

Abstract Comics: The Anthology

Andrei Molotiu

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Andrei Molotiu : Abstract Comics: The Anthology before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Abstract Comics: The Anthology:

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A Potential Watershed In Comics History By Paul Since their ostensible beginnings as passing amusements in the pages of 19th century newspapers, comics have had their peaks (the praises heaped upon George Herriman's Krazy Kat by the literati of the 1920s and 30s; Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize for Maus) and valleys (Frederic Wertham's Seduction of the Innocent) when it has come to acceptance as a genuine art. The slow rise in recognition the graphic novel has received over the course of the past two decades (from Watchmen and Maus to Jimmy Corrigan and Asterios Polyp) has gone a long way toward a wider acceptance of the form. With the publication of Abstract Comics: The Anthology, comics may be moving definitively in the direction of art-as-a-given territory and away from "comics aren't just for kids anymore" qualifiers. When approaching Abstract Comics some reader reorientation may be required. Robert S. Peterson laments in his review that he was hoping for a

book he could "open up and pour over" in the same manner he would Tom Phillips' *A Humument* (a brilliant piece of visual poetry). The reason for this defeated expectation may lie in the optimal method of digestion of one work vs the other. While *A Humument* may bear some resemblance to the works on display in *Abstract Comics*, it is a book composed of both words and pictures with the latter being composed of pictures exclusively. You can read *A Humument* as you would any work of comics, reading text while simultaneously taking in visuals. Reading *Abstract Comics* requires a different process of digestion as the normal vehicle of assimilating a narrative (text) is absent. The reader is not even aided by the presence of representational visuals as one might be in a more typical wordless comic or woodcut novel. You should approach these works in a manner similar to the way you might view a painting or sculpture. Look. Stare. Spend some time with each panel. See what it has to say. Think about it one way then another. There's nothing to decipher in the sense of a decoder ring or elaborate puzzle. The range of the works on display here is impressive. Some standouts for me (along with some subjective interpretations and comparisons) include: Blaise Larmee's *I Would Like to Live There*, a minimal but highly evocative piece, suggesting a lonely but inviting world of life just outside a city (possibly a homeless encampment); Derik Badman's *Flying Chief*, simple and meditative, it reminds me of Asian woodblock prints (it's also interesting from a formal perspective as detailed in the artist's bio); Mark Badger's *Kung Fu* (the original 1980 version), another interesting formal experiment, reminds me of that most comics-like of Cubist works, Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase*; editor Andrei Molotiu's *The Panic* is the closest piece here that brings to mind the psychic energy of Kirby-style superhero comics with its heavy chaotic blacks over luminous colors; and Janusz Jaworski's various pieces that come off like comic strips from the *Codex Seraphinianus*. The only complaint I can make is that the book may be too short. The addition of a semi-lengthy piece (15-25 pages or so) could possibly have provided a fuller picture of abstract comics' abilities. Regardless, this is a small quibble with a book that may represent a course change in how comics are perceived and produced in the coming years.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. AmazingBy Jesse Rice Absolutely beautiful book. A great addition to any collection. My professor showed me this book and I went and ordered the next day.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent catalog of styles of comicBy Will Simes Excellent catalog of styles of comic books addressing the abstract theme. recommend to all who want inspiracao and new ideas about comics and art.

