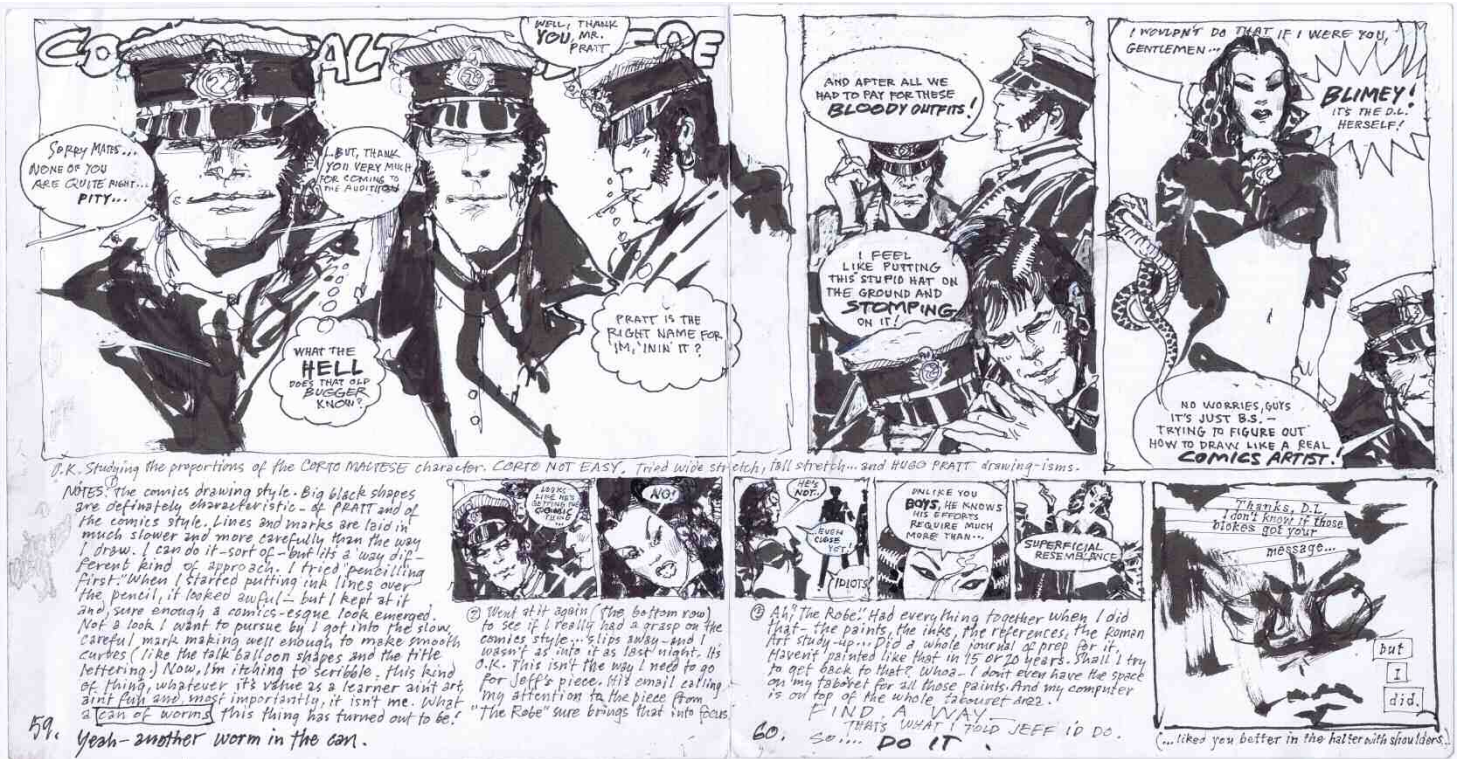


**W**hat if? That is a question I loved as a child growing up and still do to this day. The idea of imagining a different world or scenario has always been a fun way to keep my mind busy. In comics, I enjoyed the Marvel Comics *What If?* title of the 80's. In art collecting, I have found a way to explore this theme too.

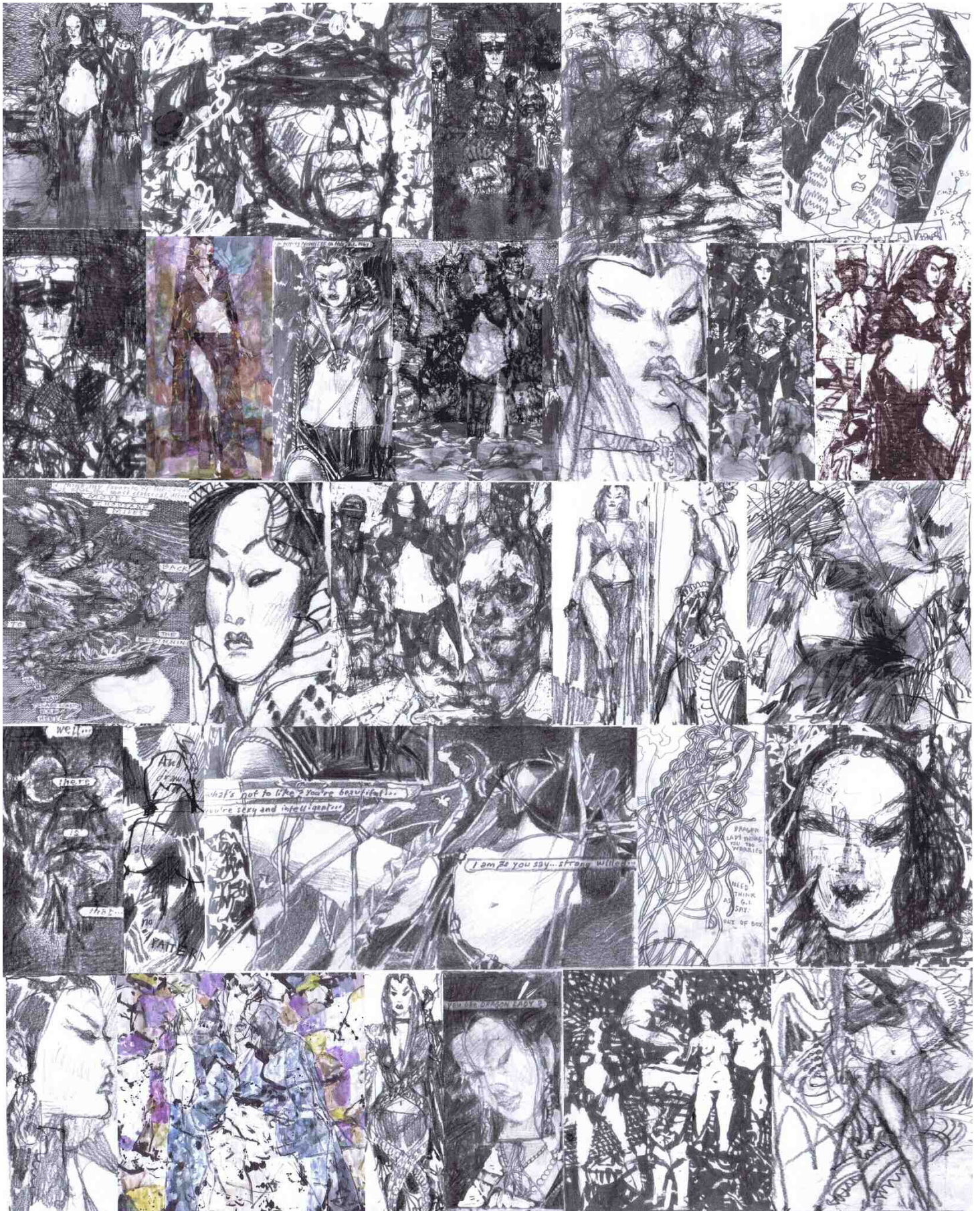
When I discovered collecting comic art I quickly found commissioning artists was a fun thing to do. It was a chance to meet the artist, get to know them and have some fun dialogue as you discussed the piece. As I have recounted on more than one occasion in the pages of CFA-APA, I came to original art collecting through Fiction House comic collecting and Jungle Girls. Among my favorites were Sheena published by Fiction House and Rulah published by Fox. Early on, I started having artists do commissions with both girls from different publishers in the same piece. These were no cheesecake or sexually oriented commissions but rather tributes to strong female characters and a more innocent (although perhaps more subversive) time in comics. I shared these commissions with you in the *Guilty Pleasures* issue of CFA-APA (#95) so I won't represent those but suggest looking at that submission again as a supplement to this topic and article.

I do have a few other collecting themes that would be appropriate for this issue. I have amassed an embarrassing amount of Dragon Lady commissions over the years. It is well over 150 at this point. I have had some pretty interesting experiences through this process and met some very fun artists. Within that Dragon Lady commission collection there is a subset of commissions where I have asked certain artists to do a piece with both the Dragon Lady and Corto Maltese together. Why? They are among my favorite comic characters with very distinctive and strong personalities. They both come from an era of adventure and mystery and could have crossed paths at some point and so there was some plausibility to the encounter against a backdrop rich for reinterpretation. When seeking out artists for these "what if" projects I am very selective. I need to know the artist knows and understands these characters as insight is required to capture their essence and not just the image alone. If the artist doesn't know both characters then I usually will give them information about one of the characters and stick with a single character commission as the potential for disappointment is lower. How is that for a commission expectation....set the bar low? I have been very fortunate to have found artists who have taken the theme and surprised me in different ways with the pieces. I thought this would be a good theme for part of this article. Some of these images have been presented before in previous submissions.

