

My Hero!

Contemporary Art & Superhero Action

Educational Guide

NOT FOR RESALE



Bedford Gallery at the Leshner Center for the **Arts**

Walnut Creek | California | bedfordgallery.org

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Curator's Statement



Our modern day superhero is the ultimate champion—an idol that destroys the bad guy, protects the innocent, and saves the day or sometimes the world. Our superheroes are usually humble guys and gals, tucked-away and living anonymously, until these vigilantes are called to suit-up, don a mask, and face the dark side, fight evil, and right the wrong.

For decades, artists have tapped the world of the superhero, eager to explore the alluring concept of what it means to have an *avatar*. We're captivated by their miraculous, superhuman strength, startling bravery, enthralling adventures, and even their weaknesses. A number of artists are also asking: What happens when Superman gets old and checks into assisted living? What does he look like and what's he up to? An unassuming and amusing drawing by New York artist Jason Yarmosky titled *Playing Cards* narrows the focus on this sobering idea with his endearing image of aging superheroes gathered around the card table playing a badass game of poker. Swedish artist Andreas Englund continues the narrative with images of his droll, forlorn, and exhausted superhero, who—after a lifetime of saving the world—is brought to his knees, literally. This superhero, craggy but tough, is a baby boomer feeling his age.

My Hero! presents a sprawling collection of artworks by artists from around the world working in a range of media from painting and sculpture to printmaking and photography. Some of the artworks in *My Hero!* are very funny and very clever—including Jenny Parks who creates images of cats (many of which have gone viral on the internet) suited-up as superheroes and ready for battle. Laurina Paperina makes delightful cartoon-like narratives that are drenched in satire and address the daily emotional struggles of being neither a superhero nor super cool.

Other works in the show reimagine iconic superheroes, celebrating the magic of the genre with a personal, social, or political narrative. The black and white photographs by French artist Rémi Noël depict a Batman doll in dreamy noir-like scenarios—at a low-end motel, atop a steamy manhole cover, or considering a quick stop to a gentleman's club. Brooklyn artist Dulce Pinzón makes photographs depicting the lives of immigrants as society's "real superheroes," with images of Catwoman working as a nanny and Superman delivering pizzas on his trusty bike. The Bedford Gallery also commissioned an edition of San Francisco artist Lizabeth Rossó's Batman warrior in the style of historic terracotta warriors from Xi'an, China. The show features nationally renowned Michigan artist Mark Newport who uses superhero imagery to explore issues of identity and the definition of a "hero." And finally, San Francisco artist Jenny Ottinger beautifully sums up the superhero's hard day's work with a series of paintings, quiet and gestural, showing a lone Superman suit retired to the hanger while our hero gets his much needed rest.

Artists and storytellers have used superheroes to express our collective fears and viewpoints since ancient times. Many of the works in this show are based on comic book art created during the mid-1930s to late 1960s—the politics of that era strongly influenced the story lines. Superheroes like Captain America fought Axis enemies during World War II, while Wonder Woman battled her enemies and served as a voice of liberation for women and girls everywhere. Politics and a desire for change are just below the surface in many superhero stories.

My Hero! studies our fascination with the astonishing and evolving characters that are woven into the fabric of our culture. Even though the superhero is complete fantasy, I think these characters resonate deeply because we all see ourselves in superheroes and their ability to do more than is humanly possible. And, there's a lot of romance and familial strife in our superhero stories, too. Superman and Lois Lane, Spidey and his gal Mary Jane, and Batman with the loss of his parents and stolen childhood... We fall in love with the idea that there will be someone there to save us. And at the same time, we daydream about being the ones who do the saving.

Every generation needs a hero. Through the eyes of contemporary artists today, *My Hero!* explores the enigmatic and iconic world of superheroes, and the staying power of the extraordinary characters that inhabit this astonishing domain.

—Carrie Lederer, Curator of Exhibitions and Programs, Bedford Gallery at the Leshar Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek, CA



My Hero! is a nationally traveling exhibition. After its debut at Bedford Gallery in January 2016, the exhibition will travel through 2018 to the following venues: the California Center for the Arts (Escondido, CA), Huntsville Museum of Art (Huntsville, AL), Daura Gallery at Lynchburg College (Lynchburg, VA), the International Museum of Art and Sciences (McAllen, TX), Yellowstone Art Museum (Billings, MT), Kalamazoo Institute of Arts (Kalamazoo, MI), South Dakota Art Museum (Brookings, SD), and the Art Museum of West Virginia University (Morgantown, WV).

Short video by Curator, Carrie Lederer: <http://on.fb.me/1TF2j9A>

Artist Statements

Mike Alcantara, Austin, TX

Mike Alcantara uses a singular medium—comics—to recreate characters like Superman and Spider-Man. Described as “upcycled”¹ imagery from comics, his collages are a storm of snapshots that create a cohesive story.

Though Alcantara starts by sketching designs for the canvas, you won’t find any ink or paint in his final artworks. His tools usually include nothing more than an X-acto knife, scissors, and gel media. Once his design is ready, he uses tattered, torn, and rescued comics to assemble the background. He then layers color comic pieces to create the images and black comic pieces to build the details. His intense use of color on the larger images focuses the primary character while the background creates a dynamic narrative. Alcantara also uses angle and perspective as tools to create an explosive and eye-catching collage that is bold and mesmerizing. His collages pull the stories from folded pages onto a flat medium, and the final result is a image that is both simple and complex and consists of stories within stories.

“I have always been into comics,” Alcantara says. “But like most, the comic collection is in a box and only occasionally looked through. I wanted a way to enjoy the comic art all of the time.”

Katherine Bradford, New York, NY

Katherine Bradford’s search for mystical links to mysterious ambiguities has led her to give Superman the starring role in her paintings. Adorned with his bright costume and bestowed the gift of flight, Bradford’s Superman is more about wonder and enchantment than theory. She is fascinated by how his “man” side and his “super” side link to create one iconic being—and this superhero, composed of simple primary colors, is a perfect palette for the artist. Art critic John Yau writes that perhaps the Superman in her paintings is “a meditation on masculinity.” Bradford says she is not taking a stand on the issue of masculinity, she is merely presenting it.

Bradford worked with oil on canvas to create *Superman Vertical* and *Cape and Boots. Superman Underpants on Shaker wood box* was made as the title suggests – applying oil paint onto a found shaker wood box. “Superman Blue Overhead” was created using gouache, an opaque water based paint, on decal edged paper. Bradford cites the iconic Superman images of Peter Saul and fellow *My Hero!* artist Mel Ramos as sources of inspiration. For her ideal superpower she would choose x-ray vision and the ability to fly. Her name would be “Star Light.”

Katherine Bradford is a New York artist who is currently working with CANADA Gallery (New York, NY) on her solo show opening January 2016. Bradford holds a BA from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and an MFA from Purchase College in New York. From 1997 to 2013 Bradford was on the MFA faculty at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. In addition she has been invited to teach at colleges such as Williams, Hunter, Maryland Institute College of Art, RISD, and Cal Arts. Bradford received a Guggenheim Award in 2011 and a Joan Mitchell Foundation Award in 2012. She has also

¹ Paste, <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2013/09/colorful-superhero-collages-created-using-little-m.html>. Retrieved December 26, 2015.

received a Pollock Krasner Grant and two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York. Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Portland Museum of Art, among others.

Robert Xavier Burden, San Francisco, CA

In 2006 Robert Xavier Burden began a series of larger-than-life “portraits” of the action figures he played with as a boy. As an adult, these toys are just cheap pieces of plastic, but as a child they were secret talismans, possessing magical properties. These toys are relics and Burden tries to present them as such, while also renewing his faded sense of awe.

Burden’s pieces are all hand-made using traditional brushes with oil paints on either canvas or panel. The frames are custom-built and often modified to display toys. Burden used silicone molds to make the hundreds of little Batman figurines ornamenting *Holy Batman’s* frame. Burden’s work is often compared to Kehinde Wiley, one of his many influences along with Joseph Cornell, Drew Struzan, Todd Schorr, Takashi Murakami, H.W. Philips, and commercial illustrators and textile designers of the 19th century.

Robert Burden was raised in the suburbs of Toronto and has been living in San Francisco for the past ten years. He did his undergraduate degree in Art & Art History from Queen's University and received his MFA in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2007. He was a 2006 recipient of a Murphy and Cadogan Fellowship and a 2007 recipient of the Irene Pijoan Memorial Painting Award. Burden would call himself “Burd Man” if he had the superhero power to fly.

Fun facts about Burden’s Batman painting:

- Burden’s painting took 1200 hours to make over the course of 7 months.
- The Batman figurine at the top of the frame is Burden’s childhood toy that inspired the piece.
- Can you find the Zorro action figure? Bob Kane and Bill Finger, the two creators of Batman, said that one of the main inspirations for Batman was Zorro.
- Can you find the reference to Sherlock Homes? This English detective was another main inspiration for the Batman character.
- Da Vinci’s ornithopter “flight machine” design (flying in the landscape behind Batman) partially inspired the aesthetic of Batman.
- The Twin Towers appear in the background. Gotham City is a nickname for New York City and these toys are primarily from Burden’s childhood. The New York City skyline of his childhood included the World Trade Center.
- The Batcave/Wayne Manor playset sits on the hill behind Batman. The initials “BK” have been painted onto the toy mansion (a reference to Bob Kane).
- Why is Predator in the painting? One of Burden’s favorite comic book crossover series from his youth was the short-lived “Batman versus Predator.”
- As a child Burden didn’t have a Scarecrow or Mad Hatter or Ra’s Al Ghul toy from the Batman universe, so he used his sister’s Wizard of Oz, Alice in Wonderland, and Stargate (Ra) figures instead.
- There are exactly 365 little Batman figurines adorning the painting. It’s a fun coincidence.

- The crocodile figure is a reference to Killer Croc but it is actually a toy crocodile that came with a GI Joe figure “Croc Master.”
- On the quarters of Two-Face it says “Finger” and “Kane” instead of “Liberty.”

Short video on Robert Burden: <http://on.fb.me/1LtOFhh>

Enrique Chagoya, San Francisco, CA

Superheroes in Enrique Chagoya’s work represent cultural icons that are symbolic of cultural paradigms. He makes them interact with iconography from different cultures and time periods as layers superimposed in an archeological style. The superheroes in the lithography *The Thingly Thingness of Things* represent cultural powers from multiple cultural origins that are blind to each other, hence the lack of visible eyes in the compositions. Chagoga thinks this reflects very much what happens in conflicts when people become afraid of each other's differences instead of celebrating the differences as a commonwealth that enriches everybody's lives.

Chagoya starts with a collage, then he translates that into a painting by projecting it, or a print by making photocopies for the plates, depending on what medium may be more adequate for the imagery, although in the samples in the exhibition both pieces could have been done in print media or painting, or even as a drawing. The final work is very much all handmade and eyeballed. Chagoya admires Goya, Daumier, Posada, Kathy Kollowitz, and Leon Golub for their social narratives and humorous approaches.

Drawing from his experiences living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border in the late 70s, and also in Europe in the late 90s, Enrique Chagoya juxtaposes secular, popular, and religious symbols to address the ongoing cultural clash between the United States, Latin America, and the world at large. He uses familiar pop icons to create deceptively friendly points of entry for the discussion of complex issues. Enrique Chagoya earned a BFA in 1984 from the San Francisco Art Institute. He then pursued his MA and MFA at the University of California, Berkeley, graduating in 1987. Chagoya is currently a Professor at Stanford University’s Department of Art and Art History. He is represented by Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco, George Adams Gallery in New York, and Lisa Sette Gallery in Scottsdale, AZ. His prints are published by Shark’s Ink in Lyons, CO; Electric Works in San Francisco, CA; Magnolia Editions in Oakland, CA; ULAE in Bay Shore, NY; Segura Publishing in Pueblo, AZ; Trillium Press in Brisbane, CA; Made in California in Oakland, CA; and Smith Andersen Editions in Palo Alto, CA.

