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Wednesday - Saturday, 1-6 pm
Free Admission; Tours available

Press images are available on request.

Slought Foundation Announces *Comicology: The New Magical Real*

Slought Foundation announces the opening of *Comicology: The New Magical Real* (September 10 - October 22, 2005), an exhibit of original comic book art in a magical realist vein. Independent curators Judith Stein and Gabriel Greenberg organized the show with the assistance of Joseph Hu. The opening reception is September 24th, 2005 from 6:30-8:30 pm, and is free and open to the public.

Comicology features work by Marc Bell, Charles Burns, Dame Darcy, Kim Deitch, Anders Nilsen, and Ron Regé, Jr. These artists represent an emerging wave of underground comics creators whose fictions are an alchemy of reality and fantasy. Populated with talking animals, impossible deformities, and cosmological surprises, their stories are a shocking reminder of the strangeness behind comic books' accepted conventions. Drawing in part from superhero serials, Sunday morning cartoons, horror comics, and Newspaper strips-- as well as sources as diverse as Victorian nursery rhymes and Christian iconography-- this is a magical realism that defies genre or convention.

At once disturbing and surreal, funny and mundane, wildly metaphysical and obsessively detailed, these stories refuse to be explained away. They are among the most ambitious and visually inventive-- not to mention creepy and hilarious-- achievements in comics today.

About the Artists

The work of the artists of *Comicology* reveals an impressive range of styles and themes. **Kim Deitch**, the longest established creator in the exhibit, began his career in the underground comix movement of the late 60s, but has continued to produce groundbreaking work ever since. **Charles Burns** first achieved prominence in the pages of Art Spiegelman's alternative comics magazine *RAW* in the 80s. Equally inspired by 60s artists and the punk aesthetic, Burns was part of a new wave of alternative comic artists that reinvigorated the medium. All inheritors of this liberated mood, **Dame Darcy**, **Marc Bell**, **Anders Nilsen**, and **Ron Regé, Jr.** began their comics careers over the course of the 90s, each defining their own highly individualistic style while refusing to settle for conventional means of expression.

Kim Deitch rose to prominence in the comix underground of the late 60s. But where many artists of the day settled on short, dense, drug-filled stories, Deitch took the hippie-comix formula and reinvented for his own ends. A continually prolific artist, he is known for his detail intensive, organically drawn pages and stories which expose the dark underbelly of the cartoon industry. His most recent comics-novel, *The Boulevard of Broken Dreams*, traces the life a promising animator as he is plagued by a domineering demon cat who insists on becoming a starring cartoon character.

Charles Burns first made his mark in the pages of *RAW*, the seminal alternative comics magazine of the 80s. Early on, he established his heavily inked and clinically polished drawing style and an obsession with strange teenage diseases. Burns' recently completed masterpiece, *Black Hole*, combines a ghoulish account of a virus that spreads exclusively among teenagers (symptoms vary: one infected

boy grows a truth-telling mouth in his chest, another girl sprouts a tail) with dark mysticism. Ten years in the making, the book pushes Burns' signature themes into increasingly poetic and abstract territory.

Marc Bell pours a continual stream of surprises into his meaty worlds. Narcotic and exhilarating, Bell's panels relentlessly reinvent the English language, comic book conventions, and his own established patterns. The wildness is given root by drawings that create concrete spaces and fill them with solidly chunky objects and animals. In a typically schizophrenic story from his book *Shrimpy and Paul and Friends*, Saul, brother of one of the main characters, Paul (a kind of walking sausage), meets an untimely death. There is a quest to recapture his unleashed soul, and when it is found, it is sent to reside in Paul's right nipple for safekeeping. Be it souls-in-nipples, class warfare, or unrequited love, Bell manages to deal in weighty themes without ever breaking his consummately goofy stride.

Dame Darcy's ongoing series *Meatcake* is a furiously inked celebration of disturbed Victoriana. Her doily-encrusted panels look more like spiderwebby relics than images out of a comic book. The episodic stories feature a returning cast of mostly female characters, including favorites like the mermaid Effluvia ("it' girl of the Brine") and Strega Pez (who's permanently severed throat acts as a giant Pez dispenser.) The comic offers up a decadent mixture of 19th century macabre, jazz-era flappers, and sideshow freaks, as delicious as meatcake.

Anders Nilsen's comics are marked by a combination of existentialist despair and a richly humanistic drawing style. His ongoing series *Big Questions* follows, among other things, a flock of birds as they ponder the fundamental questions of life and death. In Nilsen's most recent work, *Dogs and Water*, a boy finds himself inexplicably stranded in a Siberian landscape with nothing but a teddy bear and a few peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Nilsen's novel page layouts and dramatic modulations of density and empty space evoke a dynamic range of emotions, from nihilistic comedy to serene quietude.

Ron Regé, Jr. has defined himself as a kind of outsider-comic artist: his unique thin-line drawings, geometric caricatures, and kaleidoscopic layouts seem to have hatched from an alien egg. His longest work to date, *Skibber Bee Bye*, relates the delightful, and ultimately extremely disturbing story of a pair of mute, parentless twins living alone in a treetop house and their fraught relationship with the rest of society. Like the children of his story, Regé seems to look in on modern culture from the outside; in the words of comic artist Chris Ware, "Regé is one of a handful of cartoonists... to reinvent comics to suit his own idiosyncratic impulses and inspirations."

About the Curators

Judith E. Stein is a Philadelphia-based independent curator and critic. A recipient of a Pew Fellowship for her writings on art, she is a former curator at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her book on the Barnes Foundation, *The Best of the Barnes*, will be published by Running Press in Fall 2006.

Gabriel Greenberg is a graduate student in philosophy at Rutgers, as well as a comic artist. He is the curator of *Comic Art in the Green Mountains*, which runs through February 5, 2006 at Vermont's Brattleboro Museum, and creator of the Vera Hall Project (verahallproject.com) and Mutatis Mutandis (namingdistances.com/mutatis).

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Slought Foundation, a non-profit organization, encourages new futures for contemporary life through curatorial practices that resist the market-driven orientation and drive to permanence of today's institutions. Since opening in Philadelphia in 2002, we have organized around 300 exhibits, discursive events, concerts, and trade publications, as well as a significant internet presence featuring 200 hours of online recordings. We borrow our name from "slough," a wetland or marshy environment connecting species in a distributed and organic network. Exhibitions at Slought Foundation are always free to the public.