The Professional "How-To" Magazine on Comics, Illustration and Animation

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ACE PAINTER & COMIC ARTIST

CA

REGULAR COLUMNISTS JERRY ORDWAY & JAMAR NICHOLAS PLUS! MIKE MANLEY & BRET BLEVINS' COMIC ART BOOTCAMP





# THE PROFESSIONAL "HOW-TO" MAGAZINE ON **COMICS & CARTOONING**

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# Welcome to the Many Worlds of DONATO GIANCOLA

Interview conducted by Mike Manley and transcribed by Steven Tice

**DRAW!:** I see you had your "open studio" – **DONATO GIANCOLA:** Yeah, this weekend.

**DRAW!:** Two of my friends did that a couple of years ago. How many years have you been doing that now?

**DG:** On and off for the past twelve years. The typical time I host it is during a local art walk in the fall around October, but this year, because the New York Comic Con happened to be the same weekend as the art walk was, I missed out on having an open house. But I tend to do it about once a year, so it's a pretty annual thing.

**DRAWI:** So if you do it during the annual walk, there are other artists' studios near you that are open?

**DG:** Yeah, there are hundreds of them, literally—I'm not exaggerating—that are involved. Somewhere on the order of two to three hundred studios in and around the Gowanus area of Brooklyn.

### DRAWI: Wow, wow.

**DG:** Yeah, it's impressive just how many people are around and contributing art here. That's not even counting Williamsburg, either.

**DRAW!:** Oh, really? Wow. We have one in Philadelphia, and they tend to break it down Broad Street. They do the east side one weekend, and then they do the west side another weekend. Do they do that in New York, where they alternate, or do they do it all at one time?

**DG:** Well, probably like in Philadelphia, these events are actually run by volunteers, so even though other places have similar kinds of events, they're all totally run by completely different organizations. There's no coordination in that sense, and I think the organizers just select a weekend that's a non-compete with other art walks that are already in existence, so that way they don't lose out to or take away any of the luster from a preexisting art walk.

**DRAW!:** What do you get out of opening your studio besides, I guess, potential sales of people coming in and buying something? Do you get something yourself out of that?

**DG:** Oh, totally. I actually finally vacuumed my studio. [*laughter*] I get out the Windex and I take the grime of New York City off my windows once every year. I say it jokingly, but, seriously, it's like, "Wow! It's been a while since I



*Construct of Time*, a 1993 oil painting for the cover of the novel *Shadows Fall*. *Construct of Time* © Donato Giancola

cleaned this place." And I finally organize my—I had a collection of emails that I've grabbed from various conventions, having people fill out a form or write in a little book to stay updated, and those have sat in a pile for almost two years now. I finally get around to, like, "Oh, you know what? I'm going to put this data to use. I've got to let these people know what I'm doing, put them on my monthly mailing list." So, as funny as it is, the actual physical walk, the opening up of the studio, is actually just a part of the benefit that I get from hosting this event. These are all parts of running my business that get waylaid, or set aside, I should say, because of the nature of I like painting more than I like marketing.

**DRAW!:** Well, I'm assuming most artists are like that, even the ones who are fairly organized. You don't have somebody who helps you with that? You don't have an intern or assistant?

**DG:** I have an assistant, Kelley Hensing, and Kelley's been with me going on, I think, six years now. But she has her own business, and there's less of her use around the studio as well, as things have changed, and my kinds of clients and

my pace of commissions have changed from being heavily commercial with tight deadlines where I needed to get everything done on a fast schedule, to being more open with commissions that are—I'm working on one right now for a limited edition book, so it's a much looser schedule. So, yeah, I don't have anyone on a regular basis at this point that I have coming in as often as I used to.

**DRAW!:** That's an interesting point. I often try to cover that in the magazine, because some people are great at drawing, and painting, and creating, and not so good at organizing or the business side of it. But in your case, you just were talking about how your clientele is changing. Is that something that you're pushing, or is it a result of a combination of marketing forces, like the way the business itself of, say, book illustration is changing? Or is this something where you decided you wanted to kind of get off the deadline horse a little bit? **DG:** Oh, I think it's more coming from my clients' side. The business itself has changed for-not so much that it's changed, but the kind of work that they're commissioning is definitely more digital-based in that sense of speed of execution, and even aesthetically a different look than the high narrative that I execute. I'm very much grounded in focusing on storytelling and lots of figure and environment interaction in my pictures, and cover artwork is now gravitating to be something a little more symbolic and iconic in its structure, and less narrative overall.



