



All you guys
are so
different from
each other...

Don't think
it'd be poss-
ible to have
a show with
four more
different
styles.

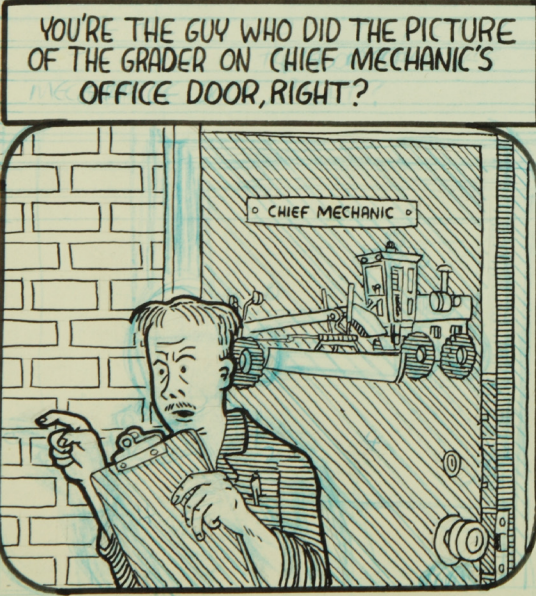
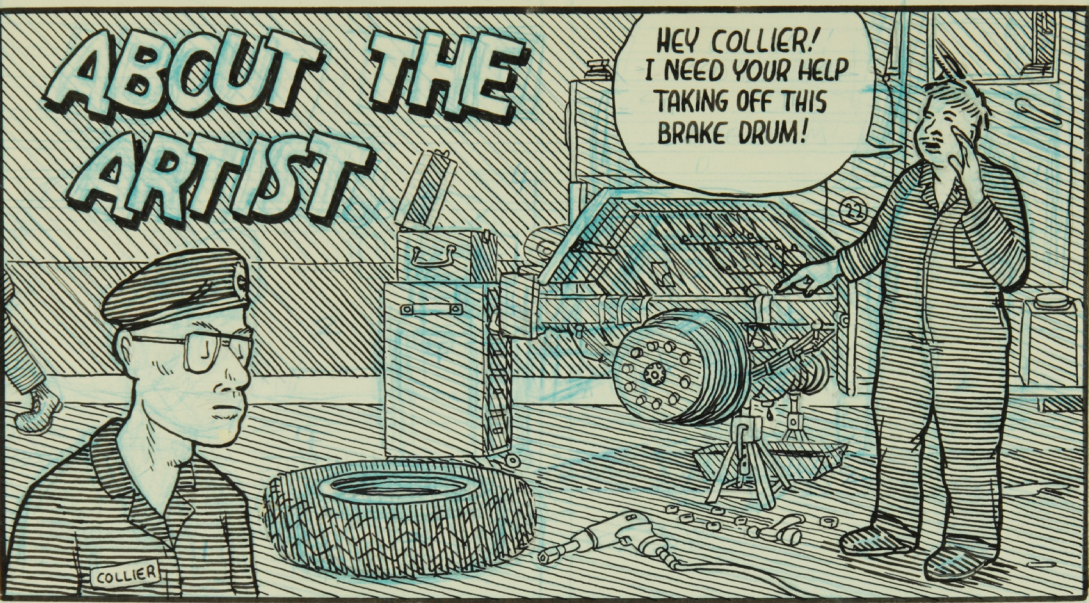
DALE
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David
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2014

