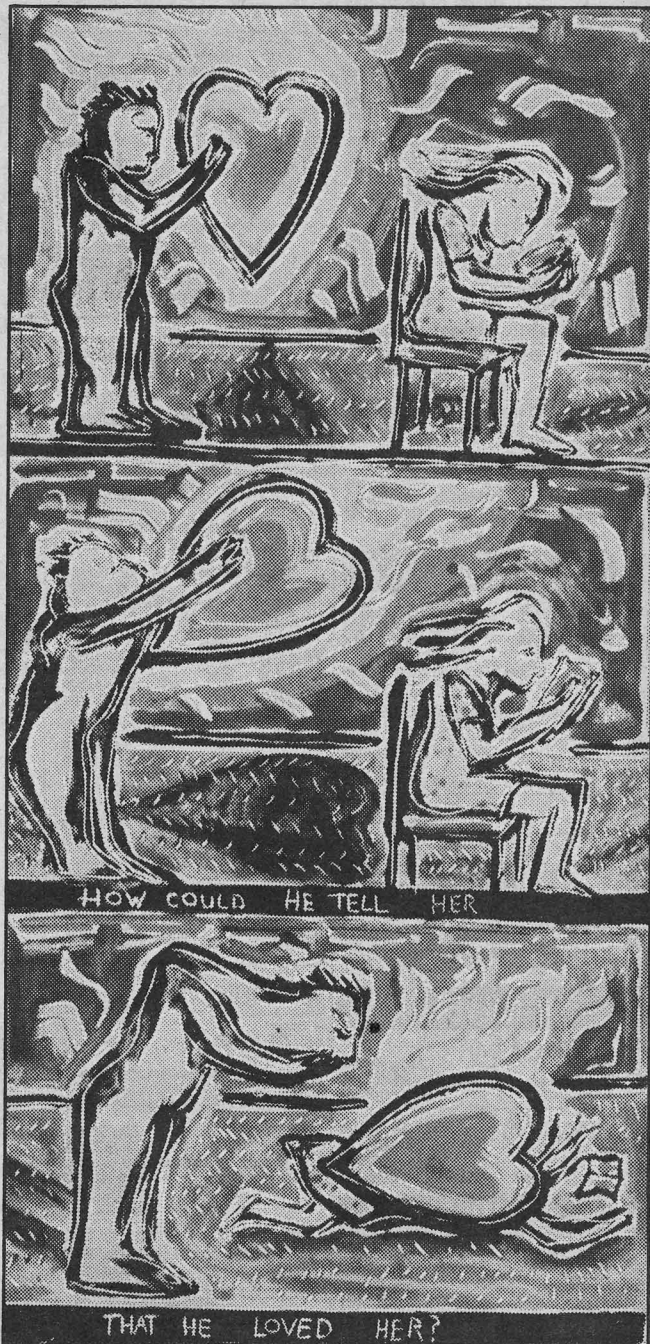


CALENDAR



Michele Roberts' "How Could He Tell Her That He Loved Her?" in "By Comix Touched" exhibition.

ART REVIEW

Touched by the Heartbeat of the 'Comix'

By WILLIAM WILSON,
Times Art Critic

Chances are that the esoteric American artist you admire did not get his first artistic thrill from the Sistine ceiling or the Victory of Samothrace. Chances are his most primitive aesthetic inspiration came from the patterned enchantment of the Sunday comics pages in the newspaper, unless of course he grew up deprived in New York, a town where the leading newspaper has no comics. Poor chump—stuck with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. . . .

So pervasive is the influence of beloved comics art that an exhibition like "By Comix Touched" at the Long Beach Museum of Art (to Sept. 11) seems almost redundant, but not quite.

The three artists on view at least tend to remind us that comics and their influence take differing forms for succeeding generations. Where Claes Oldenburg might have been moved by the wurst-like shapes of the Katzenjammer Kids or Roy Lichtenstein by the lurking elegance of True Love Romances, members of the present trio are still young enough to have been impressed with the animation of the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine" or Ralph Bakshi's adaptation of "Fritz the Cat"—originally the brilliant spawn of underground comic master R. Crumm.

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Los Angeles Times

'COMIX': Its Influence on Three Younger Artists

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Truth to tell, if this show had a different title, the comics connection might go unnoticed. It betrays considerable art-school savvy and looks suspiciously like the 48 trillionth variation on Neo-Expressionism. A traditional painter might snort that the real point of this work is to avoid confronting any of the tougher problems of the craft. By playing the joker, however, curator Josine Ianco-Starrels sets up resonances that see Neo-Ex as a kind of primitivist comic art that draws not only on the fine arts' Expressionist tradition but on present popular art, including raw Saturday kidvid and MTV graphics.

John Randolph Carter's watercolor and felt-tip pen fantasies have the half-step thinness of animation-cel workups not yet translated into final form. They are a regular stew of influences and attitudes. One looks like a midair collision between early Kandinsky and "Fantasia." A head of a man-

drill may be thinking idly of Gauguin but the speed of its rendering places it in the impermanent flow of a high-speed, channel-switching remote-control society.

Carter's use of flat graphic techniques makes the work appear public and impersonal, so it takes some looking to recognize it as a subjective rumination on the monstrosity of things.

Dick Ibach's art is more immediately personal, but not much. His scrappy figures could pass for Blue Meanies left over from the '60s with their crossed eyes and Peter Max psychedelic shoes. We see them as handmade on account of Ibach's habit of rendering everything in the compulsive stripes of certain kinds of psychotic painting. There is a family-album intimacy in themes like "Waiting for Dad's Plane" or "Reading Session With Popsicle Prize." The art longs sweetly for failed closeness, like some harmless dingbat kid. It's about disconnection.

Traditional comics tell stories directly; this art comes at its themes obliquely. Michele Roberts is the most solid painter here. Her rich surfaces keep you looking. Compositions in strips and boxes have one foot in medieval manuscripts and the other in storyboards.

Despite its pop-song title, "Joe I Gotta Go" is a variation on the expulsion from the Garden of Eden where Eve becomes the protagonist. There's a muffled feminism here that doesn't keep the work from addressing general human dilemmas concerning love's disappointment, the urgent call of primitive desires and the final daunting task of self-realization.

In form, this art is swathed in the cloth of the '80s. In spirit, it pines for the '60s.