*Portal*, a 2016 oil painting, measuring in at 60" x 40". This is about as close as Donato comes to painting starships. *Portal* © Donato Giancola

**DRAW!:** When I talked to some people at IlluxCon last year, they were saying how that seems to be happening also because they want to be able to continue to manipulate or play around with your image after you deliver it. Like, they may suddenly decide, "Well, maybe this background should all be purple." **DG:** Actually, that stuff happened way in the beginning of my career anyway, the digitizing of the image and the manipulation. This cover I'm working on right now as I'm speaking to you is an oil painting, but in a couple of days I'll be photographing it, digitizing it, and then modifying that information, that file, in order to send it off to my client. So, in a way, I'm working digitally anyway for the final result to my clients. The digital medium is really what's now changing, driving the market. It's more of an aesthetic change of visuals associated sometimes with digital artwork. The first time I saw one of my covers heavily digitally altered was way back in '95.

### DRAW!: Wow.

**DG:** There you go. I had a cloudy landscape behind a science fiction portrait, and they removed all the clouds and just turned it back into a blue sky in order to simplify the composition so the title could read a little more easily against it.

**DRAW!:** Wow, so they didn't even send it back to you. They had somebody at the publisher do that?

**DG:** Yeah, the art director did it himself. He was fluent enough in Photoshop and was able to execute that. So, yeah, that's what I'm saying—this goes back to the beginning of my career. And actually, that's always the case with any kind of image as an illustrator. Your work is going to be modified depending on the needs of the clients, ease for marketing, or layout, or whatever it is that they're going to do with your artwork.

**DRAW!:** Right. When I talked to Dave Dorman, he was talking about how people's perception of you, if you're "old school," or you use traditional media versus digital, they assume that you are automatically going to take much longer working traditionally, although a lot of guys are very fast with the traditional.

**DG:** Yeah. To be honest, I'm not getting called by the people who do see me as being a traditional artist. In a way, I can't answer that because I'm not even in discussion with those people who might be not providing opportunities for me. I don't dwell on that, the thing I am not. Even in science fiction and fantasy, I was never an alien creature kind of guy, a starship guy, so there are all these potential commissions that I kind of miss out on by not having starships in my portfolio as a science-fiction illustrator. But I'm just not interested in that. I think the people who are hiring artists for digital art for that



Donato painted this Iron Man oil painting as part of the Illustration Master Class. Iron Man © Donato Giancola. Iron Man © Marvel Characters, Inc.

## **DRAW!:** Right. But a career is a long time.

**DG:** Yeah, it is. Because you know what? When you've mastered that program, you've mastered ZBrush, you've mastered Photoshop, and then guess what the next phase is going to be? 3-D moving environments. Have you mastered that software yet? Because the next 20-something-year-old who's growing up with it is going to master it better than you, and you're going to be cut out of the loop of image creation if you rely solely on technical facility to make your work valuable. You know, being really great at chrome effects or suit design or whatever it is, that's kind of a dead-end pathway.

**DRAW!:** Yeah. You had fantasy art, and then geek culture became mainstream culture, so fantasy art became mainstream. Now everything—*Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*—is mainstream. **DG:** Right, *Iron Man* and all that.

**DRAW!:** Yeah. So you have these giant entertainment factories that need—I mean, we just saw the *Avengers* movie the other day. Literally thousands of people worked on that movie. Some guy here is doing this, and someone over here is doing this, and somebody is animating this door opening. There are literally thousands of people, like worker bees in this giant, global hive, making this stuff. You may be one of those worker bees and you may be fantastically happy and fantastically successful, but it seems like you're much

more interchangeable than someone doing what you're doing, which is making your own individual content. That's something that, within the last five years, can actually be very profitable. If you start generating your own content, and you make enough, it's possible that you can earn a comfortable living.

**DG:** Yeah, that's very true that a lot of those creative people who work in the movies are-look at the sheer numbers, right, and it's like, "Wow! That's a huge industry." But it's not like those people aren't creative, it's just that their choices for making a living, getting a job, that industry probably supports that kind of execution. To be honest, I just got lucky to fall into a business model where I'm given a lot of freedom to explore and embellish with a lot of my own story. I'm really thankful for that chance to be where I am. And like you said, look at all these people who are told, "Okay, you're going to be rendering Thor's hair. Animate his hair as he fights in battle, because we've got to embellish it beyond the model." Someone's doing that. There are a handful of these hair animators who are excellent at doing that kind of work, and it's incredible. But going back to your comment about building your own worlds, in a way I'm seeing that desire and a chance to do that even more so now. It's certainly on my radar about projecting that forward more.