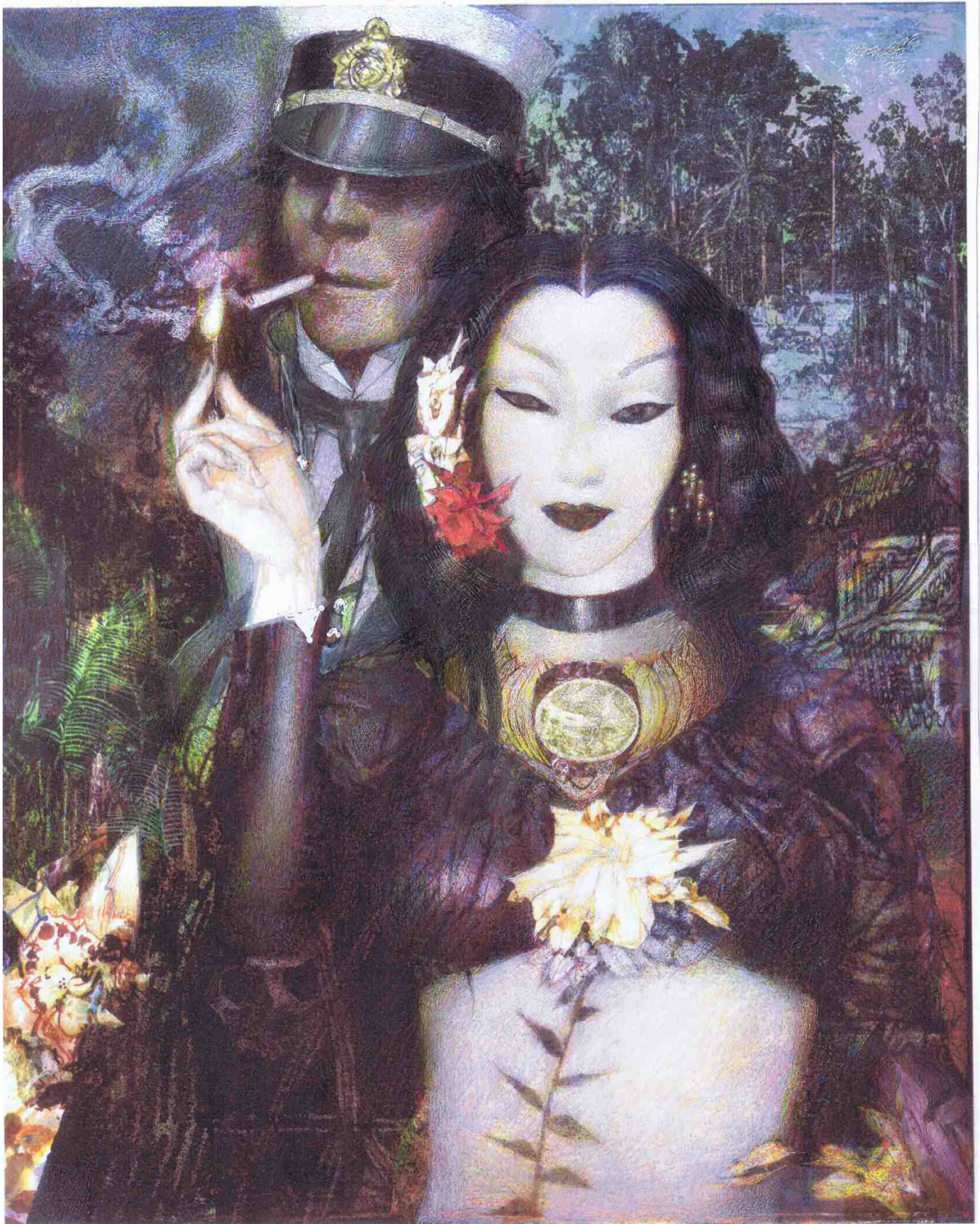
This was the one that started the theme. I have done a pretty lengthy previous article in *CFA-APA #93* on this piece so I will keep the description a bit shorter. I have admired Barron Storey before I knew who he was. I grew up seeing his art in various places like the cover of Time Magazine and in National Geographic long before I was collecting comics and learning about comic art and artists. Barron is an illustrator who has crossed over into comics at times but is no means a comic artist. I had been building a small collection of his works and through one of his fine art galleries I had asked if he would consider a unique commission. This led to some dialogue and it turned out Barron knew the characters and had a bit of a personal connection to the Dragon Lady and Caniff that he had not previously realized through an early acquaintanceship with Noel Sickles. He was interested and the gallery passed on the contact information so we could continue the dialogue. It was fortuitous that I started with Barron as it was through Barron I realized how complex a commission could be and how involved the process and decision making had the potential of being. It took Barron months and hours of work to get to the point he was ready to create the final image. In my article, *Barron Storey and the Anatomy of a Commission*, I detail the dialogue and process involved in the creation of the piece. Included as an extra were a few sacred pages from Barron's legendary journals. He never parts with these and yet he included two pages. I learned a lot from this experience that made it important to find the right artists to approach the themes going forward as the literal blood, sweat and tears Barron poured into this piece made me realize the potential for this theme. What makes this piece truly remarkable are the insights into the characters and then the decision to present them in a way that is challenging and true to their personalities. The dynamics of power and control are challenging in this piece and there are multiple interpretations and sides to this composition. Is the Dragon Lady in control or is Corto and he is just playing it cool. Is the Dragon Lady behind her façade or is she letting us and Corto behind the curtain. It is truly an inspired piece and it sits framed and on my wall next to my computer desk and I revisit it every day. Over time and on different days it means different things to me but always reminds me of the experience and what I learned from it. I learned to look at art in general in a different way and with different terms and definitions after struggling with this piece.



Pages from Barron's sketch book that he included with the commission documenting the struggle he had with the theme and creating an exceptional piece of art. During the time Barron worked on this project he created dozens of other pieces that came much more easily for exhibitions yet this one seemed to have created challenges and it took time to find a solution. 2013



Digital collage of working illustrations Barron did while working up this project. 2013



*The Dragon Lady and Corto Maltese (aka "The Robo")*

For Jeff -

BARTON STOREY '13

The next artist to approach this theme was Joe Dragunas who I have introduced you to in **CFA-APA #106**. I met Joe in artist's alley at C2E2 in 2014 and we became fast friends. Although Joe was new and still learning the craft he has an insatiable appetite to learn and grow as an artist. I liked his style and we talked at length about the two characters. Joe knew a bit about them and I filled in the rest. Joe came up with a design that I think was very reflective of his style at the time and his design sensibilities. The idea of the smoke from Corto in Venice forming the Dragon Lady and in turn her smoke forming the dragons is inspired. It suggests that Corto is remembering the Dragon Lady from a previous engagement and perhaps

perhaps lamenting an unrequited love. Although there are borders to the main image, they are broken or lost at almost every opportunity making for an image that really comes to life. Also, it is important to keep in mind how early in Joe's career this was. It was a commission I had arranged at our first meeting and I believe I might have been among the first to commission him. For a novice, self-taught artist to create such a piece in both design and execution is quite remarkable and speaks to that natural talent Joe had and that we are now seeing evolve in his work as he acquires technique and skills to grow.





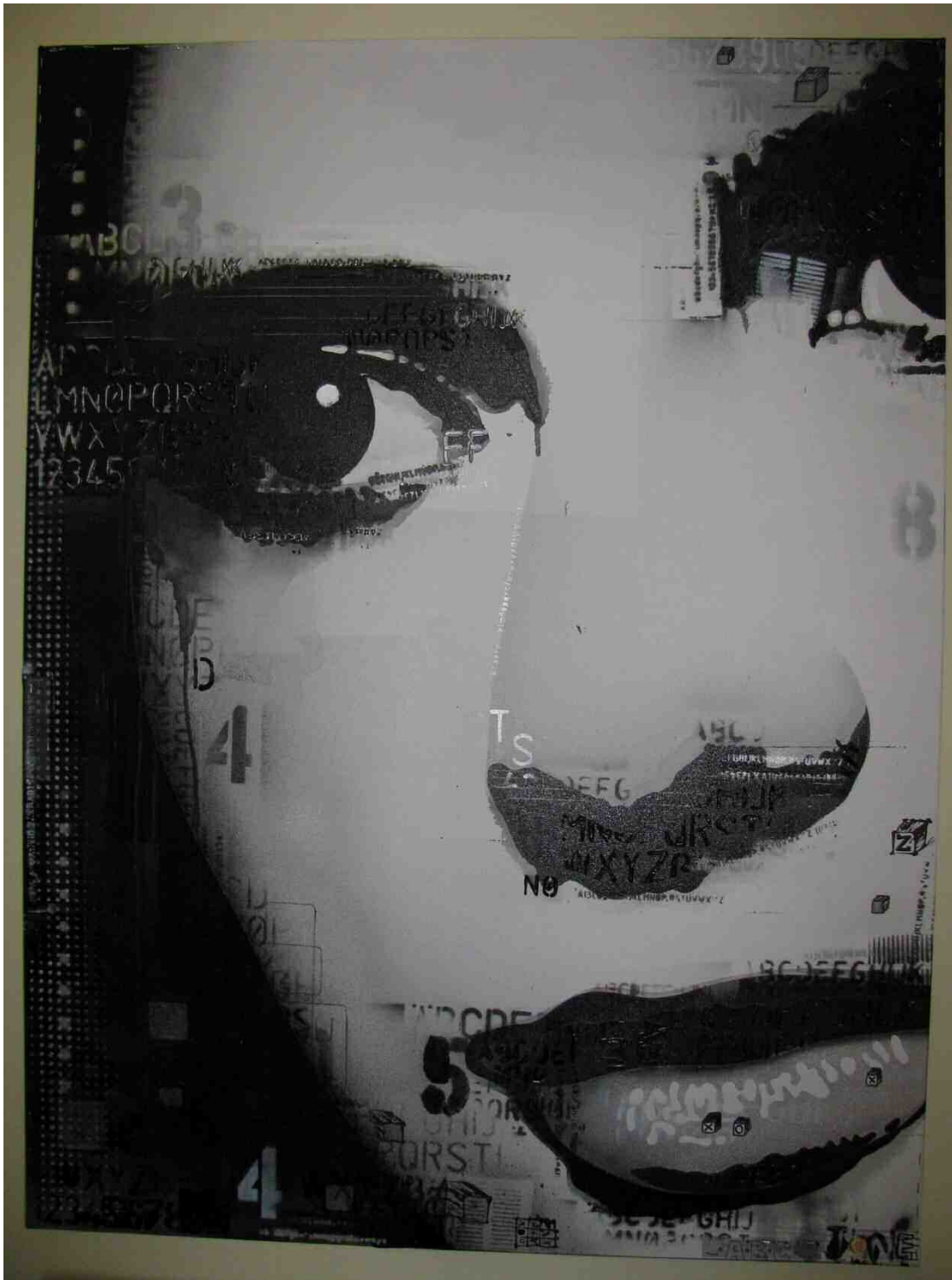
Also in 2014 I commissioned Aype Bevins, a young French comic artist. I had seen pieces by him in other people's collections and so I sought him out. I contacted him and dealt with him through his wife, Aurelie, who was acting as his agent. The commission process was fun and involved some interactions. The initial prelim he did I felt was bit too racy for my tastes and so he toned down the sexuality for the final piece. It is not how I envisioned the piece but I had seen his work and knew I could trust him although I might have had some doubts when I first saw the preliminary piece.

I don't want to tell the artists how to interpret the characters or how they decide to present the interaction or relationship between them as that is part of the enjoyment I get out of each commission is seeing how others see these characters. It is the relationship others envision that also challenges me and makes me rethink what I think would be the dynamic between these two archetypes.

This was the last piece of artwork finished by Aype. He passed away suddenly leaving behind his young family. A very tragic story attached to this piece.

Initial preliminary and the first time it has ever been shown publicly.





