little pieces and bits of things, and I think the idea of him trying to integrate those into the books is so interesting, because you can't really talk about them as just frivolous things [as some have said] he made on Sundays in his studio. That is bunk, since he tried many times to insert them into his narratives. For me, I had never really seen anything so unconventional in a regular comic. And so, I think they're incredible. I mean, Victor Hugo made drawings with tea, and there's a whole history of people doing secondary work that at times is just as interesting, if not more so, than their primary practice. So, I was just completely obsessed with them when I first discovered them. I think they're really underrated.

HATFIELD: We actually have, I think, the last collage that was published in a comic book in Kirby's lifetime in the show [from *The Hunger Dogs*] because Steve loaned it to us. So, you should check that out. [*applause*] Scott, you want to pick that up?

BUKATMAN: Just quickly about the collages. First of all, one of the reasons you might not have noticed them, reading them in the books, is because they were so badly printed. For me as a kid, these were the pages to sort of... muddle through rather than the ones that really hit. However, when better reproduction came along—or when I saw photographs of the original art—that's when they really blew me away. Then you begin to realize how often, especially in the '70s, he was using it to represent worlds beyond our own and dimensions beyond our own. And what's fascinating about that is in his *2001* [Treasury Edition]—which I liked immediately because it was bigger, so it was more immersive—in that one he uses photo collage in the most banal ways to just put the staid photographs of the various



Rather than use collage, Jack actually drew the pivotal special effects scene in his 1976 adaptation of 2001.

spaceships together. But in the "Beyond the Infinite" sequence of the film, where Doug Trumbull's special effects sort of take us out of the realm of representation, Kirby lets loose in drawing. He uses his drawing as the mode of entry into another dimension, rather than a collage, in that work. He inverts his own strategy. It just intrigued me.

HARVEY: I just wanted to throw a couple of ideas out, one about "the sublime," just to reactivate that. Illuminated manuscripts and Kirby's *horror vacui* show that the sublime can come from small, intricate, dense information networks, if you shift your attention so it becomes a larger space through contemplative attention. And I also think there's something sort of fundamentally collage-y about Kirby's entire approach to writing and drawing, as well as doing collages. I think what you're saying, Andrei, about his language being visual, I think backs that up. There's sort of a discontinuity where Stan Lee is very discursive and [*jabs finger emphatically*] sort of "on it" and... [*makes droning jabbering noise*]. Kirby sometimes seems to shift tense and I don't know what the hell he's talking about [*laughter*], but it doesn't matter. And then on another level with the pastiches he gets into in this period, pulling together *Planet of the Apes* and all these other different cultural references and things is sort of, I think, a way of understanding storytelling and visual art and communication that's rooted in, sort of, the collage revolution in the 20th century.

HATFIELD: I've always had this impulse to refer to it as Postmodern, because people say that, but it seems almost like a violation of the spirit to apply that word—which Kirby doesn't need for our appreciation, but yet, he's like the mix master *par excellence*. He's here, there and everywhere.

MOLOTIU: If I may make one quick point about that. In my article in the catalog I talk about a drawing by Kirby, but if you actually look at the drawing itself—I mean, we think of Kirbytech, which basically looks like circuit boards. Almost as if those had been drawn and collaged into it. There are parts of his interesting buildings that look basically taken from blinds, like window blinds. [*laughter*] And there are shadows which you can see look like Holstein cow markings. You can kind of see, cut down, the various little elements that he's using, and the little bit of collage element to the way he actually builds cities and machines and so on. Which again, you sort of see it in the collages, where he basically takes a washing machine or something and that becomes a propeller or a jet on a spaceship or something. You kind of see the same procedure in the actual drawings.

SAUNDERS: I just think the collage analogy that Doug was coming up with is very productive. I think Kirby's just... he's associative creatively in a Shakespearean way. By which I mean the gift is enormous but I think it's very instinctive. And I don't mean that in a... Kirby gets patronized a lot by people who ought to know better. I recently read a comment from Art Spiegelman where he said that he was finally starting to appreciate Kirby's "primitivism," or something like that. This is a belated acknowledgment that maybe there's something there, even if "that idiot didn't know what he was doing." [*light laughter*] And I don't mean it that way. I don't mean Kirby isn't a thoughtful creator. I think he is, but I don't think theory particularly interested him because he's driven by other forces. A lot of the time he would probably define it commercially...

