

An Interview With MIKE HOFFMAN

Mike Hoffman has a well-earned reputation as probably the crankiest man in Comics. But to be fair, all Hoffman has ever done in his blogs and interviews is draw attention to all the professional incompetence, greed, lack of vision, and moral cowardice prevalent at all levels in the comics business. However, personal crankiness aside, Hoffman is just too big a talent to ignore. Since striking out on his own as a publisher, writer, illustrator, painter, and musician, he has produced more than 1,500 pages of comics, hundreds of paintings and drawings, as well as producing a number of albums of his own music, some of them in the guise of fictitious Italian glam rocker "Arturo Bastard." Like almost everything he does these days, his "Arturo Bastard" albums are entirely the product of his own hands, from beginning to end. And as incredibly prolific as he is, Mike Hoffman continues to be a pretty much a one-man show, employing no drawing assistants and no photo reference, an astonishing feat by anyone's standards, considering the uniformly high quality of his draftsmanship. In 2006 he collected a nice overview of his own works into a book entitled *Mike Hoffman: Odyssey*. It's a real feast for the eyes—page after page of Hoffman-style eye candy featuring gorgeous babes, muscular heroes, and monsters of every size and description. If you'd like to see more of Hoffman's art than this short column can offer, by all means, check out his website: www.mikehoffman.com, where you can see hundreds of his paintings and drawings, as well as buy prints, books, comics, and CDs, and purchase some of his gorgeous original drawings and paintings. Stay tuned in 2009 for Hoffman's next major opus, *Underground Library*. It promises to be a real treat for fans of classic fantasy and science fiction art.

HM: Mike, you work in a style reminiscent of the classic illustrators of yore. Where did you get your training in painting and drawing? Whom do you consider your primary artistic influences?

HOFFMAN: Because I'm a self-taught, working-class artist, I tend to think more in terms of techniques than influences. I make a picture like some guy would fix your plumbing. That's not to say what I do is either Art or just skilled craftsmanship, I leave that for others to decide. I have a toolbox and I'm doing a job. I won't ignore a tool because someone else used it.

HM: What medium do you create most of your paintings in?

HOFFMAN: Mainly oil until the past few months, now I've switched to the new formula acrylics made by the Golden Company. They have most of the good attributes without as many toxins, and better drying times. I recommend them.

HM: Can you describe how you work up an idea for a painting or a big illustration? Do you do a lot of sketching? Do you work with live models? Do you work from photos?

HOFFMAN: All kinds of approaches. I'll sketch sometimes for a week or two and then set them all aside and come back to cherry-pick ideas. Or I might make a batch of abstract designs with paint, rollers, sponges or squirt guns and begin looking for subconscious forms in them to use, like looking at clouds. Or, I design a picture from the ground up with a horizon line and vanishing points. Other times I'll just draw out a painting with no preconceived ideas at all, maybe with a pencil or even a two-inch

brush. There's a lot of "thinking" work and approaching ideas laterally--sort of sneaking up on them. I try to create an environment where unique pictorial ideas can generate themselves spontaneously and accidentally. I discuss a lot of these techniques in my "Secrets of Drawing" book. I hardly ever use models or references.

HM: Right now you seem incredibly prolific. Are you doing all of your work for your own self-publishing efforts, or do you do commissioned illustration jobs for other publishers?

HOFFMAN: I get requests for covers and other jobs, but mainly it's my base of collectors that supports me, along with the sales from books I publish. Having to keep a household going with art forces me to produce more than I might otherwise. If I were a millionaire I'd probably do less and better work, but who wouldn't?

HM: When did you decide to start publishing your own work? Have you had some bad experiences working with other publishers?

HOFFMAN: To some extent working for anyone else has been a bad



experience. About the only good one I had was doing *Taboo* with Steve Bissette way back when. Then it was just arguing with a writer.

HM: What are your work habits? How much time do you devote to art every day? How much time do you devote to music?

HOFFMAN: I almost hate to say it, but just about all the time. I do music for my own enjoyment when I have free time, maybe a recording session every few weeks. Or, I might shoot a video or do some animation or sculpture. I try and break things up with walks and bike rides. I have a 1969 Stingray "Pea-Picker".

HM: What are you currently working on? Do you have any major projects in the pipeline?

HOFFMAN: Yes, I'm planning a line of Comics called "Underworld Library". I've been setting aside funds to float me through the launching of it in early 2009, and naturally now we get hit with a recession. My goal is to please myself first, and maybe bring some fun and novelty back into Comics, things you don't see much of in the current crop. It may be suicide, but they're comics for people who'd never usually read a comic. Basically, I like the medium and want to leave some stories for posterity in addition to all the pictures. We may branch out into some animation too, just to help rope in a bigger non-comics audience. My biggest trouble in comics, like everything else, is having too many ideas and not enough time to do them all.

