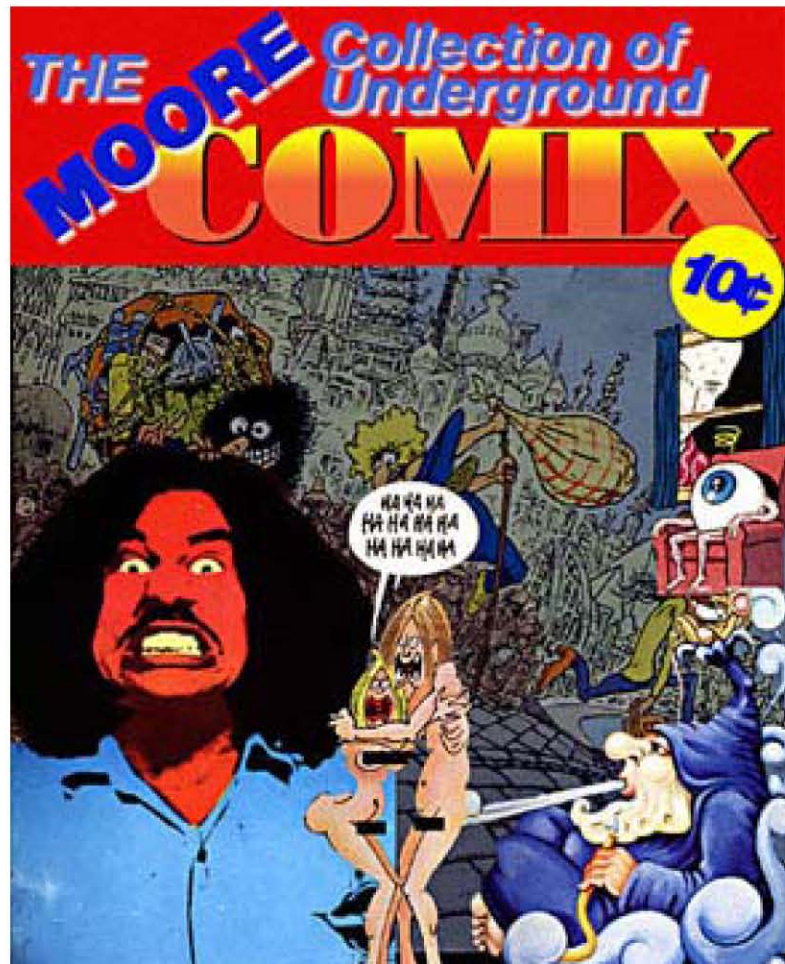


Guide to the
Moore Collection of Underground Comix
1907–1993



<http://www.lib.calpoly.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/ms052>
Moore Collection of Underground Comix, 1907–1993 (1969–1992 bulk)
Processed by Ken Kenyon, 2007; encoded by Byte Managers, 2008

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Descriptive Summary

Title:

Moore Collection of Underground Comix, 1907–1993 (bulk 1969–1992)

Collection Number:

MS 052

Creator:

Moore, Michael

Abstract:

Comic book publisher and collector Michael Moore donated this collection of underground comix in 1993. The collection contains comics from 1907 to 1993, with the bulk of issues representing underground comix in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Topics include feminism, marijuana legalization, Black Power, abortion, anti-war, and gay and lesbian issues. The collection reflects the resurgence of comix popularity as an alternative to mass-market mainstream comic books in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The collection also contains pre-press proofs, books about comix and the history of comics, catalogs, advertisements, rock n' roll flyers, and artwork. The collection is partially arranged.

Extent:

19 Paige boxes, 1 Hollinger box, 1 oversize box (26 linear feet)

Language:

English

Repository:

Special Collections, Robert E. Kennedy Library
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

Administrative Information

Provenance:

Donated by Michael Moore in 1993, the Moore Collection of Underground Comix is housed in and administered by Special Collections at Cal Poly.

Access:

The collection is open to qualified researchers by appointment only. For more information on access policies and to obtain a copy of the Researcher Registration form, please visit the Special Collections Access page. The collection is stored remotely. Advance notice for use is required.

Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:

In order to reproduce, publish, broadcast, exhibit, and/or quote from this material, researchers must submit a written request and obtain formal permission from Special Collections, Cal Poly, as the owner of the physical collection. Researchers should also consult with an appropriate staff member regarding literary or other intellectual property rights pertaining to this collection.