BUKATMAN: Driven by deadlines.

SAUNDERS: Yes. The desire to make money to feed people. Clearly that's a cover story after a while. The amount of pages he's producing... There's a way in which his foot has been on the gas for so long that he doesn't know how to let it up. When you read something like *Kamandi* and you see that there's sort of a *Planet of the Apes* knock-off, but then he decides, "Oh, this week I'm just going to do the story of *King Kong*. Except it's not really the story of *King Kong*, because the person in the Fay Wray position is actually going to be Kamandi. But I'm not really going to think about what it means to flip the gender here, I'm just going to do it and see what happens." And then at the end, is it funny or is it pastiche by the end when the big ape falls? 'Cause there's no way it's a surprise. You know you're reading *King Kong* by three pages in. But when the ape falls and says—

HATFIELD: "Tiny hurt." [*laughter*]

SAUNDERS: "I hurt," and "can't play—with—you—no more," and you feel it *here*. I don't take the Shakespeare comparison lightly. I think there are ways in which... You don't have to work with the conscious intent to super-saturate the thing that you are doing with all of these symbolic meanings, for them to be there. They end up being there anyway. Just because the creative process is—because the faucet was just open and the culture is coming out. And Kirby's influences just come out. The experiences come out in this fantastical, very genre-driven, still maybe kind of a children's medium, way. There's *nothing else* like it. So it's endlessly fascinating and I think collage is actually a pretty good metaphor for it.

McGOVERN: Speaking of intuition and the sheer pleasure and wonder of these things, when those collages were being done, I was too young to be dropping acid, so they were my psychedelia. [*laughter*] Mind-blowing, strange things that I associated with things like sequences in *Yellow Submarine* and stuff like that. I know it's not uncommon to say that Kirby was anticipating Photoshop, and like, "Oh, what would he have done with it?" The collages clearly show him straining against the expressive limits of his medium—though there's something about those limitations that I find really illuminating. I mean the flatness with which things are applied is almost like the best we can see something from a higher dimension. Thus, it speaks to Kirby's sense of there being other realities and just the way... now that I think back, I really liked coming upon those because they'd have these weird pastels. Even some of the printing flaws that we were talking about seemed to aid that. The fact that you're flung from this four-color universe to this weird, fake newspaper look, and it's Kirby reaching into the broader world of media and our visual and conceptual experience of those times—like they've fallen into a universe of Kirby's cut-up magazines.

MOLOTIU: Why did he never do a collage comic from beginning to end?

HATFIELD: Mark Evanier tells us the Negative Zone, which is a plot point in the *Fantastic Four* series, was conceived with this in mind. Initially, the idea behind the Negative Zone was that it would only ever be rendered in collage. That idea lasted for about one page—[*laughter*] a beautiful page, right?—because the production standards of comic books, or just the production line at Marvel, could not tolerate this, but he at one time had a notion that he would have whole sequences, stories or chapters that would be set in this... I mean the usual answer given was that it was just too hard production-wise.

MOLOTIU: And was it more time consuming for him to do a collage page than doing a drawing page?

HATFIELD: I know a lot of people when I was young viewed these as "cheats." Like he didn't have to draw a page. That's seems silly to me. I had an experience walking through the gallery with one of our painting instructors here at CSUN who had seen some of the work when he was young. Someone who practices abstract painting, teaches it, and he was sort of reconnecting—or just learning what this stuff looked like—and we walked through the gallery together. He really looked at the collages particularly and said, "Oh, his visual language is the same in the collages as in the drawings"; something, frankly, difficult for me to see, because I've been reading the comics for so long. I said, "Yeah, you're right." And he said, "What, did he spend all of his time in this sort of visual world in his own head?" I said, "Yes. He did. [*laughter*] I think he did." We usually hear the production impediments were the problem there. I always thought they looked cool myself, in the comics.