Anthony Livet a.k.a. TONE is a fine artist living in Quebec Canada. He has no affiliation with comics. I met TONE quite by accident a few years ago. I had been to a comic show downtown and had paid the \$20 for parking and the admission fee and it was a disappointing show for an art collector. Vendors only and no guests and so I left early. They were having a fine art fair in another large hall in the same convention center. Since I was already invested in time and parking, I decided to make the most of it and went to look at art. Although I saw a number of interesting pieces, there was one artist that I really fell for. TONE. He works on relatively large canvases and uses interesting mixed media. I liked his imagery and style. Typography plays a big role in some of his pieces and letter printing and reliefs are used to create tone, line and shade. There was one piece in particular that stood out to me and reminded me of cyberpunk themes. It took a bit of negotiating and back and forth a few times

but I walked out of the show with it. Here is the piece I bought from him at that show.

It is still one of my favorite images and has been the home screen on my cellphone since I acquired the piece. Since then I have bought a few other pieces off of TONE. I was thinking of another commission and we started talking. TONE is quite well versed in comics having grown up in the French part of Canada, Corto was already well known to him and he was aware of the Dragon Lady and Caniff. We started talking about the characters and how they might be combined in a piece by him. In the end we decided on a large triptych done in his style that features both the pre and post-war Dragon Lady personas and Corto in the middle. The art is huge and hangs over my son's bed. 36 x 60 inches. You will notice the mixed media elements like old Chinese newspaper in the Dragon Lady's hat, coins used as earrings, wallpaper and other elements used to create a striking image.





After this commission, I stopped for 3 years as I didn't think I was going to be able to add to these four very distinctive and meaningful pieces. I did get a few more commissions in that time of either Corto Maltese or the Dragon Lady but never together. It was often a matter of not finding the right artists who really understood the characters. Since these are my two favorite characters I don't want to chance a disappointing commission and so I have been very selective.

This is my latest commission. Matias Bergara. Another artist that I had seen art by in other people's galleries and had thought I'd like a piece from him. He lives in Uruguay in the city of Montevideo and that started our conversation. I knew Alberto Breccia was born there although he had lived most of his life in Buenos Aires. I had asked him if Breccia's influence was felt in his birthplace and he replied that it was everywhere and all the local comic creators were aware of his legacy. We had a lengthy discussion about Breccia, Hugo Pratt, Corto Maltese, Milton Caniff and the Dragon Lady. I had found my next artist. We set the commission up and when the promised time to do it came around I was sent a preliminary which I approved and here is the final piece.



Another interesting take on the dynamic between these characters. Matias is referencing a lesser known print



Pratt did of Corto.

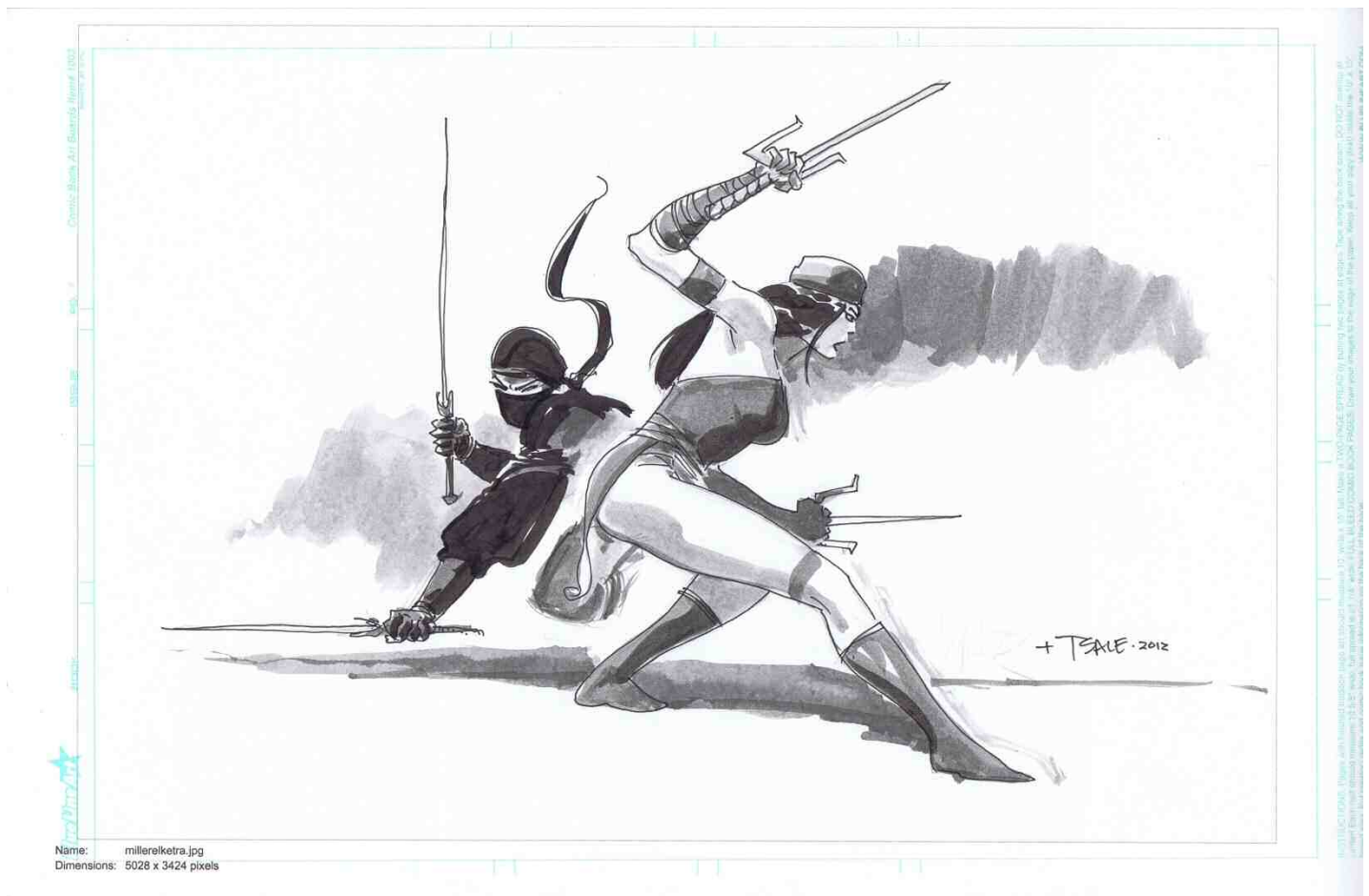
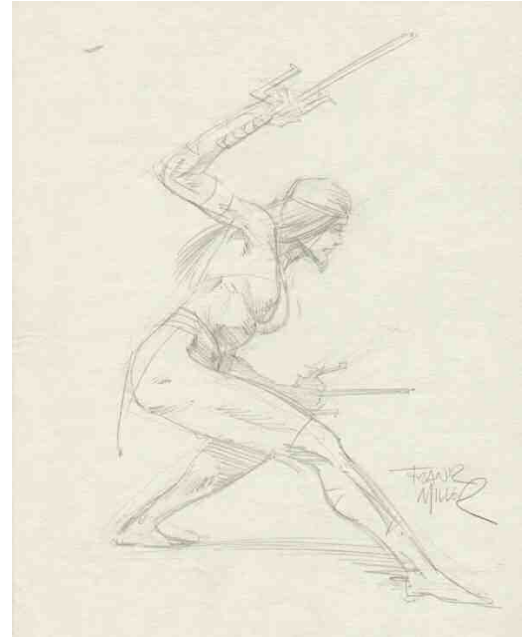
I think the color choices and design elements are bold and work well with the overall layout. It is quite striking in person.

So far, that is it for this theme in commissions. I don't think it will be the last one but I am in no rush to get another. It will have to be the right artist with the right understanding of the characters for me to add to this collection. I look forward to the journey in discovering that next artist and things I will learn along the way. Always the student.

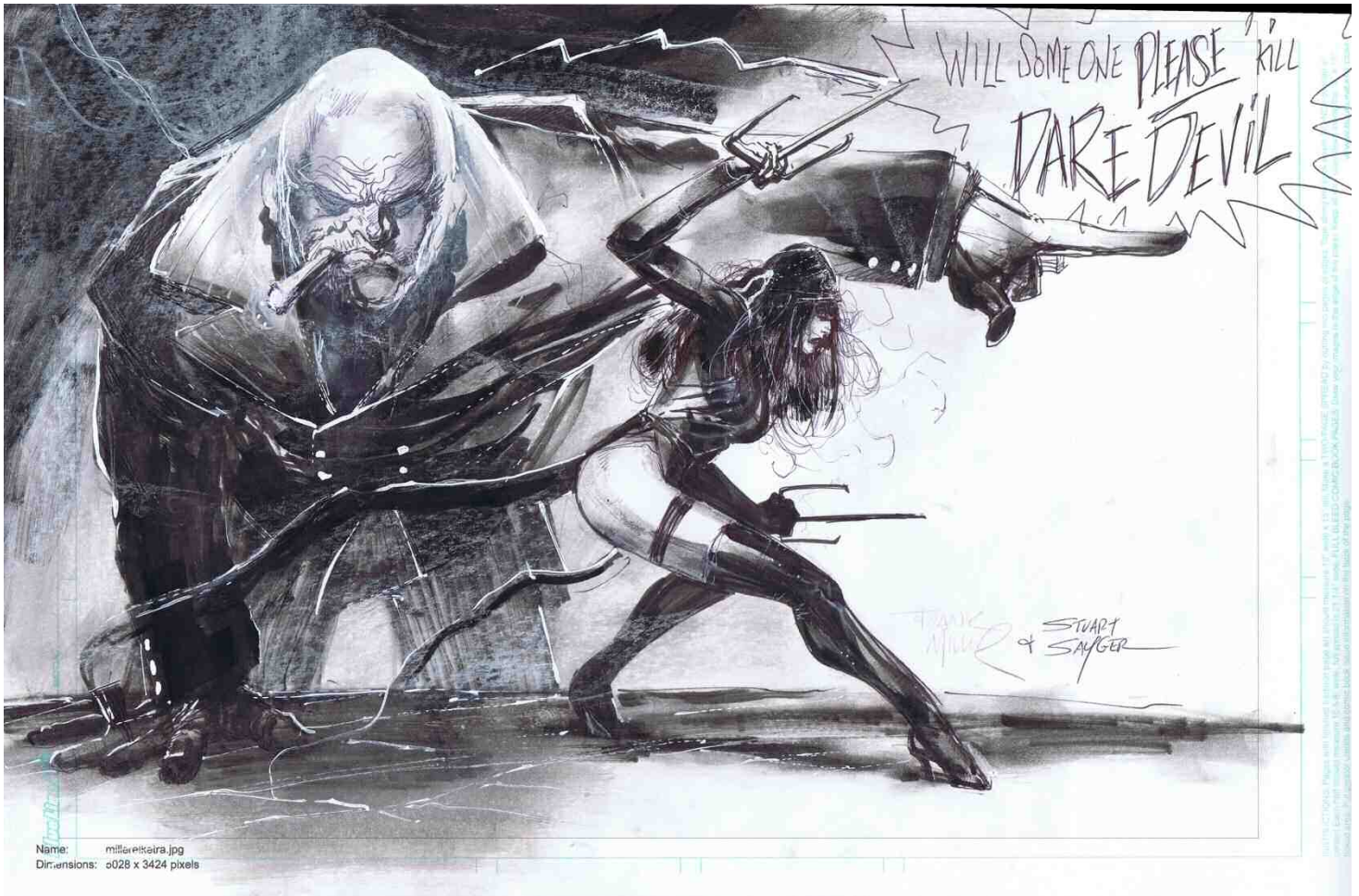
I want to talk about another commission theme I have started on but seemed to have stalled on getting further pieces done. The preface to this is that my first real comic I read and collected was Daredevil #200. It had a classic John Byrne cover and featured a fight between Bulleye and Daredevil. It was a conclusion of sorts of the whole Elektra death saga although at the time I didn't know it. Over the next few years I would discover Miller's run on Daredevil and read the series. I loved the characters and Frank Miller's art. It is only as an art collector did I come to realize how important Klaus Janson's inks were to the look and feel of Miller's work on that series. I had always wondered what if someone else had been inking...what that would have looked like.