FINN
2015

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2014



Between the Panels

The Comics Art of David Collier, David Finch, Jeff Lemire, and Kagan McLeod

Curated by Dr. Dale Jacobs and Dr. C. Suzanne Matheson





Director's Foreword

It was just shy of two years ago that guest curators Dr. Suzanne Matheson and Dr. Dale Jacobs of the University of Windsor's English Department approached the Art Gallery of Windsor with the idea for this exhibition featuring four artists working in the comics medium whose lives have in various ways been connected to Windsor-Essex. The idea immediately appealed to us, not only for its important contribution to widening awareness of the visual expressions of artists working in and beyond the region, but also for its ability to showcase important work being done by Canadians whose works are deserving of increased recognition. The timing of this proposal coincided with the AGW's interest in the art of American comic artist Alex Ross and co-presentation of these two projects provided an opportunity to bring such enhanced profile to all the artists and intersect the art histories and artists of two nations. Equally, the critical acumen of these two international scholars who are the project's guest curators was compelling. The AGW has for many decades promoted both the work and lives of artists whose practices touch on this region and also enjoyed a proud legacy of working collaboratively with the University of Windsor to benefit from each other's visual and intellectual contributions.

The realization of this project is thanks to the efforts of many stakeholders and staff. First I commend the four artists who include David Collier, David Finch, Jeff Lemire and Kagan McLeod for their creative work and for their cooperation in attending to the exhibition details with our curatorial staff at the AGW and with the guest curators. My thanks are extended to Caesars Windsor for joining the exhibition as title sponsor and for their commitment to supporting art practice in the region through this and other recent projects they have worked on with us. Each and every staff member of the AGW has in some way contributed to the successful outcome of this exhibition and I recognize all of them from exhibition production, design and education to finance, development and public relations. In particular Curator of Contemporary Art, Srimoyee Mitra ably guided this project to fruition with the guest curators.

(previous page) **David Collier**; *About the Artist*, 1991; ink on paper; Collection of the artist
 (facing page) Installation view

The AGW is indebted to the ongoing support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council in bringing this project to fruition. The City of Windsor continues to support the AGW through our 49-year year *gratis* lease agreement wherein *Between the Panels* is presented. The support from these organizations has ensured that we are able to deliver a strong program of contemporary art exhibitions and corresponding publications for our audiences to enjoy. Thanks are also extended to Otto Buj for his design of this publication in our ongoing series of e-publishing available through the Gallery's website. Finally, I would like to recognize the four artists for asking us as viewers to reflect on the importance of storytelling and character formation and identity through the comics medium.

Catharine Mastin, PhD
Director, Art Gallery of Windsor



Kagan McLeod with Sam Hiti; Untitled (Canoe), 2013; ink and watercolour on paper; Collection of the artist