Sandra Chevrier, Montreal, Canada

Sandra Chevrier never had an interest in comic books. When she started gaining more knowledge about the comic book world, however, she began to understand how people can be passionate about a universe where the good guys win and ordinary people become heroes. Chevrier is interested in the fragility of superheroes, how despite all the playfulness of their stories there remains a human element. Her portraits also tackle the underlying tragedy of oppressed female identity and the exposed superficial illusion therein. Within her *Cages* series, her subjects denounce the role given to the female comic book counterparts, refusing to play the part of seducer or victim. These women, encased in cages of brash, imposing paint or comic books that mask their very person, symbolize the struggle women have with

expectations of beauty and perfection. They also depict the limitations society places on women, corrupting what truly is beautiful by placing women in prisons of identity. By defining these limits, society is asking them to become superheroes.

Chevrier usually begins sketching her ideas and studying the concept before becoming serious about creating a piece. She searches comic books for powerful images to use as the mask and puts them aside. Then she creates the background and portrait before beginning the process of collage. For the past few months she has been using old collage studies to make them all hand-painted. She adds the finer details – highlights, shadow, blending – until the work is complete. Chevrier is inspired by many artists – Zoltan Veevaete, Richard Prince, Kent Williams, Ed Ruscha. However, she is most inspired by life in all its forms of beauties and tragedies. If she could have any superpower it would be the power to heal people – mind, body and soul.

Sandra Chevrier currently lives in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. She is an idea chaser and a full-time single mom. Her work takes her traveling over a broad range of fluctuating emotional enigmas and concepts that have set the standard for our modern communication. Working in a home studio, Chevrier produces her work full-time. The series, *Cages* has obtained worldwide success. Chevrier has a full schedule of exhibition tour dates through 2019.

Bill Concannon, Crockett, CA

Bill Concannon has been exploring color and form for the past 20 years, combining neon light with non-precious, “degraded” materials such as used plastic shopping bags, bottles from the recycling bin, and detritus picked up from the street. In his work, Concannon straddles the world of neon sign making and fine art, as he is both a commercial sign maker and an artist. All of his work is made of neon light, or as he puts it, “glowing glass tubes filled with inert gases at low pressure excited by high voltage electricity.” Concannon’s *Pow!!* was inspired by the intertitles from the Batman TV shows of the 1960s and 1970s. Concannon says he “inhaled” comic books as a kid and remains a superhero fan to this day (he is a DC Comics loyalist).

His neon shop, Aargon Neon, is divided amongst equipment for bending and forming glass tubes, which includes a set of torches called “fires,” a wire-screen tube-bending table that allows him to work from full-sized butcher paper layouts, plus an assortment of small specialized hand tools, and the tube filling apparatus, which includes a large transformer called a “bombarder” for heating the tubes, a vacuum pump, glass bottles of various inert gasses, and various gauges to measure different aspects of the process. An entire project can take anywhere from a few hours to a few months to complete.

Neon technology, equipment, and materials such as glass tubing, electrodes, and transformers come out of the electric sign industry; Concannon says that making neon signs has allowed him to develop and practice his skills for fine art applications. He says, “I really enjoy neon sign making, it informs my art, just as my art informs it.” What is Concannon’s favorite neon fun fact? The first neon piece was made in the 19th century by German bohemian bead makers.

Marco D'Alfonso, Toronto, Canada

Ever since he was a young child, Marco D'Alfonso admired superhero art in the comics he read and would always try to draw his favorite characters in the style of his favorite artists. Since then, he has been enamored with superheroes and the good they represent. D'Alfonso's Captain America piece is based on a Norman Rockwell painting titled *Soldier Marching with Children*. The piece was made as a tribute to the Fourth of July since in the Marvel Universe Captain America is a living symbol of American patriotism. He thought it would be fun to portray Captain America as if he were depicted by Norman Rockwell, in his mind the artist most synonymous with the American way of life. D'Alfonso's piece was digitally painted using Adobe Photoshop.

The Spider-Man piece is based on a classic comic panel from *Amazing Spider-Man #50* by John Romita Sr. In this story titled "Spider-Man No More!" Peter Parker throws his costume in the trash and quits being Spider-Man because of the public scrutiny. D'Alfonso thought it would be fun to update the iconic panel with Peter Parker throwing out all the Spider-Man costumes he has amassed over the last 50 years. D'Alfonso's *Spider-Man No More* was done traditionally in pencil and ink and then colored in Photoshop. He has a few stand-out artistic inspirations - Norman Rockwell's classic compositions and realistic style, Bruce Timm's unmistakable classic animation style, and Alphonse Mucha's beautifully detailed ornamental illustrations.

Marco D'Alfonso is a Canadian artist who has been drawing for the majority of his life, finding inspiration in animation, comics, contemporary art, and pop culture. He is a freelance illustrator and designer whose work includes toy and video game designs, editorial illustrations, and comic book cover art. His work has been featured in numerous galleries such as iAm8Bit in Los Angeles and Bottleneck Gallery in New York. D'Alfonso currently resides in Toronto. He would love to have the superpower to time travel and would call himself "Back-to-the-Future Man."

Andreas Englund, Stockholm, Sweden

Andreas Englund centers his work around storytelling and communication. He believes the superhero concept, along with the routes and motifs it inspires, has made him the artist he is today. In his *Aging Superhero* series Englund creates realistic and humoristic oil paintings depicting an anonymous superhero in his everyday life. Englund was originally interested in portraying ancient Greek heroes as modern superheroes with costumes. The idea eventuated into his aging superhero paintings modeled after his father.

Englund's subject does not shy away from showing weakness – he is intentionally portrayed to show the vulnerability and fragility of human and superhero life. He starts his paintings by photographing the model (his father) and coloring his skin digitally. He then paints from the photo. While Englund's aging superhero does not have a name, he is super strong and can fly.

Andreas Englund is a painter based in Stockholm, Sweden. He graduated from RMI-Berghs School of Communication in 2000. After a successful international career as an art director, Englund left that position to become a full-time artist. His superhero series has captured the attention of the art world, causing Englund to develop a pervasive online presence. Much of his work is displayed in hotels and restaurants along with traditional galleries.

Jeremy Fisher, Los Angeles, CA

Jeremy Fisher is drawn to Batman and Iron Man because they stand alongside god-like “super men” against monsters, aliens, and super villains without any supernatural powers. Batman is a vigilante who protects citizens using handy gadgets. Iron Man is a missile expert and a drime fighter. Superheroes have traditionally represented the idealized man as the apex of morality. Their strength comes from sheer will, calculating minds, and technical know-how. These heroes remind us of our own fragility as they suffer from sincere human flaws - addiction, depression, post-traumatic stress, and anger management.

Fisher believes superheroes’ popularity stems from our heroic aspiration to stare down death while living with these flaws. This is reflected in the materials he uses to create his art. Fisher’s sculptures utilize resin casts of real human skulls, epoxy clay, and cardboard for the head. He used a 3D modeling program to construct the helmets, incorporating paper, cardboard, clay and tin foil to create a distressed look. Fisher wanted his sculptures to have an anthropological quality, presenting them like museum artifacts.

Jeremy Fisher is an artist and stop motion animator who holds a BA from Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, FL. He is also a former Bedford Gallery artist having featured work *The Skull Show* in 2013.

Justin Hager, New York, NY

Justin Hager combines celebrity myth, popular culture, and word play² in surprising ways, leaving us with illustrations that make perfect sense in their own way.

Sometimes, he creates layers of myth, like in his illustration of Batman and Robin Williams. Here, Williams isn’t really Williams, but Mrs. Doubtfire wielding a duster and seemingly providing Batman with some time-tested advice. Batman’s expression of wide-eyed interest suggests this Robin (or Mrs. Doubtfire) knows what she’s talking about. Batman is poised, arm extended as if ready to take flight, and hanging on every word.

Hager is a self-taught artist who grew up in Bakersfield, CA. He has been drawing for most of his life, but only started his “mashup portraits” a little over five years ago. He made a drawing a day using a ballpoint pen and printer paper, sketching as quickly as he could. Eventually he had over 400 drawings

² Vice. <http://www.vice.com/read/inside-the-cleverly-literal-mind-of-justin-hager-652>. Retrieved December 28, 2015.

based on nostalgic characters, as pop culture icons became an endless supply of subject matter. Hager started to gain popularity, especially through social media, and projects and gallery opportunities started coming his way. When he started to show his work in galleries, Hager moved to more sophisticated tools – making his own canvases, making sculpture, and using archival products.

Hager's work has been shown in multiple exhibitions in the Bay Area, New York, and Los Angeles. Hager recently moved to New York from San Francisco, where he lived and worked for many years.

Cheong-ah Hwang, Columbus, OH

Ohio artist Cheong-ah Hwang uses paper to create relief sculptures inspired by everyday living. Born and raised in Seoul, Korea, she came to the United States in the early 90s. Hwang played with paper as a child and discovered paper sculpture as an art form in her early 30s. She taught herself how to create in this medium and began working as a professional artist in 2000.

Her paper relief sculpture of Captain America bursts with energy as the character appears to climb out of the wall, ready for battle. The details, like the set of Captain's jaw and his muscular build and body armor, contribute to the piece's power and believability.

Hwang's sculptures are made of many layers of paper, usually 1 to 2 inches in depth. She starts with a sketch, and then separates, cuts, shapes, and assembles the paper layers.

Hwang studied Fine Art with a focus on Art & Technology at The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. Her work has been exhibited in solo and group shows across Ohio, as well as in Michigan. Hwang works on commissions for individuals, companies, and institutions. In 2013 she published a how-to book, *Creative Paper Cutting: 15 Paper Sculptures to Inspire and Delight* (GMC Publications, UK). Many of her artworks are posted at <http://www.papernoodle.com>. Hwang lives in Columbus, OH with her husband and son.

Ole Marius Joergensen, Oslo, Norway

Ole Marius Joergensen became obsessed with superheroes when he was seven years old. Their meaningful, adventurous lives and colorful costumes captivated him so much that his mother made him his own superhero costume. As an adult Joergensen decided to make Superman the subject of a photo series depicting the iconic character as a real human being trying to do the impossible: fly. Through his subjects' disregard for the consequences, Joergensen explores all the trials and errors of living life on the edge.

Ole Marius Joergensen is a fine art photographer with a background in film based in Oslo, Norway. He combines humor and a Norwegian strain of surrealism in his work and finds his inspiration in the inner and outer landscapes of his countrymen. He likes to shoot in the sparsely populated areas of the Northern regions. Many of his iconic images reflect the dreams and mysteries of the Norwegian people and raise questions of identity.

Graham Kirk, Plymouth, New Zealand

Graham Kirk first started drawing comics as a nine year old in 1957, but it wasn't until 1989 that he decided to put Superman in a painting. After writing and drawing a comic strip called "Dick Sargeson," which ran in the New Zealand Listener magazine for three years, Kirk decided to replace his comic characters with superheroes. In the *My Hero!* exhibition, Batman and Robin, Wonderwoman, and Supergirl are set against New Zealand backgrounds (the last two being located within a kilometer of where Kirk lives).

Photography has always had appeal for Kirk. In the early seventies began taking black and white street photographs inspired by Cartier Bresson and Robert Frank. When he is out with his camera these days, he looks for an image that can serve as a background to somebody or something else. Finding a match of subject and location is the biggest challenge. Kirk uses acrylic paints mixed with gloss medium which he paints onto gessoed hardboard. He generally works from actual size photos and uses cotton buds and brushes to apply the paint, building up color and tone with repeated coverings. A painting can take anywhere from around five to ten weeks to complete.

Graham Kirk lives and works in New Zealand. His piece *Wonderwoman and Light Over Okato* displays the view from his studio window. He combines photography, drawing and painting to make pieces exhibited in art venues around the world. Kirk carries his camera with him wherever he goes.

Short video on Graham Kirk: <http://bit.ly/1TByeG4>

Dave Laro, White River Junction, VT

For Dave Laro, Superman conjures up memories of American childhood. The conceptual idea behind *FREE Suit for You!* compares the similarities of commercial advertising and superhero fairytales. Laro's Superman is colorful, inviting, and alluring enough to make you want to glance twice.

