

The New Comics: Mark Ehling

written by Guest Contributor | June 11, 2015



"The Sound"

MARK EHLING is a person on Earth. He is the author of [River Dead of Minneapolis Scavenged by Teenagers](#), a book of short stories, monologues, and dialogues in comics form. He also posts new work on [Tumblr](#).

ON PERFORMANCE AND THE PAGE



I love the energy of performance. I always need a deadline or a crisis in order to write—people waiting in a room for me to show up and deliver something, otherwise they will feel angry or cheated—and I love all the energy that flows from that: working toward the moment when the room goes dark and the show happens. But with writing a novel, making a book... the world is not waiting for you. No one cares. That road is hard.

On the page, I aim for compression—trying to maintain the energy. I used to try to write “real stories”—plots and characters. They were terrible. At the same time I always kept notebooks—a concrete record of observable things. And those things—interesting moments that happen in everyday life—are pure gold. They’re atomic. So I just started stringing them together... collaging them... presenting them on platters... putting them in the mouth of some wind-up puppet and letting that puppet do its show-and-tell routine.

I wrote all these short pieces over the years, but I don’t have a long attention span, so I never really thought about bearing down and making a full book. I just got my kicks out of performance—seeing a house react, and feeling the energy... it’s a thrill.

But the flip-side of performance just kills me. The moments you share with an audience are completely transient. They end, they’re gone forever, and you’re left with air. So I’m always pulled back to books and media—little machines you can hold in your hand that create these special experiences over and over again.

ON FICTION AND COMICS

 When my first son was around two I kind of left reading fiction behind. I got tired of text. Then I got into reading comics again. I liked the pleasure of it. I liked diving into these gorgeous pages. The pages had *stuff* on them. The pages used some serious ink.

I was approaching 40, and I started to think, “I should really get a book out.” So I made it my birthday present to myself. I cannibalized a batch of

pieces from my early plays and zines and put images to them. I like how images can add tone and presence and emotional depth. In a way, that's what's cool about theater too—you're going to this dark place, and it's lit with these moody lights, and the room is hushed and these elements somehow signal that magic will happen. Comics panels feel like those ritualistic rooms to me.

ON DRAWING

I hadn't drawn in years, but then I read an interview with the comics artist Warren Craghead. He composes in a way that I have total affinity for. He just draws all the time, as a compulsion—he draws with food, he draws on post-it notes, he even draws in the car—and there's a wild *realness* in his work. The drawings almost seem as though they've been created by some neolithic, documentary cave painter. They're gorgeous. Then he takes these seemingly unconnected drawings and groups them or arranges them into quiet narratives.

It knocked me out. And it was one of the things that got me interested in drawing again. It was important for me to see this loose, collage-y style of image-making, because as I got back into drawing I realized a weird problem: when I tried to earnestly “represent” some figure or thing in a realistic way, my drawings became bad and embarrassing. But when I celebrated the fucked-up nature of my own line, the drawings felt more interesting and fun. There is probably an art-truth buried in here somewhere, and it probably has something to do with the spirit of play we all have as children, then lose, then try to recapture.

That's been a thread for me for a lot of years now—trying to find some thing in life that seems real or strange or interesting, and then trying to get out of the way of myself so that I can become a medium for passing it on.

For more from Mark, click the top left thumbnail. His new book is now available from [New Carriage](#).



Want to be considered for future installments of *The New Comics*? Send your work to Comics Curator Keith McCleary via the Entropy [submissions page](#).