Between the Panels

The Comics Art of David Collier, David Finch, Jeff Lemire, and Kagan McLeod

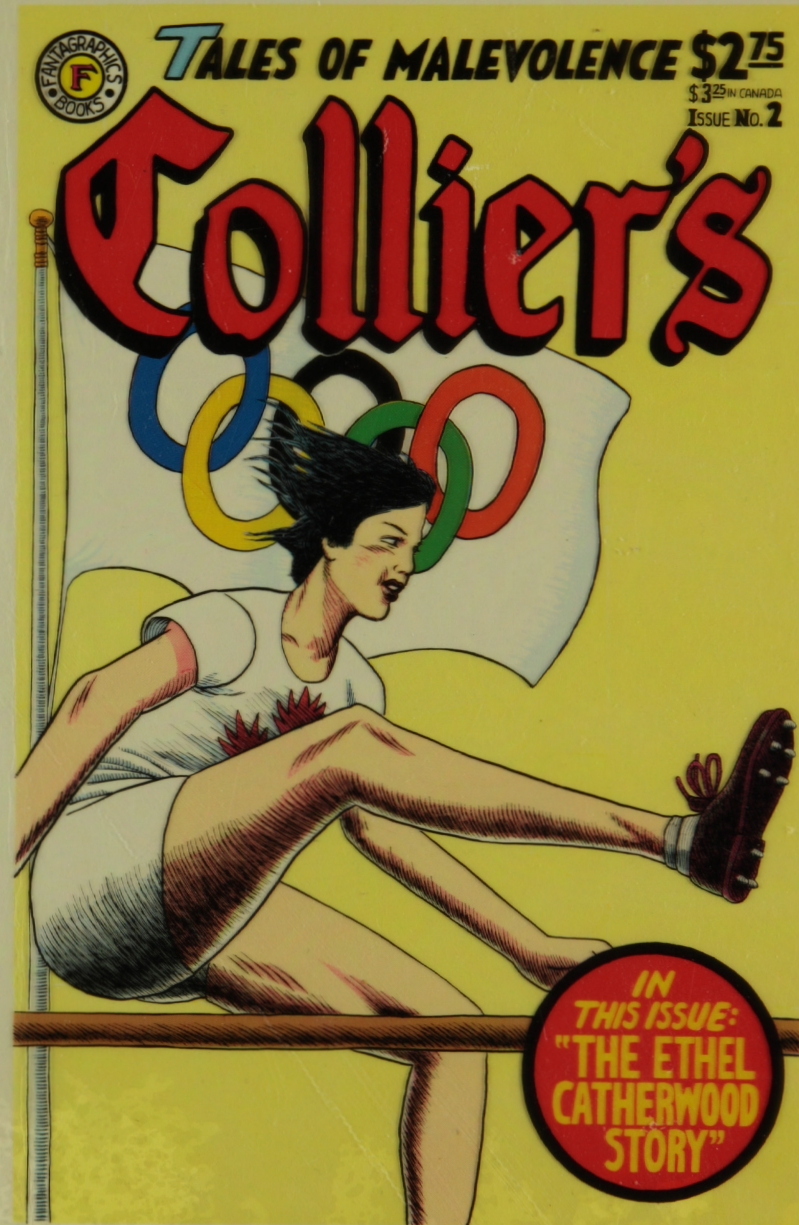
Dr. Dale Jacobs and Dr. C. Suzanne Matheson

The world of comics and the sphere of the gallery may sometimes seem like parallel universes, with different languages, customs, and worldviews. However, every avid reader of comics knows that place and time are infinitely porous. Harvey Pekar, author of the comics series *American Splendor*, was fond of saying, “Comics are words and pictures. You can do anything with words and pictures.”¹ In the myriad ways that comics can be used to tell stories and represent creators’ visions of worlds both near and far, fantastic and mundane, they model how we understand our own world in all of its diversity, waywardness, force, and beauty. While the everyday seems increasingly saturated with information, reading comics recovers the individual pleasure of making meaning between picture and text, panels and gutters, between what is told and what is understood.

Between the Panels: The Comics Art of David Collier, David Finch, Jeff Lemire, and Kagan McLeod presents work by four noted Canadian artists, all of whom were born or have lived in Windsor and Essex County. Each is prominent in the diverse, international field of contemporary comics. Their work demonstrates collectively the range, ingenuity, flexibility, and public reach of the 21st century comics form. While all four artists have carved out substantial careers in comics, their styles, experiences, venues for publication, and artistic processes differ widely from each other and serve as examples of the various kinds of art and graphic storytelling strategies employed in the comics medium. This exhibition of four lead artists from southwestern Ontario, brings together a selection of 72 compelling sketches, drawings and works on paper, many bearing marks or features concealed when the works are published for mass audiences. *Between the Panels* offer insights into the artists’ processes as well as the stages by which their works journey into print and into our hands.

David Finch’s drawings of iconic DC characters such as Batman and Wonder Woman, and his atmospheric renderings of Gotham City place him squarely in the superhero tradition, one of the most recognizable and commercial genres of the medium. The popular monthly comics which Finch usually draws, attest to the mass