Laro starts his pieces by making a panel out of a plywood type material surrounded by a pine frame. He then affixes old newspapers or magazines to the panel as a background. After making a silkscreen of the chosen image, he prints the black outline onto the panel. Laro sometimes cuts out the areas that pertain to associated colors and paints them separately. To create varied surfaces, he sands the different pieces and paints them again before putting them back together. He then screen prints the black outline on the panel again. The last step is to apply a protective matte varnish.

Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol inspire Laro because they use the observer's memories and notions as an essential element in the experience of viewing their art. Laro would love to have the superpower of being confident in all situations – like Superman, even though he was wearing his underwear outside his pants.

A Vermont native, Dave Laro was born in White River Junction in 1971 where he continues to live and work at his home and studio. Primarily self-taught, he refined his skills as a master wood worker and

wood carver as apprentice to the renowned furniture designer and maker Charles Shackleton. Laro considers himself a storyteller, relying on the visual impact of color, composition, and the materials he uses to evoke a response and conjure a story told from the viewer's perspective – not just his own. Laro's "pop constructions" and complex silk screen pieces have been exhibited in galleries throughout New England, most notably in several solo exhibitions at Kobalt Gallery in Provincetown, MA and Ava Gallery and Art Center in Lebanon, NH. Laro's work is in numerous private collections across the country and abroad.

Adam Lister, Beacon, NY

Beacon, NY artist Adam Lister has always felt a close connection to the idea of the superhero. Growing up, he was a Hulk and Superman fan. "They were iconic, legendary guys who, in my mind, could do anything," he says.

Lister uses a geometric and hard-edge painting technique to build his artworks, square by square. Each painting starts out as a very simple pencil drawing. He sketches the most basic shapes first, gradually adding more of the details. His watercolor paintings intentionally lack realism and bring to mind the pixelation of a low res image. Although there is minimal information, we are able to fill in the gaps, round out the corners, and instantly recognize the familiar superhero.

"I take the original subject matter and deconstruct it on paper while reconstructing it in my head," Lister says. "I think this sort of 'pixelated' interpretation brings about concepts revolving around visual language and collective familiarity."

Ironically, when asked what superpower he would choose and why, he responds that he would seek invisibility. His superhero name would be "Creature of the Night." Our question for Lister: How would you pixelate invisibility?

Lister studied painting at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and received his BFA in 2003. After graduating, he opened a studio space in Brooklyn and started teaching elementary school in Manhattan. Seven years later, he moved to northern Virginia and ran his own gallery there. In 2013, he moved back to New York and focused full time on painting. Lister lives with his wife and one-year-old daughter.

Jannis Markopoulos, Berlin, Germany

Jannis Markopoulos' work investigates the realistic loveliness of the unexpected. He is interested in transparency and semi-transparency, creating paintings that combine realistic human bodies with comic heroes. He believes we need heroes to define the limits of our aspirations and our ideals.

Markopoulos finds it important to trace the transformation of our cultural definition of heroes from Greek cult icons to comic book heroes. To the ancient Greeks a hero was a mortal who had done something far beyond normal human ability, but it did not matter whether that was good or bad. Today, we only call heroes those whom we admire and wish to emulate. We largely define our ideals after heroic attributes like courage, honor, and justice. Our heroes are transparent symbols for us.

Markopoulos' work is influenced by minimalism, arte povera and pop art. His superpower would be his mental prowess to do things deemed unimaginable and be able to alter reality with his mind. Markopoulos' superhero name would be "Imitheos," a demigod product of the union between a human and a god.

Jannis Markopoulos was born in Athens, Greece in 1962. He studied at the School of Art of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki before moving to Berlin to complete a Bachelor of Arts. Today Markopoulos is a regular participant in international art fairs and exhibitions all over the world.

Foto Marvellini, Milan, Italy

Foto Marvellini is a group of two artists, Andrea and Carlo Marvellini, based in Milan, Italy. Friends for thirty years, they only recently began their first joint art project in 2011. They consider their partnership a brotherhood and imagine themselves as heirs to an ancient and mythological archive from where they derive their pseudonyms. Their antique superhero portraits are inspired by the holy subjects of the old European masters. They speak directly to the affective sphere and play with the impossible. American pop culture has also influenced Foto Marvellini as artists who are very skeptical about the arts becoming so "academic" or "conceptual" that they are inaccessible. Their anonymity is also noteworthy: the Marvellini duo are artists who don't sign with their real identities. It is their way to draw focus to the work and not to the reputation of the artist.

Foto Marvellini works with images based on antiquated family portraits and vintage photographs. The photographs present familiar imagery, background, and clothing, coupled with a superhero costume. This combination plays with our imagination and interjects humor, and invites the viewer to consider the technique used to create these images. Utilizing the genre of a tintype photograph with vintage superhero garb, the images draw the viewer in and ask us to consider our superheroes back in the 19th century.

The pieces in *My Hero!* were created by scanning original antique photos which are then digitally manipulated with masks, capes, and other superhero accoutrement. All the works are mounted in vintage or antique frames. *Portrait of Miss Wonder* and *Bat Reading* are baryta-coated papers, printed in the darkroom with baths of tannic acid called "Marvellini's wash."

Simon Monk, Essex, UK

Secret Identity is an ongoing series of paintings by UK artist Simon Monk. Each piece represents a plastic model of a famous superhero contained in a clear polythene carrier bag. Monk believes superheroes are icons of male power whose adventures see them engaged in epic battles across the universe. Yet these mythic figures have another life as consumer objects to be found in commercial and domestic contexts. Placed in carrier bags and hung on a hook in a domestic space, they become recently purchased objects robbed of the enormous power they wield in their narrative. Their dynamic energy is stymied, but

despite this reduction, the figures remain irresistible in their cartoonish rage and pride. Monk uses the clear bag to explore the concepts of transparency and identity. The transparency of the carrier bag reveals the superheroes within, yet in the paintings light reflects on the bag, obscuring the characters. In this way the superheroes are doubly masked – the bag conceals the avatar which is concealing the true identity of the superheroes. Monk reveals the true identity of these heroes through the titles of his works, such as *Bruce Wayne* and *Clark Kent*. Monk likens this observation of identity to the life of an artist – the multifariousness of an individual’s persona is condensed in the studio to that of “the artist”: a secret identity in itself.

Monk prefers the strength and rigidity of wooden panels over canvas. Recently he has started producing drawings on paper stretched over board in order to get a similar stable surface. The pieces in *My Hero!* are prints from original paintings.

Simon Monk graduated from Camberwell College at the University of the Arts London with a degree in Fine Art. He lectured at various art schools in and around London while also writing about art and architecture. He has participated in many international art fairs and exhibitions, including East Wing Ten at the Courtland Institute. He currently lives and works full time at his studio in Southend-on-Sea, Essex.

Mark Newport, Keego Harbor, MI

Mark Newport started his superhero knit costume series in 2003 while living in Arizona. In post-9/11 America, the news was inundated with stories predicting imminent threats from terrorists and undocumented citizens. At the same time, Newport’s children were small and pushing at the boundaries of their world, causing him to worry about their safety. He started knitting costumes to explore ideas of safety and vulnerability through the image of the superhero as the ultimate symbol of protection. Newport considers his art his superpower, saying he would make his official superhero name “Sweaterman.”

The pieces in this exhibition are from a group of “big heroes” Newport knits. He plays with scale to build a relationship with the viewer. Newport’s costumes, despite being drooping and empty, dwarf the viewer triggering a version of the protective child-adult relationship. His cozy knitted suits are ill-fitting and pajama-like, setting-up a confusing tension: how can our superhero do his job in this baggy, comfy getup? About this work Mark says, “Turning the superhero inside out is a way for me to present an understanding of masculinity. Superheroes suggest strength, but knitting them or covering them with embroidery provides a softness that is contradictory to their image.”

Each costume is hand knit from Red Heart acrylic yarn, a common brand found in most arts and crafts stores. The acrylic yarn has a personal connection to the sweaters his mother knit for him and his brother while growing up in New England. Newport begins at the shoulders and knits down to the feet using standard double-ended or circular needles. Newport is inspired by Anne Wilson, Jane Lackey, and Joan Livingstone because they were his mentors and first role models for how to be an artist. He is also

very interested in HC Westermann, a Chicago sculptor whose surreal woodwork and drawing blended Westermann's experiences in the war and at home.

Mark Newport was born in Amsterdam, NY and attended the Kansas City Art Institute (BFA) and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA). Newport's work has been exhibited internationally. Recent awards include grants from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Creative Capital Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Arizona Commission on the Arts. Newport's work is in the collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Arizona State University Art Museum, the Cranbrook Art Museum, and The Detroit Institute of Arts. The Simone DeSousa Gallery, Duane Reed Gallery, and the Greg Kucera Gallery represent his work. Newport is the Artist-in-Residence and Head of Fiber at the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He resides in Keego Harbor, Michigan.

Aaron Noble, Los Angeles, CA

For Aaron Noble the superhero is a metaphor of transcendence. Built to withstand extreme states, superheroes absorb more information and extend the human project. Noble's real subject is not the superhero but the vocabulary of superhero cartooning, which is the carrier of this transcendent content.

Noble's pieces are from a group of works he has been adding to regularly for years. They are based on Superman's color scheme: red, yellow, and blue. These primary colors were the perfect choice for the very first superhero costume, the costume from which a thousand flowers bloomed. As with all Noble's work, the relationship between color and line is continually explored. Much of the color is applied with line applications in mind, but perhaps half of the time the color takes its own direction and inspires the line to follow it or comment on it. At certain points, the color takes no line, or the line refuses or contradicts the color. Too much of this and the drawing starts to lose cohesion, but without a little the drawing can die.

Noble creates the design for his work by collaging pieces of comic books. He makes a color copy that can be disassembled and put back into his fragment bank. Many pieces have been used several times in the planning of different works. Next the design is projected onto the paper and its basic outlines penciled very lightly on. Then Noble works with watery gouache colors, continuously mixing to keep the iridescent medium from settling and clotting up. Since Noble works from contemporary comics, he has to translate very slick digital coloring techniques into a more unpredictable watercolor style closer to pre-1990 comic coloring. Except for small adjustments, the color is done completely first and the black line finishes the drawing.

Noble is inspired by many artists - Max Ernst for his frottage paintings, which evoke the deep soul of the forest without actually depicting trees; William Blake for embodying the whole gestalt of superhero comic book production a century ahead of time by writing, drawing, engraving, printing and coloring epic mythological works of integrated text and image; and always Jack Kirby, whose collected comic works for a dozen companies in as many genres never fail to express his singularly protean, humanist, and expansive vision. He dreams of having the superpower to make any spot, moment, event, or situation the center of the universe. His superhero name would be "Focus."

Aaron Noble attended the San Francisco Art Institute in 1981-82 and is a cofounder of the Clarion Alley Mural Project (CAMP) in San Francisco which he directed from 1997 to 2001. He has done permanent outdoor murals in San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Beijing; and temporary wall paintings at the UCLA Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, White Columns in New York and the Honolulu Museum of Art, among others. He has shown at Blum & Poe and Track 16 in LA, PeerUK in London, Pavel Zoubok Gallery in New York, and many others. He is represented by Andres Guerrero Gallery in San Francisco and is a member of Brooklyn Artists Alliance and the Artists Pension Trust. Aaron Noble lives and works in Los Angeles.

Rémi Noël, Paris, France

Rémi Noël's Batman obsession is a stolen inspiration. He began photographing the figure after taking one of his son's toys when he was cleaning his room. Upon taking the first picture, Noël realized Batman is very photogenic and romantic. His series plays up these qualities by shooting Batman in black and white out in the world to showcase the superhero's strong presence.

When Noël travels to the United States he takes Batman with him to feel less alone. He takes the figure out and sets him up in scenarios generally involving symbols of American mythology – rundown motels, neon signs, swimming pools, desert expanses, desolate highways. Even though Batman is often captured alone in his environment, Noël does not set out to make a statement about solitude. He unconsciously presents a “lonely Batman,” yet Batman is never alone – he travels with Noël.