Here is a vintage Frank Miller pencil sketch of Elektra I have. It is on 8.5 x 11 inch paper and from the period he first drew Elektra. I have owned it for most of my collecting career. A few years ago I got it printed on 11 x 17 artboard at the original size that left a lot of room and I started commissioning a few artists to ink vintage Miller pencils and then to add some of their own elements to the piece to make it theirs. It was a fun theme for me but the reception I got from artists was a little less enthusiastic and so I stopped after a few. I respect the artists I commission greatly and the last thing I want to do is have them work on something they don't have interest in. Here are the few I have had done.

The first one is by Tim Sale. In the past, Tim was doing fastpass drawings at shows. Basically you lined up at the beginning of the show and the first 10 or so people got a fastpass like Disney does to come back at a set time for Tim to do a 15-20 minute sketch. He put aside the time and during this time there were no signings. This is one of the times I was lucky enough to get one of Tim's passes and here is what he came up with.



Next up is new CFA-APA member Stuart Sayger. I have forgotten which convention we set this up at but it was in 2011. It is a great looking image of the Kingpin with some of Stuart's very dynamic backgrounds.



The next one came at a convention, probably C2E2 2011 with Tony Moore. At that time the Walking Dead had been blowing away all sales records for about 2 years and Tony was hard to get sketches from. At the beginning of each day they would take names of all the people that wanted a sketch that were lined up or at their booth before a certain time. They would then draw from the names about 6 to 8 people who would get sketches that day and in that order. I got lucky at 2 conventions over a many year period and this is what I had Tony do at the time. Zombie apocalypse vs. Elektra. It was his choice what to do with the pencils.

The last one I got in this theme was from my all-time favorite comic artist, Bill Sienkiewicz. I gave Bill free reign as well and to make it his own. He chose to do it in color and add a character he created which made for a fun piece.

I have been giving thought to revisiting this theme but the Corto Maltese and Dragon Lady themes are still the main ones and I am moving slowly away from commissioning as often.

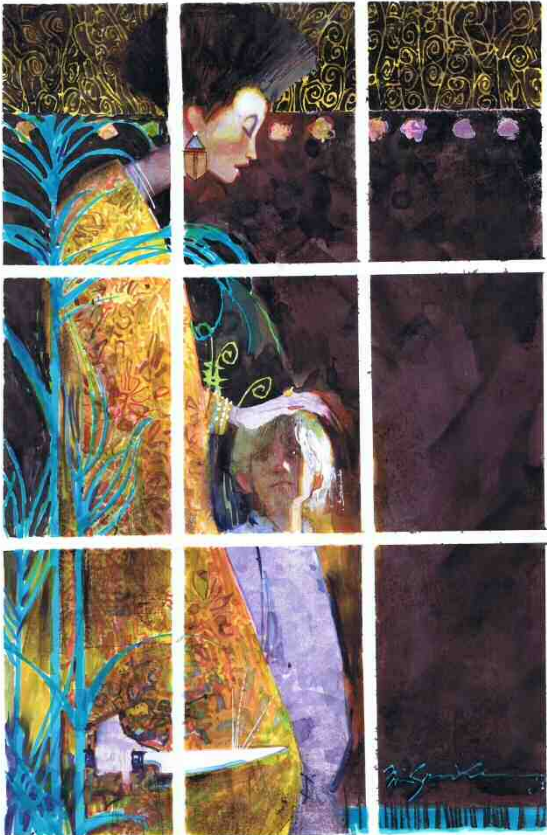
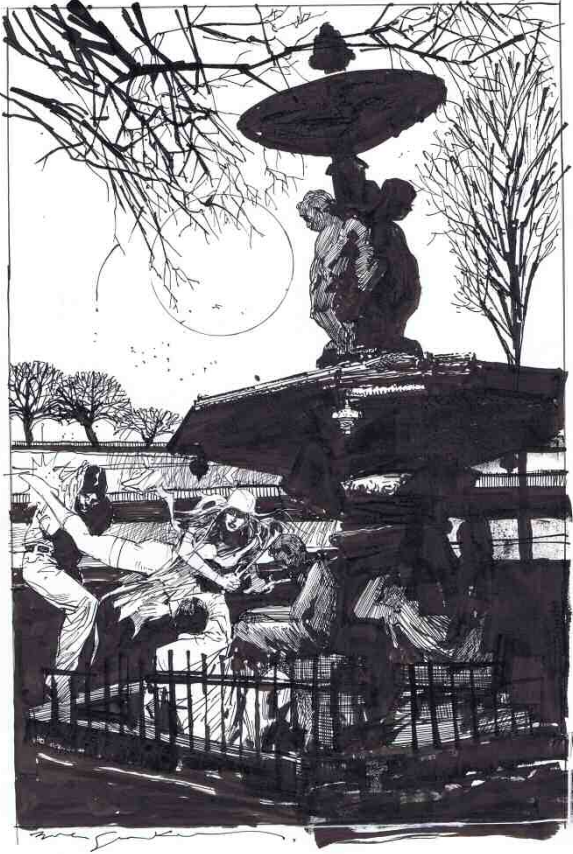


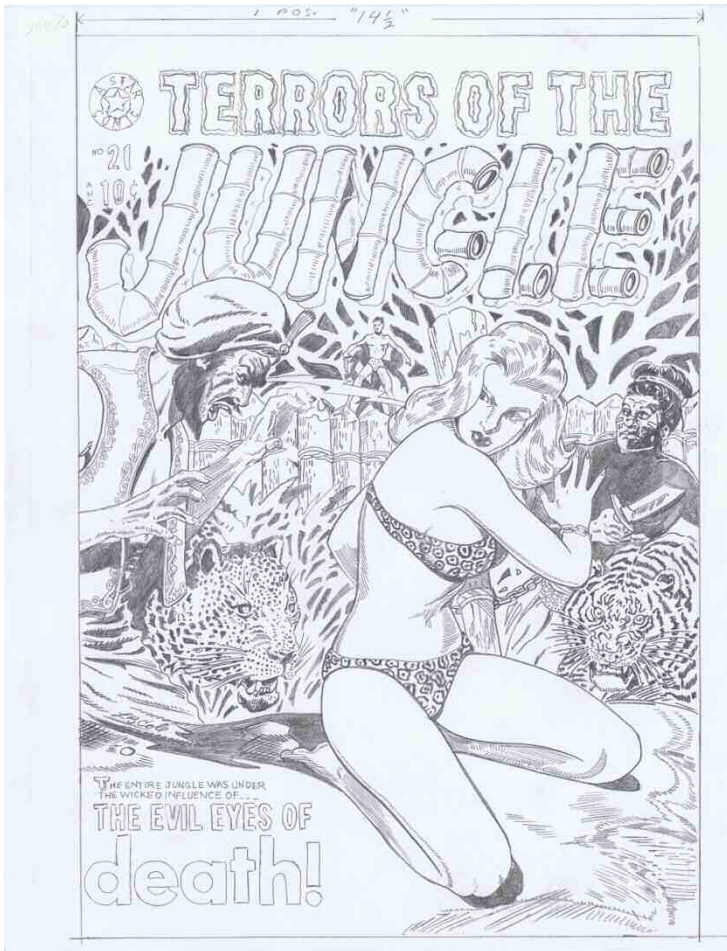


Below are more Bill Sienkiewicz recreations. Up first is the black promotional poster he did for the Elektra Assassin series. I had this poster on my wall for a decade as a teen and in University. It is still my singular favorite piece by Bill. I was lucky to get him to agree to a recreation of it. Next is convention sketch where I asked him to revisit the cover to Elektra Assassin #4 with Garret and Elektra in a heart with cherubs all around. I asked him to do it with Daredevil and Elektra instead. Next is a recreation of a great Moon Knight page with Elektra being substituted in for Moon Knight. One more...a recreation of a Stray Toasters splash by Bill. This started out as a commission to revisit this page but to change the characters to Elektra and Daredevil. The instructions were forgotten and a nice recreation of a favorite page arrived instead. Actually, one more...here is Bill recreating the cover to Elektra Lives by Frank Miller. Another misunderstanding in instructions which were to create the Miller sketch commission but this one happened instead. I ended up buying both. Wow...I have a lot more personal pieces by Bill than I would have actually thought. Cool.

Next is an L.B.Cole recreation of one of his more iconic covers. The original covers were lost. I believe I had heard he had a flood and so much of his golden age artwork was destroyed. In the 80's he was recreating some covers and this is one of the pencil prelims he did in working up this project.







I had almost forgotten an important What If? commission series I had gotten. Through a long relationship and friendship with Jordi Bernet, I have ended up with some unique commissions. The first few I got were rather standard pieces but as our relationship grew, so did the quality of the commissions. Here is the first, the Dragon Lady in her war-time attire. I think it is a great tribute to the Caniff and his femme fatale. Through a friend and a translator, I got to know Jordi and we started doing trade deals for commissions. He is a big fan of strip art and so in exchange for strip art, I was able to get additional commissions. Up next was a look back to the jungle girl themes that got me into comic art in the first place. I asked Jordi to do a comic page commission in the style of Fiction House with a jungle girl. This is what he came up with. To say that I was blown away would be an understatement. Even though I have had some great commissions from Jordi since and I have some of his best published work, I think this piece is my favorite from everything he has ever done. I could not have been more thrilled with the art, the layout and the humor. I think I have been pretty fortunate in the opportunities to get commissions and even in those opportunities, I have been fortunate at how things turned out but I'd have to say this one stands out among the best of the best.