David Finch (penciller) and **Richard Friend** (inker); *Batman: The Dark Knight* #11 cover, 2013; ink over pencils, on paper; Collection of the artist



appeal and public expectations of the comics form. In contrast to the superhero genre, David Collier works in the tradition of the underground comics movement that arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s, dealing overtly with social and political subjects that often provoked and shocked audiences. This movement, which represented a reaction against the repressive Comics Code in the United States, presaged not only alternative comics genres such as autobiography and comics journalism, but also alternative publication venues and art styles.² Jeff Lemire's work ranges in subject and genre from science fiction to semi-autobiographical narratives. His work spans the commercial, genre-based comics, successfully navigated by David Finch, and the more personal, literary, and autobiographical possibilities of the medium that stem from the underground and alternative traditions. Kagan McLeod, like Lemire and Finch, has also created long-form comics in popular genres such as martial arts and science fiction. However, the majority of his artistic output has been in short-form comics and illustrations in high-profile magazines and newspapers such as *GQ*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Women's Health*, *The National Post*, and *Esquire*. *Between the Panels* shows the breadth of artistic, thematic, and commercial possibilities within the comics medium, providing viewers with an introduction to how contemporary comics are produced and consumed.

Within the history of the North American comic book, Batman is one of the most recognizable figures and David Finch is the latest in a line of distinguished comics artists who have represented the character since he first appeared in 1939. Over the seven and a half decades of Batman's existence, Finch's predecessors have rendered Gotham as an increasingly stylized and foreboding space. In his inked drawing for a 2012 cover of *Batman: The Dark Knight*, Finch envisions Gotham as an amalgamation of 19th-century rooflines, early 20th-century classicism and modernistic towers, an urban environment shaped by slow accretion that reminds us too of the character's historical legacy. In Finch's hands, this timeless city is both a backdrop and responsibility for the hero, whose plumed cloak fans protectively over the slates of the building where he pauses. Batman is as monumental as the architecture he guards, but resistant to the city's angularity and shallowness. His musculature and sweeping costume are at odds with the geometry of the environment, while the shadows of his cape seem deeper even than those caught between the buildings. He is the magnet of the city's darkness; while light emanates in sharp points from behind the tall skyline in Finch's drawing, blackness pools with Batman in the foreground. Finch's depiction of Batman as the Dark Knight, a creature of the

David Collier; *Collier's* #2 cover (printer's proof), 1992; 4 layers of film; Collection of the artist



shadows who is both echo and protector of his city, emerges from earlier artistic treatments of Batman on the comics page and the film screen, and represents a throwback to the original depictions of the character. Finch is a comics artist who produces art firmly within the mainstream, commercial tradition, a fact emphasized here by the pre-fabricated blue borders of the standard DC page template on which Finch has worked.

As an artist influenced by the underground and alternative tradition in comics, David Collier depicts not the superhero or the fantastic, but rather the overlooked, forgotten or also-rans. His graphic biography of Ethel Catherwood, the Dakota-born, Saskatchewan-based athlete who rose to fame in the late 1920s then disappeared from view, is a case in point. Catherwood remains the only Canadian woman to have won an Olympic gold medal in track and field. After her triumph at the 1928 Amsterdam games, Catherwood was in rapid succession, feted, courted, hounded by the press, offered a Hollywood contract, married secretly, divorced and plagued by scandal. In Collier's hands her story is one of genuine achievement soured by celebrity, a remarkable arc from an ordinary background, through the stresses of world attention, to an after-life of fiercely-guarded anonymity. On the cover of the eponymous *Collier's* #2, Collier presents Catherwood as wholly heroic: a 20-year old clearing the bar and a world record through her own mortal power. Solitary, suspended in air, lifted away from the distractions of her surroundings, Collier's image evokes the mental focus and emotional experience of the high-jumper. The physical achievement of this young, strong, unself-conscious woman is a world away from the exaggerated musculature of a superhero such as Batman. Collier's characteristically 'rustic' line in drawing rescues Catherwood, the 'Lily of Saskatoon,' from the hungry lens that chased her on and off the sports field, and from the glamorous maw of a film industry she rejected. His homelier manner of representation returns Catherwood to her roots. It is typical of Collier's work that communities across Canada — Saskatoon, Hamilton, CFB Trenton — are defined not just through their physical landmarks, but through the stories he recovers during his periods of residence.

Both the perennial popularity of the superhero and the flight of comics into new narrative territories are powerfully illustrated in Lemire's award-winning *Essex County*. On this page Lemire's child-protagonist experiences a brief respite from the emotionally and topographically bald landscapes of his county life.