Before Noël's annual stateside visits, he prepares drawings and layouts of what he wants to shoot over the year. However, he remains open to chance and happy accidents that happen along the way. He tries to photograph in a natural way, avoiding complex techniques and shoots with a classic Nikon FM3a SLR 35mm film camera. He always uses a black-and-white silver film and none of his photographs are digitally altered.

Rémi Noël started his career as a copywriter for an ad agency before becoming a photographer. He did not have any technical skills but was interested in visual culture. He began practicing photography at the age of 30 and currently works in Paris as an art director.

Jennie Ottinger, San Francisco, CA

Jennie Ottinger's work strips away the superhero myth and quietly faces the realities of life. Her colorful and unassuming image of Superman's costume on a hanger implies that even superheroes have to launder their clothes now and again. We imagine the inevitable: Superman must get pretty dirty flying through the air, saving lives and fighting off Lex Luther.

We look beyond the superhero costume to find ourselves in Ottinger's narrative. A costume on a hanger reminds us that we all change and adjust our attitudes as we move through our days. Our lives are a

series of events and we are constantly entering one door and exiting another—every entry and exit brings a need to adapt, just like Clark Kent ducking into a phone booth and emerging as Superman. Ottinger’s gestural paintings also bring to mind a superhero’s hard day’s work with a quiet image of a Superman suit retired to the hanger while our hero gets his much needed rest.

Ottinger studied art in Northern California, receiving her BA from University of the Pacific in Stockton, her BFA from California College of the Arts, and her MFA from Mills College. She has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions across the Greater Bay Area, Los Angeles Dallas, New York, and London. She is currently represented by Johanasson Projects in Oakland, CA.

Laurina Paperina, Italy

As legend goes, when Laurina Paperina was a child, a car hit her and crushed her feet, so her little human feet became duck feet. Since then she has become Laurina Paperina (her name means “Little Laura Little Duck” in Italian). Paperina has always enjoyed drawing. Her inclination towards art began when she was “a little human,” before she transformed into Laurina Paperina, a strange mutant with a human body and duck feet. She grew up tucked away in her bedroom in a small town in Italy, reading comics and drawing strange characters. While Paperina believes superheroes are in her DNA, she considers herself more of a fake superhero due to her lack of a superpower. If she could transform into a real superhero, she would love the ability to paint with superhuman speed in order to gain more time for sleep.

Paperina does not want to make “serious art,” she wants to have fun and entertain people. She also aims to explain serious matters through fun and laughter. Paperina has created artworks that present an ironic commentary in response to current events related to the art world, music, and movies. The medium is not very important in her work yet all her animations, installations, paintings, and photography start as drawings. She enjoys street art and urban art and is also inspired by the large works of Barry McGee and Ed Templeton, the animations of David Lynch, the installations of the Chapman Brothers, the sculptures of David Shrigley, and the drawings of Royal Art Lodge. Her other interests expand to food, music, television, movies, nature animals, our world, and alien worlds.

Laurina Paperina was born in Rovereto, Italy. She studied at the Institute of Art in Rovereto and the Academy of Fine Arts in Verona. Paperina paints, draws, and creates installations and video animations. Working predominantly with imaginary superheroes, her art references the 80s and 90s pop culture of her childhood. Paperina’s work has been exhibited internationally, including solo and group exhibitions in galleries, art foundations, museums, and public spaces.

Jenny Parks, Denver, CO

Jenny Parks shot to internet fame after creating a series of illustrations depicting cats as characters from the popular TV series *Doctor Who*. She began creating cat superhero images, giving them creative names such as “Iron Cat,” “Hulkitty,” and “Captain Catmerica.” When Parks began drawing at the age of 11 she found she enjoyed drawing cats more than people. She says that cats have always struck her as the reluctant superhero type because they like to do things on their own terms. It is easy to imagine cats as superheroes and villains, setting off on adventures around the world – as long as it doesn’t interrupt nap time. Parks creates her art digitally with a Cintiq tablet and Photoshop but also does traditional paintings for commission.

Jenny Parks is a scientific illustrator who also happens to be a shameless nerd with a penchant for drawing animals, dinosaurs, imaginary creatures, and people as cats. She found herself with internet fame from an illustration called *Doctor Mew*. With a BFA in illustration from the California College of the Arts and a graduate degree in Science Illustration from UC Santa Cruz, Parks now resides in Denver, CO as a freelance illustrator. She has most recently done variant covers for Marvel Comics’ *Animal* variant series.

Dulce Pinzón, Brooklyn, NY

Dulce Pinzón’s superhero series was a response to the untold stories of 9/11. After noticing how much attention the media was paying to people that helped rebuild New York and the nation, Pinzón found that an invisible group was left out of the story: the city’s immigrant population. She was working as a union organizer at the time and saw the need to recognize the labor and achievements of Latino immigrants who not only worked for the lowest wages and paid taxes, but somehow managed to send money back to their communities. Inspired by the work she was doing, the superhero concept was born after spotting a Spider-Man costume at a local market in Mexico.

Pinzón’s satirical photographs feature ordinary men and women in their work environment in New York City. They are immigrants donning superhero garb, raising questions about our post-9/11 definition of heroism and our ignorance to the workforce that fuels our ever-consuming economy. Text featuring the name of the worker, country of origin, and how much money they send to their communities generally accompanies each image. This highlights the human nature of the individuals in the photographs. Pinzón’s passion for social issues carries into her dream superpower – the power to eliminate global warming.

Dulce Pinzón was born in Mexico City in 1974. She studied Mass Media Communications at the Universidad de Las Americas in Puebla, Mexico and Photography at Indiana University in Pennsylvania. In 1995 she moved to New York where she studied at The International Center of Photography. In 2001 her photos were used for the cover of a publication of Howard Zinn’s book *A People’s History of the United States*. In 2002 she won the prestigious Jovenes Creadores/FONCA grant in Mexico for her work. In 2012 she was invited to take part at the renowned photography festival *‘Les Rencontres D’Arles*

Photographie' in France where she received a nomination for the prestigious Prix Pictet award. The same year she got a honorific mention at the 10th edition of the FEMSA biennial. Her book *The Real Story of the Superheroes* was published in 2012 in three languages: English, Spanish, and French. Pinzón is currently a recipient of Mexico's prestigious Endowment of the Arts SNCA/FONCA fellowship (2014-2017). She lives and works in Mexico and New York.

Peter and Madeline Powell, Maui, HI

Peter and Madeline Powell wanted a piece of today's superhero mania. Using their large collection of retro superhero lunch boxes, they created a piece that continues their current theme of painting piles of commercial objects. *Take a Superhero to Lunch* blends childhood nostalgia with bright, bold colors that place superheroes, and their infectious energy, in the here and now.

The Powells start by setting up the composition and then take numerous photos to use as reference for the painting. Then they lay out the piece in graphite with all the detail, including shadows, highlights, and reflections on canvas or board. Next starts the long process of laying down the acrylic paint. On larger areas they sometimes use an airbrush to achieve the base colors with minimal brush strokes and then paint in the fine details with sable brushes. They also use masking tape to isolate areas before applying the paint which also allows for very precise clean edges and straighter lines where needed.

The Powells live and work on the island of Maui in Hawaii. Their studio is located on the bottom floor of their home on the slopes of Haleakala Crater. Madeline Powell received her fine arts degree from Ohio University and Peter Powell is mostly self-taught. They have been painting as a team for over 38 years. The Powells have had numerous solo shows in galleries in New York, Miami, and Hawaii, as well as many group shows. They have an upcoming solo exhibition scheduled with their primary dealer, Scott Richards Contemporary Art in San Francisco, in the spring of 2016. Peter Powell would love the superpower of breathing underwater to tackle his fear of surfing large waves. Madeline Powell would love to be able to lurk invisibly in galleries where their art is displayed, calling herself "The Mighty No-See-Em."

Alessandro Rabatti, Florence, Italy

Alessandro Rabatti has been playing with the visual imagery of coins and banknotes as symbols of the recent global economic crisis. His *Facebank* project mixes up faces depicted on official banknotes and morphs them into fanciful "super-banknotes." Rabatti feels that banks and financial gurus are useless in solving the economic crisis. Why not appeal to a superhero's intervention instead?

Rabatti became interested in the *Facebank* concept when he discovered that the faces of Abraham Lincoln, Queen Elizabeth and Mao Tse-Tung depicted on their respective banknotes (US Dollar, British Pound, and Yuan) all look similar. All three faces are portrayed in three-quarter perspective, a likeness that allows an imaginary overlapping. Rabatti created his *Facebank* superhero currency as a metaphor of

today's society. In *Facebank*, markets behave like the personal profiles we "build" on social networks. We never portray who we are but who we ideally want to be.

Rabatti scanned details of the faces portrayed on banknotes into a layered digital file, a virtual collage with many colored layers to be cut and overlapped. In addition to the original images of the banknotes, which he did not want to modify, he impressed golden elements to highlight minimal but essential details of the superhero he wanted to recall. These prints are Rabatti's currency to escape the crisis and stimulate the creation of new works. Rabatti says Jacques Attali's manifesto "*Survivre aux crises*" changed his perspective about the undergoing economic crisis, teaching him to transform difficulties into opportunity through the strength of creativity. Rabatti believes that his creativity is his superpower.

Alessandro Rabatti was born in 1969 in Florence and graduated from the Florence Institute of Fine Arts. He founded an illustration atelier "*inklink*" before becoming a Creative and Art Director for various communication projects. At the same time Rabatti decided to begin personal artistic research, out of which *Facebank* emerges. He recently founded Lander Project, a communications agency.

Mel Ramos, Oakland, CA

Oakland-based artist Mel Ramos is widely considered a Pop Art icon. After giving up painting abstract expressionism in the early 1960s, he turned to the comic book heroes he loved so much as a child. Ramos' superhero woodcut paintings gave new life to his art with *Superman* defining his distinct style. His other depictions of Batman and Wonderwoman played well alongside other contemporary pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Ed Ruscha. Ramos' original *Superman* and *Batman* oil paintings from 1961 were created with thickly applied impasto, a technique Ramos learned from his mentor Wayne Thieband. In recent years he teamed up with Oakland art studio Magnolia Editions to experiment with woodblock printing, a new technique for him.

Over the course of several months, Ramos and Magnolia digitally translated his compositions into a digital template for a computer-guided laser to carve the basic matrix from a block of wood, and then hand-carve the details. The woodcut medium required that the team at Magnolia re-interpret the thick layers of paint applied by Ramos's distinctive hand in the original composition, using only a series of crosshatched and staggered lines of varying frequency and thickness. Ultimately, a wide range of textures were achieved by overlaying discrete passages of lines pitched in multiple directions. Areas where Ramos's original brushwork shows are actually carved into the wood block itself.³

Mel Ramos lives in Oakland, CA where he has a studio. He also spends three months of the year in Horta de Sant Joan, Spain where he also has a home and studio. Ramos' love of Spain was inspired by a trip in 1972 to Catalonia, home of Picasso. He fell in love with the landscape and now travels there every summer. Ramos attended Sacramento City College and received his Masters at California State University – Sacramento. He has had major solo exhibitions at the Albertina (Vienna, Austria), Crocker

³<http://www.magnoliaeditions.com/artworks/superman/>

Art Museum (Sacramento, CA), Oakland Museum (Oakland, CA), Ludwig Museum (Koblenz, Germany), and group exhibitions at Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), Whitney Museum (New York, NY), Guggenheim Museum (New York, NY), National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA), and the de Young Museum (San Francisco, CA).

Short video on Mel Ramos: <http://bit.ly/1Q5eb0s>

Cheyenne Randall, Seattle, WA

Cheyenne Randall is known for photoshopping tattoos onto famous celebrities. He has inked everyone, from classic Hollywood icons like Marilyn Monroe and James Dean to a young Barack Obama. Other notable images include Madonna, Bruce Lee, Prince William and Princess Kate, JFK and Jackie Kennedy, Dolly Parton, Mick Jagger, and John Lennon. His tattooed Wonderwoman recalls the classic character as an iconic symbol of feminine strength.

