

2005

Walk Fifth and Brink

A Strnad Project in Cartooning by Nick Holtkamp

I began my Strnad Project with the vague intent to draw cartoons. I've always loved comics, such as *The Far Side* and *Calvin & Hobbes*. I'm also an obsessive doodler in class. Cartooning seemed to be a perfect choice for a project.

In my original proposal, I decided to create a book of comics similar to *The Far Side* and *Calvin & Hobbes* since I was most accustomed to the one, three and four cell formats. The Hummer comic was my first attempt. I used a simple Bic Pen and Sharpie Marker. It depicts a Hummer in a rear view mirror with the caption, "Objects and persons in mirror may be smaller than they appear," implying that driving a monstrous vehicle does not make a person anymore important. At the time, I thought I was being clever. I took my newfound confidence into political cartoons.

As I shifted to political cartooning, I switched from Bic Pens and Sharpie Markers to nibbed pens, which are similar to fountainhead pens. They were difficult to use because of a steep learning curve not only in the necessity of breaking in the nibs, but also because one wrong motion can splatter the black ink all over the comic. I eventually grew unhappy with my political cartoons because they all turned into thinly veiled metaphors bashing President Bush, which are the most popular type and easiest to create. I turned to writing gag cartoons. I enjoyed imagining and drawing gag cartoons because there was a large amount of creative freedom. A small twist of any thought, story or situation could be transformed into a cartoon. At this stage, I replaced my nibbed pens with a series of Micron Pens, which were much more versatile in my inexperienced hands. The Micron Pens allowed me to not only draw more quickly, but to more easily vary the line width. I also added more depth to the comics by adding grey with the program *Adobe Photoshop*. But, I still wasn't completely satisfied with the gag comics. I wanted to try new types and formats of comics. I turned to The Internet for more ideas.

There were countless numbers of comics on The Internet, ranging in every imaginable size, theme and style. What fascinated me the most were the various art forums that harbored communities of artists. The most helpful of these communities was a website aptly named Eatpoo.com, which had many different types of artwork, including a comics section devoted to very skilled amateurs, art students and professionals alike. The forum introduced me to full-page comics. And so, of course, I began to try to create my own.

The full-page comics are immensely tougher to draw than the single cell comics. It's not only difficult to physically draw and color the full page, but also to depict the story or message. My first attempt at a full-page comic is the first comic that appears in my book. I first inked two pictures, and then combined them on an eleven by fourteen inch of Strathmore Bristol board to make a full page. The top section shows a boy dropping his teddy bear out of a car window. The bottom section is modeled after downtown Cleveland. I drew it too small, but there is supposed to be a car on the bridge to the right, and the bear falling near the middle of the comic. Even though I colored the bottom section too dark, I was content with this as a first attempt at coloring. I found creating a full page to be much more satisfying than a smaller comic, so I began to experiment more.

I drew one page showing a series of TV screens that as they progress, almost like cells in a comic, they turn into a crumbled piece of paper, which is then thrown into the trash. Another page I drew as a platform for a poem I wrote, named The O.D., which describes the horrors of the T.V. show, *The O.C.* After completing these pages, I was ready for my final effort— a four page colored sequential comic.

The first of the four pages begins by showing a man, the radio show host, picking his nose. Just as his radio show is about to begin, he flings his boogers, which slam the mouse into the wall. The second page is full of dialogue. Basically, the radio host and caller start to fight

and the radio host transforms into a monster, who in the third page, drags the caller out of the microphone and then eats the caller. The epic tale ends on the fourth page with the host morphing back to human form and going to commercial break while the mouse chugs down a can of the host's beer.

It was an extensive process to create each page. I always started with thumbnails, where I recorded the ideas, sequences, and any characters or dialogue. The thumbnails always turned into a mass of scrap paper. After settling on a storyline and layout, I penciled in the frames and sketched the comic onto my eleven by fourteen piece of Bristol board. All the penciled lines were inked over, and the remaining pencil was erased. The page was scanned at 300 dpi and opened in *Adobe Photoshop*. I adjusted the levels and cleaned any remaining pencil smudges. I then painted the whole page in a darkish color so that the coloring itself wasn't too dark, which would be the result of a bright white background. To color, I used my Wacom tablet. The tablet allows me to use a special pen to draw on the light grey surface of the tablet. The cursor on the screen matches my movements on the tablet. Finally, using many layers, sizes, styles and opacities of brushes, I slowly began the process of coloring the whole image. The last step was to add the text bubbles and dialogue.

After I was content with the comics I had drawn, I decided to finish my Strnad by creating a book and website. For the book, I loaded all the images onto a C.D. and had them printed at Kinkos. After multiple printing efforts, there were still flaws. But, I was running short on time so the brightness, sizing, and font issues that came up would have to remain. I brought the printed pages to Esper Bindery, where the pages were quickly and skillfully bound. All in all, I came out with seven books relatively unscathed. I can't say the same for the website, as that has crashed and burned due to the fickle nature of computers and people, namely me.

I need to thank my family for their help during the long nights and the entire project. Thank you Mr. de la Mata. His persistence and my constant fear of telling him that I hadn't done anything over the last six months forced me to start and finish this project. Final thanks go to the Strnad Committee and the Strnad Family whose generous grant made this project not only possible, but also enjoyable.