(left to right)

Jeff Lemire; *Trillium* #1 cover, 2013; watercolour on paper; Collection of the artist

Jeff Lemire; *Essex County* interior page, 2006; ink on paper; Collection of the artist



In Lester's struggle to deal with the aftermath of his mother's death, wearing the cape and mask, along with reading and writing comic books, become his escape and solace. Lemire shows us poignantly that the superhero is universal shorthand for desire, a dream of power for the disenfranchised, a parable of transformation and self-identity. Through 10-year old Lester, Lemire evokes the promises as well as limitations of the conventional comic book; here the boy soars towards us, hands breaching the defined space of the panel, gazing directly at the reader before we are both recalled by the imperative voice of his Uncle Ken. *Essex County* dwells on the heroism of everyday life and the 'secret identities' held across generations of a family. Lemire's distinctive rough line and heavy use of black inking, as well as the irregularities of the hand-lettered text, maintain a direct sense of the artist and with it, the subjectivity of the narrative's point of view. Through such image-making, Lemire influences the reader's perception of the worlds he creates — whether real or imagined — inflecting the reading of his narratives with a sense of both melancholy and nascent imperfection

McLeod's commissioned works address in large measure the real events and personalities of his era. The image reproduced here, taken from a comic book for grade-school children entitled *Assassination! The Story of Murdered Presidents*, depicts the November 24, 1963 shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald, the man accused of assassinating John F. Kennedy, by Jack Ruby. With its fluid shifts between historical narrative and popular culture, and between the genres of film, still photography, and drawing, the work speaks to McLeod's ever-evolving practice. Kennedy's death and Ruby's ambush of Oswald, famously transmitted live on NBC, marked the end of a presidency shaped for the first time by televised images. McLeod approaches the educational comic with a sensibility honed both by popular culture and narrative media and, in doing so, unerringly exposes the line between celebrity culture and public office that gives bite to his subsequent satirical works. As a sequential art form, comics allow McLeod to record both the event and its translation into popular memory; comics are a perfect medium to explore an event that has been treated so forensically in American culture — literally frame-by-frame in the case of Kennedy's death.

In his drawing of Colin Kaepernick, which appeared in *Sportsnet Magazine* in 2013, McLeod further explores the notion of celebrity, this time within the venerable tradition of caricature. Like Finch's Batman, Kaepernick

is here presented as preternaturally muscled, his tattoos seeming to ripple on his biceps, a physical specimen who operates at the edge of the superhuman. Like the underground artists and the caricaturists who came before him, however, McLeod does not hold the athlete up for adulation, but rather to subject the notion of human perfection and our obsession with fame to critical scrutiny. In the action of kissing his bicep, Kaepernick is shown to be self-absorbed to the point of narcissism, a trait of celebrity that we tend, as a culture, to either overlook or embrace. Within this context, Kaepernick’s tattoos, carefully observed by McLeod, read ironically as the quarterback’s usurpation of image-making. By using “TM” to represent the sound of the kiss, McLeod goes further, appropriating the convention of the sound effect from comics to imply the commercial exploitation of the image of celebrity.

