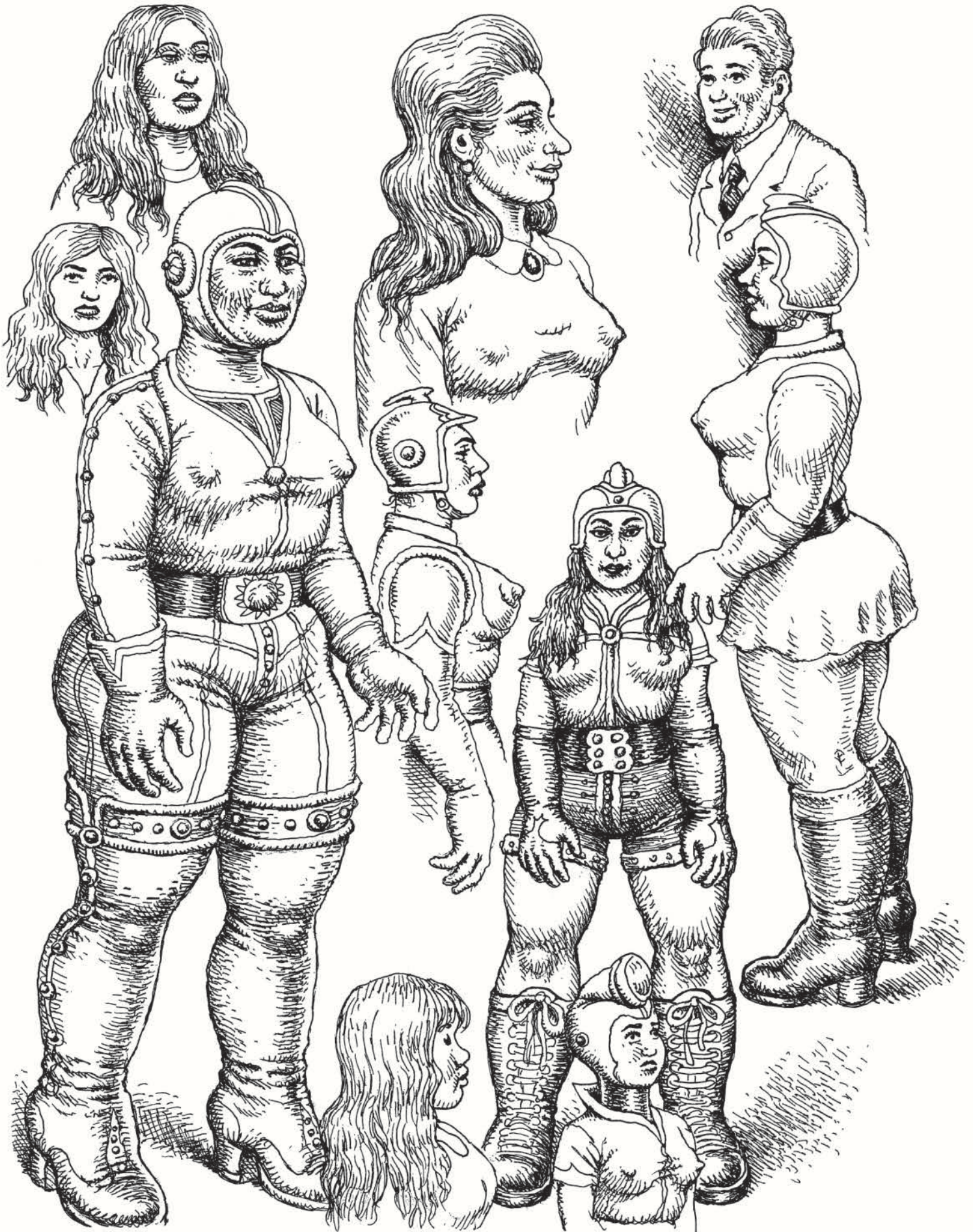


A Crumle



Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

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The first sixteen pages of the catalogue were pulled from a sequence from one of Robert Crumb's sketchbooks, 1970, artist's collection.

