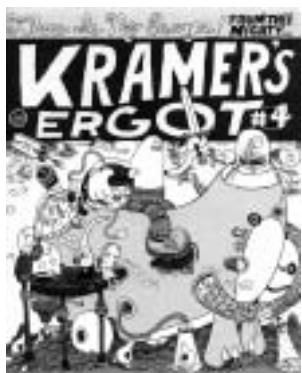


Zine & Comic Reviews

Mark Pawson

I'm sneaking this column back into Variant and hoping that nobody has noticed its absence for the last year!



KRAMERS ERGOT #4 is a mammoth sized, avant-garde cartoon anthology with recent strips/doodles/sketchbooks/collages/anything in between by 25 artists. Who are these people inhabiting the hallucinogenic KRAMERS ERGOT dreamland? Well you might possibly have heard of

Marc Bell, Mat Brinkman and Ron Rege Jr, so I guess the others are their pals and gals, some kind of post Fort Thunder generation born and raised listening to Lightning Bolt? We're definitely into comics as art territory here, cor baby it's really free, with esoteric obsessive-compulsive drawing aplenty here, lots of it on the art-brut-not-art-brut trip. With over 300 pages, each contributor gets as much space as they want, all in full colour and they all have a go at drawing a cover as well. I'm pleased to admit that I'm reviewing KRAMERS ERGOT #4 without having read it all, it's just too big to devour in a couple of evenings, and deserves repeated readings/viewings/flicking-throughs.



S. Blanquet's Graphic Novel LA NOUVELLE AUX PIS is the strangest, most incredible book I've seen in the last couple of years. The wordless story is told in 11 chapters illustrated in beautifully repulsive silhouette pen drawings, like small creepy-crawly insects have been dipped in ink

and then let loose on the pages. The narratives in each chapter gradually weave together and interlink into a complex scary fairy tale involving a gang of feral sisters living in the forest, a baby clothed in a dead dog, nasty nuns, a bleak orphanage and a skeleton chasing the new inhabitants of his skin! LA NOUVELLE AUX PIS is an extraordinarily accomplished work from French-Canadian artist Blanquet, his work is an acquired taste and has suffered in the past from overproduction and repeated exploration of favourite themes. LA NOUVELLE AUX PIS will amply reward anyone who manages to track down a copy.

BLOOD ORANGE #1 is a

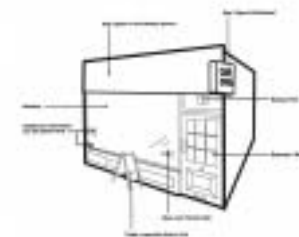
new anthology that covers similar ground to KRAMERS ERGOT, and shares some of the same contributors, but BLOOD ORANGE concentrates on slightly less unconventional comic strip formats. It's published by Fantagraphics, so should be relatively easy to get hold of a copy in the UK, think of it as an affordable taster for sampling this new wave of mark-makers, whilst saving your pennies for a copy of KRAMERS ERGOT.

There's a few pages of Gary Baseman's sketchbooks in BLOOD ORANGE which look like preparatory sketches for his wonderful collaboration with Tim Biskup, MODULAR POPULOUS—a set of 48 interchangeable postcards which you can arrange to create your own characters from the different heads, bodies and legs painted on 48 identical size canvases by Baseman and Biskup. Their styles work well together. Biskup's clear curvaceous graphic style complements Baseman's raw-edged brushwork—there's beatnik birds, mystery aquatic creatures, hapless cute animals, manga-robots and godzillas galore, for you to build frankenstein-like into thousands of different combinations (4096 to be precise). MODULAR POPULOUS is the perfect combination of a piece of art and a toy, keep one copy framed on the wall and another to play with, yes it's a set of postcards but they're too-nice-to-post postcards. It reminds me of Gary Panter and Charles Burns' similarly great FACETASM book even down to the two complementary styles, one with ultra clean lines, the other more raw edged, a reminder to myself to get FACETASM down off the shelf for its annual viewing. Baseman and Biskup are busy boys, both have new books out—Baseman's DUMB LUCK and Biskup's 100 PAINTINGS will be on bookshop shelves when you read this and they've also both had sets of toys issued in the VANIMAL ZOO series.

A project of Sony Creative Products in Japan, VANIMAL ZOO has worked with artists/illustrators to turn their drawings and paintings into



Outside features of Your Greasy Spoon

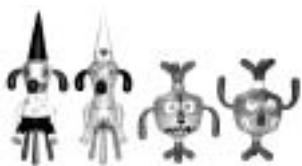


collectable, covetable figures, there's 5 figures in each set, packed randomly so you don't know which one you're getting. So far there's been 10 different sets, half by Japanese designers, the rest by US artists. They're like postmodern designer Kinder Egg toys. Unlike Pete Fowler's MONSTERISM figures (Series 3 on the way my industry informants reveal) you can't rearrange the VANIMAL ZOO figures, once you've opened the package they just sit on a shelf. In their native Japan VANIMAL ZOO sells for £3.00 each, figure on paying twice that once they've made their way here. There's also SETON figures from Medicom, which I can only describe as IKEA-style flat-pack canines—dogs with square heads and a series of flat interlocking panels for bodies! It's an interesting sign of the way things are going that in the new Forbidden Planet London Megastore comics and books have been relegated to the basement whilst action figures, toys and collectibles with higher profit margins fill the entire ground floor.