**DRAW!:** You're sort of doing two things, because your commercial work is kind of like your personal work, but then



was asked to participate on *Action Comics* #1000, which doubled as an 80th birthday promotion for the character of Superman. I wrote and drew many well regarded stories for the character in the 1980s and 1990s and was up for the challenge of revisiting the Man of Steel, teaming with writer Louise Simonson on a five-page story sequence as artist.

When we'd worked on the characters years back, we'd worked "plot style" meaning there was a broad outline prepared, generally with individual page breaks, and the artist was free to adapt the story visually. Dialogue balloons were then written based on the penciled pages that the artist came up with. This is always my preferred method to work, but times change, and most comic scripts now include full panel descriptions and dialogue.

With Louise's "full script" (descriptions and dialogue included), though, I still had the freedom to add to or interpret the story, as she would revise the dialogue after seeing my finished art.

Another thing to note is that in the old days, if you intended to ink your own pencils, you still needed to draw some form of pencils or a layout so that the writer could supply dialogue for the

page, which had to be given to a lettering specialist to handletter onto the page before you could ink or finish the line art. That impediment doesn't exist now as the lettering is added digitally onto the inked pages, which are uploaded to and retrieved from a server or storage site. It's much easier to control what you turn in to the editor, from making digital edits or digital clean-up on a page. Extra work, but I can fix bits of drawing that bother me, like shrinking a head that looks a tad big, or raising or lowering a figure that isn't following my perspective plane.

I always tell aspiring artists that thumbnail sketches don't need to be legible, so long as you can figure out what you



Superman © DC Comics

scribbled! I'm not looking at reference at this stage, I'm only interested in panel flow and building in space for the dialogue balloons and captions. If you zero in on the lower half of the sketch for page 2, you can see how loose the drawing is. Superman is stopping a train, but I'm focused on deciding out how to break down the actions. Pages 3 and 4 are even less defined, though they do help me in setting up the action in the tighter prelims that follow. The final note on the thumbnails is that I believe they're a necessary stage in the whole process. I've done them one by one before, going from thumbnail to prelim to finish on a single page at a time, but I prefer to work in sequences of several pages on a longer or standard 20-page story. They help prepare you for what comes ahead in a script, and I've had scripts where you get to page 6 only to find there was an addi-

tional character in the scene that wasn't mentioned in pages 1-5, in which case I would have had to go back and insert that character into the already finished pages. So, thumbnails are necessary; they help you wrap your head around what the story requires, and can force you to look for plot holes or important details a writer may have neglected to state up front.

#### FIVE MINUTES

#### PAGE ONE

Evening at the Daily Planet. Clark at his subject typing up a story. Perry is leasing over, hashing him on a deadline. Planet will CLOCK behind Chark says 6:58. In the background can be Jimmy Quen, Ron Troupp, Lois Lane, Steve Lembard and/or Jacker. Waiters. Where you feel like drawing.

PERRY:

Finish up. Kentl The Alien Attack story is our Page One headliner... me FIVE MINUTES

CREDITS:



#### PAGE TWO

# t. Clark cocks his head, frowns, as Perty rants on, not listening to Perry but hearing acreal via his super-hearing. Maybe he's got his glasses down, looking with X-ray vision.

PERRY and printing's giving me hell about holding the presses,

- VOICES: We're going too fast!
- VOICE Curve's counting up!
- VOICE We're gonna DIE!

2. Clark looks back at Perry as he rushes from his cubicle, opening his tie. Perry yells after him.

- PERRY: You have five minutes! Kent? Kent?
- 3. Supes in contume flies off Daily Planes roof at superspeed. He's looking with Super into the controls of a subway car. The conductor has collapsed, and fallen against the thrott
- 4. Solicide Slam. At superspeed, Supes dives in front of an elevated train which is appr a curve. CLOCK somewhere says: 6:56. Bibbo's Ace O' Clubs is below the EL
- 5. iL The train slams into Supes pushing him backwards. Looks like he might not he able to stop



Superman © DC Comics



TAGE FINE L Super grain the collect of the posts wile are person to re-I days want, Jerry, Toper can still the past with and raises ( er Sande Der bad gept over in State. Fall De verpf (fot in Sand of a tiger ander ting Milder and des part sking og at tils sky A Les nd Super large ) ----Three advances What's day ? the sky, bigs, logs 1 P Japan Saleta' Sandari Santi Santi ya 1756 ..... TTR (I Dissingly its al, Sepai and -



# PAGE 1

ACTON 1000

As I had not previously drawn Superman in the current continuity, I tried to familiarize myself with the reference provided to me by the editor. As I worked on the first page, set in the Daily Planet, I realized I needed more to bring me up to date on newsrooms, so I contacted a friend who works for a great metropolitan newspaper, to possibly have him take a few quick pics of his workplace and desk. With some real-world details, I was confident to proceed. For the purpose of this story, which required constant visual clues as to the time in each panel, I had to show various clocks counting down the minutes until Clark Kent's deadline while he solves several problems as Superman.