(previous page) Kamandi *#7 pencils (1973). (above) Much better collage reproduction was possible by 1983's* Captain Victory Special *#1.*

I want to divert to a different issue. I had a delightful experience a few weeks ago when one of the CSUN Arts Council volunteers here started following me around the gallery. Two of my colleagues had come in—folks that I knew from my college—and I was showing them around some of the work, and one of our volunteer docents from the Arts Council, whom we had been speaking to earlier in the day, said, "Is this a guided tour?" and joined in. I had the longest conversation with her. She said she had never seen comics of this type. She had no knowledge of comic books. She was encountering this work for the first time, and she said to me—with reference to one or two or more images in the gallery—"He's really drawn to the dark side, no?" [*laughter*] And I thought, "Yeah, but let me show you this touching page with a baby over on the other wall." She asked me, "Does it not depress you?" I said, "Well, no. And it didn't when I was ten years old either. It excited me." But it made me think about the various claims people make about Kirby—his biographers and his fans. For some, he's an eternal optimist. He's sort of an always sunlit kind of personality, because hope is part of what he deals in. I don't know that I necessarily read the comics that way, and I wonder if among the kind of works we pulled into the gallery—if any of you have a "read" or response to that. Is he Utopian? Dystopian? Is there a vast yawning darkness under your feet when you read them? Is there a brightness? Do any of you have thoughts on that?

MOLOTIU: [*chuckles*] I just heard Glen Gold talk about this in the gallery, so... [*points to crowd*].

HATFIELD: Glen—yes? [*Glen is in the audience; greetings are exchanged.*] Glen David Gold: novelist, catalog contributor, and lender to the show. A big help. Thank you, Glen. [*applause*]

(below) From Forever People *#7 (1972), the young still respect their elders—in this case, Abe Lincoln. But were Mark Moonrider and Beautiful Dreamer on their way to save him when the police stepped in?*

(next page) Jack finally found a way for fish-out-of-water Flippa Dippa to use his scuba skills, in Jimmy Olsen *#144 (1971).*

GLEN DAVID GOLD: [*from audience*] My own feelings about Kirby, optimism or pessimism, is that I think they are flip sides of the same coin. I think it depends on... The essay I wrote in there is called "The Red Sheet." It's about his World War II experiences and about how he brought Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to *Captain America*. The original essay I wrote was way too long. For the first time in my life, I cut something down. At one point in World War II, he talks about when he came out at Omaha Beach, that's when he understood that there was a God. And then later in the same war, he understood there was no God. So it was as if it was the flip side of violence, and one side was affirmation to him of there being some sort of guiding light, and at the same time, other types of violence made him think there was none. So I think actually what he was, was a fully-rounded, mature person who understood that sometimes there was cause for optimism and sometimes causes for extreme pessimism.

McGOVERN: I think he almost had a kind of Buddhist understanding of, like, destruction being necessary for regeneration. He deals so much with youth and affirming the youth culture of the times in books like *The Forever People*. I know there is this one opening sequence, in *Forever People* #7, where this council of juniors is appealing to Highfather to reverse some decision of his, and the caption says that on New Genesis, "the young have a voice." So he's very much endorsing the 18-year-old vote and other opportunities for participation in society for youth. And I think he really saw... it was a generational story, the Fourth World. He saw those who came after him as the ones who could benefit from what he had fought for. Kind of... I don't want to go so seriously as to liken it to in [Spiegelman's] *Maus* where Artie's shrink tells him that he's the true survivor, not Vladek, but I think Kirby had that conception that he had fought up to a certain level and there were others who would enjoy the fruits of this. So he was kind of entropic in conceiving of his own fate, but optimistic for subsequent generations.

HATFIELD: Do you remember this bit where Highfather—he's kind of a Moses-like patriarch—and he tells Orion, the fierce warrior, before they have sort of a war council, or before they talk about serious matters, he says, "First, Orion, we bow to the young." They sort of bow to this group of children that are there; "We bow to the young because they represent the future." And then the plot moves on from there, but it's a very telling moment. Anyone else have thoughts in response to Glen or to the question?

BUKATMAN: I just want to footnote Glen's point, which is a really good one. But to say that Kirby also didn't polarize good and evil—it wasn't like a Manichean dichotomy that just was inviolate. In the *New Gods* saga, which we have been referencing a lot today for obvious reasons, if you've read it, the main character Orion is the son of the darkest villain in all of Comicdom. But he is living among the peaceful people, and Mister Miracle, the hero of another book, is the son of the good, Utopian society who was forced to grow up in this dystopia. So this sense of crossing over, of things not being purely one or the other, I think is really at the core of at least his most interesting characters, if not a whole cosmology.