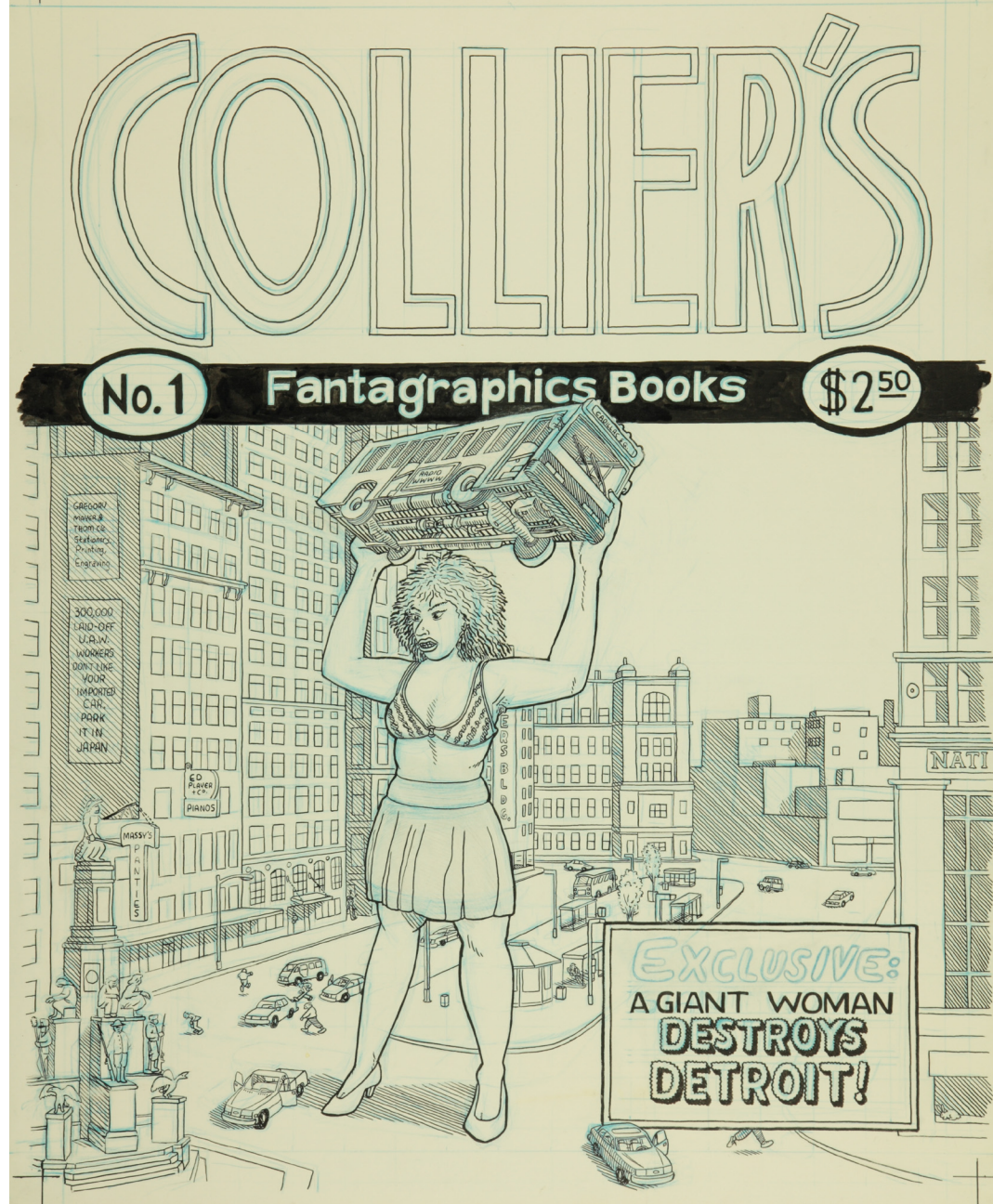
Over the last 25 years, the comics medium has become an ever more visible and well-regarded part of mainstream culture, with graphic novels, or long-form comics, reviewed in major newspapers and featured on the shelves of both independent and chain bookstores. Major publishing houses now produce work in the comics medium, while both school and public libraries are building graphic novels collections in order to tempt adolescents into the library. Comics appear in newspapers, magazines, textbooks, and many other venues, forming part of the culture that surrounds us. Taken together, the artworks included in *Between the Panels: The Comics Art of David Collier, David Finch, Jeff Lemire, and Kagan McLeod* — a mix of original comics pages, character sketches, covers, and magazine/newspaper illustrations in a range of media, including penciled and inked drawings, fully coloured pages, and watercolour illustrations — elucidate the different modes of artistic production, thematic concerns, and venues of publication that comprise the comics field. As Pekar always said, and this exhibition demonstrates, anything is possible with words and pictures.