When drawing my prelims, I am planning to ultimately use them as my pencils, so I try to draw them tightly detailed. They will be scanned and printed out on good Bristol drawing paper later to be inked. I print my bluelines on an Epson Stylus Photo 1400, which handles paper widths up to 13 inches and takes a sheet of 2-ply Bristol paper pretty well. This machine cost \$400 several years back and has six separate color ink cartridges, so you only need to replace the cyan if you mainly do bluelines, which is handy, as opposed to a printer with all the color tanks grouped in one cartridge.



(top) Jerry's preliminary sketch for page 1 of his *Action Comics* #1000 story. (above) Jerry's printer and the freshly printed blue lines for page 4. (right) Jerry's finished inks for page 1. Superman © DC Comics





**DRAW!:** How are you today? **GEORGE PRATT:** Good! School's out, no more classes.

**DRAW!:** Yeah, I just attended the annual student exhibition at the academy last night, because yesterday was graduation day at PAFA [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts]. All the third-year certificate students, the fourth-year certificate and BFA students, and the second-year Masters students get to show, so it was a very good show. Do you guys have the same type of thing at Ringling?

**GP:** Yeah, we have the senior shows—they put all their work up. The only problem is, they don't give them a whole lot of space. Where it used to be this sort of free-for-all, which

was really cool, and they could design the space however they wanted—some of it looked horrible, granted, but some of it was really fun because you got a feeling for the unique outlooks and points of view of the different students. They could hang large paintings and stuff like that, and now it's so small, the amount of space they're given, almost everything has to be a print. It's just blanderized the whole process, which is sort of sad, because there's not a lot of traditional work being put up, and that's disappointing. We have our own painting department within our department, and we push that whole traditional mindset. We force them to get those skills.

**DRAW!:** You're in the Illustration department, correct?



The drawing begins as a pen-and-ink sketch, then George paints over the sketch with watercolor. Artwork © George Pratt

GP: Correct.

**DRAW!:** So you have an Illustration department and a Fine Art department?

**GP:** Yeah. The Fine Art department has very few students these days. Our department is the largest one on campus. We have upwards of 500 students just in our own department. Next is Computer Animation, and then Gaming. There's a new one coming up they're just starting, and that's the Virtual Reality department. But we are the largest.

**DRAW!:** And this is Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida?

**GP:** Yes. Down south of Tampa. It's nice here.

**DRAW!:** How many years have you been there? **GP:** Man, it's twelve years I've been here, I think.

**DRAW!:** And you were teaching in New York before that, right?

**GP:** Yeah, I taught at Pratt Institute and then the Joe Kubert School, and I did per diem teaching for Marshall Arisman and his Master's program [at the School of Visual Arts]. I was also one of the advisors for that program, off and on, for students. Then in '98 I moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and didn't do any teaching until I taught a ten-week stint at SCAD in Savannah. My first day was 9/11.

# DRAW!: Oh, geez!

**GP:** Yeah, it was horrible. My son was only one year old then, and he and my then-wife were in Chapel Hill. It was freaky. Later I taught for three, maybe close to four years at Virginia Commonwealth University, and that was a bit of a long commute. That was when Greg Spalenka called, and he was like,

"Oh, man, I'm going to be in your neck of the woods." He was doing the Illustration Academy in Richmond. And that's actually how I started teaching at Virginia Commonwealth. They saw me do my dog-and-pony and hit me up.

I just wanted to see the Academy, because I'd heard so much about it. Greg talked to John English [co-founder of the Illustration Academy], and John said, "Have him come up. I'm not going to pay him or anything [*laughter*], but have him come up if he wants to scope it out, and I'll get him a hotel room." So I came up, and John and I hit it off immediately. We had a blast, and he had me take over the drawing session one night. I was working on the *Wolverine: Netsuke* series at that point, so I had one of the covers I'd just finished, and I brought that. But John wanted me to keep coming back each year.