PARADISE FOUND

—JEAN-LUC FROMENTAL

So far I've published three Crumb books, each of them falling outside the canon for one reason or another. *R. Crumb's Big Yum Yum Book*, his very first, wasn't even meant for publication. Aged nineteen—"and still a virgin"—he created it to win the heart of Dana Morgan, destined to become his first wife: "Six months to draw it, fifteen years to get divorced." Stylistically prehistoric, it nonetheless contains quite a few of the basic elements of the oeuvre to come, among them the taste for solidly built ladies. At the other extreme stands the monolithic *Book of Genesis*, the author's most monumental project ever, a sort of instant classic whose publication immediately triggered a storm of contradictory reactions, including radical rejection by his most fanatical admirers. Crumb's used to this kind of thing, though, his career never having been a bed of roses. Next, as a provisional conclusion to the series, came the unrestrained *Parle-moi d'amour! / Drawn Together*, written as a duo with Aline Kominsky-Crumb, his second wife and lifelong associate. This diary written—and prepublished in various forms—over the course of forty years together bridges the gap between youth and maturity. The Crumb presented here is a far cry from the cavorting autobiographical character of the central part of the oeuvre, the compulsively buffoonish hero of *My Troubles with Women* and *The Adventures of R. Crumb Himself*. More composed, more in control, less powerless against the slings and arrows of everyday life, this is a virile Crumb, master of himself and his personal relationships, sometimes even dogmatic, and most certainly idealized by Aline who, with an unfailing

tolerance for his adolescent monomanias, systematically confirms his status as maestro and head of the family.

Like other folk heroes of his stature, Crumb has been the victim of a primal trauma. The immediate impact of an oeuvre perfectly in tune with its age drew enthusiasts for whom he was more prophet than creative artist. What you might call the Dylan Syndrome, but at the risk of seriously antagonizing someone whose passion for Old-Time Music stops with the 1930s. A mask, a role, and an ideology have been grafted onto a character who, since then, has endlessly striven to get out from under the readymade image his fans attempt to impose. This game of hide-and-seek has generated the ambiguities, misunderstandings, disenchantments, fatal nostalgias, and excesses of admiration studying a career devoted to a quest for an elusive truth: one buried somewhere in the folds of a humanity considered in all its stark nakedness.

It is interesting to observe Crumb's vision of himself in the *Big Yum Yum Book* as someone still anonymous and untouched by fame. He describes himself as a sociopathic toad, drawn to the company of his animal brothers, but so ill-equipped for relationships that an episode of murderous ravishment has him banned from society. A giant beanstalk bears him upwards, far from his fellow men, into an Eden inhabited by a bulimic Eve whose measurements, especially from a toad's-eye view, are a real turn-on. Naturally, though, the physical discrepancies and the giantess's appetites soon bring the rapturous stay to an end, but in a

burst of optimism rare in the Crumb oeuvre—and doubtless due to the book's marital motivations—a fairy-tale kiss turns the toad into a man, and all is well. And all the themes of the work to come have been established.

As is only right, the paradise-lost motif crops up in the first pages of *The Book of Genesis*. Interestingly, the project grew out of a handful of satirical sketches of Adam and Eve, but after tinkering with the idea of parody, Crumb decided to take the text literally. His prepublication decision to take out

when committing the sin that bears his name? This piece of prudishness on the part of the supposed champion of the hard-on in all its glory has even been condemned by leading exegetes of the Book of Books. And yet the transcendent factor, the thing that validates the whole enterprise, is Crumb's ability to see and exalt women through all the superhuman disproportion of obsessive desire. The women of *Genesis*—Eve, Sarah, Rachel, and Potiphar's libidinous wife—inhabit Crumb's version so potently as to impose a new vision of the Good Book. Remaining utterly true

with and by Aline, *Parle-moi d'amour! Drawn Together* brings an everyday answer to the question of paradise lost. Written like a sitcom, this family chronicle shows two artists born of the utopian big bang of the Sixties living, changing, and growing older, and doing their best along the way to come up with pathways to an existence far removed from codes and conventions, yet devoted—like us, like everyone else—to the pursuit of happiness. And amazingly, we find Crumb the misfit—tormented, paroxysmal, hypersensitive, chronically paranoid—finally declaring himself a happy man. Just one frame, but with a triple-whammy impact unrivaled in the entire oeuvre: “You know, ultimately I got everything I ever wanted! I’ve left my mark... I’ve had the most fabulous sex imaginable, beyond my wildest dreams! I’ve been lucky that way! I have two wonderful children and a beautiful grandchild! [...] I’m fulfilled.” Emerging from a childhood sanctuary embodied for him in a paper Mount Olympus where his ancestors reside—Rudolph Dirks, E.C. Segar, George Herriman, Bud Fisher, Carl Barks, and the others—Crumb looks at his wife, and his life, and belatedly discovers (as summed up in the utterly American line that closes the book: “Jew + Goy = Joy”) that when you look beyond the Limbo of hatching and consolatory linework, Paradise is Other People.