Notes

1. Witek, Joseph. *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar*. Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1989, 121.
2. The Comic Magazine Association of America was founded as a trade association in 1954 in order to adopt an industry-wide comics code. The CMAA sought to change the tide of public opinion by demonstrating a unified commitment to what the publishers perceived as community standards. Severe restrictions were imposed on depictions of crime, violence, sex, and horror.

Installation view





About the Artist

David Collier (b. 1963), a gifted observational cartoonist, is best known for his nonfiction and autobiographical comics, published in his own comic book, *Collier's*, and collected in various comics anthologies. He has also published prose-rich comics essays in newspapers such as *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*. His work first appeared in Robert Crumb's underground magazine *Weirdo* in 1986; Collier has since maintained a rich correspondence with this significant and controversial artist. The underground and alternative comics movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which Crumb helped shape, dealt overtly with social and political subjects that shocked audiences. Collier's quietly subversive perspective on contemporary culture — whether manifested in a rural artists' collective, a Canadian military base, or on a city street — is one legacy of this movement, together with his distinctively rustic line, characteristic use of cross-hatching, and deep engagement with text.

His collections of work include *Just the Facts: A Decade of Comics Essays*, *Portraits from Life*, *Hamilton Sketchbook*, and *The Frank Ritza Papers*, which won the Doug Wright Award for Best Book in 2005. *Chimo* (2011), Collier's most recent work, is a wry account of his ambition to become a war artist, chronicling his brief stint aboard a navy frigate, courtesy of the Canadian War Artists Program, and his subsequent decision to re-enlist as a Reservist. *Chimo* documents the physical, mental, and social effects of basic training on a 40-something year-old freelance artist, but it also shows the absolute centrality of drawing in Collier's life and his thoughts on a national identity he has pledged to both protect and represent.

David Collier; *Collier's* #1 cover, 1992; ink on paper; Private collection



About the Artist

David Finch (b. 1972) is one of the most sought-after artists in mainstream comics today. A self-taught artist, he began his career at Top Cow Productions, taking over penciling duties on *Cyberforce* from series creator Marc Silvestri in 1995. Finch is best known, however, for his work at Marvel Comics, where he worked from 2003–2009 on titles such as *Ultimate X-Men*, *The New Avengers*, and *Moon Knight*, and at DC Comics, where he has been under an exclusive contract since 2010. At DC, Finch has drawn for series such as *Batman: The Dark Knight*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Forever Evil*. He won the 2009 Joe Shuster Canadian Comic Book Creator Award for Outstanding Artist.

Finch's drawings of characters such as Marvel's Wolverine and Captain America, and DC's Batman and Wonder Woman, as well as his atmospheric renderings of New York and Gotham City place him squarely in the superhero tradition, one of the most recognizable and commercial genres of the medium. In recent years, Finch has become especially associated with *Batman*, one of the most iconic characters in the history of comics. Finch's depiction of Batman as the Dark Knight, a creature of the shadows who is both echo and protector of his troubled city, emerges from earlier artistic treatments of Batman on the comics page and the film screen. In this way, Fince builds on and extends the artistic traditions of the many artists who came before him. Finch, like his forebearers at Marvel and DC, produces art firmly within the mainstream, commercial tradition, a fact emphasized by the pre-fabricated blue borders of the standard DC page template on which Finch has worked.