After Richmond we moved it down here to Ringling's campus. Ringling saw me do my dog-and-pony, and they headhunted me from Virginia Commonwealth. I was on tenure track at that point, but I was actually happy to leave. The tenure thing was so onerous, having to sit and validate my existence every time I turned around. I was like, "I should be teaching instead of sitting around doing this stuff." Ringling doesn't have tenure; it's just a yearly contract. But if you've been here long enough, it's pretty much like tenure. I've been here ever since. And I still do the Academy in the summers, but that's now back up in Kansas City.

**DRAW!:** So the Illustration Academy was originally in Richmond, Virginia?

**GP:** Well, it was originally in Liberty, Kansas. And then it might have moved into Kansas City, but then it went down to Richmond, and that's when I got involved. It was an off-shoot. The original inception of the Illustration Academy was the Illustrators Workshop, which was Mark English, Bernie Fuchs, Bob Peak, Alan Cober, Fred Otnes, and Robert Hein-

**DRAW!:** It's all skinning the same onion, right? Some people skin it one way, some skin it another way. One of the critiques I hear from certain quarters of the art school is that the ateliers are very limited and only teach you one way of doing something, and it's not very creative. But the way I look at it is if you want to sing jazz, but you can't sing jazz, maybe you need to go study with a jazz singer. That doesn't mean that you'll ever be a great jazz singer. You may not possess that type of voice, but you will develop a better voice for having done it.

**GP:** I think it's all worthwhile, honestly. There's something that can be gleaned from all of the different methods. But I think when they go straight into the sight-size, they become stunted a little bit. It's safe. There's a safety net there when you measure everything, and for me, it sucks the life out of the drawing. Especially for illustrators. You can be a reporter—"Just the facts, ma'am"—or you can be a poet, and they're very different. One is just the facts—"I'm going to tell you about this picture that I'm drawing. It's exactly what I'm seeing." Then there's the other side—"I have feelings right



now that have nothing to do with this picture, but I'm going to inject them into it," or "I'm illustrating something that needs to have this emotional content or thrust to it. The narrative aspect demands this." And the kids who are just measuring, from my own experience at Ringling, it's just sucked the life out of their work. If I'm going to be that precise, I'd rather just take a photograph.

**DRAW!:** From what I've read of the old ateliers, you started with the still lifes and drawing the basic forms. You learned to control your tools. That's why you drew the casts, so you could draw properly. But you had to have a certain level of facility before you were allowed to go to the next level. You weren't just automatically advanced at the end of the year. I think that's the biggest problem with modern art schools. It costs so much that people are pushed from one year to the next. If you get a C-, you still go to the next year, which means you might graduate with a really poor skill set. When you look at the old Russian Academy, the students' work, that stuff has so much energy in it. It's amazing. It has such

power to it. It's not just measuring the knee cap against the other knee cap. They're doing that, but they're doing it in a way in a way that still has power to it.

**GP:** Maybe they were measuring, but it seems to me that they were working with landmarks, which is a very spontaneous way to attack the figure. And I think it's a cool way. "Well, the way that arm angle connects, if I follow it down it will connect with the hip." If you get all these angles right as you're drawing with snap-decision making, the proportions are there. And it works. But the students I come into contact with, the majority of them don't seem to adhere to the idea that drawing and painting are the things they really need, and yet they talk about wanting to be concept artists. Concept artists are like comic artists—they can draw anything and they have real skills.

**DRAW!:** Take Gil Kane and Joe Kubert. They were both highly expressive, great with the figure. Kane was much more about construction, and I learned a lot from him as a young artist because his work was very consistent in the way he constructed things. But then you had the feeling of someone like Kubert, who would sometimes draw a figure that was so distorted. "How did he get that guy's head"—[*George laughs*] he'd draw the head through the body and the head looked broken off and shoved over. But you'd have two conflicting styles that you would like.

**GP:** Kubert's *felt* right. It wasn't right, but it felt right. And to me that was vital. And believe me, I love Kane, but Kubert felt right. There was an energy to it that was different from Gil Kane's, but they both had that dynamism in their work.