HARVEY: Maybe George Lucas's whole cosmology. [*laughter from the panel*]

McGOVERN: Actually I'd like to add one thing too. People oversimplify the Fourth World as being, quote, "about Good and Evil." Even Doug Wolk has done this. But it was really about Control versus Free Will, and Free Will can lead to a lot of mistakes and itself can lead to evil, but Kirby had the nuanced perspective of people having the choice and hopefully making the right one.

HATFIELD: Shall we entertain some questions from the people who are here? [*to audience member*] Yes, please.

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE: You're talking about whether or not Kirby is an optimist or pessimist. Could another word for him be "potentialist"? For example, he tends to lean both towards the pessimistic and the optimistic, showing what a better world could be like and also showing how others perceive the natural world to be currently. So would it be accurate to suggest that maybe he's demonstrating potentials for one side or the other?

McGOVERN: I like that a lot, because so much of what he was doing in the '70s was a critique of the society he saw around him. I mean Mark Evanier, his biographer, has talked about how people would say, "Who is Darkseid?" and he would say, "Well, it would vary. Sometimes he was Nixon, sometimes he was Martin Goodman," [*laughter*] or whatever was scarier. But clearly there is always an implication of what could be better. Like when Lightray says he knows a place where everyone is non-violent. New Genesis was always put up as the example of what we should be, and more subtly, of course, he had "The World That's Coming" in *OMAC*, which was ostensibly very sleek and cool, but is actually completely cold—something that he was afraid of. That's probably where he thought we *were* going, and New Genesis probably where he felt we *should* be going, but the kernel was there. I agree with you.

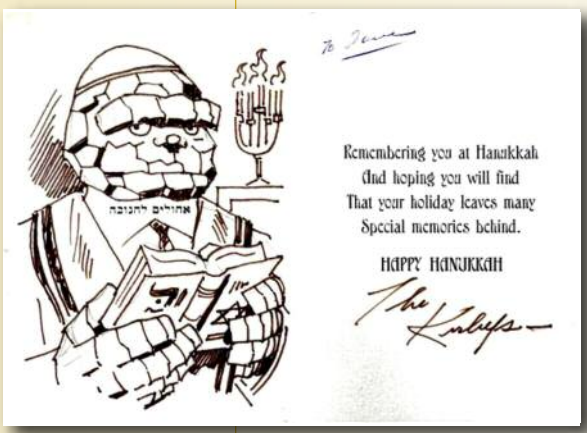
HATFIELD: Others? A response to that question, or...? José?

JOSÉ ALANIZ [*from audience*]: I came very late to Kirby. In fact it was work that really didn't speak to me as a kid and I kind of pondered why that is, and this has been illuminating. But I'm curious as to how you guys feel about Kirby's engagement with his own times, particularly that period in the '70s. You've referenced some of this, but in particular his treatment—maybe utopian, maybe dystopian—of diversity. For example, Ben, you alluded to kind of doing a transgender move without pursuing its logical ends in some sense. In particular, his treatment of racialized kind of types and how there's this wonderful kind of sense of how Kirby is very much ahead of his time, but there's also these weird retrograde kind of elements in Vykin The Black or Flippa Dippa and stuff like that. I'm fascinated by what you guys think about that side of Kirby in the '70s. Was this

a place that's maybe more open to a critique?

HATFIELD: There's a character in the Fourth World [named] Sonny Sumo, and he's sort of a badly orange-colored Asian brickhouse of a man. He is a Sumo wrestler and he really is built like a house. On one hand, this is a complete cliché, right? "Sonny Sumo"—Kirby decides to introduce an "Asian" character. On the other hand, there's something cosmic and sort of beyond comprehension about Sonny Sumo. He's got a cosmic secret in his brain. He's a character of great nobility. He's a character that's got inside him whatever it is that the bad guy, Darkseid, wants. But Sonny himself is really like an undiluted vision of the good, and to me that's sort of the textbook example of that—when a character seems at first blush maybe even a little embarrassing, or a very dated kind of character, but there's a sense that this character is bearing around inside him something larger than everybody else. It's kind of hard to describe unless you read those comics. So realism's got nothing to do with it, but there's a sense in which Kirby's trying to exalt this character, and if he had his druthers or if there had been an opening in the schedule or if DC had asked, he would have cooked up a *Sonny Sumo* comic book. This is kind of how the Black Panther originates—the same kind of spontaneous response to the times. Anyone else on that question?