TO MY FRIEND JEFF SINGH, WITH BEST WISHES

Indi  2010.





Soaring from the success of the previous commission, I asked Jordi to recreate one of my favorite storylines from Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*. It is the storyline where the Dragon Lady teaches Terry to dance to impress April Kane at the ball. I have talked about and shared these commissions with you previously in CFA-APA #100 in my article *Finding the Dragon Lady* so I won't go into much length describing them again but you get to see the images again. The second of the two was an unexpected bonus as Jordi was unsure if he had done a good enough job on the first piece. Clearly he had far exceeded my expectations.



\* GUION: JEFF SINGH / DIBUJOS: IMITANDO EL ESTILO DEL GRAN MILTON CANIFF EN TERRY, DE JORDI BERQUET, PARA MI AMIGO JEFF -



We then started talking about a bigger commission. This would be a Sunday page featuring Corto Maltese and Rasputin playing chess and reminiscing about adventure, peril, women and their complex history. This commission proved to be a real struggle for Jordi although initially it was something he was very keen on. It took years to complete and in the years from beginning to end he had met several people that had assisted and worked with Pratt who had less positive experiences. This took a lot of the wind out of Jordi's sails and things stalled. In the end, he drew me three pieces with Corto and his own Torpedo character together in hopes to make up for not being able to do a pure Pratt tribute. Although I think the original idea would have been brilliant, I certainly understand and respect his decisions and am grateful for the generous work he did on the theme.



\* PARA MI AMIGO JEFF SINGH, CON UN ABRAZO



\* PARA JEFF, CON AFFECTO.



\* PARA MI AMIGO JEFF SINGH. UN HOMENAJE A CORTO MALTES DE PRATT. ESPERANDO QUE SEA DE SU AGRADO Y QUE SIRVA PARA DISCULPAME UN POCO POR MI IMPERDONABLE RETRASO.



BARCELONA  
2018 -

© HUGO PRATT.

I also have more Dragon Lady teaching Terry to dance commissions but those too were previously focused on in **CFA-APA #100, Finding the Dragon Lady** and won't be represented here.

Up next, more **What If?**

This last section continues off topic but still fitting under my **What If?** title. This is the stuff of urban myths. It also happened the day after I wrote the above article. I was debating keeping this story for a future CFA-APA submission but thought it fit here and I am bursting to tell you all anyways.

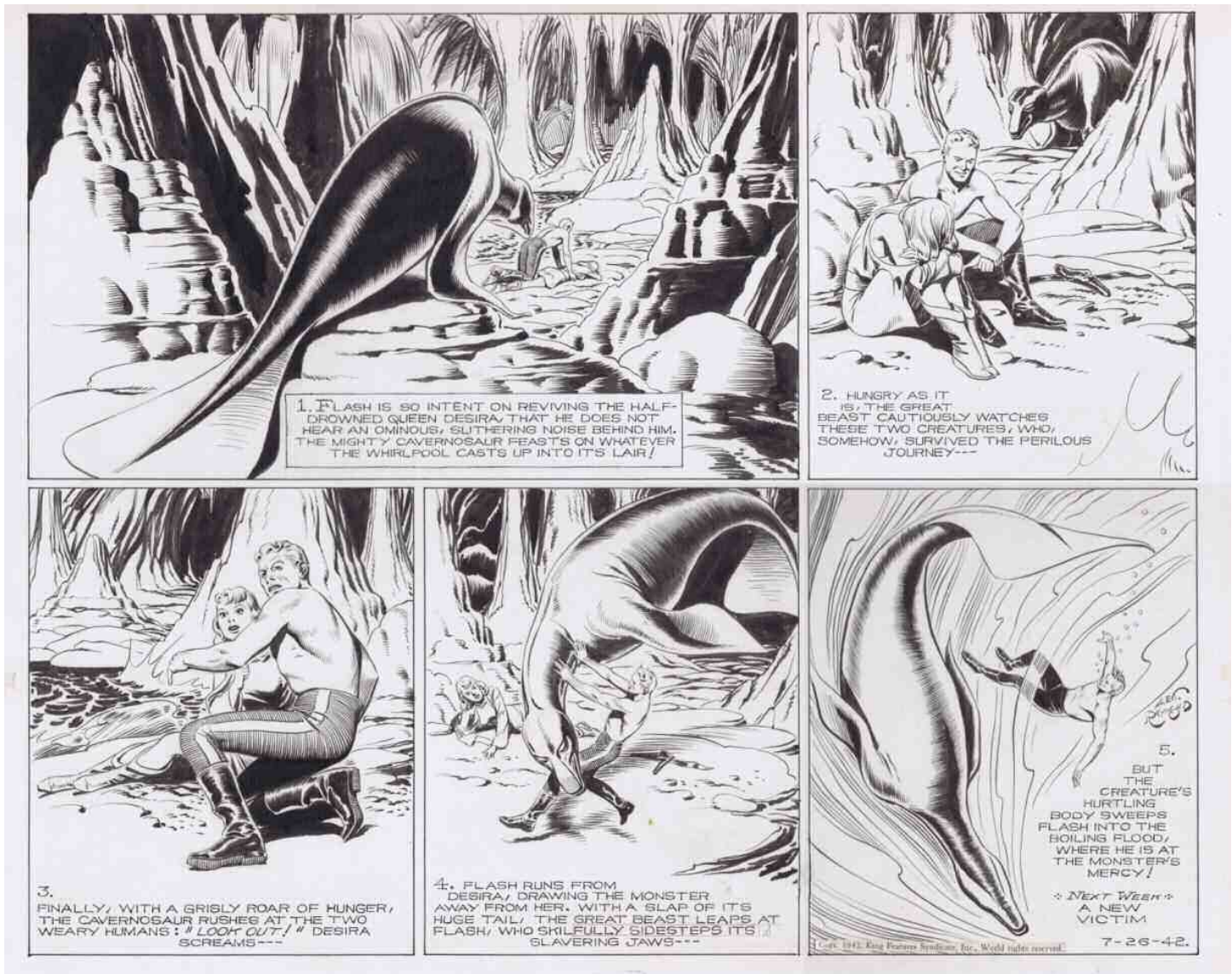
Everyone has heard of those stories of someone walking into antique shop and finding a great piece of strip art like Peanuts dailies or the garage sale finds. These are all stories we hear about but the validity of most of them I don't know. How many people do you know that this actually happened to? For me, I have heard of a dozen of these stories but if I had to prove any of them, I couldn't because I never knew who exactly these things happened to. Perhaps there are a few in our midst who knew someone this happened to. Well, now you all do...it happened to me!

It was no antique shop but a full on comic con in the year 2019. Fan Expo is a big show in Toronto. Around 130,000 attendees and the last reported numbers I found were 2016. I believe the show has increased capacity since then. It is

my least favorite show but I go every year because it is local and I get free dealer passes for life from a dealer who I gave up my booth to a few years ago. I have been going for over 25 years now.

I'd set up originally there as an art dealer/collector for a few years and slowly transitioned from a booth with 10 art portfolios to a booth with a dozen comic boxes and two portfolios of art behind the counter. Comics sold and art didn't. I am sure you are aware of the fact that with few exceptions, I am not a costumed hero fan and so the art I own and subsequently sell is not of this nature and that is not congruent with what most of the fans at these shows want. I had been saying for years that this was my last year but every year I'd sign up again because I knew the wait list for a booth was decades long and so if I let go of it, I would never get another.

Three years ago I finally decided it was done. I sold most of my key issue comics and had a lot of nice comics and over 50 long boxes at home that I decided were going to be wholesaled. I loved comics but now I am a reader and no longer a collector. I never revisited those boxes. My kids like comics and manga but never had any interest in exploring the long boxes and so it was time for them to go. I traded them all in one trade deal with a dealer/collector for a single piece of artwork. It is my Flash Gordon Sunday by Alex Raymond. It is one of the pieces rescued from a dumpster by Al



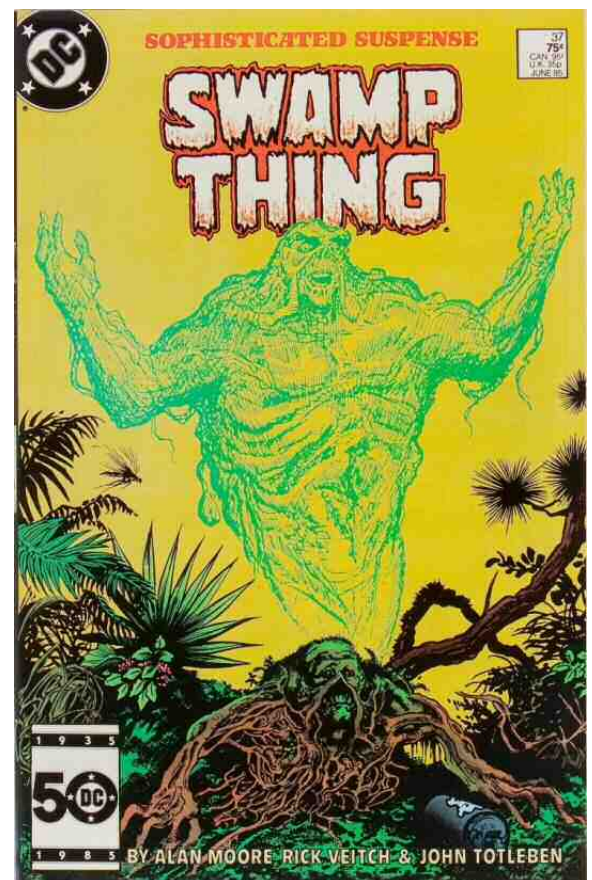
Williamson and given to the previous owner with instructions not to sell it. He didn't, he traded and all this happened almost 50 years after it was given to him and almost a decade after Al had passed.

All of a sudden I had all this new space on the floor and on the wall to put up art and I have never regretted parting with all those books for a moment. No more books meant no more need for a table at the show and so I made a deal with an

adjacent vendor who had 7 tables and wanted an 8<sup>th</sup>. I signed over my table to them and in exchange I get exhibitor passes for life. He gets so many passes with his booths that it is not a big deal and it means I never have to wait in line. If I had to pay or to wait in line, I'd skip show. Even free, I only usually attend one or two of the 4 days and it is almost always all just to socialize.