Akiko Shishido's BRITISH GREASY SPOON INSTRUCTION MANUAL is a practical guide for newcomers on how to use these ubiquitous dining establishments. Clear diagrams show how to locate, enter and order your meal in a greasy spoon cafe, then how

to accessorise your traditional english breakfast (no other menu options are considered) with all available condiments, sugar excepted. It comes packaged in a cheapo red and white stripy plastic bag accompanied with a set of 3 postcards with annotated illustrations of generic take-away restaurants—Fish and Chips, Kebab, Chinese. It's a tidy little package all right, but c'mon Akiko, six quid is a bit steep init? I'll give you two ninety five for it—same price as a full english. Forget all this citizenship ceremony nonsense, copies of the BRITISH GREASY SPOON INSTRUCTION MANUAL should be given to every person coming to live in the UK.

San Francisco's Skullz Press booklets usually feature work by graffiti artists, COLLECTED WRITINGS OF BOB LICKY is a bit of an oddity. Bob Licky wasn't content to be just another graffiti kid with a can of stolen spraypaint, so instead he decided to take his message to the street on a series of mysterious



rubberstamped stickers. COLLECTED WRITINGS OF BOB LICKY features 250 of his enigmatic, sloganeering stickers, producing new designs weekly of Bob Licky continually thick black ink on white stickers. Something of a start-your-own-cult feel to this and spreading slogans virus-like on the street, brings Shepard Fairey/Andre The Giant to mind, which is certainly good company for Bob Licky to find himself in. File next to Ivor Cutler's 'Befriend a Bacterium' booklet, a collection of his Able-Label stickers.



WESTERN SUIT by Derek McCormack is a fictional account of Western singer 'Hank' preparing for his debut at the Grand Ole Opry, and the ensuing tussle for Hank's affection and wardrobe duties between his girlfriend 'Audrey', with her homemade stage-outfits, and 'Nudie', a manipulative, malignant tailor of extraordinary beautiful Western stage outfits. You may recognise some of the characters as undisguised real life Country and Western celebrities! The book is meticulously designed and illustrated by Pas de Chance/Ian Philips (whose LOST collection of lost pet posters was previously reviewed in this column), and comes bound in brown suedette fabric with the title on an embroidered jeans-style label sewn onto the cover. And as if this wasn't enough, it's accompanied with a sewing pattern and instructions for making your own elaborately detailed Cowboy-style shirt and comes packaged inside a full colour envelope.

Face it, you're never going to

own one of Mark Ryden's surreal paintings, because Leonardo Di Caprio and Marilyn Manson have bought them all already! You'll have to settle for a copy of

BLOOD - MINIATURE PAINTINGS OF SORROW AND FEAR. This tiny exhibition catalogue is exquisitely produced with a leather-look embossed cover and features some of Ryden's darkest imagery to date. These miniatures, typically 4 x 6 inches in size, are stripped-down ver-

sions of Ryden's work, which is usually chock-a-block full of pop culture imagery and references. The inspiration behind this series of paintings may owe something to the artist's mood after his recent acrimonious divorce. The catalogue is accompanied with a separate CD soundtrack by Stan Ridgeway. All previous Mark Ryden publications have sold out instantly, the enormous 20,000 print run for **BLOOD - MINIATURE PAINTINGS OF SORROW AND FEAR** ensures there's enough copies for everyone who wants one.

The enterprising Borbonesa gang, who are also behind Brighton's Permanent Gallery/Bookshop, have sent their strange and wonderful publications for review before and would be quite justified in being annoyed that I never quite got round to mentioning them. Their latest curious production, **TURTLE SOUP**, is "a collection of literary, illustrative and sonic ruminations issued quarterly in four distinct parts. Each part vaguely deliberates the interactions between humankind and the natural world." The precious package contains 2 intricately folded leaflets, a poster and 3 inch CD that I actually listened to more than once. There's a retro-futuristic feel to it all—tales of a machine enabling conversation with pets and plans for

the world's first Airborne Menagerie (inside a hot air balloon) are accompanied with a list of records to watch seagulls fly to, and a recipe for cheese and chicken quiche entirely in drawings.