McGOVERN: Yeah, Kirby I think of as definitely transitional, but he went further than a lot of comic creators of his generation. I mean, he was vocally remorseful about stereotypes that he participated in in Golden Age comics in ways that it took Will Eisner, supposedly much more sophisticated, decades longer to come to terms with. The signature story for me is "Mile-A-Minute Jones" from *The Losers*, which was not cosmic but was, you know, war stories, and it's about this Jesse Owens-type figure who ends up in a race with the now-Nazi German he faced in the Olympics. There's this one scene that really struck me and I didn't realize why at the time, as a kid reading it, where they end up in a race again, and it's like a white line that gets them through a minefield that they're kind of hallucinating as the old lines on a track where they first met as allies. And Jones says, "I'll show you that a Black man can win!" And at the time I thought, "Wow, this is pretty un-theoretical" and basic, but I realized Kirby was approaching race with a rawness—that it really is a conflict between people with unequal rights—in ways that a lot more self-conscious writers, like Denny O'Neil, were really kind of twisting themselves into knots [over] and being self-congratulatory or inadvertently insulting, where Kirby had that direct sense of conflict. He knew it from when he was brawling with other ethnic groups that weren't him on the Lower East Side. So I think he had an honest conception of it, but was very transitional in terms of being fully enlightened about it.



SAUNDERS: This is a really good question—and it's a difficult one, I think. I'm very acutely conscious that we all seem to be over-forty white guys sitting here [*audience laughter*], and I think it's something we really tried to address in the catalog, actually. We were self-conscious about trying to make sure we had some articles by women and articles by people of color in the catalog, because my own belief is that—I'm a practitioner of a certain kind of ideological and political criticism, and I also came of age in an era of increased awareness of the vital importance of considering questions of difference when engaging in critical work. And at the same time I have a sufficiently residually humanist sort of faith, as unfashionable as it is, that there are artists who can speak to everybody, and I want to believe that Kirby is one of those artists. I think that he didn't like bullies. I think that he had a deep investment and interest in the experience of being, or being made to feel, marginal. I think that his own deep conflicts around this are apparent in his own renaming himself. Joe Simon tells this story about confronting him with "Jack Kirby" as a name, saying, "Are you ashamed to be identified as Jewish?" And Kirby, almost not understanding, is saying, "What? You don't like 'Jack Kirby' as a name?" And not getting it. And then you read about... The more I learn about his life, what I see—especially the relationship with Joe Simon is a very clear version of it—is this is a man who consistently did not recognize his own worth. Kirby, consistently throughout his whole career, was underpaid and felt like he needed someone like Joe in the early days to sort of negotiate the business angle of things, because he just wanted to get down to the business of drawing. He bristled at the suggestion that he had changed his name because of some embarrassment over his own Jewishness, but he changed his name. Because there is a—there was a sense in which "Jack Kirby" could do anything. Jacob Kurtzberg, I don't know that he can do what "Jack Kirby" can do. There's a Woody Allen line from one of the later, well, one of the middle period movies now. A character accuses him of being a self-hating Jew and he says, "Don't say that! I hate myself, but not because I'm Jewish." [*laughter*] And I think that there's an aspect of that in Kirby's own personality. That Kirby absolutely was not at all ashamed of his Jewishness, but he was nonetheless, at some level, ashamed of who he... he felt worried that he didn't measure up.

HATFIELD: Well, it was a class thing, right?

SAUNDERS: It's a class thing.

HATFIELD: He would say something like, "I looked up to Joe because Joe was a middle-class guy and I didn't know any middle-class guys when I grew up."

SAUNDERS: Even knowing how to order things in a restaurant—that kind of insecurity. I think that that part of him, when it wasn't a source of bitterness and insecurity, was a source of empathy and relation. And I think we can see all these things in the end are relative. Even when the *Fantastic Four* is about a New York that doesn't seem to have any ethnicities in it, there are these moments of identification. This is an anecdotal thing from Tom Orzechowski, who says when he grew up in Detroit and went to a mostly Black school and was friends with a lot of kids, they bonded over *Fantastic Four*, and the character a lot of his Black friends liked the best was the Thing. Now there's both tragedy and power there. It's a tragedy that a community can be so underrepresented in the culture that you identify with the rocky orange monster, because you never actually get to see anyone who looks remotely like you. So on one hand it's kind of criminal, and not something to celebrate. On the other hand, Kirby was thinking about what it meant to really look different and to feel isolated and regarded as... There's a long history in the racist culture of this country of making monsters out of people who look different. Kirby's latching onto that, running with that and using it. So I think within the context of his own historical moment, there's no doubt in my mind if Kirby had lived, that he would be on the same side as all the rest of us on these progressive issues.