Photocopying of material is permitted at staff discretion and provided on a fee basis. Photocopies are not to be used for any purpose other than for private study, scholarship, or research. Special Collections staff reserves the right to limit photocopying and deny access or reproduction in cases when, in the opinion of staff, the original materials would be harmed.

Preferred Citation:

[Identification of Item]. Moore Collection of Underground Comix, Special Collections, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Abbreviations Used:

c.: circa
n.d.: no date
n.p.: no publisher
l.f.: linear feet
c.f.: cubic feet
FF: flat file

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects:

Adventure stories, American -- Illustrations
American wit and humor, pictorial
Caricatures and cartoons -- United States -- 20th century
Comic books, strips, etc. -- History and criticism
Comic books, strips, etc. -- United States -- History and criticism
Counterculture -- United States -- History -- 20th century
Detective and mystery comic books, strips, etc.
Erotic comic books, strips, etc.
Heroes
Horror comic books, strips, etc. -- United States
Jazz -- Comic books, strips, etc.
Narrative art
Newspapers -- Sections, columns, etc. -- Comics
Rock musicians -- Comic books, strips, etc.
Science Fiction Comic books, strips, etc.
Sex -- Comic books, strips, etc. -- United States
Western comic books, strips, etc.
Wit and humor, Pictorial.

Genres and Forms of Material:

Comic Books
Books
Flyers
Artwork
Pre-press proofs
Catalogs
Advertisements

Related Materials

Materials Cataloged Separately:

MARC records for 93 books have been cataloged separately.

Related Collections:

Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University
Lynn R. Hansen Comix Collection

Special Collections, University of Missouri–Columbia Libraries
The Frank Stack Collection: Papers, 1957–[ongoing]

Special Collections Dept., Florida State University Libraries
Robert M. Ervin Jr. Collection, bulk 1950–1970

Special Collections Dept., Iowa State University Library
Clay Geerdes, Historical Underground Photographs, MS 630

Special Collections Dept., Iowa State University Library
Underground Comix Collection, 1947–1995, 1971–1977, MS–636

Biographical Note

Michael Moore writes: "It all started with my parents making me burn my comic books. In 1954 *Reader's Digest* printed an article by Dr. Frederick Wertham that claimed that reading comic books resulted in "juvenile delinquency." My parents saw the article and called me and my comic books into the living room for an inquisition. Consequently I was soon standing in the back yard beside our rusty 55 gallon trash barrel watching my collections of *The Vault of Horror*, *Mad* and *Weird Science*, and others, going up in smoke. This was a defining moment for me; as the ashes spiraled up into the sky I realized how wrong my parents could be and thus began my lifelong negative attitude towards authority. In 1971 I got even with my parents by founding the Los Angeles Comic Book Company.

"I was working in Westwood at the Free Press Bookstore when I noticed this intense, balding little guy hanging out around the comic book rack. We struck up a conversation. He introduced himself as Fred Walker, and we found we had a common interest in E.C. Comics (those same comic books that had caused so much juvenile delinquency back in the '50s). This conversation led us to contact Bill Spicer, a well known authority on E.C. Comics. All of us had a common interest in the comics medium, and its potential, and had been following the "Underground" comix scene ("comix" being the preferred spelling) that had begun with the first *Zap*. (I had picked up my copy – the one in this collection – at the City Lights Bookstore only a few days after its publication.) Fred was in contact with Gilbert Shelton, the creator of the *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*, who was then living and working in Venice. Gilbert suggested we might start an underground comic book company in the Los Angeles area. Gilbert contacted Robert Williams, Robert Crumb and Spain Rodriguez and we all met and discussed the idea one balmy evening in a restaurant in Westwood. Inspired by this harmonic convergence of underground legends, Bill, Fred and I searched out

Marty Novell our financial angel (whose parents as I recall put up the \$5000) and so was founded the Los Angeles Comic Book Company.

"Our first book was *LA Comics* and consisted primarily of Los Angeles artists. We later went on to publish *Mickey Rat*, *Weird Fantasies* (arguably the first color underground comix; priced at 50 cents it was the first nail in our financial coffin). *LA Comics #2* and lastly *Mutants of the Metropolis*, a book so unique that no one bought it, assuring our demise. Bill still has a garage full of them to this day.