HM: What exactly is Underworld Library? How many titles are you planning, and what will be the thrust of the stor(ies)? Will each title be done in a standard comics format, as graphic novels, or something else?

HOFFMAN: It's the name of the imprint itself, and "Underworld" implies "Underground" in the sense that I'm operating outside the current Comics status quo, much like a weed sprouting up through the cracks in the pavement. My goal, as usual, is to keep the story themes and other elements universal so that non-comics readers won't be lost or too embarrassed. I'll be using a larger magazine-sized format, probably black and white interiors on the cheapest paper possible. If I had to describe it by comparison, it'd be like Charles Addams meets *Hot-Rod Cartoons*.

HM: Aside from publishing Underworld Library what are your plans for the next few years?

HOFFMAN: I'll be fifty this year and will probably be a lot more careful about what I choose to do, but my main goal has been to maintain enough freedom so I can realize ideas as they come along. That's something I have no shortage of.

HM: When you mentioned your motivation for self-publishing, were you more concerned with maintaining artistic control or avoiding unpleasant personal interactions? Also, where did your first professional work appear?

HOFFMAN: Definitely both. I think my first published comic story was for Pacific Comics way back in the early 80s.

HM: Your self-published comics and art prints have tackled a range of genres, everything from science fiction and fantasy to westerns, horror, "good girl art," and classics like H.G. Wells. You've even immortalized a cult movie figure like Tura Satana. Do you have a favorite genre or type of story?

HOFFMAN: I have a proclivity for mixing unlikely genres, my Madame Tarantula stories are futuristic Westerns, and my SF tales are largely social commentaries. Superheroes are something I've been applying myself to over the years, but none of that has seen print, and that's what Underworld Library is for. My feeling is that superheroes work best on paper, not on the screen. To me, the most ridiculous idea imaginable is a man fighting while wearing a cape, which is essentially a hangman's noose for whatever baddie chooses to grab onto it. I'm not sure why that doesn't get noticed more. Anyway, there is certainly a silliness factor in the genre, and I hope to exploit that with Underworld Library without being undramatic or illogical.

HM: Given your choice, would you rather draw, paint, or create music these days?

HOFFMAN: I like to toggle through different mediums as the mood strikes. I'll get tired of painting after a time and switch to ink drawings or watercolors, or to recording music and making videos, or maybe making sculptures from found

objects. I'm just not happy doing only one thing forever, and I wonder about people who do. I don't see how they can stand it.

HM: Speaking of music, do you ever take "Arturo Bastard" out on the road for live shows, or is he strictly a studio creation?

HOFFMAN: I had big plans for a U.S. tour when I recently came back from Europe, but unlike my artwork that depends on finding kindred spirits to work with. So far, I haven't had any luck putting a complete band together for that, though I'm still trying. I do solo gigs as Arturo occasionally.

HM: Do you think you'll ever retire or are you planning to drop dead at the drawing board?

HOFFMAN: I almost did keel at the drawing board a few years ago but have figured out how to pace myself better, and I take a lot of fish oil and other exotic substances to ward off potential strokes and premature senility. Using a small section of the right brain continually for years tends to drain the brain's chemistry and can leave it like a squeezed-out dishrag. I used to think it was like a printed circuit board you could abuse and overload forever, but not anymore.

FASTER, PUSSYCAT... KILL! KILL!

Starting with one of the greatest titles in all of cinema, Russ Meyer's campy cult masterpiece gave Tura Satana her most iconic role as Varla, a murderous, leather-clad stripper with a serious sadistic streak and a taste for speed. Now film artist and sculptor Mark Alfrey has immortalized Tura in one of the coolest collectible statues I've ever seen.

This full-color masterpiece stands 11 inches high on its base and dares you not to worship its cult-film allure.

It's an excellent likeness of Tura from her boots to her leather gloves, right down to her impressive bust line (though Tura did say that in reality her own ass was somewhat flatter than the lushly rounded derriere Alfrey gave his sculpture, but give him credit for artistic license). The limited edition the statue autographed by Tura Satana is already sold out, but you can still get the regular edition for a mere 99 bucks plus shipping. It comes in a nifty box illustrated with photos of the statue and Tura herself in all her ass-kicking glory, plus two different paintings by Mike Hoffman, who did his own way-cool Tura Satana comic book. But wait, there's more—the statue comes with a print of one of Mike's beautiful Tura paintings. You can get order it from Mark Alfrey's website: www.MarkAlfrey.com, but you'd better hurry since the statue's a limited edition of only 500 copies. A visit to Mark's website is worth it anyway to see a cool little QuickTime movie of the statue from all angles. While you're there, you can also order Mark's how-to videos and collectible statues of monsters and babes. If you do order a statue, be sure to tell Mark that *Heavy Metal* sent you.