“A giant beanstalk bears him upwards, far from his fellow men, into an Eden inhabited by a bulimic Eve whose measurements, especially from a toad’s-eye view, are a real turn-on.”

a frame showing the Serpent squeezing Eve’s nipple testifies to his determination not to violate the monkish character of his task or allow any frivolity into its message. It is this quest for austerity that disconcerted some of his most dedicated fans to the point of repudiating the Master or, at least, of accusing him of ultimately bending the knee to the eternal enemy that is puritanism. How many times has he been attacked for having Onan turn his back

to the words and tone of the original, right down to its tedious ellipses, repetitions, contradictions, lyrical flights, and legalistic listings, Crumb succeeds in providing a new, exclusively graphic reading, making it clear that humanity’s misfortune and consolation are to be found in the divine attraction between the two halves torn one from the other when they were driven out of the Garden of Eden.

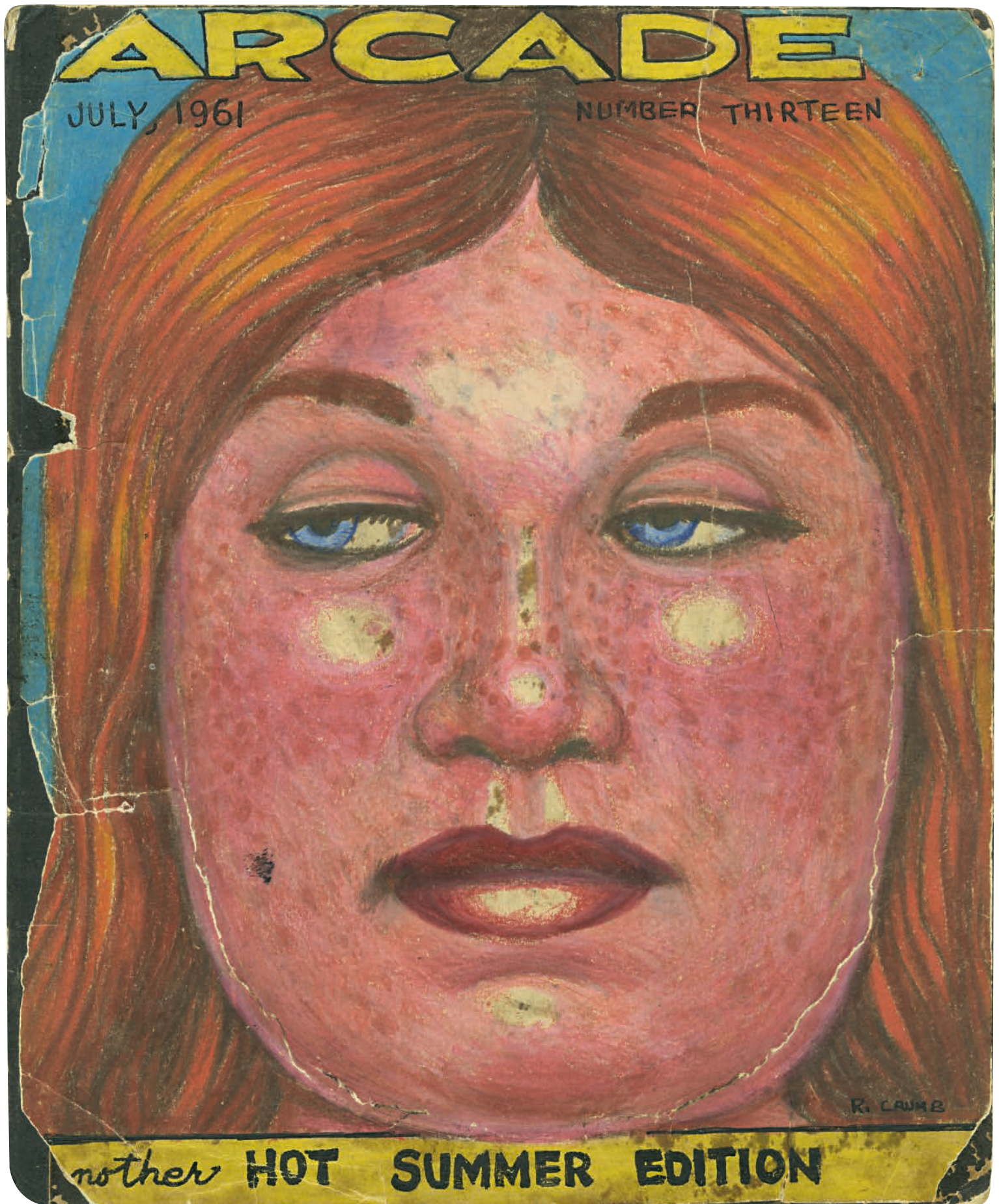
Conceived, drawn, and experienced

CRUMB BEFORE CRUMB

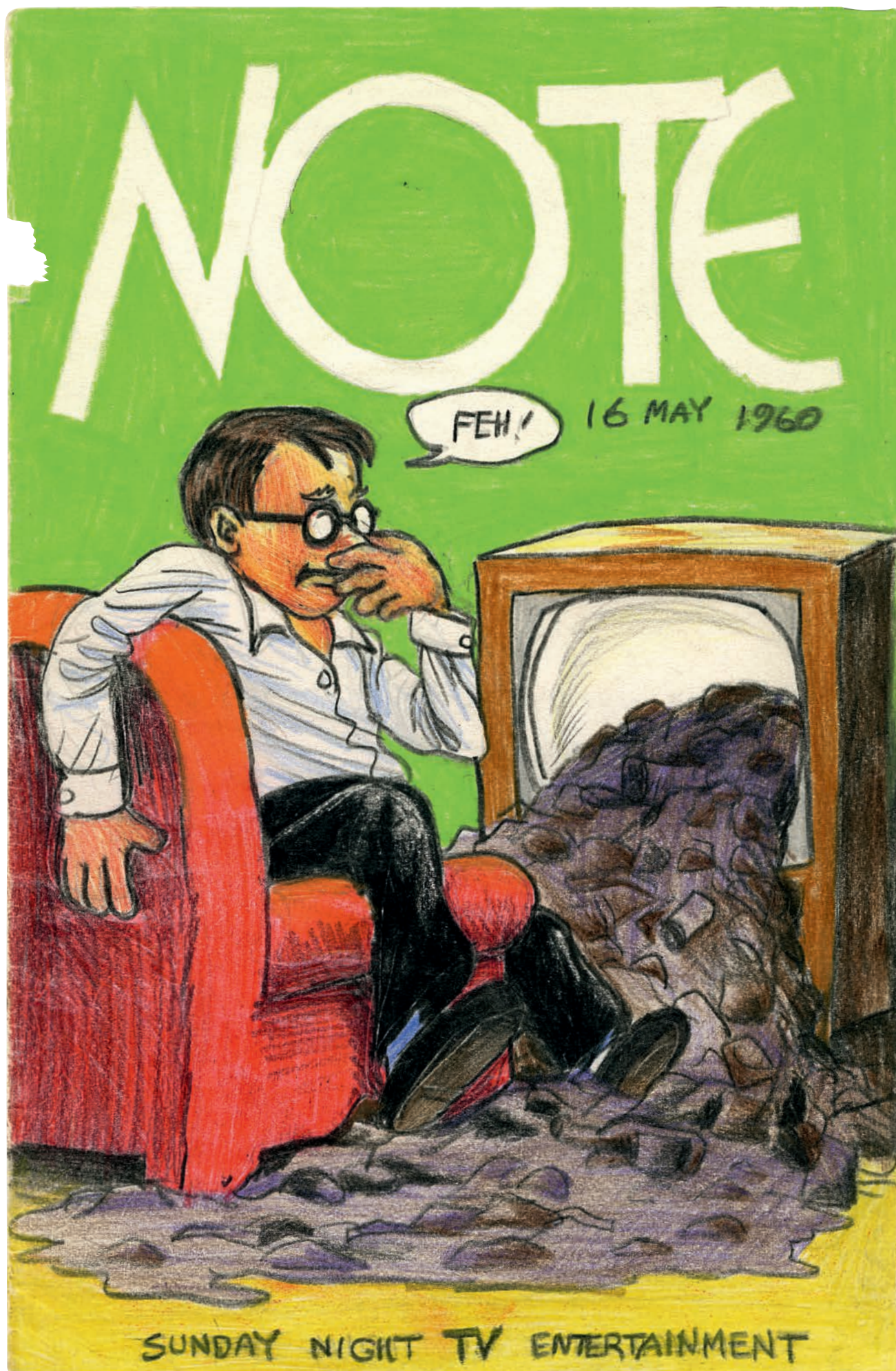
1943-1966



CAT. 29, Untitled, 1966



CAT. 4, Another Hot Summer Edition, July 1961



CAT. 2, Note, Sunday Night TV Entertainment, 1960