Nominated for a 2010 Will Eisner Comic Industry Award: the first collection devoted to non-representational comics presents aesthetically rich, graphically bold, surprisingly affecting work from masters such as Crumb, Panter Moscoso alongside lesser-known pioneers. Abstract comics? Dont all comics tell stories? How can a comic be abstract? Well, as it happens, beginning with the experiments of Saul Steinberg, through some of the more psychedelic creations of R. Crumb and Victor Moscoso, and with increasing frequency in recent years, cartoonists and other artists have played with the possibility of comics whose panels contain little to no representational imagery, and which tell no stories other than those that result from the transformation and interaction of shapes across the layout of a comic page. Reduced to the most basic elements of comics the panel grid, brushstrokes, and sometimes colors abstract comics highlight the formal mechanisms that underlie all comics, such as the graphic dynamism that leads the eye (and the mind) from panel to panel or the aesthetically rich interplay between sequentiality and page layout. *Abstract Comics*, edited by Andrei Molotiu, an art historian as well as one of the best-known contemporary abstract-comic creators, is the first collection devoted to this budding genre. It gathers the best abstract comics so far created, including early experiments in the form by cartoonists primarily known for other types of comics, such as Gary Panter, Patrick McDonnell, or Lewis Trondheim, and pieces by little-known pioneers such as Benoit Joly, Bill Boichel and Jeff Zenick, as well as by recent creators who have devoted a good part of their output to perfecting the form, such as Ibn al Rabin, Billy Mavreas, Mark Staff Brandl, and many others. It also features first attempts, commissioned specifically for this anthology, by well-known cartoonists such as James Kochalka, J.R. Williams and Warren Craghead. Comprehensive in scope, *Abstract Comics* gathers work not only from North America, but also from France, Switzerland, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, showing the rise in popularity of the genre to be a true international phenomenon. In the process, the anthology highlights the wide variety of approaches taken to the combination of abstraction and sequential art approaches resulting in work that is not only graphically bold, but also often proves to be surprisingly humorous or emotionally disturbing. Complete list of contributors (in order of appearance): R. Crumb, Victor Moscoso, Spyros Horemis, Jeff Zenick, Bill Shut, Patrick McDonnell, Mark Badger, Benoit Joly, Bill Boichel, Gary Panter, Damien Jay, Ibn al Rabin, Lewis Trondheim, Andy Bleck, Mark Staff Brandl, Andrei Molotiu, Anders Pearson, Derik Badman, Grant Thomas, Casey Camp, Henrik Rehr, James Kochalka, John Hankiewicz, Mike Getsiv, J.R. Williams, Blaise Larmee, Warren Craghead III, Janusz Jaworski, Richard Hahn, Geoff Grogan, Panayiotis Terzis, Mark Gonyea, Greg Shaw, Alexey Sokolin, Jason Overby, Bruno Schaub, Draw, Jason T. Miles, Elijah Brubaker, Noah Berlatsky, Tim Gaze, troylloyd, Billy Mavreas. Nominated for a 2010 Will Eisner Comic Industry Award (Best Anthology). color and bw illustrations

The artists assembled by Andrei Molotiu for his anthology *Abstract Comics* push 'cartooning' to its limits... Its a