MOLOTIU: Well, Kirby identified with the Thing. He basically had a self-portrait as the Thing. So he identified with the monster.

HATFIELD: Look for the story called "Street Code" in the gallery, which shows Jack, in his sixties, recalling what it was like 60 years before to be a poor kid on the streets of the Lower East Side, which

was one of the most crowded neighborhoods on Earth at that time. A place of real privation and struggle, and you can really get a sense of that marginality. You had a question?

DAVID SCHWARTZ [*from audience*]: A comment actually; some thoughts. My name is David Schwartz. I knew Jack. I knew Jack well, for about ten years. The thing I wanted to add to what you guys are saying is that first and foremost, when it came to his work, Jack was a storyteller. Even when he drew pictures on his wall that were display pieces, if you asked him what the picture meant, he would go into some lengthy story explaining everything about the picture. Now whether that was something by design or just because you asked, he was going to do so. He was always thinking, in a sense. He didn't drive. Basically his wife Roz drove, because there's a story about in Thousand Oaks, he was driving once down the street from where he lived, and he was thinking of some story and ran into a police car [*laughter*] that was parked. It was *parked.* [*harder laughter*] And so Jack didn't drive because he was constantly thinking of things. And when you were talking about how Sonny Sumo and the different characters that were at first simplistic, but also had way more to them when you actually explored the characters—the thing about Jack's work, in my opinion, is that it had real depth. So you could appreciate it on all sorts of different levels. And I think that's also part of the reason it sustains itself so well, as all of us have grown up. Because as children, we were able to read it on one level, and then as adults we can re-read it and go, "Oh my gosh! There's so much more here than we had originally thought."

And my last point is that Jack really revered—or "revered" may be the wrong word—Jack really was good with kids. What happened was in the '60s and '70s, when he was doing, as you guys said, all of these pages, people would find their way to his house because he was Jack Kirby, and people admired him. And instead of just cursory, "Hello, how are you?", he and Roz, his wife, they'd invite these kids in, feed them... and then all of a sudden kids are coming up from San Diego that helped found the San Diego convention. He put them in the *Jimmy Olsen* book. So he's got these kids coming up to his house who were in this club, who he's not only entertaining, he's taking time away from his work, et cetera, and then he puts them in the comic book. I mean, he was really good with that kind of making everyone family. And that's just part and parcel of who he was, and I think a lot of that is represented in *The New Gods* and *Forever People*. It's just very well represented.

HATFIELD: Sir? You want to build on that?

MAN IN AUDIENCE: Yeah. I wanted to expand on that too. I used to work for Malibu Comics, which was in Thousand Oaks, and Jack Kirby actually made a trip to our office and had toured our office, and he invited the whole art department to his house. And every week, up until maybe about a week before he passed away, we would go to his house, and he would just tell us stories. And that was our thing on Wednesdays. We would go to the comic book store and then we would go to his house for lunch. Roz would make us lunch and we would just kind of hang out there and he would tell us stories, stories about everything. And he would even give us the artwork of his pages. But then you'd have Roz standing there right at the front door... [*laughter*] "No. You can't leave with that." That's what he used to do. And he always welcomed us in, until towards the end when Roz said, "He's not feeling good. You guys'll have to come back next time." And that's how it was for us. The whole six months to a year I was at Malibu, from '93 to '95, we would all do that. That was really a fun time in my life, too. On what he just said about Jack welcoming everybody into his house, he did that for everybody, and we would have at least ten of us over to the house, and we would sit there and he would talk and we would just listen, you know. And then we went back to work all hyped and stuff, so that was a good period.