Cheyenne Randall used to paint Native American art before moving to his *Shopped Tattoos* project. *Shopped Tattoos* is an ongoing body of work showcasing iconic figures of the past and present digitally tattooed in the American traditional style. Randall began this project in the summer of 2013 during a two-month bed rest period thanks to a dislocated kneecap. Randall taught himself Photoshop in what he refers to as his “Bootleg School of Design.” Thanks to his strong online presence, his work is shared and viewed by people around the world.

Matt Ritchie, Castro Valley, CA

Matt Ritchie has been a comic book collector for 38 years. He infuses his deep love and knowledge of comic books, cartoons, and video games to create signature wood-cut paintings. Ritchie conceptualized his piece for *My Hero!* by thinking about how superheroes have moved beyond print, crossing over into every digestible form of media. He believes these crime fighters are starting to suffer during this transition.

Ritchie’s work is made from a variety of medium. He uses pen, paper, ink, paint, and puts them all together with saws, brushes, sanders, and rotary tools. Ritchie’s work is heavily inspired by the comic books he loved as a child and tattoo illustrations. When asked about his dream superpower, he gave an unlikely (and stomach-turning) answer: “My friend Dave thought of the ultimate superhero power already. The power to make someone spontaneously defecate.”

Matt Ritchie is a Bay Area artist who lives in Castro Valley. He has a lovely wife, an awesome kid, and a cat that would have been first on the list if he didn’t think his wife would read it. Ritchie shows his work in galleries around the world.

Lizbeth Eva Rossof, San Francisco, CA

Lizbeth Eva Rossof's *Xi'an-American Batman Warrior* is inspired by the terracotta figures discovered in the tomb of China's first emperor Quin Shi Huang. In Huang's tomb there were 8,000 clay soldiers arranged in three pits. Rossof's series of Xi'an warriors are outfitted with heads of popular American superheroes, including Batman and Spider-Man. She likes that they both have identities related to animals, rather unlikeable ones at that. Rossof thinks about her present work becoming future ruins. An understanding of the Xi'an Warriors of 200 BC will not seem so distant from the plastic action figures we are leaving behind. Rossof's five figurines representing major entertainment corporations – Batman (DC Comics), Spider-man (Marvel Comics), Mickey Mouse (Disney), Bart Simpson (FOX) and Shrek (DreamWorks).

Of course, there is some political and economic messaging in Rossof's pieces, mainly the "Disneyfication" of global culture, the outsourcing of art and animation jobs overseas, and the practice of counterfeiting in Asia versus the copyright laws of the West. Rossof herself has outsourced the making of her Warriors to an artist's studio in Xi'an. These issues all arise when looking at her warriors. Rossof is inspired by situationists. She admires James Turrell's work for being huge and subtle. Jenny Holtzer rocked her world as a tween. Cindy Sherman makes her smile, and if she could live a second, parallel life she would want to be Pipilotti Rist. Her ideal superpower would be time travel.

Lizbeth Eva Rossof examines the dissemination of personal, political, economic, and sexual power and freedom in the digital age. As an interventionist and provocateur, Rossof challenges societal and commercial norms. Her art is research-based, the fabrication of which is regularly outsourced to the very industries they are critiquing.

She has exhibited in Berlin, Chicago, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Miami, New York, Oaxaca, Osaka, Aspen, and at the National Center for Contemporary Art in Moscow. Rossof has been the recipient of many academic awards including the Thomas J. Watson Award and the Jacob K. Javits Award, as well as several artist honors including The San Francisco Art Commission's Murphy Award, C5's Gran Prix at ISEA, and Takashi Murakami's GEISAI Miami. She has completed residencies at Montalvo Center for the Arts and Anderson Ranch Arts Center, and has been awarded residencies at Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, and CAMAC: Centre des Artes Marnay in France. She lives and works in San Francisco.

Short video on Liz Rossof: <http://on.fb.me/1PDrRj5>

Hannah Rothstein, Berkeley, CA

Hannah Rothstein has always been mildly smitten with the punch-packing aesthetics of superhero imagery. The vibrant colors and graphical style appeal to her, and inspire her to dream big. If superheroes existed in every day life, their actions would be called crimes (think Robinhood). Rothstein examines this anomaly in her work. Who are our societal heroes? Why do we revere them? How much of our perception is built upon the framework we're given by media and group mentality?

The *Who Are Heroes?* series of prints stem from Rothstein's original paintings which were acrylic on illustration board. To make each work, she first amasses an array of photos and illustrations to reference. After studying this material, she begins by lightly sketching her composition on the board. Next, she paints, filling in the darkest shadows first and building up from there. Rothstein likes to visualize light in blocks, to see it as shapes, so she often squints at her reference images to see what forms the light makes. She then paint these shapes onto board or canvas.

Rothstein's best influence and inspiration always comes from a more personal source than famous figures. Lately she has been learning a lot from Forest Stearns, an artist who runs the art residency at Planet Labs. As for Rothstein's dream superpower? She would love to be able to heal, both physically and emotionally. The only fitting superhero name would be an art-pun: The Cureator.

Born with a baffling amount of creativity, Hannah Rothstein is a self-taught conceptual artist and painter. Raised in the wilds of New York State and currently residing in Berkeley, CA, Rothstein's work is known for presenting the everyday in new, witty ways, and has been featured in *TIME*, *Vogue Italia*, *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*, *Fast Company*, *Slate*, *This Is Colossal*, and more. Her most famous pieces are *Thanksgiving Special* and *Dr. Dreidel*. One of the Bay Area's up-and-coming young artists, Rothstein was an early artist in residence at Planet Labs and her work has been shown at several San Francisco galleries. In summer 2016, her first book, *Yoga for Bros*, a satire based on her photography series "Broga," will be released by Sterling Publishers. When not painting or tackling her impossibly long list of art project ideas, Rothstein, a graduate of Brandeis University, fills every breath of free time with hiking, biking, rock climbing, reading, and delivering ridiculous karaoke performances.

Steve Seeley, Chicago, IL

Comics are an art form Steve Seeley could always relate to. He collected superhero comics as a child, making them absolutely essential in the formation of his creativity and artistic thought process. For more than a decade all Seeley's work has centered around a story about man, space exploration, celebrities, heavy metal, and superpowered animals.

To create his work in *My Hero!*, based off his *The Delicate Matters* series, Seeley gathered and arranged images in his mind and then on the computer until each piece was able to stand on its own to complete the overarching "story." Everything is painted with acrylic, his art-drug of choice since he started painting as a teen. Seeley is inspired by many comic artists, Russ Manning, Curt Swan, Jesse Marsh, but he owes the most to the king himself - Jack Kirby.⁴ Beyond comics, Seeley is a huge fan of contemporary art, particularly the work of Marcel Dzama, Mark Mulroney, and Trenton Doyle. Seeley's ideal superpower would be flight, although he does not want a secret identity. He envisions onlookers giggling as "Steve-Man" zips around their heads.

⁴ Jack Kirby (August 28, 1917 – February 6, 1994), was an American comic book artist, writer, and editor widely regarded as one of the medium's major innovators and one of its most prolific and influential creators.

Seeley received a BFA in Printmaking from University of Wisconsin Stevens Point and an MFA in Printmaking from Ohio State University. He currently lives in Chicago where he regularly exhibits work at Packer Gallery.

Inez Storer, Inverness, CA

Inez Storer thinks the world needs more heroes. Her work draws upon the past and present, inspired by Superman as the iconic superhero image of the 21st century, angels as religious-based superheroes, and Velasquez as a “superimposed” artist superhero.

Storer begins every piece by crafting a visual narrative. She then uses acrylics, pencil, and glue to complete the art. The scattered images around the central image are the superhero’s narrative from Storer’s perspective. Storer’s artistic influences fluctuate depending on her current interests, yet Matisse is always by her side. She also enjoys people who are considered “outside artists.” Storer takes a political stand when choosing her ideal superpower - the ability to make people vote responsibly and with good sense.

Inez Storer was born in Santa Monica, CA and received her BA from Dominican University in San Rafael. She went on to receive an MA from University of San Francisco. Storer’s work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions in the United States and Europe including San Jose Museum of Art, the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C., the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. Her work is included in the permanent collections of museums around the Bay Area including Oakland Museum of Art and San Jose Museum of Art. She is currently represented by Gallery 16 in San Francisco, Seager Gray Gallery in Mill Valley, and Magnolia Editions in Oakland. Her work *7 Days to Make the World* was recently exhibited in the de Young Museum for nearly three years.

Mark Todd, Sierra Madre, CA

Like a lot of kids, Mark Todd’s early influence and desire to become an artist were rooted in comic books. His artistic choices are not only based on the composition and line of existing comics but just as much by the memories of them as a teen. Todd’s illustrations are a chaos of color and lines created using acrylics, cel-vinyl, and sometimes spray enamel or stains. For his mixed media collage pieces, he uses an array of materials and objects. Todd loves the bold and heavy line work of Jack Kirby, the playful quality of Philip Guston, the spontaneity and freedom of folk and self-taught artists such as Henry Darger, and the compositions of Alex Katz and Cindy Sherman. The superpower to stop time would be ideal for Todd so he could have more time to paint. He would call himself “The Procrastinator.”

Mark Todd took his first creative cues from comic books and Star Wars: worlds of inventive fantasy. He grew up in Las Vegas; the sparkling neon glitz of the city’s glow could be seen from his backyard. His work involves intense scrutiny and alteration of classic comic covers from “Fantastic Four,” “X-Men,” “Iron Man,” “Spiderman,” and other series, including the work of legendary illustrators like Jack Kirby. “I

love the type, the heavy shadows, the colors and the way they seemed to use every inch of the page,” says Todd. “I sit and study them, and my brush reconstructs them.” Todd is referencing the past, waxing nostalgic about it and simultaneously lending his own post-modern sensibility to it. Todd graduated from Art Center College of Design in 1993. His work has appeared in most major magazines and has been exhibited throughout the United States.

Frank Trankina, Chicago, IL

Pop culture and Americana have long been featured in Frank Trankina’s work. Superheroes first appeared incidentally in his compositions. More recently, they take on a starring role. *Superhero Pothead No. 3* is a combination of Trankina’s interests in pop culture, narrative, and still life painting. The concept in this work is about altering and re-contextualizing the superhero image to create and imply a new narrative. The title *Superhero Pothead* can be taken as a visual and verbal pun, having a possible dysfunctional and absurd connotation. The painting can also be seen as a portrait of sorts.

Trankina uses traditional oil painting materials – oil on linen canvas. He works completely from observation and does not use any sort of mechanical or digital devices, or photographic references. Trankina believes this gives him a more direct and complete experience. His work begins by compiling a large collection of objects and putting them together, much like a choreographer creating a dance. He then determines the composition and sketches it out. The rest of the painting proceeds in the process of indirect painting in many layers until it is finished. Trankina is inspired by still life painters including John Peto, William Harnett, Cezanne, Giorgio Morandi, and Stewart Davis. He also enjoys pop and outsider art and is especially inspired by the Chicago Imagists with their figuration, pop references, and cryptic use of humor. His dream superpower would be to make evil and mean people nice. He would call himself “The Alleviator.”

Living and working in Chicago, Frank Trankina received his Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied with several of the Chicago Imagists and renowned artist-educator Ray Yoshida. Trankina was the first recipient of the prestigious Alexander Rutsch Award in Painting and an Illinois Arts Council Finalist Award. His work is represented by galleries in Chicago and Tokyo, Japan, and has been exhibited internationally and nationally in Cambridge, England, San Diego, Miami, Dallas, New York, Tokyo, and extensively in the Midwest. Trankina’s work is in numerous international and national private collections in Indonesia, Japan, New York, and Washington D.C., as well as others, and is in permanent museum collections including Rockford Art Museum, Illinois State Museum, Elmhurst College, and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Frank Trankina is a Professor at Northern Illinois University.

