

Comics and Graphic Novels by Women

Barbara Postema

As a person who studies comics and spends time among comics scholars and aficionados, I have discovered that the drive to collect is very strong among them. In fact, comics collectors are renowned or perhaps infamous: They are known for their tenacity in acquiring the first edition of *Action Comics No. 1*, where Superman makes his debut, or for keeping their collections in pristine condition by never reading their treasures but storing them in polypropylene sleeves. I have never seen myself as such a collector. I love my comics because I read and study them, and I buy them to read them again and again, not because they may increase in value if they become collector's items.

Over time another aspect of accumulating a certain amount of comics has struck me: the resource for study that these works represent. Among my shelves of comics and graphic novels I have created a collection of works by women comics artists. Taken together, this collection can serve as the basis for an in-depth study of what women have achieved within the field of comics, an area in which they have long been marginalized. My collection shows the growing body of work by women cartoonists, and illustrates the various areas in comics toward which they have gravitated.

I have divided up my bibliography to highlight these areas. This list shows that women in comics work predominately in autobiography and independent fiction (the first two categories in the bibliography), rather than in mainstream superhero and genre comics. In recent years the presence of women artists has become more visible in anthologies, but in order to break through many still start with minicomix and self-publication (the third category), and many never get beyond that. There is only a handful of women who have really established themselves and can live off comics alone. Examples of this are Lynda Barry, Marjane Satrapi and Lynn Johnston, all three of whom are represented in my collection. There is still a sense that comics are a man's domain, and women depend on each other for support in that world. This is shown in the list of websites I also incorporate in my bibliography (the last category).

My collection is far from exhaustive, but I consciously add to it all the time, seeking out work by upcoming women cartoonists, especially at expo's. Such work is partly represented by the minicomix in my bibliography. These booklets are handmade in small quantities and thus quite rare. Some of mine are signed by the artists. Besides comics, I have also included a section of secondary texts (category number four). These are books and essays that touch on issues of women and comics, giving some context for their work. In addition to the more than fifty entries in my bibliography, my collection also includes a number of uncataloged paraphernalia, such as artists' business cards, promotional postcards and prints, and newspaper clippings: clearly I am not immune to the collecting bug after all.