The way Wolverine came about was interesting. I was in the middle of Batman and I was struggling with it because there were all kinds of issues going on with me and the editor. What he was wanting was for me to basically redo Enemy Ace, and I was like, "I don't paint that way anymore." It was a whole weird thing. Chris Claremont lived down the street from me in Brooklyn, and I bumped into him. He asked, "Hey, what's going on?" and I just started bombarding him with all this angst over the Batman book. [laughter] It was like he stepped into a buzz saw. He goes, "I just got made Vice President in charge of story development [at Marvel]." I said, "Oh, that's so cool!" He said, "Why don't you come work for Marvel?" I said, "Well, I'm in the middle of this thing." He said, "If you come to us, we will leave you totally alone. You can do whatever you want to do." I was never a Marvel guy. I mean, I read a lot of Marvel books, but I was really a DC guy. But the character I especially liked at Marvel was Wolverine, which I read in my art school days-the Frank Miller stuff



Wolverine © Marvel Characters, Inc.



with Chris writing. I said, "Well, would you mind if I tackled Wolverine?" I'd always heard he was very protective of the character. He said, "That would be great!" "Can I come in Monday?" He said, "All right, yeah."

I'd already been reading all this Japanese literature — ghost tales and folk tales and stuff. But I had not read Wolverine since I got out of art school. I always liked the samurai thing with Mariko and all that, but I had no clue she had died. I knew nothing about what was going on in the canon, but when I found out, "Oh, that fits perfectly." So I came up with this ghost story, went in to see Chris, and he said, "Yeah, let's do it." I said, "But I have two years left on *Batman*." He said, "That's okay. Let's go ahead and get it all figured out, sign the contracts, the whole bit, and when you're ready, that's when you do it."

When it finally came around, Chris had unfortunately been let go by that point, and I was like, "Oh, no. I hope I still have a job." But he said, "It's cool." He'd already handed it



Thumbnails and line art for "Bloodlines", an unpublished story intended for DC's *Solo* series. George: "In this story I gave myself the challenge of creating color separations by hand. Each panel had a minimum of four or so drawings, one for the actual line art and a bunch of others for color holds, etc. Each panel/drawing was executed, like *Wolverine*, directly in dip pen. I then used a splatter brush to add tone and obliterate areas. I then went back in with white acrylic and a brush to restate, refine, or simplify areas, etc. Bloodlines © George Pratt

to [Joe] Quesada, who let it go through, so basically I packaged that entire series for them. Except for the covers where they wanted to see sketches, everything else I just did it. They never said boo. They never looked at anything. I was doing it as separate panels based on my layouts, which I just did for me, and then I scanned them into Photoshop and put them together as pages, and I designed the issue in Quark. I did my own lettering, and they said, "You have to do the lettering in Illustrator." I absolutely despise and loathe that program. I said, "Well, that's not going to happen." [Mike laughs] They said, "No, it has to be that way," and they put me in touch with John Babcock, who had been a student of mine at the Kubert School. We sat on the phone and he tried to teach me for an hour and a half about how to do this in Illustrator. Finally I said, "John, this is not going to happen. This all has to be put in a Quark file ultimately, so why am I not just lettering it in Quark? It's so easy. You just draw a balloon, you type in it, you can put tone on it, and then you're done. You don't have to do all this complicated junk in Illustrator." He said, "I don't know, man. I don't know if it will work." "It'll work." So I did it that way, and of course it worked, and it was so easy. I just sent them DVDs that went straight to the printer.

# DRAW!: Wow!

**GP:** I did all the lettering, all the packaging—everything. It was a really great experience, because they really did leave

me alone, and I had a blast. That was the first time I'd done anything that was not a graphic novel, where I would come out of the gate fast like a race horse, and as I got further along I'd be dying because I couldn't see the end of the tunnel. This was a real pleasure because I had two or two-and-a-half issues in the bag, and then they started releasing them and it was like a shot in the arm. "Oh, yeah! I want to do more!" It fed itself and kept me going.

But that was the big difference in going from doing complete pages the traditional comic way, and then on *Wolverine* doing them as panels and putting them together in Photoshop and Quark. It was such a liberating experience because I could just have fun drawing and painting. Each panel was a piece, and I could have fun with it. At the beginning I was overpainting, drawing more than what was needed in each panel. I was doing way too much. But as I went along I got the idea more in hand about just how far I needed to push things. There are some panels that are just storytelling panels—going from A to B. And then some panels you need to say, "Yeah, let me put some time into this thing." It became a real pleasure to work that way.

**DRAW!:** You're doing so much teaching now. Teaching is your full-time gig. Are you doing much freelancing now? Or are you just doing your own personal painting?

**GP:** I'm doing shows and mostly personal work. I recently took a sabbatical and went to Morocco, which I'd been wanting



George: "I put the final drawings on a lightbox and on a new sheet, using a pen, brush, or crayon, defined areas of color [1: color hold for shadows; 2: color hold for the shirt patterns; 3: color hold for the foggy background element]. These analogue files are preferable, to me at least, to creating these marks digitally, as they contain dry brush effects, etc. These were all scanned as bitmap/ line art files (1200 dpi) and saved as tiffs. So everything is solid black-and-white, no grayscale.