KEVIN DOOLEY [*from audience*]: Something that has barely been touched on—a little devil's advocate thing here. Kirby's Fourth World was just amazing. I loved it when I first read it. I got to be honored to assistant edit on *Mister Miracle* and write *Mister Miracle*. But when it was first posited that we restart *New Gods* and *Mister Miracle*, we were told by the Powers That Be that Kirby's DC work would never sell. And indeed if you look at *New Gods* and *The Forever People*, they didn't even last a year. Some people have averred that he never really sold well on his own, by himself—that he always needed someone else in order to sell well. And that just freaked me out. "What do you mean? But this is the *New Gods*! This is Kirby—how can you say that?" Unfortunately, it bears out that it didn't sell well and I'd love the panel's thoughts on that.

BUKATMAN: I just have a quick response. You could see that as someone who was not as much in touch with the comics buying public as the people who he collaborated with were, perhaps. But you could also make the case, which is borne out by this show, this panel and all of this, that it demonstrates his idiosyncrasy. It demonstrates the way in which he was true to some internal sense of what he wanted to do. And if that wasn't selling, I'm sure he wasn't happy about that, but I also don't think that the ultimate goal was to figure out ways to boost his sales.

DOOLEY: But the other point is that *Fantastic Four* sold so well with Kirby and Lee. People said he didn't sell well on his own.

HATFIELD: When we think about comic books, we think about something where the sales figures become the source of validation. All of us play this game, especially in Los Angeles where we watch the box office receipts of movies we want to do well and see whether they do—whether the receipts accord with our tastes or judgment, as if those numbers are some kind of referendum on our tastes. Some kind of validation of our tastes. I mean, *New Gods* didn't sell *Fantastic Four* numbers, but it still outsold, I bet, almost any comic book published today, forty-odd years later. So these things are kind of relative to context. And we see how generative—it's funny how DC cancelled *New Gods* and *Forever People* within less than two years, and then within five years sought to revive them—and sought to

(above) Kirby, the Thing, and Joe Sinnott in a mid-1970s photo by David Folkman. Jack apparently felt Ben Grimm was Jewish, based on this Kirby family Hanukkah card (previous page) drawn for David Folkman. In 2002, Jeffrey Weiss wrote a wonderful article about the Thing (and Jack's) Jewish heritage for The Dallas Morning News. *You can read it at: http://www.beliefnet.com/News/2002/09/Comic-Faith-The-Things-Religion-Revealed.aspx*

revive them again... and again... and again, often without much long-term success. Doug?

HARVEY: I just wanted to point out how with the Fourth World, I think the only sort of vaguely conventional superhero was *Mister Miracle*, who had a superhero name and some powers a typical adolescent might think were cool, but with *Jimmy Olsen* and the Newsboy Legion and then *The Forever People* and *New Gods*, it was like, "How many of them *were* there? They're gods?" They were all very... they weren't, you know, Invisible Girl or whatever. So I think maybe Kirby was deliberately trying to expand the mythological vocabulary of the superhero genre. It wasn't allowed to play out. It might have caught on if it had been allowed to stretch out a little bit, but it just wasn't immediately a hit.

BUKATMAN: I think something that the show bears out as well is that Kirby on his own was rougher—more raw and less pretty. When he died, Neil Gaiman wrote that Kirby was a great artist but he wasn't a pretty artist. And so this is really unlovely work in some way. It's not the slickness that Joe Sinnott gave Kirby with his inks. It's not as smooth. The edges are not smoothed down. But I think that's the way he wanted it and I think it's why, surprisingly enough, when I go back to read the Marvel books, I find Stan Lee's writing, which I really used to valorize, almost unreadable. And I find Kirby's writing, that I used to excoriate, really bracing and intriguing. So I just think there was something going on, beyond the drive for commercial acceptance, that maybe he wasn't happy about at the time, but is probably the reason we're here.

HATFIELD: I think we have time for a couple other questions or comments. I've seen a couple of hands. Rand?

RAND HOPPE [*from audience*]: I just wanted to talk briefly about the comic book business at the time, [when] comics were being distributed on the newsstand—

HATFIELD: This is Rand Hoppe of the Jack Kirby Museum and Research Center, by the way. [*applause*]

HOPPE: He was [sold] on the newsstand, and at the time there was a burgeoning development of fan comic book dealers who would go into the newsstand distributors and take bales or packages of comics out of the warehouse. Those were not reported as being sold. Money was exchanged, but they weren't reported sold to the comic book publishers. And there's one particular scholar/comic book dealer, Bob Beerbohm, who has reported that in his experience, there were any number of Jack Kirby comics that were taken out of the distributors—being *Forever People* and *New Gods*—for some reason *Mister Miracle* was not as desired by the comic book dealers. And wouldn't you know, it was *Mister Miracle* that had the good numbers that kept on, but *New Gods* and *Forever People*—which were the ones where the numbers weren't being reported accurately—were the ones that were cancelled. So actually, the comics that were reported by the distributors as being destroyed, and not sold, were actually making it to the comic book fan market.