Reprints of Italian polymath artist/product designer Bruno Munari's books from the 1960s/70s continue to emerge. Many of these books were originally issued in minuscule, long unavailable private press editions and are being made available to a wider audience for the first time. In **ROSES IN THE SALAD** from 1974, Munari takes a sharp knife to a basket full of vegetables and flowers, slices across them and has fun using the cut faces as rubber stamps. The swirling organic shapes of onions, cabbage and celery stalks make intriguing prints. It's post potato-print printing, try this at home! What would happen if the Vienna Vegetable Orchestra, who perform using instruments made from fresh vegetables and after their concerts make soup from the instruments they've just played and serve it to the audience, get hold of a copy of this book and decide to incorporate vegetable print-making into their performances as well!

NUDE #3 has US punk poster designer Frank Kozik, Burlesque performance artist Marisa Carnesky, retro-typographers House Industries, pop culture outfitters the Contemporary Wardrobe and Variant cover artist Lorna Miller. Certainly hip, definitely not trendy, **NUDE** is put together by Suzy Prince and Ian Lowey who were the moving forces between two of London's most loved (now sadly missed) shops, Last Chance Saloon and Strangely Satisfying, their fiercely independent spirit shows in this welcome addition to the newstand shelves. The first couple of **NUDE**'s were freebies, now it's ambitiously swollen to 48 pages with a modest cover price of £1.50 which you can't really complain about.

CHEAP DATE is back, the Spring/Summer 2004 issue has pin-ups, photo-stories, Fashion Strike, Jimmy Saville, Jumble Sales, Frees Stuff Parties, Supermodels in Charity Shop Outfits and Harry Hill's paintings—which are 1000% better than Vic Reeves' Daubs. This



big issue with plenty of full-colour is a return to top form for **CHEAP DATE**.

SMOKE - A LONDON PECULIAR is a miscellany of photos and witty, wordy articles about contemporary London. The photographs are nicely observed details of unglamorous, everyday parts of London. The articles—about canals, supermarkets and power stations—all seem to take the same travel writing approach about the authors' city of residence,

which is fine for one article but several contributors all trying to be a little bit too whimsical and writerly becomes irritating. **SMOKE** has already received favourable coverage on local radio and is apparently popular amongst Taxi Drivers(?). This issue feels disjointed, too much of a miscellany, perhaps each issue would benefit from having a theme. I'm sure that with a few more issues **SMOKE** will carve out its own place somewhere in the vast gulf between I. Sinclair and E. Standard.

Taking a very different approach to London is Gabrielle O'Connor's **THE WEEKLY SPECTACLE** which consists entirely of **HEAT** magazine style photo exposés of the author going about her everyday business around London town.

Gabrielle is a large lady and wears a Minnie Mouse style red and white polka dot dress whilst waiting at the bus stop, sitting on a park bench and getting into a taxi. By putting herself in each picture wearing this over-the-top glamorous costume she's critiquing **HEAT** magazine and its readers' pathetically shallow fascination with celebrities whilst simultaneously affecting repulsion at an extra ounce of gained weight or the mere hint of underarm perspiration. The confident lady in these photos looks pretty happy with her ample size and I think she can live with that little bit of 'orange peel' exposed when she does the classic 'getting into a Taxi' photo.

Date for your diary

ARTIST LED PUBLICATION FAIR and EXHIBITION. Date to be confirmed, probably 3 July. Cubitt, 8 Angel Mews, London N1 9HH. 020 7278 8226. www.cubittartists.org.uk

SMALL PUBLISHERS FAIR 2004. 22-23 October 2004. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London.

LONDON ARTISTS BOOK FAIR 2004. 26-28 November 2004. ICA, The Mall, London.

Contacts

KRAMERS ERGOT #4 \$24.95
avodahbooks.com

LA NOUVELLE AUX PIS
www.blanquet.com
www.cornelius.fr

BLOOD ORANGE #1 \$5.95
fantagraphics.com

MODULAR POPULOUS \$19.95
www.timbiskup.com
www.garybaseman.com

Spend all your pocket money on **VANIMAL ZOO** and **SETON** toys at Forbidden Planet, Shaftesbury Av., London and Playlounge, Beak St, London.

BRITISH GREASY SPOON INSTRUCTION MANUAL £6.00
SHELF, 40 Cheshire Street, London, E2 www.fullbelli.com

COLLECTED WRITINGS OF BOB LICKY \$5.00 skullzpress.com

WESTERN SUIT £17.50 'BLOOD - Miniature Paintings of Sorrow and Fear' Mark Ryden. \$25.00
www.lastgasp.com

TURTLE SOUP £6.00
www.borbonesa.co.uk

ROSES IN THE SALAD £8.99 from **MAGMA**, Manchester and London
www.corraini.co.uk

NUDE £2.00 inc p+p. P.O.Box 587 London WC1H 9WB
www.nudemagazine.co.uk

CHEAP DATE £5.00
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SMOKE - A LONDON PECULIAR £2.35 inc p+p. P.O.Box 14274, London SE11 6ZG www.smokelondon.co.uk

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