Winston Tseng, New York, NY

Winston Tseng's work presents recognizable, familiar subjects with a twist. Superheroes, who are widely known and revered, make a perfect starting point. All of the "classic superheroes" are Caucasian, a reflection of the era they were originally created in, but they do not accurately reflect today's society. Tseng reimagines them as "International Superheroes" to challenge the viewer's expectations of what a superhero could and should be.

As a graphic artist, most of Tseng's work is done on a computer. He uses standard Adobe graphics programs, along with a pen tablet for the majority of his work. While he occasionally sketches preliminary ideas, all the fine tuning is done on the computer, allowing him to make infinite changes until he is satisfied. Once the piece is finished, it goes into production depending on the final form it will take. In *My Hero!*, the skate decks were produced and silkscreened by a manufacturer and the prints were made by Tseng.

Tseng is inspired by many of his peers in the skate industry, fellow artists that create board graphics. Outside of skateboarding, two of Tseng's favorite artists are Ron Mueck and Tom Sachs. Their work is very different from each other, but both have managed to master their own style, a quality Tseng admires.

Winston Tseng is a graphic artist based in New York City. He was born and raised in Redondo Beach, CA where skateboarding consumed his life and has shaped his artistic sensibilities. He has taken an unconventional path into art - graduating from UC Berkeley with degrees in mathematics and economics, then working as a web developer turned web designer turned graphic artist (with a phobia of math, economics, web development, and web design). Tseng is primarily known in the "skate world," where for over a decade he has created artwork for top brands in the skate industry, including Enjoi, Birdhouse, Popwar, and Emerica. These decks may look familiar to those who saw the Bedford Gallery's 2009 exhibition *Full Deck: A Short History of Skate Art*, in which Tseng's work was prominently featured. He has been featured in books and international publications including *IdN Extra*, *FLJ* (Japan), *Eight* (Netherlands), *Concrete* (Canada), and has had work shown in the Museum of Design in Atlanta and La Gaîté Lyrique in Paris.

Linda Vallejo, Topanga Canyon, CA

Linda Vallejo has found that the "pop" image is a vital and integral aspect of the human psyche. Her *Make 'Em All Mexican* works are made from repurposed objects found on the internet, antique malls, and estate sales. Vallejo believes she must find and create the images, repurposed into her Latin American fantasy. The objects usually represent a part of the collective musing, and represent or are modeled after images that the world considers valuable and collectable. *Super Hombre*, a "brown" version of Superman, was found online and manufactured in the Philippines. Vallejo stated that after seeing her piece, a couple of Latin American men shared that *Super Hombre* allowed them to see

themselves are heroes, honored by their communities, completing works of good will. As men of color, Vallejo's image is a positive reinforcement for her community and the world at large.

Vallejo's formative years were spent in far flung locations throughout the US and Europe. During her early years as an artist, she became increasingly immersed in Chicano/Latino arts and indigenous communities – experiences that have informed her cultural perspectives and, by extension, her art practice. It has taken Vallejo her entire artistic career to fuse together an image that defines her multicultural experience of the world and her place in it. Vallejo's series *Make 'Em All Mexican* has ironic underpinnings that bring forth some of the most difficult questions of our time: "Do race, color, and class define our status in the world?" "Is it possible to be a part of and earnestly contribute to multiple cultures simultaneously?" "Does color and class define our understanding and appreciation of culture?" And finally, "Who gets to create today's accepted aesthetic— is it inherent or is it the result of a dominant cultural community?"

Make 'Em All Mexican is an effort to juxtapose questions about class and race with post-modern art making techniques. Vallejo wanted to create works based on the concept of cultural appropriation with the technical method of repurposing objects. In essence, she is appropriating culture and history to re-create a new "brown" vision of the world by painting directly on time-honored icons of international traditional and pop culture. She literally paints directly on repurposed objects (postcards, magazine, newspaper, figurines, and statues) in oil, gouache, and acrylic to deconstruct iconic images of national and world culture. *Super Hombre* was completed with an auto paint process, creating a double entendre about car sub-culture and issues of machismo.

Linda Vallejo consolidates multiple international influences gained from a life of study and travel throughout Europe, the United States, and Mexico to works that investigate contemporary cultural and political issues. Vallejo's work was included in The California/International Arts Foundation's *L.A. Rising: SoCal Artists Before 1980* and the Getty Foundation's *Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA 1945-1980* show in two exhibitions, *Mapping Another LA: The Chicano Art Movement* at the UCLA Fowler Museum and *Doin' It in Public: Art and Feminism* at the Woman's Building at the Otis College of Art and Design Ben Maltz Gallery. Both exhibitions included major historical catalogs. Vallejo is represented by the George Lawson Gallery in San Francisco, CA. She has exhibited her work at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago, MacNider Museum in Iowa, Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum, Museum of Modern Art New York, San Antonio Museum, and Mexico City Modern Art Museum. Her work is in the permanent collections of The National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, IL; Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Print Department, Los Angeles, CA; University of California, Santa Barbara, (CEMA), California Multicultural and Ethnic Archives; University of California, Los Angeles, (UCLA) Chicano Study Research Center; and Stanford University Chicana Art Multimedia Database. She lives in Topanga Canyon, CA with her husband Ron Dillaway.

Patricia Waller, Berlin, Germany

Patricia Waller's series *Broken Heroes* is a reflection on the discrepancy between the rosy ideal world created by media and advertising and our own experience of real life. This discrepancy gives birth to an unhealthily distorted perception of reality. Waller views her work as a critical reflection on the cult of the star in our society, where the celebrity or idol serves as a contemporary substitute for the more traditional hero. They are role models and bearers of hope, and they reflect our longing for the special.

Waller's materials are simple – acrylic yarn and crochet needles. She sews the figure out of fabric and puts wire and polyester filling inside. Spider-Man is completely crocheted. Waller uses acrylic yarn because it is moth-resistant and lighter than other yarns. As far as artistic inspirations, she enjoys artists who have a certain kind of humor and irony in their work, like Italian artist Maurizio Cattalan and Jeff Koons. She also admires René Magritte and Ron Mueck.

Patricia Waller has studied in Europe and the United States where she holds two degrees. She lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Her dream superpower is to change the world.

Dan Willner, Charlotte, NC

Dan Willner has been a comic reader for over 30 years. When he started to whittle wood he wanted to do something different than what he was seeing. He also wanted laughter to be the driving force behind his art. Superheroes seemed like the right step to take. Willner considers superheroes to be deities or gods in their own worlds. What better way to conceptualize them than putting them in a totem form?

Willner makes his work using just a block of basswood and a knife. He begins by making rough sketches on the wood before whittling his design. Willner is inspired by the way other artists craft their superheroes. One of his favorites comic artists, Sam Keith, creates superheroes with over-accentuated body parts. *MAD Magazine* artist Don Martin draws the best heads and fantastic folding feet. Indiana Jones from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* also inspired Willner to study archeology and learn about ancient civilizations, a clear reference in his totem designs.

Dan Willner describes himself as a humble husband and father who is a building supervisor by day and a wood whittler by night. He would love the superpower of speed so he could have a shorter commute and more time for other activities. Willner lives in Charlotte, NC.

William Wray, Sierra Madre, CA

As a young man, William Wray created comics for DC, Marvel and Mad Magazine, and animation for Hanna-Barbera, Disney, and *The Ren & Stimpy Show* before becoming a fine art painter. He had felt too intimidated by contemporary art but eventually started painting in 2005. His superhero paintings followed a few years later. Wray's work started by capturing real moments at comic conventions and on

Hollywood Boulevard, home to many superhero impersonators. While many artists separate comic book and fine art styles, Wray embraces his comic book past and has been encouraged to incorporate it in his work.

William Wray has lived in California most of his life and studied painting at the Art Students League in New York. Making a living as a cartoonist who specialized in painted subjects, he spent many years coalescing an eclectic array of art styles, ultimately finding his voice in a contemporized reflection of traditional California regional painting that focuses on humble subject matter rarely considered fine art. Wray blends traditional skill sets of realism and the sheer energy of abstract expressionism in an ongoing evolution to find the balance between two seemingly unrelated styles. Wray has challenged himself to create a brand of realistic expressionism he hopes to use as a bridge into the customarily circumspect contemporary art world.

Documentary on William Wray: <https://vimeo.com/105653642>

Jason Yarmosky, Brooklyn, NY

Jason Yarmosky's paintings are a reflection on aging. Our society doesn't celebrate aging the way we celebrate youth. We also live in a society that emphasizes superficiality. We are brought into the world thinking of ourselves physically (the body) rather than spiritually (the energy). With that influence it is easy to understand why people fear aging; it is a constant reminder of our mortality. However, everything ages and change is inevitable, as we see in Yarmosky's superhero costumes.

Playing Cards is from Yarmosky's past series titled *Elder Kinder* which explores the relationship between the limitations of social norms and freedom of expression, particularly the juxtaposition between the young and old. The raw freedom that is so much a part of youth often gives way to borders and boundaries placed on adult behavior. As we transition from adult to elderly, these raw freedoms often reemerge. As a child we learn to walk; later in life we learn to un-walk, literally and metaphorically. Yet the dreams of the young, often sublimated by the years, never really disappear. Yarmosky had his grandparents, great aunt, and two of their friends dress up in an assortment of superhero costumes to stage the poker scene in *Playing Cards*. The *Elder Kinder* series was inspired by Caravaggio and the dark sense of absence surrounding the figures in his works.

Jason Yarmosky was born in 1987 in New York and began drawing as a child. His artistic work examines the complexities of the aging experience, particularly in his relationship to his 88-year-old grandparents, and explores the questions of memory, time, and mortality revealed in the tension between the physical and psychological transformations endured by his subjects. Yarmosky is a graduate of the School for Visual Arts in New York. His paintings and drawings have been exhibited and collected internationally. His work has appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines, and web sites, including *American Artist*, *New American Paintings*, *Hi Fructose*, *20 minutos*, and *The Huffington Post*. He is a past winner of the Elizabeth Greenshields Award. Most recently, his works appeared at the Nanjing International Art Festival in Nanjing, China. He is also preparing for exhibitions in Brussels and a solo museum show at the University of Maine Museum of Art.

Maurizio Zuluaga, Jersey City, NJ

As an adult, Maurizio Zuluaga can better appreciate the mythology and pop culture references in the comics and movies he enjoyed growing up. He finds that a superhero can touch our inner child by embedding contemporary mythology, its symbols of heroism, life, the cosmos, and the purpose of humanity.

Zuluaga visually relates to a mixture of different styles. He likes to express movement, energy, color, form, and composition by juxtaposing and layering figures and elements that create a story with a unique visceral context. This helps expand the possibilities of our imagination and opens a prelude into the unknown by tapping our inner being and our subconscious, and inducing us to explore the psycho-geographical drift images of context that morph together in conflux as one avant-garde piece.

Zuluaga's process involves mixed media and stream of consciousness. Everything begins with an idea and a specific composition he can visualize. The source material is researched and created through drawings, books, photos, films, magazine, found objects, and the internet. He then applies paint, collages, stencils, and more paint over many layers of color and forms that merge together. Zuluaga also creates spaces, symbols, images, and words using materials and techniques consisting of brushwork, oil, acrylic, aerosol, oil stick, pastels, ink, pencils, rubber bands, found objects, stencils, and print work over many layers.

Superhero 101

Superman

Artist & Publication Summary

It's a bird! It's a plan! No, it's Superman!

Created by writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster in 1933, Superman started as a bald villain with super-human powers.⁵ (Maybe this character served as early inspiration for Lex Luther?) As the writer-artist team progressed, the character resembling the cultural icon we know as Superman began to emerge. Shuster modeled Superman on Douglas Fairbanks Sr. He modeled Superman's nerdy-but-handsome, bespectacled alter ego Clark Kent on a combination of silent film star Harold Lloyd and Shuster himself. The pair created the name "Clark Kent" from movie star names Clark Gable and Kent Taylor.⁶

Superman made his first appearance in *Action Comics* in June 1938 and eventually found his way into radio serials, newspaper strips, television programs, films, and video games. He has been venerated as the #1 superhero on IGN's "Top 100 Comic Book Heroes" list and is considered "the blueprint for the modern superhero."⁷

Story Background

Doting and desperate parents launch their baby Kal-El (Superman) from his home planet Krypton just moments before the planet explodes. Little Kal-El eventually crashes to Earth in the Midwest. Jonathan and Martha Kent discover his demolished spacecraft in a field and bring him to their farm in Smallville, Kansas. They name the galactic castaway "Clark" and raise him as their son.⁸

Clark's super human abilities manifest soon after he arrives on Earth and he commits to using his powers to help humanity. He eventually leaves Smallville to join the rank and file in the city of Metropolis. There, he encounters plenty of terror, crime, and human suffering. When trouble is near, Clark conveniently disappears, whether it's into a phone booth or down an alley, and moments later... the Man of Steel emerges!