David Finch (penciller) and **Scott Williams** (inker); *Brightest Day* #12 cover, 2010; ink over pencils, on paper; Collection of the artist



About the Artist

Jeff Lemire (b. 1976) is the critically acclaimed creator of *The Underwater Welder*, *Sweet Tooth*, *The Nobody*, *Trillium*, and the *Essex County Trilogy*, selected as one of five titles for “Canada Reads.” His comics career began in 2005 when he received a Xeric Award to facilitate the publication of his first book, *Lost Dogs*. Lemire’s work ranges in subject and genre from science fiction to semi-autobiographical narratives that circle around his home territory of Woodslee, Ontario. Over the past decade, his work has embraced the possibilities of genre-based comics and the creative energy of the underground and alternative traditions. In 2008, Lemire won the Joe Shuster Canadian Comic Book Creator Award for Outstanding Cartoonist and the Doug Wright Award for Best Emerging Talent. He has also been nominated for many awards in the comics industry, including an Ignatz, a Harvey, and two Eisner Awards. In addition to his work as an artist, Lemire is a prolific comics writer, working for companies such as DC, Marvel, and Valiant. *Descender*, his collaboration with artist Dustin Nguyen, was recently optioned for film by Sony Pictures.

Lemire’s expressive line and preference for the irregularities of the hand-lettered text maintain a direct sense of the artist on the page. His graphic presence reminds the reader of how individual experience shapes what is understood and remembered. Through such image-making, Lemire influences the reader’s perception of the worlds he creates — whether real or imagined — inflecting the reading of his narratives with a sense of both melancholy and nascent imperfection.

Jeff Lemire; *Essex County* cover, *Book 2: Ghost Stories*, 2006; ink on paper; Private collection



About the Artist

Kagan McLeod (b. 1978) is an illustrator whose work has appeared in a wide range of publications, from comic books and magazines to posters and newspapers. He has created long-form comics in popular genres such as martial arts and science fiction. His graphic novel, *Infinite Kung Fu*, which he began serializing in 2000, was published in collected form to critical acclaim in 2011, while *Kaptara*, a new science fiction series on which he is collaborating with writer Chip Zdarsky, debuted in April, 2015. Most of his artistic output has been in short-form comics and illustrations in high-profile magazines and newspapers such as *Glamour*, *GQ*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Maxim*, *Women's Health*, *Esquire*, *Maclean's*, and *The Wall Street Journal*; he has also worked as a staff illustrator for the *National Post*. McLeod's work in these venues typically addresses the real personalities of his era — celebrities, actors, musicians, politicians, athletes — and their public lives. Through short-form comics on subjects as diverse as musician R. Kelly, the 1950s execution of the Rosenbergs, and the 2015 trial of Senator Mike Duffy, McLeod uses the sequential form to record both current events and their translation into popular memory. Through illustrations and caricatures of figures such as Ben Affleck, Uma Thurman, and Colin Kaepernick, McLeod records our collective fascination with celebrities, a task intensified by his recent assignments to live draw both the Academy Awards and Golden Globe Awards for the *National Post*. With a sensibility honed both by popular culture and narrative media, McLeod unerringly chronicles the media-obsessed world in which we live.

About the Curators

Dr. Dale Jacobs is an Associate Professor, English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor, and is the author of *Graphic Encounters: Comics and the Sponsorship of Multimodal Literacy* (Bloomsbury, 2013). His essays on comics have appeared in *English Journal*, *Biography*, *College Composition and Communication*, *ImageText*, *Studies in Comics*, and *Journal of Teaching Writing*. He is the editor of the Spring 2015 special issue of *Composition Studies* on comics, multimodality, and composition.

Dr. C. Suzanne Matheson is an Associate Professor, English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor, and writes on visual culture, historical spectatorship and the invention of public art exhibition in 18th/19th-century Britain. Her interest in comics is informed by work on 18th century graphic satire, book illustration and contemporary artists’ books. She contributed to the Courtauld’s groundbreaking *Art on Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House* and recently co-curated an exhibition on Tintern Abbey as a site of inspiration for artists and poets (Chepstow Museum, Wales).

Between the Panels: The Comics Art of David Collier, David Finch, Jeff Lemire, and Kagan McLeod

May 30 – September 20, 2015

Title Sponsor



Curators Dr. Dale Jacobs, Dr. C. Suzanne Matheson

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Cover: **Jeff Lemire, Kagan McLeod, David Collier, David Finch**; *Artists’ Jam*, 2015; ink on paper; Private collection



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