On the first day, a Thursday, I arrived at about 11:30. I took the train in as I had dinner plans that involved a 5 hour meal and plenty of wine so I knew I'd need to be without a car to get home. This year I got in early and got my badge. I walked around about 20 minutes and chatted with a few friends for 20 minutes. I probably moved 50 feet in the entire time and then it was time to rush out to meet Jeffrey Morgan for lunch. Who? I'll introduce you to Jeffrey in a future CFA-APA article that I think will be quite enjoyable. We had a nice lunch for about 2 hours mostly talking. I gave Jeffrey some art I had bought on his behalf from Nate Sanders and he gave me cash for it. A favor for a friend who doesn't like the methods the auction house accepts payments and so he asked me to facilitate. So, I had some money in my pocket. In recent years I have found such little art that I have stopped getting cash out for the show as most of the time I can pay with a credit card or I can get money from a few friends/dealers or if nothing else, I can hit the ATM. I get back to the show around 3:00 pm. The VIP ticket holders have already been in for an hour. I start in the rows number 2200 and work back. I walk up and down each aisle making sure to see everything that everyone has. I like a lot of pop culture, manga, anime, fantasy, horror and the kitchen sink so I can understand and appreciate almost everything that is there. It took me about 2 hours to get to the area near artist's alley. I stopped at one booth in the 700's and they had 6 portfolios of artwork. I spent a bit of time flipping through. Lots of Archie art by Dan Parent and later Dan Decarlo from the 90's. \$1000 a story \$700 covers. They had some nice Katy Keene interiors for \$1600 which I found a bit aggressive. They had some other miscellaneous art. I did stop at one Vince Locke page they had that I rather liked but they wanted too much for it. As much as I love Vince's work, he usually doesn't command very much for his pieces. I did try and work out something but we were too far apart. I was also debating getting a Tim Sale commission for \$1060 or a Juanjo Guarnido sketch for \$675-800 for a single character but in the end decided that I need to remain a bit more focused on how I want to grow my collection and apply a bit of discipline. I kept walking.

In row 600, essentially across the aisle from my former booth was a small booth for a used toy collector. Dingy, poorly lit and with curtain barriers on both sides it looked like a hovel. It had a glass showcase in front filled with action figures and toys from the 50's to the 70's. In the showcase he had vanity license plates with geek themes and these were a bit of a unique item and so were attracting attention. A private collector/dealer in his late 40's setting up for the first time. He was standing there with a hard hat on and a bright, reflective construction vest. On his showcase, at the front of his booth on a pedestal at eye level sat the piece of art. It was in a terrible frame that lacked a mat and went right to the edges of the art. It is one of those frames you might buy at a store to put a trival award in. I saw the piece there and thought no f\$#\*ing way was this real art. It is an iconic cover to Swamp Thing #37 and among one of the most memorable from the Alan Moore Swamp Thing run and a true key issue being the first John Constantine appearance. I assumed the original must be buried in one any number of big Moore or 80's/90's era collectors. No way is this sitting here in plain view and no one is seeing it. Perhaps I had some bad falafel or quinoa for lunch and I was seeing things! I asked casually for the vendor to tell me about this piece. He lit up and said it was the original art that the artist drew for the cover and he had bought it in the 80's. He was selling it. I asked him how much. He told me his price. I said done...but I wanted to see it out of frame as I wanted to see the back. I had to make sure it wasn't some sort of recreation, print, copy or other item. It was a painful and anxious good 3 to 4 minutes watching him peel off the aged masking tape and the brown, brittle cardboard from the back of the frame without any tools but we got there. The stamps were there. This was the real thing. I told him I didn't need the frame



and put the art in my portfolio bag and paid him the cash. He was happy. Until the art was in my hands and he had his payment, I kept feeling like this deal was going to fall through. I tried to be cool and not so anxious but I am sure that didn't come through. I do things at work all the time that are down to the very last half second before people die or just after they die bringing them back and as much as that is exciting, this art deal was a little too exciting for me. I felt it in my stomach and my knees were weak. I did ask about other art he owned. He had bought 2 other Bill Willingham pieces at the same time and I looked at those but had no idea what they were. I passed on them. Those were the only 3 pages of art he ever bought and he never paid attention to comics or comic art since. I think his toy collection was also very popular. People were lining up to buy toys from him. They looked like a lot of vintage items and the prices must have been good too as he was busy. I wouldn't be surprised if he was sold out by the end of the show.

I was in a bit of shock from the time he told me what it was and his asking price on it and for probably the next hour. I couldn't believe what had just happened. I finished the aisles and then went up and down artist alley. I probably absorbed about 20% of what I usually would as my mind was elsewhere. It is more than 48 hours later I am writing this and it has not fully sunk in. This is a key comic cover that was buried and essentially lost for 30 years that pops up. At least 5000 people walked by this thing before I saw it. It blows my mind that I was the first to see it and realize what it might be. Even knowing what I know, I didn't think it was going to be anything other than some nice print. I got it for an embarrassingly cheap price but it is what he was asking. If he had asked me for an offer it would have been many multiples of what he had asked for but he knew what he wanted for it and I was happy to pay it. I don't want to put the price in print but let's say it was a very, very, very small fraction of what it should have sold for.

I did get a chance to share the piece and the story with a few collectors and friends at the show. That night I went to my annual Fan Expo dinner with two collectors (we have been doing it for a decade and it is the highlight of the Fan Expo for me). We did the 30 minute walk from the convention center to the dinner and I managed to not talk about this deal at all until we got there. I did tell one of my friends I had something to show him but that he had to be sitting down to see it. After being seated, I pulled it out face down and handed it to him. He sat there for about 10 minutes speechless. He missed us ordering all together but since we knew we were doing the 7 course tasting menu it was not important. The wine pairing was particularly good this time and our sommelier was particularly generous so we were well liquored as we left. We closed the restaurant about 1 am and walked back to his hotel which gave me a bit of time for the wine to start to wear off and I took an Uber home from his hotel.

I had no need to go back to the convention the next day and so I slept in. I did drive into town that evening to meet up with Albert Moy and a buddy for dinner in the distillery district. I'll probably go in tomorrow for the last day. I want to reconnect with Dan Parent about an Archie project Bob and I are jointly working on for this journal. The con will be over but it is one I will never forget. I will still complain about the con and how much I hate it but there was that one year, 2019 when I found that Swamp Thing cover. It is a story I will still be telling on my deathbed. It is the kind of story that turns into myth. It is the stuff of collectors' dreams....what if?

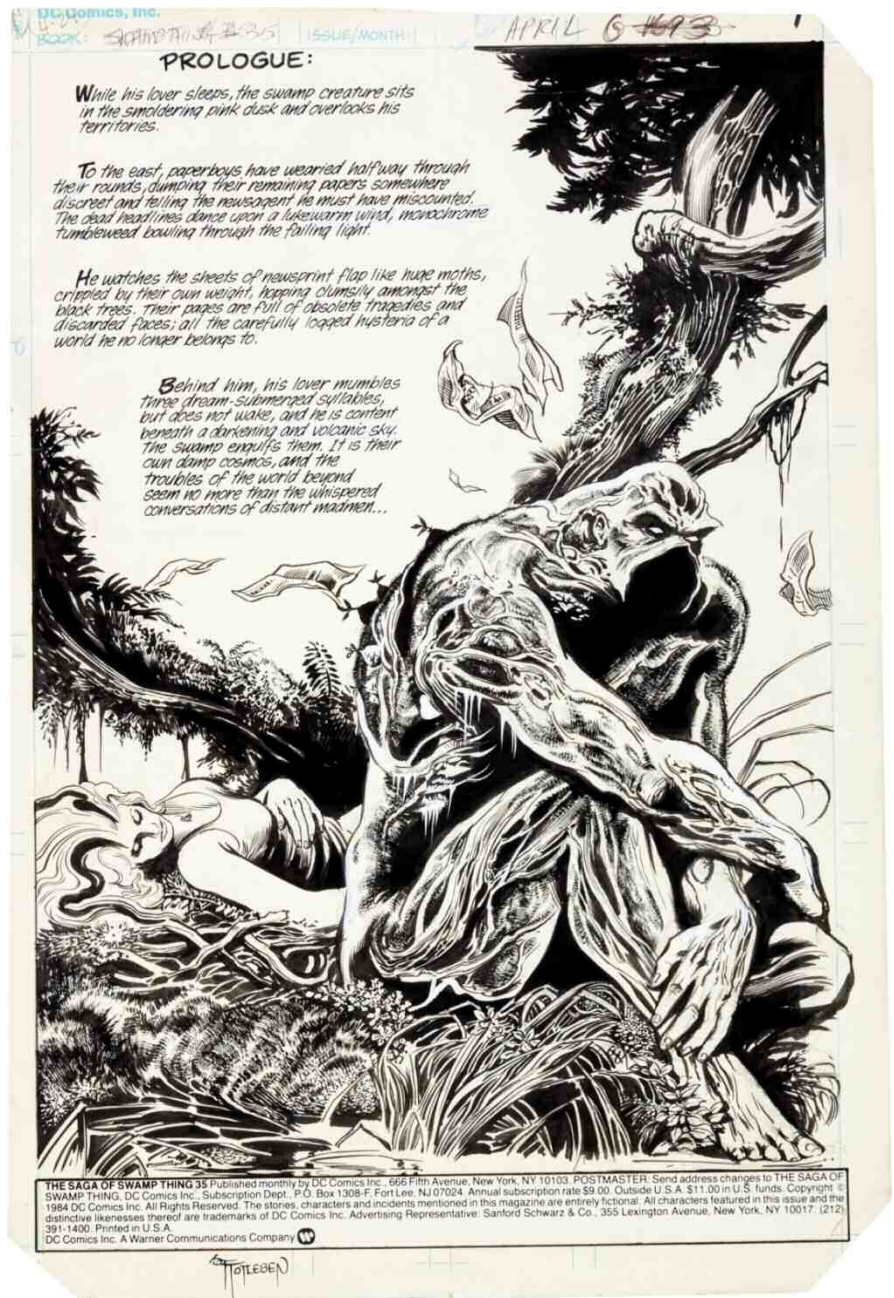
Putting aside what it cost me, I now own a very important cover from a series I read and worshipped as a teen. It is slightly different from the published cover in that the hovering Swamp Thing image has been redrawn, the image is cropped on the right and the insect has been moved slightly. It is already framed and on my wall but I am trying to decide what to do with it. I already have a spectacular splash from that series with both Abbey and the Swamp Thing that I prefer. I don't think my collection needs both. I am hoping to perhaps trade this piece for something I want that is well beyond my normal budget that I'd enjoy owning more. Also presented is my other Swamp Thing page which comes just after Issue #34, the *Rites of Spring* which I think might be the high point not only in Alan Moore's career but comics in general. It ties in with that issues themes and an interesting transition into the next story. For me, it is the perfect Swamp Thing page and I don't need another.