fascinating book to stare at, and as with other kinds of abstract art, half the fun is observing your own reactions... - Douglas Wolk, The New York Times Book An impressive collection of old and new work with unique pages covering exactly what the title says... bold... intriguing... This is a book for readers who like fine art or those who would like to expand their sequential art experiences. A hearty slap on the back for Fantagraphics for choosing to create this marvelous example of a widely unknown artistic expression. - Kris Bather, Comic Book Jesus[Abstract Comics] is designed beautifully... The content serves as a great introduction to a genre of comics that few people knew existed. Molotiu takes somewhat of a scholarly approach to the content, placing the concept of abstract comics within art history in his introduction. He makes a good case... Overall, this is a cool concept and I was surprised by it. I think its definitely going to cause some debates about what comics are and are not, and thats a good thing. - Eden Miller, ComicsgirlA revealing, thought-provoking and genuinely lovely book that I'll be sure to be rereading in the months to come. - Chris Mautner, Robot 6[Abstract Comics] did dare me to eschew my 'western' values of linear, results oriented thinking and simply give way to my intuitive understanding of the art before me . . . to see comics stripped of their representational elements does amplify certain things that are so unique about the medium and probably reveals its potential even more fully. These are comics to be experienced. - Jason Newcomb, StashMyComicsMolotiu has created a fun and accessible anthology here, one thats smart and well-researched but not in the slightest bit obtuse. You dont need to be an art snob to appreciate it; you just need an open mind. With that, the reward for Abstract Comics is quite lovely. And quite possibly a good opportunity for you to increase your appreciation for the comics format exponentially. - John Hogan, Graphic Novel ReporterThe anthology highlights the wide variety of approaches taken to the combination of abstraction and sequential art approaches resulting in work that is not only graphically bold, but also often proves to be surprisingly humorous or emotionally disturbing. - The Geek CurmudgeonAbstract Comics exists as a testament to the fact that comics like these investigations of rhythm, colour, layout can indeed be created a manifesto for the genre these are all curious, inquisitive works of cartooning, regardless of their abstraction. - Sean Rogers, The WalrusNeedless to say, one could study the art found within Abstract Comics: The Anthology for months, or one could flip through the entire thing in five minutes, and the conclusions one could draw from either experience of the volume could easily be justified as informed and insightful. - Alan David Doane, Comic Book GalaxyAbstract Comics, perhaps more so than any other recent comic release, highlights the way in which the comics world is markedly changing. Comics are indeed reaching across more disparate audiences and being found in a much wider selection of venues. But what might be the implications of this?... If nothing else, it seems that Abstract Comics makes explicit that the line between comics and high art is beginning to disappear... Abstract Comics is a necessary addition to the comics canon in that it forces us to continue to think what exactly constitutes the comics form. - Sara Cole, PopMattersI said, 'It seems to me that when comics become abstract, they really cease to be comics and become, for all effective purposes, simply abstract art.' But this anthology, in its best work as well as in its not-best, shows that that's not true. Comics really are a coherent enough medium to support their own tradition of abstraction. That tradition doesn't quite exist yet. But, in this anthology, [editor] Andrei [Molotiu] shows conclusively that it could. - Noah Berlatsky, The Hooded UtilitarianBesides being a beautifully done work of artistry and imagination, among particular crowds [Abstract Comics] spurs the question 'If these are comics, then what "are comics"?' - Neil Cohn, Emaki.net[G]oes one step beyond to leave the accepted definition of comics outdated, noting that the expressive possibilities of this medium and this language are still unknown. - La Carcel de PapelMore proof that comics are truly an art form. They can be just as weird, surreal, absurd, artistic, expressive and transcendent as any other medium. - Corey Blake[It's fascinating to see what you can do with comics when you're dealing with non-representational, non-narrative imagery, stretching the limits of the medium. - Matthew J. BradyWhat I liked, I liked for more than just the strips themselvesI liked them for the proof they offer that comics really is still a Wild West medium in which one's bliss can be followed even beyond the boundaries of what many or even most readers would care to define as 'comics.' That an entire deluxe hardcover collection of such comics now exists is, I think, one of the great triumphs for the medium in a decade full to bursting with them. - Sean T. CollinsThe fact is that comics have always had an abstract artistic potential and as far as my memory goes, one that is accepted by all worthwhile theoretical definitions of comics. But, until now, its role was secondary, relegated to isolated experiments. It is here that the anthology does its job: presenting an overview and organizing it, Abstract Comics creates a movement. From it, abstraction in comics can move beyond an experiment and become a legitimate possibility a process that began in the visual arts years ago. - Eduardo Nasi, Universo HQThe collection has a wealth of rewarding material, some of it awkward, some groundbreaking on the whole, it is a significant historical document that may jump-start an actual new genre. - Doug Harvey, LA WeeklyAn abstract comic? What the hell is that? And more importantly, whats the point of a comic if it doesnt tell a story? These are the questions a book like Abstract Comics raises right off the bat. Thankfully, it also answers them. The anthology, edited by Andrei Molotiu, covers the time period of 1967-2009 and is in all respects a Serious (capital S) volume. ... Worth a look, for sure, and maybe more. - Molly Young, We Love You SoHandsomely designed and smartly edited, this anthology of non-narrative comics was one of the year's most unique releases. ...I appreciated all of the "stories" to one degree or another and the cumulative effect of "reading" them all together was thrilling. - Patrick Markfort, Articulate NerdAs a whole, I like Abstract Comics a lot. Id say that it works like a good

art exhibition, or at least an exhibition unburdened by obligations to teach history, one in which multiple formal and aesthetic connections are there but not shouted out, rather left to be discovered (or not) by the strolling viewer according to his or her inclinations. - Charles Hatfield, *Thought Balloonists* *Abstract Comics* is an important book... It is a truly groundbreaking book that points the way towards a whole new conception of comics and challenges readers and artists alike to explore this new area. - Ed Howard, *Only the Cinema* *Heres* a book that was initially attractive as an intriguing, if intellectual, curiosity, only to reveal itself in short order as a continually fascinating experience. ...*Abstract Comics* is the most surprising book of the year. - Rich Kreiner, *The Comics Journal* *About the Author* *Andrei Molotiu* is an artist and art historian living in Bloomington, Indiana. He is the author of *Fragonards Allegory of Love*. *Nautilus*, a collection of his abstract comics, is forthcoming from Danish publisher Fahrenheit.