"Distribution was (and still is) the crucial factor in publishing. In those days comix were sold in what were known as "headshops." For instance, the Free Press Bookstores in Los Angeles were really headshops selling drug paraphernalia surrounded by the protective cover of book sales. Instead of outright sales to distributors in other cities, the LA Comic Book Company would swap equal values of comix (i.e. 500 copies of "Mickey Rat" for 500 copies of *Zap Comics*) and then I would go out and sell these traded comix to the various headshops between Santa Barbara and San Diego. As you can imagine the market was not large for all of these titles and so the core of the present collection began to grow in my garage.

"The underground comix grew out of the political and cultural foment of the 1960s and '70s and reflected in graphic terms the issues of those times. Political subjects were targets with books like *Radical America Komics* and *Corporate Crime Komics*. The Vietnam War and protests against the draft was the subject of *Jesus Meets the Armed Services*. Comic books like *Dope* and *Cocaine* comix reflected the drug use and abuse in the culture. The *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* were the creation of Gilbert Shelton and the ironically titled Rip Off Press (as close to an artists' cooperative as the comix movement got) and used drugs as its main subject; it cast a jaundiced eye on American society and the hypocrisy in the youth culture, and was funny to boot. Robert Crumb, although he would deny it, had more to do with the underground comix movement than any other person. At a young age, along with his brothers, Crumb had drawn comic books, so in 1967 he self-published *Zap #1* which became a focus for other graphic artists like Victor Moscoso, Spain Rodriguez and Robert Williams. Crumb almost uniquely did not share in the values and tastes of the Hippie Generation and went on to produce dyspeptic, but hilarious, portraits of American Society and the culture that he was thought to be a part of. Almost every cause created its own comic book: feminism, marijuana legalization, Black Power, anti-abortion and anti-war. Comics with explicit sexual content also flourished along with comix with gay and lesbian themes. Most of the comic book companies were under-financed and counted on the profits of the previous comix to finance the next. Many artists printed their own comix. Hence, print runs were characteristically low but as evidenced by this collection the number of titles runs into the thousands.

"The legacy of the underground comix is mixed. In the late '80s a group of artists avoiding the mainstream publishers like Marvel and DC and began to publish comix books similar in content (super heroes) but with a fresh point of view and retaining the ownership of the characters, something not allowed by the big companies. There also sprang up a totally unique group of comix like *Love of Rockets*, *Raw*, *American Splendor*, *Eightball*, and *Yummy Fur*, which introduced adult (even intellectual) content combined with a contemporary artistic sensibility. While few of these books have reached a large audience they give

hope that the comix medium will mature further and fulfill the promise that the underground comic book movement began in the 1960s.”

Scope and Content Note

The Moore Underground Comix Collection contains the comic books, comic strips, pre–press proofs, books, catalogs, advertisements, rock n’ roll flyers and artwork donated by Michael Moore, underground comix publisher and collector in 1993. Moore was a part of the underground comix scene and with others started the Los Angeles Comic Book Company in 1971, which published and distributed comix such as *Mickey Rat* and *Weird Fantasies*.

The collection includes a multitude of titles that emerged during the turbulent 1960s and is an excellent overall chronicle of underground comix, with the heavy bulk of its issues representing the surges in their popularity from 1969 to 1973, and again from 1984 to 1991.

Of particular interest are the underground comix published in late 1960s and early ‘70s. The *Bijou Funnies* include Gilbert Shelton’s “Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers” and Robert Crumb’s crusty, white–haired “Mr. Natural.”

The *New York Herald* comic strips “Loony Literature” by Quincy Scott and “Little Nemo in Slumberland” by Winsor McCay comic strips, both published in 1907, are the earliest examples of comics in the collection. There are also comics from the 1930s and 1940s, such as *Captain George Presents*. Underground comix, reflecting the resurgence of creative comix in the latter part of the 1980s as a graphic and diverse alternative to mainstream comic books, are well represented in the collection.

The last few years have seen a rebirth of interest, both popular and scholarly, in the anti–war and countercultural movements of the 1960s. And, while the Vietnam war is long over, we still struggle with many of the same issues that galvanized that decade: war, social justice, feminism, gay rights, and environmental issues.

The collection is housed in 21 boxes. The collection is partially processed and arranged alphabetically by title.

Series Description/Folder List

Intellectual access to the processed portion of the collection is available via an online database at: http://lib.calpoly.edu/spec_coll/comix/searchform.html.