Next, I opened these files in Photoshop and flipped them to grayscale, then flipped them to RGB files, dropping the dpi to 300 after the conversion. I copied them and added them each as a Multiply layer within one file. The line art file would be the black plate.

Each of the "color" files I opened in Hue, Saturation (Cmd + U) and then played with the sliders to colorize each of these layers.

When I was happy with the colors and the arrangements, I would then Flatten all the color layers to one layer, keeping the black line art separate.

I would add "Noise" to the color layer which gives it the feeling of an old stone lithograph and makes it warmer in the sense that it feel less digital and more man-made.

I then flattened the Line art and the color art together for the final file [see right], saving it as a 300 dpi tiff file."





# THE SKETCHBOOK WORKOUT SYSTEM

# BY MIKE MANLEY + BRET BLEVINS

Monsterman © Mike Manley

ne of the questions both Bret and I (or any successful artists) are asked is, "How do you get your *ideas*?" quickly followed by, "How do you get better?" or "How do you study?" If I had a dime for every time I was asked this, I could retire with enough coin to buy a Frazetta original from Heritage Auctions.

All kidding aside, they are important questions, and I asked them myself as a young artist, though I think I had plenty of ideas—actually at times I seemed to have too many of them, some diametrically opposed to others I later found out.

Not having any formal art education until my mid-40s, I was always very serious and focused on breaking into the business and studying, but looking back I could have studied smarter and made better progress. I had no internet, and only the local library and a chance meeting or two with a pro at a con in my teens. I had only myself to curate my intake of art, and reading, and what to study or whom, which led to me studying mainly what I wanted—which is different than studying what I *needed*.

I was always an inveterate doodler and sketcher, as was Bret. And I had a few sketchpads in my teens, most now long lost, but I still have a few. My sketchbooks were not any formal way of studying, but practice or big doodle pads. In fact, when I was a teenager, like many students I have taught, I also had a "fear of blank paper"! F.O.B.P., as I call it, is a real thing—especially with a fresh sketchbook. It freezes some people up until at some point maybe it gets dirty or drawn in enough not to be precious anymore. So often I drew on sheets of scrap paper. Then came the opposite—feeling very free in the sketchbook, but then tightening up on the job, try-ing to keep the same energy of the sketch in the final piece. It's always something! And the latter is something artists of all kinds have battled for centuries.

While talking about this subject on the phone with Bret, we decided this would make a great "Bootcamp" article. Like I said earlier in this article, I always doodled, and as a kid my parents and especially my grandmother supplied me with plenty of paper, pens, etc. My grandma worked as a secretary for Chrysler and always brought me plenty of scrap paper, pens, and pencils they were tossing away. I even had a big box at her house just stuffed with drawing supplies. In my teens as I got more and more serious, I kept up drawing but never really in a formal way in a sketchbook—though I should have. They are great journals of our process, as opposed to a pile of loose drawings which float around and get lost.



Later on in my career, I'd hear stories from Al Williamson about Frank Frazetta filling a sketchbook with drawings of just shoes, or just hands, etc. Al, always a doodler himself, never seemed to have a sketchbook, but like me, had lots of great loose sketches and drawings. Then I met Steve Rude and saw his sketchbook, and there were other artists like Adam Hughes who supposedly had great sketchbooks. Robert Crumb sold one of his for enough money to buy a house in France! So clearly there were artists whose sketchbooks were perhaps even more precious than the published pages they drew-and far more personal.

done to study

anatomy while

grad. I made

this to go over

of anatomy. Drawings © Mike Manley

Now, of course, I have many sketchbooks, maybe twelve to fifteen floating about. These also include watercolor books for landscape painting. I do enjoy my comics work, but honestly I enjoy what I do in my sketchbooks more. I feel total freedom there, and the discipline from many years of work allows me the skill and ability to explore ideas which are purely my own. I wish I'd been more serious about using sketchbooks earlier, but you can't change the past. You can, however, grow into the future.