It is now 3 weeks later and I am updating this article. I decided to leave the above part untouched and continue the story. The story was leaked a week later to one of the CGC comic art board by one of the comic guests at the convention who I don't know personally and didn't talk to or tell about the art. He posted with good intentions of telling how in this day and age, such incredible finds are possible. He also posted the price I paid which was a piece of information told only to 3 - 4 people. He thought the price was public and had a sticker on the art and so it was fair game. It wasn't but this is part of the problem with third and fourth hand information...details get lost and things get added to the story. I think the price is irrelevant as it was an incredible bargain and a small fraction of what it was worth and the exact amount was not

necessary for the story but to put a number to it overshadowed the point of the story and it took on a life of its own. Several posters accused the buyer (still not publicly known but perhaps will be since I am putting it into print here and perhaps members from this group feels the need to share it with others...hopefully not) of everything from elder abuse and deception to theft and moral corruption. With the exception of a half dozen people who like to stir up things, almost everyone agrees they would have done the same thing in a heartbeat. The art was brought to the show to sell by a dealer who set up at the show to sell his collectables. The seller had a fixed price on it. I paid the seller the full price he was looking for and he was happy. End of story. Thankfully none of the negative vibes got much traction and it seems like there is consensus that nothing nefarious took place. Nothing did, you have the full story above. The seller left happy and I hope he never finds out for his sake as it would serve no purpose and only be upsetting.

Now for a further update, as of a few hours ago, a final agreement was made in a trade/cash deal that sees this piece move into a private collection. The art has physically left my possession and it won't be seen again for another 3 decades. My friend does not post his art or share with other people what he has. Poof! Just like that it is gone again. The original article had a nice scan of the art included but the piece now belongs to another collector and he has asked me not to post scans of the original art and so the scan was removed from this article. It is his art now and I will respect his wishes. I probably would have posted the art if it were not for the negative turn the CGC boards took and the sour grapes maligning me and the deal. I think it changed how things played out with this art and what I ultimately did with it. In the end, the negative and hateful posts ruined what should have been the highlight of my collecting career for me. I have traded for art I can enjoy and not have to be reminded about the all the deleterious fanfare around it every time I looked at it. That was the only downside of this whole deal. It is something I would have been happy to share and perhaps present it in a different light with a controlled narrative instead of a story that was missing much of the detail and had the focus turn into something else because of transaction details that were never meant to be public. Now the art is gone and will remain part of the mystery of this story.

What I learned from this whole thing is something I had known. If I didn't want anyone to know, I should not have told anyone. From the moment I told the first person, there was the potential for the story getting out. I could have put the art in my portfolio and continues as if nothing had happened. That is not my nature; I like storytelling and sharing art with friends. It is why I am in CFA-APA and why I post on Comcartfans.com. The one other thing I might have done differently was to post about the find first and I came close to doing that. I had made the decision that I would first tell my story at my annual art gathering which happens in a week from now in Toronto. I would then share the story with the



CFA-APA and then it would go on Comcartfans. As David often says, “Mann Tracht, Un Gott Lacht” (Man plans, God laughs).

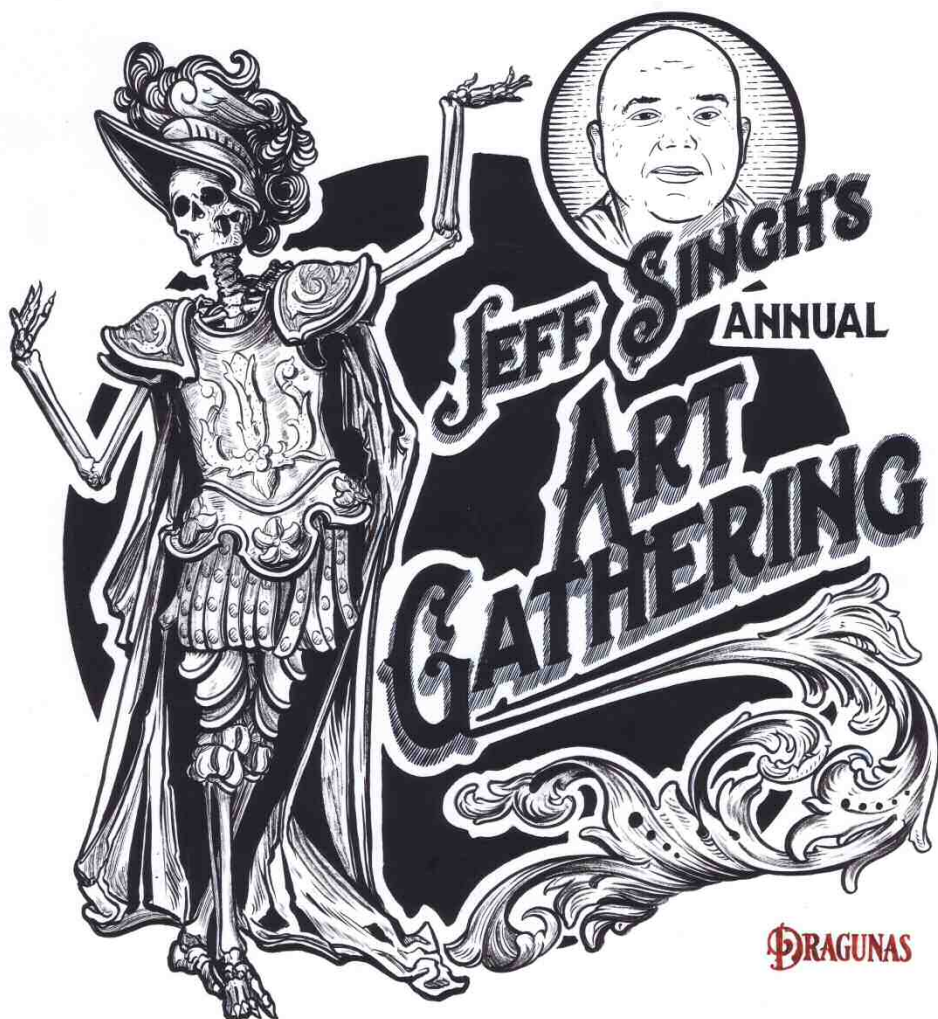
So, a few “what if?”s in there. What if you could trade away all your comics for a single piece of artwork? What if you walked into a convention or store and saw an incredible find of a lost piece of key artwork? What if someone you told your story to told someone else who felt it was OK to post the details of your transactions publicly? What if Elektra Had Lived? All but the last of these I found answers to in my experiences with this deal. What would I do differently next time (what if? there was a next time)...I’d probably still share my story but keep things quiet until it was time to share. I’d hold back my enthusiasm in telling people right away...nahh...I’d do the same thing again. I am not one to learn from my own mistakes but perhaps you will! Until next time, happy hunting and pleasant dreams of What If?

If other members have similar stories, I’d love to read about them. Perhaps put them in your mailing comments if there is not enough for a full article.

Still milking the What If? theme with this next update. What If 38 art collectors got together to share an evening of collecting stories and art. My annual art dinner was this past weekend. It has grown to include almost 40 collectors and since a few of the regulars didn’t attend, I suspect it will creep well over 40 next year. I am likely going to cap it. In addition to people in the Toronto area we had a collector from Hawaii come in. Artist Joe Dragunas, whom you have seen art in this article from, also came in the capacity of an art collector and fan. Fellow CFA-APA members George Hagenauer and Bob Kopman were also in attendance again. It was a fun night and the first year in many that the barbeque didn’t catch on fire prompting emergency measures to keep the house from burning down.

Joe came in from Ohio a few days early and surprised me with an art gift. A beautiful sign for my art party and then he made 30 limited edition prints which he signed to be given out. I got to keep the original art. Joe got to meet a number of new collectors and I believe sold art work to Bob and George. Including myself, Benno, Alan and the two new owners of Joe’s artwork, we almost have enough members with art by Joe to do a dedication issue☺

We had about eight new participants this year so lots of new art to see and new people to meet. As you can imagine when it gets to that size, it is not possible to talk to everyone or see all the art that is there. As host, I am off doing things and interrupting my interactions constantly to attend to things. I think the size and not being able to see everything gives





one more to look forward to in subsequent years. It is the highlight of my comic collecting year every year and I am very thankful my wife is so understanding and helpful.