Superman is virtually indestructible—criminals break their hands when they try to punch him and bullets ricochet off his body. He is vulnerable to only one thing: kryptonite. And maybe love.

Superman's female foil, Lois Lane, is a spitfire newspaper reporter who works with Clark at the Daily Planet. Clark secretly loves Lois; meanwhile, Lois pines for Superman and thinks of Clark as an amicable co-worker. Superman is handsome and dashing when Lois looks upon him; but criminals, particularly his

⁵ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superman>. Retrieved 12/12/15.

⁶ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superman>. Retrieved 12/12/15.

⁷ IGN. <http://www.ign.com/top/comic-book-heroes/1>. Retrieved 12/13/15.

⁸ SuperHero Stuff, <http://www.superherostuff.com/biographies/supermanbio.html>. Retrieved 12/12/15.

archenemy Lex Luther, see a very different side of him. When fighting for truth, justice, and the American way, his jaw is set and his eyes are piercing. He will put himself in harm's way if need be.

Batman

Artist & Publication Summary

A brooding hero who harbors deep angst, The Dark Knight moves through Gotham City obscured by his gallant cape. Created by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger, Batman first appeared in Detective Comics in May 1939⁹. Batman enjoyed instant popularity and landed his own comic book title in 1940. Character treatment has varied over the years—the 1960s television series used a camp art aesthetic¹⁰ to portray Batman. Beginning in 1986, Frank Miller's limited comic book series *The Dark Knight Returns* revived the story's complexity. The Warner Bros. film series that began in 1989¹¹ has enjoyed blockbuster status with endless special effects, fearful story lines, and violent encounters between Batman and the bad guys. Ben Affleck is slated as the next Batman to appear in the 2016 film *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. Affleck recently remarked in an interview that Batman is basically the American version of Hamlet; we accept that he's played by different actors with different interpretations. Affleck's version is older, darker, and more tired too. He's at the end of his run and maybe at the end of his life. In this upcoming film there's a world weariness to him.

Kane developed the initial Batman persona and invited Finger to collaborate.¹² Kane's first sketches of Batman portrayed a character in a black costume with some red embellishments, a simple mask, and black wings. Finger's suggestions helped shape the Batman we know today: He suggested removing the red embellishments from the costume and giving Batman a cowl, instead of a simple mask. He also recommended the flowing cape, instead of wings.¹³ Finger is said to have created the name for Bruce Wayne, Batman's alter ego, by combining the name of Robert Bruce, the Scottish patriot, with American colonial Army officer Anthony Wayne.

Story Background

Batman's alter ego Bruce Wayne is a billionaire philanthropist who witnesses the brutal murder of his parents as a child. This tragedy forges his life and sense of purpose—from that moment he swears to fight for justice and unleash his revenge on criminals. He tirelessly trains himself physically and mentally, and creates his bat-inspired costume and persona. He retreats to his Batcave beneath his mansion when he needs to think or invent. His butler Alfred and others provide emotional support and intelligence to help him ferret out criminals.

⁹ Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batman>. Retrieved 12/13/15.

¹⁰ Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_\(style\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_(style)). Retrieved 12/13/15.

¹¹ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batman_in_film. Retrieved 12/13/15.

¹² Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batman>. Retrieved 12/13/15.

¹³ Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batman>. Retrieved 12/13/15.

Batman is a human being and does not possess any superpowers, though his mind is the ultimate weapon. He conquers evil through a combination of supreme intelligence, hard work and great wealth that enables every imaginable innovation. He faces some of the most frightening villains around, including his psychopathic archenemy, The Joker.

Spider-Man

Artist & Publication Summary

Teen superhero Spider-Man leapt into the Marvel comic book scene in August 1962.¹⁴ Created by writer-editor Stan Lee and writer-artist Steve Ditko, Spider-Man was inspired by Lee's desire to develop a primary character that teenagers could relate to. In the 1960s, teen superheroes usually served as side-kicks, which made Spider-Man even more novel and likely increased his appeal.

Story Background

Spider-Man's alter ego is teenage science whiz Peter Parker, an orphan who lives a quiet life with his Aunt May and Uncle Ben. Peter's life changes forever when a radioactive spider bites his hand during a science exhibit. His superpowers begin to emerge—he develops a jumpy “spider sense” and is super strong and agile. He can also cling to most surfaces on a whim. Intrigued by his new powers, Parker begins to craft his spidery persona, developing a wrist-mounted web gadget. With the flick of his wrist, Spider-Man shoots sprawling, elastic webs that snare the bad guys. He also uses these powerful nets as barriers and other protection.

As his adventures become more intense, Peter's life gets more complicated. His real life and superhero life are at odds and he faces universal teen woes. As with many superheroes, Spider-Man is guided by a commitment to justice and a desire to help. But Spider-Man's superhero life is distinct: Early in his evolution, he is a lone wolf and must learn for himself how to navigate two identities. The first Spider-Man story closes with a text box that reads: “With great powers there must also come great responsibility.” Peter Parker struggles, and then Spider-Man succeeds, but Peter's feelings of inadequacy are just a human heartbeat away. The tension of this story lies in this superhero learning curve.

Catwoman

Artist & Publication Summary

Sleek and tempting, Catwoman has walked a fine line between villain and anti-heroine since Batman creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger inked her story. Catwoman made her first appearance in spring 1940 in the Batman #1 comic book published by DC Comics. She landed her own series in 1993.¹⁵

¹⁴ Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spider-Man>. Retrieved 12/13/15.

¹⁵ Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catwoman>. Retrieved 12/14/15.

Story Background

Kane modeled Catwoman after his cousin Ruth Steel and actress Jean Harlow. She made her debut as a whip-carrying cat burglar who gets into Batman's head in a very different way than your average criminal. Though Catwoman's storyline has been somewhat scattered, her hold over Batman and the tension between the two have remained constant. (Rumor has it that Batman has let her get away with her crimes—now that's love!).

Catwoman's alter ego is Selina Kyle, a complex character who claws her way through a traumatic youth that includes a period of time living on the street. Though she lacks real superpowers, IGN gives her a special nod for her ability to hold Bruce Wayne's fickle attentions.¹⁶ Her weapons of choice include bullwhips and Cat 'O Nine Tails, but she'll use a pistol if she has to. She also wields retractable claws.

Wonder Woman

Artist & Publication Summary

With her long dark hair, piercing eyes and confident stance, Wonder Woman has served as an example of strength and justice for generations of children. Created by American psychologist and writer William Moulton Marston, Wonder Woman made her first appearance in All Star Comics in December 1941.¹⁷ Wonder Woman was born from the same mind that invented the systolic blood pressure test, which later became a measure used in the polygraph, or lie detector test.

Marston's entrance into comic book fame began in an unlikely way. He is said to have talked about the comic book genre in his October 1940 interview in *Family Circle*, which piqued the interest of comics publisher Max Gaines. Shortly after, Gaines hired Marston as an educational consultant for National Periodicals and All-American Publications. (The two publications would later become DC Comics.) Marston dreamed up a superhero that "would triumph not with fists or firepower, but with love."¹⁸ Marston's wife Elizabeth urged him to make the superhero a woman.

Marston's unconventional personal life and relationships with women undoubtedly inspired Wonder Woman's liberated, feminist identity. Marston had a wife and a mistress, he had children with both women, and both families lived together in Rye, N.Y.¹⁹

Story Background

Wonder Woman is more than a superhero: she is Princess Diana of Themyscira, an Amazon warrior princess. Her alter ego is Diana Prince. In the television series with Lynda Carter, Diana Prince is an

¹⁶ Wikipedia. <http://www.ign.com/top/comic-book-heroes/20>. Retrieved 12/14/15.

¹⁷ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder_Woman. Retrieved 12/19/15.

¹⁸ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder_Woman. Retrieved December 19, 2015.

¹⁹ NPR. <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/27/359078315/the-man-behind-wonder-woman-was-inspired-by-both-suffragists-and-centerfolds>. Retrieved December 19, 2015.

unassuming, bespectacled woman. Carter conjured her superhero persona by spinning round and round, creating an explosion that, when the clouds parted, revealed... Wonder Woman!

Wonder Woman has an array of inventive weapons at her disposal and possesses incredible fighting skills. Her star-studded tiara launches projectiles. And, rather than causing harm to a lying captive, she wraps them in her Lasso of Truth and gets what she needs to solve the puzzle or crime. (Could this be a tribute to the lie detector test?) When bullets fly, Wonder Woman raises her arms and thwarts them with the help of her indestructible bracelets.

Marston created Wonder Woman during World War II, so naturally the character began her story fighting Axis military forces. Over time, she battled characters from Greek mythology, as well as villains that include Cheetah and Doctor Psycho.²⁰ Her foes are crafty and evil, but Wonder Woman remains wise and kind—these characteristics serve her well in her battles. She is considered a feminist icon, while also serving as the epitome of the ultimate woman—one who can do it all without bending to external pressures.

Robin

Artist & Publication Summary

Bob Kane, Bill Finger and Jerry Robinson created superhero side kick Robin, also known as the Boy Wonder, to give Batman a hand... and also to attract young readers.²¹ There have been several versions of Robin in comic book history—the character made his debut in Detective Comics in April 1940.²²

Story Background

Batman and Robin are the Dynamic Duo brazenly fighting for truth and justice in a sordid world. While Robin stands in Batman's shadow, he brings a youthful confidence and pluck to the team as he learns the ropes from his caped mentor.

Dick Grayson was the first incarnation and alter ego for Robin. Dick is an 8-year-old acrobat, the youngest in a family of circus performers. When a gangster named Boss Zucco sabotages his parents' trapeze act and causes their death, Batman arrives to investigate the crime. He finds Dick parentless and alone; his alter ego Bruce Wayne makes Dick his legal guardian. Together they solve the crime that ends Zucco's deadly career. Batman outfits Dick in his signature garb that was inspired by Robinson's childhood interest in the medieval Robin Hood.

²⁰ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wonder_Woman. Retrieved December 19, 2015.

²¹ Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_(comics)). Retrieved December 23, 2015.

²² Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_(comics)) Retrieved December 23, 2015.

Captain America

Artist & Publication Summary

Sporting a costume emblazoned with the American flag, Captain America is a patriotic superhero who joined the comic book scene during World War II. Cartoonists Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created Captain America for Timely Comics, a predecessor of Marvel Comics, and the character made his debut in March 1941.²³

Simon and Kirby were disgusted by the horrors unleashed by Nazi Germany in the years leading up to the United States' involvement in World War II. They believed war was inevitable and their character Captain America is a conscious political statement of that viewpoint. Captain America was met with widespread enthusiasm when it was released a year into World War II, but there was also vast opposition to the comic.²⁴ Simon and Kirby received threatening letters and protesters lined up outside the office. Police were called in for protection. New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia is said to have called Simon and Kirby to express his support of what they were doing.

Story Background

Captain America fights Axis powers and defends himself with an indestructible shield. His alter ego is scrawny art student Steve Rogers, a comic book writer and artist who receives an experimental serum that pushes him to the peak of human strength and perfection. With his newfound confidence and power, he assists the United States during wartime and fights enemies of the Allies. Later, he fights communism. He has no superhuman powers, but is sustained and transformed by the serum, which continually replenishes in his body.

After a stint in the 1950s, Captain America returns in the 1960s to lead the Avengers. A new story unfolds that keeps him in modern times: Near the end of World War II, he fell from a plane into the ocean and was preserved in ice. He was revived by his friends in the present day. Once revived, he is a man "out of his time" and this becomes one of his primary struggles.

