

The interview issue

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‘The Interview Issue’ marks the first time the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* has dedicated an entire issue to the voice of the cartoonist. When we were asked to become American Editors of this journal, we made it one of our goals to actively draw comics creators into the scholarly discussion of the medium and the message of comics. Thus, our special issue represents the voices of some of the best cartoonists of our time, each of whom captures the legacy of comics as well as its leading edge. From underground to documentary; monsters to militants; catastrophes to communities; violence to visions, various topics are taken up by the artists we interviewed. Our task as critics has been to amplify their voices and highlight the power of their creations.

We counted on the generosity of the cartoonists gathered together in these pages to talk to us about their work and even a bit about themselves: Derf Backderf, Thi Bui, Emil Ferris, Riad Sattouf, and Carol Tyler. Each creator offers us insight into distinct visions of the comics form yet all of their works share a sense of political urgency. Each embrace the form’s rootedness in the political, which yet breaks through the noise of politics.¹ Whether about the refugee experience and climate change (Bui), disinformation and the right to protest against the state (Backderf), the cultural crisis of girlhood sexuality (Ferris), the rise of nationalism across the globe (Sattouf), or unresolved grief from war and finding hope in dark times (Tyler), all of our discussions focused on such thematic concerns, but also recognised in intensely pragmatic way how the function of comics as a form (often trivialised by the unenlightened as childish!) lends itself to the most pressing problems of our troubled times. We reflected on comics’ ability to resist the rapid fire of thoughts and information of our current era dominated by social media. Instead, comics requires dedicated time and an eye that will linger over the images, even stare and process rather than simply react. The cartoonists offered their voices to assist us as scholars in our understanding of the form and thus help defend and define the future of comics scholarship.

We believe these interviews *speak* for themselves. We conducted, compiled and edited these interviews during the different stages of the coronavirus pandemic—and undoubtedly this context shaped our sense of urgency, tragedy and the determined hope that emerges in the conversations. While we did not discuss COVID explicitly in the interviews (as our focus was on the comics), our commitment to creativity and healing power of the arts served as our life rafts during the flooding pandemic. This conviction informed our experiences and the questions we asked. Offering an energetic jolt in a period of languishing,² our conversations with this tribe of immensely gifted and sensitive cartoonists reminded us of our dedication to stories and their transformative power. Even when the stories they tell are distressing, it is hope for the future that propels their telling. The

creator's need to chronicle and provide a witness to history offers the reader not only consolation but also the community that we hope is enhanced by this special issue of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*.

Notes


1. For the many histories of the politics of comics, see for example, Camden, V. J., & Zullo, V. L. (2020). Comics on the Couch: Introduction. *American Imago*, 77 (3), 443–458, Gardner, J. (2012). *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-first-century Storytelling*. Stanford University Press or Galvan, M., & Misemer, L. (2019). "Introduction: The Counterpublics of Underground Comics." *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, 3 (1), 1–5.
2. Grant, A. (2021) 'There's a Name for the Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing.' <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>.


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Disclosure statement

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