

ART BUTT

By Lisa Maul
Staff Reporter

Art Butt's comic strip characters don't resemble Calvin and Hobbes, Opus and Steve Dallas, or Batman. In Butt's world, humans and humanoid figures are the villains. His work bears a strong environmental message. The Earth is a dirty, dying place, but only animals, dragons and mutants seem to care.

In a recent interview, Butt talked about the way he works and his evolution as an artist. He said he had coloring books as a child, but he could never stay in the lines. In kindergarten, he remembers a teacher who taught the class to draw birds as elongated "m's." He was upset about it, until he realized that it didn't have to apply to him.

Butt drew caricatures of friends and teachers in high school. These,

he said, probably were his first comics. At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Butt enrolled in art classes. "They helped because they had equipment, but they hurt because they had instructors," he said.

A look at one of Butt's sketch books reveals a wide variety of drawings, border designs and intricate doodles, as well as comics. He usually works in pen and ink. He said he feels as though the ideas for his work develop as he draws. He seldom has a concrete concept when he picks up his pen.

As far as the messages in his work, he said, "I try to keep messages out of it. When you have something to say, you just say it. It just comes out."

Will the things he has to say in his comics raise anyone's consciousness?

"I think the people who already care about environmental things

will say, 'yeah, that's great,' but I don't think it will change anything," he said. "I wonder, for example, how many people will drop their copy of the Daily Nebraskan on the ground after they read this."

Art Butt's comics are both funny and disturbing. They don't have happy endings and the heroes aren't easy to identify. Who are Butt's heroes?

"They change from hour to hour," he said. "Right now, my heroes are probably the beer in front of me and the people who do commercials for constipation or hemorrhoid medicine. They amaze me. But that's just for now."

Can art and the printed word save the world? Butt doesn't think so.

"But," he said, "They can sure make going down the tubes a lot more enjoyable." **D**

RAND PAUL

By Mick Dyer
Senior Editor

Warning! Exposure to zany, subversive underground comics as a child may lead to drawing zany, subversive cartoons as an adult. Just look at Rand Paul's work.

Paul, a Lincoln native and graduate of the Colorado Institute of Art, said after seeing the risqué, taboo-breaking comics by S. Clay Wilson and Robert Crumb in Zap and Freak Brothers comics, he was hooked on sarcastic comics with mature themes.

"I started out in the little Walt Disney school of copying Mickey Mouse, Donald and Goofy," he said. "Then once I drew a cartoon of Minnie giving Mickey a b..."

Paul said intellectuals in Europe read comics. And everyone from grade school students to high-power business executives in Japan read sophisticated comics. But for some reason, in the United States, "comics are equated with trash."

"A lot of people think comics are for kids," Paul said. "I'd rather deal with political issues or social issues."

Paul compared underground comics to other literary vehicles, such as the play or the novel, for telling substantial adult-oriented stories.

"I don't see much difference between avant garde comics and literary fiction," he said. "But you've got to know where to look -- you're

not going to find that in Archie comics."

Besides the artwork and the sarcastic tone of the stories, Paul said underground comics offer more intellectual stimulation than the average comic.

"It's one step beyond political cartoons," Paul said. "They are something you can take a little more seriously than Beetle Bailey or Family Circus."

And Paul said underground comics have an unconventional appeal.

"You can do anything with words and pictures," he said. "They're government breakers, they are. Just ask the Russians, I bet they have an opinion about that." **D**

JEFF MASON

By Mick Dyer
Senior Editor

Over the last year, local illustrator Jeff Mason has made a macabre discovery. After taking cartoon assignments and getting positive reactions to his work on them, he decided he enjoys drawing horror cartoons.

That's a startling revelation to a dyed-in-the-wool commercial artist.

It takes almost no effort for the Omaha Studio Academy School of Commercial Art and Graphic Design graduate to produce a whole stack of twisted, poignant and humorous horror cartoons. He draws two cartoons a month for "Afraid," a monthly horror writers newsletter, as well as contributing cartoons to other small press horror magazines, such as "October Dreams" and "Gauntlet."

He isn't entirely sure where his inspiration to draw these cartoons comes from, but most of his cartoons deal with social or political issues. And his cartoons tend to be a bit irreverent.

"A lot of it (inspiration), I suppose, is subconscious, whatever makes me laugh or angry," he said. "To get my views across I use a cartoon." **D**

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