Iron Man

Artist & Publication Summary

A testament to the power of American technology, Iron Man is a superhero virtually encased in indestructible material. Created by writer and editor Stan Lee, developed by scripter Larry Lieber, and designed by artists Don Heck and Jack Kirby, Iron Man made his debut in Marvel Comics in March 1963.²⁵

²³ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_America. Retrieved December 20, 2015.

²⁴ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_America. Retrieved December 20, 2015.

²⁵ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Man. Retrieved December 20, 2015.

Lee took a calculated risk when he developed Iron Man, a character who represented everything popular culture abhorred in the 1960s: a billionaire capitalist who made weapons for the military. Lee modeled the character after wealthy and eccentric businessman Howard Hughes.

“I thought it would be fun to take the kind of character that nobody would like, none of our readers would like, and shove him down their throats and make them like him....And he became very popular,” Stan Lee said in a Paramount Pictures DVD.²⁶

Story Background

Iron Man’s alter ego is Tony Stark, an American billionaire, ladies’ man, and engineer. Stark is kidnapped by thugs who try to force him to build a weapon of mass destruction. He endures a horrific injury to his chest during the kidnapping—his heart is literally broken—and instead of building the weapon for his American interests in the Cold War battle against communism. He is also among the leaders of the superhero team, The Avengers.

The Cold War is at the heart of Iron Man’s political saga. As the story unfolds, Tony’s personal troubles, such as his struggle with alcoholism, begin to emerge. Tony Stark/Iron Man is an unlikable character, but writers weave humanity through the storyline and make him someone we want to watch. From his mangled heart to the temptations that hound him, he is very human... and super appealing.

Supergirl

Artist & Publication Summary

A close relative of comic book royalty, Supergirl is an action adventure show by Ali Adler, Greg Berlanti, and Andrew Kreisberg on CBS. Supergirl is based on the DC Comics character Supergirl (Kara Zor-El), created by Otto Binder and Al Plastino.²⁷

Story Background

Kara Zor-El was 13 years old when her parents spirited her away from Krypton with instructions to look after her cousin Kal-El, also known as Superman. Shock waves from Krypton’s explosion pushed her off course and she landed in the Phantom Zone, where time stopped. When she finally lands on Earth, she is still 13, but 24 years have passed. Her cousin, now known as Clark Kent, greets her and introduces her to his friends, the Danvers, who raise her and encourage her to guard her powers.

Supergirl only reveals her powers when absolutely necessary. She soon discovers her mother’s twin sister Astra lives on Earth and is intent on conquering the world. Kryptonian history in one form or another is always following her, which complicates her life and brings out her inner superhero.

²⁶ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Man. Retrieved December 20, 2015.

²⁷ Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supergirl_\(U.S._TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supergirl_(U.S._TV_series)). Retrieved December 23, 2015.

Fantastic Four

Artist & Publication Summary

The Fantastic Four superhero team combines the power, foresight and intelligence of supreme beings and pits them against the world's evil. Developed by writer-editor Stan Lee and artist/co-plotter Jack Kirby, Fantastic Four first appeared in Marvel Comics in November 1961.²⁸ Fantastic Four was Marvel's first superhero team.²⁹

Story Background

Four friends were exposed to cosmic rays during a scientific mission to outer space. These friends are Reed Richards, Sue Storm, Sue's brother Johnny Storm and Ben Grimm. The rays imbued them with superpowers, and, unlike other superheroes, they don't take great pains to conceal how amazing they can be. Reed Richards is Mister Fantastic, a rubber band-like superhero who can stretch his body long and wide. Sue Storm is the Invisible Woman and befuddles mortals with her ability to disappear. Johnny Storm is the Human Torch—he can burst into flames or create a wall of flames around his personal inferno. And, like most flames, he can fly. Ben Grimm is Thing. Aptly named, he resembles a human rock sculpture and packs all the power you'd expect from pure stone. Together, they fight evil villains such as Doctor Doom.

One of Marvel's most successful series, Fantastic Four brings lively personalities and complementary superpowers together to create a dynamic and complex story. There's power in numbers!

The Avengers

Artist & Publication History

The Avengers are known for fighting “the foes no single superhero can withstand.”³⁰ Created by writer-editor Stan Lee and artist/co-plotter Jack Kirby, The Avengers made their debut in Marvel Comics in September 1963.³¹ It is said The Avengers concept was inspired by the success of Justice League of America, published by DC Comics.

Story Background

The Avengers are “Earth's Mightiest Heroes”—the group is always changing, bringing together humans, mutants, robots, former villains, and more. The original lineup consisted of Hank Pym (a character that takes on numerous superhero identities) and Hulk, Iron Man, Thor, and the Wasp. When the group discovered Captain America trapped in ice, they revived him and made him a part of the group.

²⁸ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantastic_Four. Retrieved December 23, 2015.

²⁹ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantastic_Four. Retrieved December 23, 2015.

³⁰ Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avengers_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avengers_(comics)). Retrieved December 23, 2015.

³¹ Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avengers_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avengers_(comics)). Retrieved December 23, 2015.

Avengers from near and far converge under the battle cry “Avengers Assemble!” The changing nature of this intense group—and the drama and relationships they bring to the story—creates a soap opera appeal that is irresistible. Thor’s brother Loki, intent on conquering the Earth, provides plenty of explosive action. Other enemies have included crafty Kang the Conqueror and Italian aristocrat-turned-villain Count Nefaria.

Superhero Glossary³²

Alter ego

An **alter ego** (from Latin, "other I") is another self, a second personality or persona within a person. The term is commonly used in comic books, for the secret identity of a superheros and supervillains.

An alter ego is usually used by superheroes to conceal their identities in order to protect their friends and family from harm at the hands of their enemies, whereas supervillians usually have an alter ego to make sure they don't get arrested.

Android

An artificial being designed to resemble a human being in as many ways as possible, and whose physiology and life functions replicate and mimic those of human beings as closely as possible. An android could be a robot or synthetic organism. Compare with clone, cyborg, robot, and Synthezoid.

Anti-hero

An anti-hero has widely come to mean a character who has some characteristics that are antithetical to those of the traditional hero. An anti-hero in today's comic books will perform acts generally deemed "heroic," but will do so with methods, manners, or intentions that may not be heroic.

Bionic

Of or having to do with an artificial simulation of a living thing or, more usually, of part of a living thing. A cyborg possesses certain bionic limbs or organs. An android's body is entirely bionic.

Cyborg

Cyborg is a contraction of the words cybernetic organism. A cyborg is any organic being with robotic or cybernetic augmentation or implants to replace or enhance physical parts.

Deus ex machina

A deus ex machina is a literary device, a way of ending a plot by bringing in an outside element to accomplish what the main characters have been unable to throughout the story. To qualify as deus ex machina, the means of ending the story (defeating the villain, saving the world, etc.) must have been no more than hinted at during the story, or possibly not mentioned at all. It must be done by a person or element which is outside of the influence of the main characters (although bringing in a main character from another story would count—for example, if the Fantastic Four spent five issues fighting Dr. Doom, then on the last page Wolverine arrived and stabbed him), and it must completely resolve the story.

³² Marvel Wikia. http://marvel.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Glossary_Entries?sort=alphabetical&display=exhibition. Retrieved Friday, January 8, 2016

Doppelgangers

A doppelgänger is 'the ghostly double of a living person.'

In the vernacular, "Doppelgänger" has come to refer to any double or look-alike of a person—most commonly an "evil twin." The literal translation of the German word is "doublewalker," meaning someone who is acting (e.g. walking) the same way as another person. The word is also used to describe the sensation of having glimpsed oneself in peripheral vision, in a position where there is no chance that it could have been a reflection. They are generally regarded as harbingers of bad luck. In some traditions, a doppelgänger seen by a person's friends or relatives portends illness or danger, while seeing one's own doppelgänger is an omen of death. In Norse mythology, a vardøger is a ghostly double who precedes a living person and is seen performing their actions in advance.

Hybrids

Hybrids, sometimes called "half-breeds," are the result of the cross between two species, one or both not necessarily humanoids.

Immortality

Immortality is the ability to live forever. This may be complete immortality in which the character cannot be killed in any way, appears to die but is resurrected somehow, and they are forever young, or even only be killed in specific ways (i.e. decapitation).

Katana

Katana pronounced [kah-tah-nah] is a curved, single-edged sword traditionally used by the samurai.

Limited Series

The limited series is a term referring to a comic book series with a set finite number of issues. A limited series differs from an ongoing series in that the number of intended issues is determined before production of the series, and differs from a "one shot" in that it is comprised of multiple issues. It is still different from a finite series in that the number of issues is pre-determined while the latter has no definite number of issues set which could run for a number of years before it ends.

Mutant

Mutants, or Homo Superior, are beings who were born with physical characteristic(s) not possessed by either of their parents.

No Prize

The No Prize is a reward given out to fans who get a letter printed in a Marvel comic, which points out a mistake within a series and comes up with a clever excuse for it being printed. Stan Lee would print the letter in a later edition and tell the reader they "valiantly won a No Prize," which was nothing.

Omnipotent

All-powerful. The term is also used generically to describe numerous beings possessing vast power, which, although not unlimited, by far surpasses that of most sentient beings. Among the known so-called omnipotents are Galactus, the Celestials, the Watchers, the Stranger, the Living Tribunal, and others.

Parallel Earth

A counterpart to Earth within another dimension that never diverged from this dimension's Earth, but has somehow come to resemble this Earth in various ways. No known other-dimensional Earth in this multiverse has yet been identified as a parallel Earth rather than a divergent Earth, and no true parallel Earths may exist within this multiverse.

Polymorph

A being with shape-changing powers.

Psychokinesis

The psi ability to move or manipulate physical matter without physically touching it. The word is synonymous with telekinesis, which has the added connotation of greater distance being involved between the matter being manipulated and the manipulator.

Pyrokinesis

The ability to create and/or manipulate fire with psionic energy.

Radar Sense

An extrasensory means of perception by which the brain generates electromagnetic waves which travel outward, bounce off objects, and are again picked up by the brain, which thus determines what its surroundings are.

Shapeshifting

Shapeshifting is the ability to change appearance and/or body structure. Different forms include:

- **Metamorphosis** (limited to human forms, unable to change mass)
- **Animorphosis** (take on animal forms. May be able to take on the abilities of the altered form)
- **Polymorphosis** (assume any form, size, mass and appearance at will)
- **Therianthrope** (or "were-" would transform from a human to an animal, e.g. a "werewolf")

- **Liquification** (ability to turn partially or completely into a liquid)
- **Sublimation** (transformation into a gaseous, mist, or fog-like form)

Sidekick

In Comic Books, the term sidekick most commonly refers to assistants of superheroes, usually in a crimefighting capacity. The sidekick has the literary function of playing against the hero, often contrasting in skill, asking the questions the reader would ask, or performing functions not suited to the hero.

Storyline

A storyline is typically several comic book issues that cover a long story. They are typically made up of one or more story arcs, and often cover the prelude to an event, the event itself, and the post-event epilogue.

Supervillain

A supervillain is a variant of the villain character type, commonly found in comic books. Supervillains concoct complex and ambitious schemes to accumulate power and suppress adversaries. They often have colorful names and costumes and/or other eccentricities.

Telepathy

Telepathy is the psionic ability to send or receive thoughts directly into or from other minds. People with this ability can also usually control minds. A person with this ability is called a telepath.

Trade Paperback

A trade paperback (TPB or simply trade) specifically refers to a collection of stories originally published in comic books reprinted in book format, usually capturing one story arc from a single title or a series of stories with a connected story arc or common theme from one or more titles.

Warlock

A male sorcerer who practices black magic, that is to say, who manipulates magical energies granted to him by malevolent entities such as demons. A female sorcerer (sorceress) who does so is a witch.

Will Power

Willpower is an individuals control over their own mind and soul. People with an Indomitable Will enable them to be immune to all forms of temptation including Subordination Manipulation, Telepathy, Mind Control and Subliminal Seduction.