HATFIELD: Want to follow up, Adam? And then this gentleman over here.

McGOVERN: Sure. And of course Paul Levitz has proclaimed a lot that he looked back at the sales figures and DC thought they were going to get *Superman*-like numbers from Kirby, so they ordered quantities that made it seem like a failure. But it also has to do with

(above) Page 47 ("The Cheater") of True Divorce Cases. *(next page)* Soul Love's *"The Model", inks by Vince Colletta. Both 1971.*

the churn of popular tastes. It's interesting you mention alternatives to the superhero mythos. Kirby's most unqualified hit at the time was *Kamandi*, which was very far afield of the typical superhero mythos. And also there's a telling and very depressing quote from Carmine Infantino when he's justifying cancelling the Fourth World, saying, "Oh, the college kids were really flaking out over it"—he means "freaking," but whatever. "But you know it just didn't have the sales among the [younger] kids." Of course nowadays you would think, "Let us target that niche—let us select that audience," but that wasn't the mentality of the times.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: Yes. You were talking earlier about Kirby's roughness. But earlier in his career he was known for the Romance comics, which...you know, Romance is in a bit of a revival right now. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about his Good Girl Art and when he was drawing the Romance genre.

HATFIELD: Well, we know this—thanks to a scholar named Harry Mendryk, who worked with Joe Simon, even in recent years before Simon, Kirby's longtime partner, passed away. We know that between about 1947 and—'57? —a decade later, Jack Kirby drew more pages of Romance than he did of any other genre, and, in fact, of all the other genres he worked on *combined* during that period. And we know too that Romance enabled Kirby and Joe Simon to buy houses in the suburbs. Kirby moved his family from Brooklyn to Long Island and had a house right next door or across the street from his partner Joe, and Romance did that. The Romance comics they published with a publisher called Crestwood really did that. We don't tend to think about those comics today, except insofar as they've become part of the Marvel Comics blueprint—sort of soap opera/melodrama and continuing relationship stories. We kind of see that as part of the... if you look closely at the Marvel superhero comics of the '60s, we can see the Romance being in the DNA there, as part of what makes those a different kind of superhero comic. But the truth is that Romance comics, which we tried to note in the exhibition briefly, were maybe one quarter of the entire comic book market by the end of the '40s. Jack Kirby was the first artist known for drawing Romance comics. It's still the case that many people look back on Jack's Romance comics and think that the characters are unlovely; times change, or maybe we read back into them the Kirby that we know from later years. I would say, go into the exhibition and look at the few examples of Romance we have there and think of those alongside the examples of Barda—the sort of superhero that appears in *Mister Miracle* comics. We have several of those [pages], where there's a pin-up-like aspect to it, but there's also a depth to the character. That feels like another deferred response kicking in. You know one of Kirby's unrealized projects in the early '70s was to be a Romance revival called—get this—*True Divorce Cases* [*laughter*], while he was creating the *New Gods* and *Forever People* and everything. And another unrealized project from that period was to be an African-American Romance comic called *Soul Love*. [*light laughter*] He was always willing to go back there. He was not unwilling to go back there. The market was unwilling to return there, I think, in 1970-71, but he was always willing to kind of go at it, especially if the topic might be expanded or the [range of] people represented in the comic might be expanded.

I don't know that I addressed your question, except that Romance comics are really important. They are sort of what connects the Kirby of the '40s to the Kirby of the '60s, in ways that we still haven't studied enough. Diana Schutz, one of our catalog contributors—she is here, or was here, today—has a wonderful essay about Kirby's Romance comics. It's the first essay in the catalog, so we definitely want to call attention to that. [*applause*] We have a number of contributors to the catalog here that are not on the dais with us, so buttonhole these people and ask them to sign your books when you go across the street.

I think we are out of time and we should give people a chance to revisit the gallery, so thank you for your kind attention... [*applause*] Go across the street and look at Kirby art. It'll do you good. ★