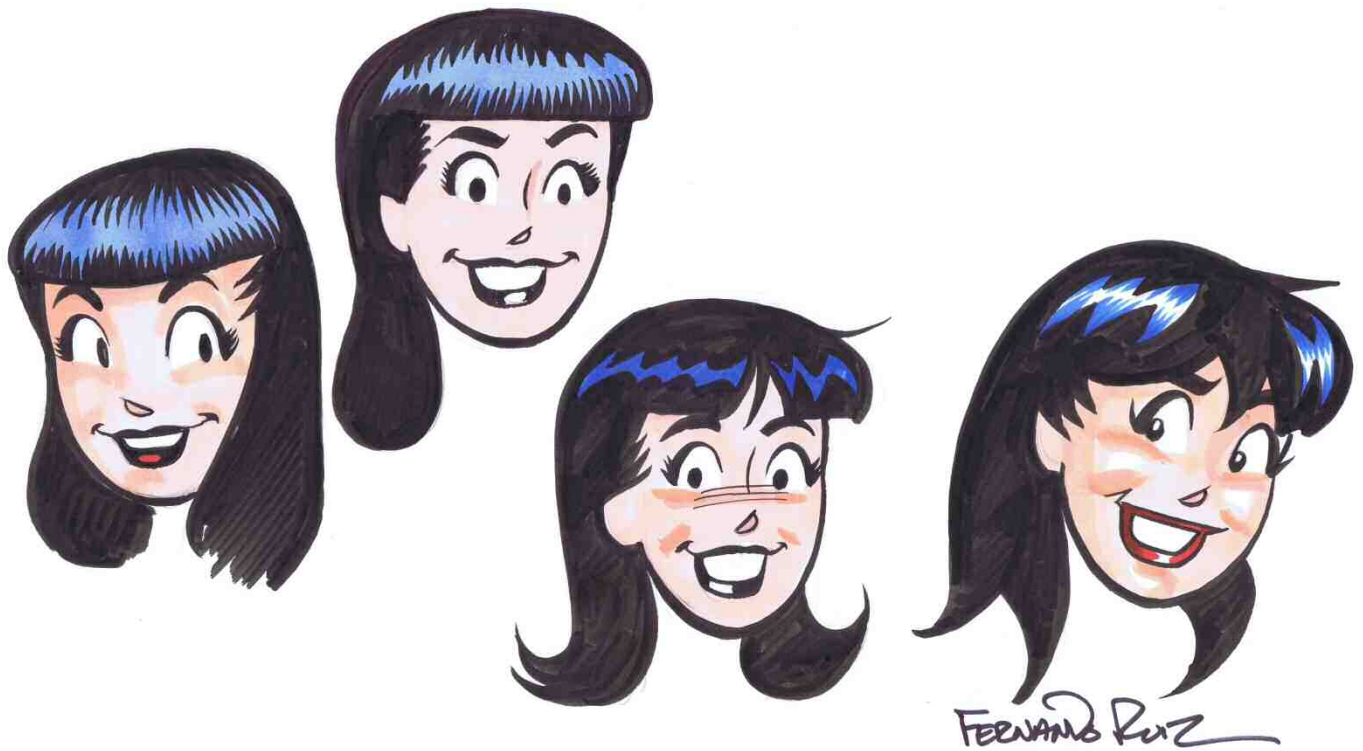
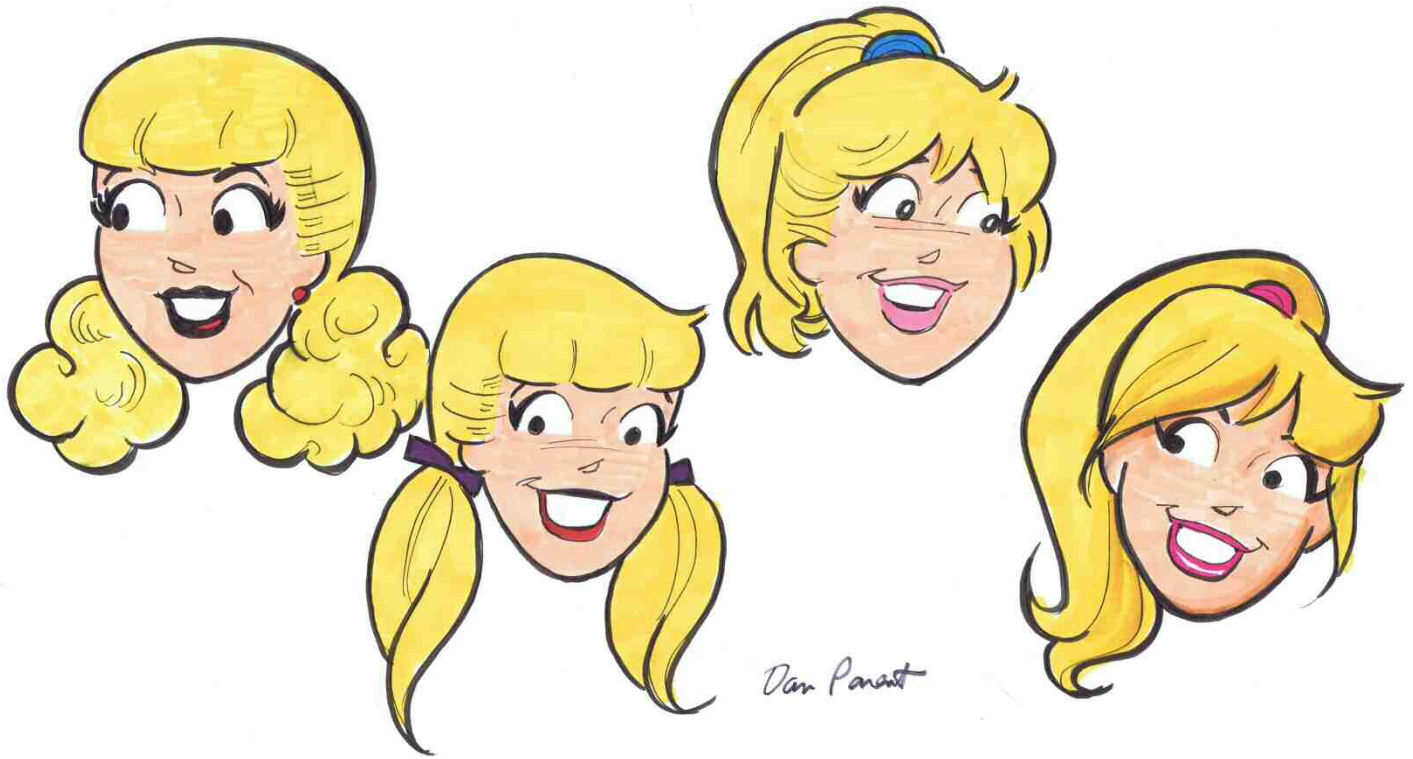


The art highlights for me other than the piece by Joe were seeing some really nice Krazy Kat Sundays, a gorgeous Dave McKean collection and a top tier Matt Baker good girl art story printed several times by Fiction House. Although predominantly costumed hero art, there was quite a bit of strip art, illustration art and other like items. I'd like to think I have played a small role in increasing the visibility and collectability of non-hero art among the local collecting community over the years.

I also told my Swamp Thing cover find story to the group as a whole to avoid having to tell it 38 times that night.

I leave copies of CFA-APA around too and there is always a great deal of interest in them and many inquiries. Perhaps I will find some new recruits from among this year's cohort to bring into the fold.





In the Interest of no blank pages here is some art from the last day of Fan Expo...Betty and Veronica through the ages with Dan Parent and Fernando Ruiz doing Montana, Decarlo, Vigoda and Goldberg tributes in addition to their own versions. Although perhaps a little stalled, I am working on a large project with Bob Kopman for an Archie Style Guide and that was the inspiration for these commissions.

## ***Mailing Comments CFA APA 108***

Already a favorite issue as I love my comic strip art. Great job on putting this one together. A BIG thank you to everyone that contributed. A huge standing ovation for David as our maestro and John as our facilitator/printer.

**Stephen Stein** – Star Wars has been blessed with some of the greatest comic artists having working on it. I have never read it and although a fan of the original movies, I never really got into anything outside of that original cannon. I'd like to add a Manning to my collection and I have owned a few Williamson Star Wars pieces over the years.

**Wally Harrington** – I love the sci-fi themed comic strips. As good as the original Buck and Flash were, I do think the British really did the best job with the theme. Nice overview of Dan Dare.

**Ray Cuthbert** – Fun landscape format to your article and very fitting for the topic (wished I had thought of that). Nice selection of strips to show from classic adventure and sci-fi to romance and gags.

**Ron Sonenthal** – I very much enjoyed your impressions of being in the room at Heritage. If I ever have the chance to go to Dallas for something art related, I will hopefully be able to time it so I can attend a big Heritage Auction live.

**John Butler** – very touching story of friendship and art. It was among my favorite articles of the year!

**Bill Leach** – a very welcomed alternative interpretation of the Strip Art theme! Great collection of pin-ups.

**Marcelo Anciano** – great to meet you in person in London. I very much enjoyed our visit and talk. Thank you for the Gianni book, it was a treat to go through. Those were some gorgeous Bolland Killing Joke pages you owned.

**Joe Latino** – Nice and detailed research on Ditko.

**Bob Kopman** – Nice seeing you present and talk about the strip art in your collection. My favorites are easy, LOA and GA.

**Michael O'Connell** – what a great collecting story and a follow up to your last article. Among my favorites this issue.

**Benno** – I have long admired Prince Valiant but always put off the daunting task of diving in and reading 5 decades of work. I just started recently now that the Fantagraphics reprints have reached the end of Foster's run and I have to say I am so impressed with the stories and art so far. Foster hit the ground running with this strip, perfect from the beginning. It make take me months or years to get through it all but I am motivated and am looking forward to joining in on the adventure of a life time. I enjoyed the interviews you did, very insightful. Hopefully I'll be seeing you and Alan around the time this issue gets published.

**Lee Banaka** – it is always fun reading your articles and seeing what the art collecting landscape was like long before I was a part of it.

**Tom Vincent** – interesting perspective on Wrightson and Marvel's attempts to control his style.

**John Stuart** – Modesty Blaise ... there can never be too many images or articles on her. Nice overview.

**George Hagenauer** – nice seeing you again at the comic art party. I've always like police dramas.

**Hal Turner** – Nice story about the Gray Morrow art. I was a big fan of his art when I first started collecting but over the years my tastes change. I still think he was a great artists, just no longer art that fits in my collection. Funny how that happens. Tony Millionaire, there is someone I need more art from in my collection.

**Alan Dion** – nice Strip art collection. You have a Gumps...nice. The Brick Bradford I think is my favorite. Perhaps I can talk you into being a travel mate on a future Europe art trip.

**Michael Hranek** – Nice seeing Archie art in your article. I am becoming a much bigger fan. Although a little stalled, I am hoping to have a big project done for a future mailing along with my co-writer Bob Kopman.

**Aaron Sultan** – Nice to read about your thrift shop find. Spectacular.

**Chad Kolean** – I have some nice Jones images in this issue of APA for you and in the next I will have pictures from the Jones exhibition in Lucca. I hope you enjoy.

**Roger Hill** – seeing the cover to HOS #92 and Swamp Things 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 all in one place...it is inconceivable to me. What a great story.

**David Applegate** – Holtz Strip art book is my bible. I call it my magic book and I have a few friends who are too cheap to get their own consult me about looking things up for them in my magic book. If I had to give up all other comic books and guides a I have and keep only one, this would be it. I loved seeing you talk about For Better or For Worse. It is the comic strip of my childhood having grown up at about the same time as Michael was and sharing the Canadian experiences like bags of milk. It is such a part of my psyche that I don't even see it as comic strip, it is just part of my life and I happy to own a few examples.

I recently did a short interview over the phone with a freelance reporter doing a story on comic art and how the Marvel movies have led to a big jump in the value of original comic art. I disagreed with this premise and said that although the value of comic art has seen a rather brisk growth period that coincided with the time frame Marvel movies were coming out, I did not think the two were

correlated. I explained that I think new fans entering comic art collecting were driving up the prices as there was now higher demand but these new collectors were generally well healed comic book collectors. It is unlikely that someone saw a Marvel movie and decided to spend thousands on artwork. It takes time to evolve from your first comic to your first back issue to comic art. Overall the movies have been good for exposure to comics but I am not sure they have increased comic sales that much but I have no actual data to back up that gestalt. Anyway, the article got picked up by a major Canadian Newspaper, the Toronto Star and they sent a photographer over to take a few pictures. It was a quick 3 minute visit and the reporter came over too and we hung out for about an hour. He is a comic fan and is just starting to dabble in comic art too. Here is a link to the article.

<https://www.thestar.com/business/2019/12/27/zowie-original-comic-book-art-is-suddenly-selling-for-millions.html>

As mentioned, the article does jump right in the super hero tropes with the title and dives right into prices as well. Although I think this shouldn't be the focus of the article, it is what outsiders think of our hobby and it is how reporters get people to read their stories. I'd prefer the article being about collecting and not about values but that is what the reports and editors think will make for what their readers will read. I am OK with some of that being in there but if I can subvert the conversation and navigate into other territory, I will. Below, James Martin Juliet commission and the two Willingham pieces the Swamp Thing cover seller had for sale.