What I recommend now to every young artist on their tenyear march into the business and gaining the necessary skills to succeed, is to have a dozen sketchbooks and to use them for a variety of studying tasks. Use them, if you can, at least once every day-especially if it's for something of your owneven if you don't do it for any other reason or don't even show them to anyone. For my students I recommend from the start that they have a stack of sketchbooks to use like a gym training routine. Just like when working out you might have a leg day, a back day, a cardio day, etc., break out a specific sketchbook for specific training. A basic list follows:

- **1. HEADS** (male and/or female)
- 2. HANDS/FEET

**3.** FIGURES/ANATOMY (male and/or female)—you can even break it down to arms, legs, torsos, etc.

- 4. DRAPERY/FOLDS
- **5. Gesture drawings**
- **6.** ANIMALS
- 7. Perspective/Environments
- 8. Compositions/Master studies

9. LIFE **DRAWING**—a sketchbook you take on the train or bus, or to the coffee shop. Draw from life as often as possible. We are mostly drawing fellow humans, and compiling observed gestures really builds the memory banks to pull from later.

**10. You CAN ADD YOUR OWN:** vehicles, aliens, inking, etc.

Dick Blick, Michaels, A.C. Moore, etc.-all the art stores are constantly running sales on sketchbooks. They don't all have to be Moleskines or expensive. In fact, in the beginning maybe they shouldn't be, you just need the paper to not bleed. Be serious and takes notes and observations too. Think about what you are studying. You can do a drawing of the hand, then a drawing of the bones in the same position, etc. You will be surprised how only 50-100 drawings of anything will dramatically improve your skill set and memory banks. "A hundred drawings!" you are thinking. Yes, but three to five drawings a day for a month easily reaches that goal.

The following are excerpts of various sketchbooks from my teenage years until today, and even though much of my teenage work was nothing special at all, it does show that if you are honest about where you are at skill-wise, keep at it, and stay focused, you can reach your goals and dreams.

# **FROM THE SKETCHBOOKS**



The following is a selection of drawings from about 40 years' worth of time from a lot of old and new sketchbooks. Looking back at this is quite amazing to myself, and it's the best way to see how my journey as an artist has evolved in all that time.



(left) I drew a series of pencil drawings of Lou Ferrigno as the Hulk while still in high school, in 10th grade I believe. I was thinking I could possibly work at the local newspaper doing illustrations for the TV section. That never happened, but I still have the drawing—and look at that fancy signature! (right) A funny, much more cartoony drawing, which, I think, was colored with Dr. Ph. Martin's dyes. As much as I loved realism, I also loved cartoony cartooning. My work was at times confusing because I wanted to do both styles. I do that now and have worked out how to do multiple styles.



(left) These were drawn within a few years of each other. I would often work from photos for practice and to try and gain knowledge. I was on my own and trying to get better one drawing at a time. (right) The same subject with roughly 30 years between them. You will find themes running through your sketchbooks you might not be aware of while drawing, and see them only later.





Another important use of sketchbooks is the invaluable experience of creating your own *customized textbooks*. As a teenager I filled many sketchbooks with basic anatomy studies, as seen in the surviving fragments shown above. I'd read somewhere that Frazetta had copied an entire anatomy book, so I did the same (it may have even been the same book— a famous volume by George Bridgman).

As mentioned above, you can't estimate or even fully understand everything you are learning by diligently pouring yourself into this sort of attentive scrutiny of a subject. Just imitating the mark-making of another artist is adding a new skill to your hand that you may not even be aware of.



I did the same with animals. This sheet dates from when I was 14 or 15.



elcome back, all and sundry to another letter from your dip-pen pen-pal, your fail-safe freelancer friend, your Blackwing (pencil) wingman who will never let

you down and always have your b try to pick up art supplies (and hor Critic returns once again! ISSUE

My mission: I travel through Nicholas, your friendly neighbor his deadlines, and at night (and your Crusty Critic, taking to the patrolling the internet alleyways you, the reader, from getting ro chases! It's a tough job, but I've s and get you the best stuff for you

As referenced in my last articl the WACOM MobileStudio Pro) age of digital, and more and mo the industry using a totally digita paper, brush and Bristol, and goir to get work done. Yours truly hea tablet call my name almost daily, worlds. Sometimes nothing is be sheet of illustration board.

Which brings me to my article real-world hacks for spicing up s

throughs at the table. This time I won't be using my trusty beret grading system, but don't fret-the hat will be back!

DRAW #35 Fantasy/sci-fi illustrator DONATO GIANCOLA (Game of

Thrones) demos his artistic process, GEORGE PRATT (Enemy

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## **RIPPING IT UP**

One of the coolest effects that is hard to replicate without a workaround or a custom brush is the tried and true "rain effect" on a comic page, most striking when a white staccato-styled white line is placed on a dark background, giving an organic mood



This 1992 Batman pin-up by Klaus Janson is a fine example of the razor nicking technique. Batman © DC Comics