



Introduction to Art Spiegelman. 1:53 min. Photo & montage by Raymond Elman. Music: My Grey Heaven, from Normalology (1996), by Phillip Johnston, Jedible Music (BMI)

A Video Conversation with Pulitzer Prize Recipient

Art Spiegelman

By Elman + Skye

From the Steven Barclay Agency:

Art Spiegelman (b. 1948) has almost single-handedly brought comic books out of the toy closet and onto the literature shelves. In 1992, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his masterful Holocaust narrative *Maus*— which portrayed Jews as mice and Nazis as cats. *Maus II* continued the remarkable story of his parents' survival of the Nazi regime and their lives later in America. His comics are best known for their shifting graphic styles, their formal complexity, and controversial content. He believes that in our post-literate culture the importance of the comic is on the rise, for “comics echo the way the brain works. People think in iconographic images, not in holograms, and people think in bursts of language, not in paragraphs.”

Having rejected his parents' aspirations for him to become a dentist, Art Spiegelman studied cartooning in high school and began drawing professionally at age 16. He went on to study art and philosophy at Harpur College before becoming part of the underground comix subculture of the 60s and 70s. As creative consultant for Topps Bubble Gum Co. from 1965-1987, Spiegelman created *Wacky Packages*, *Garbage Pail Kids* and other novelty items, and taught history and aesthetics of comics at the School for Visual Arts in New York from 1979-1986. In 2007 he was a Heyman Fellow of the Humanities at Columbia University where he taught a Masters of the Comics seminar. In 1980, Spiegelman founded *RAW*, the acclaimed avant-garde comics magazine, with his wife, Françoise Mouly. *Maus* was originally serialized in the pages of *RAW*, before being published by Pantheon. Pantheon has published many of his subsequent works including an illustrated version of the 1928 lost classic, *The Wild Party*, by Joseph Moncure March.

He and Mouly more recently co-edited *Little Lit*, a series of three comics anthologies for children published by HarperCollins (*Comics — They're Not Just for Grown-Ups Anymore*) and *Big Fat Little Lit*, collecting the three comics into one volume. Currently, he and his wife publish a series of early readers called *Toon Books* — picture books in comics format. They have co-edited *A Toon Treasury of Classic Children's Comics* (Fall 2009). His work has been published in many periodicals, including *The New Yorker*, where he was a staff artist and writer from 1993-2003.

In 2004 he completed a two-year cycle of broadsheet-sized color comics pages, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, first published in a number of European newspapers and magazines including *Die Zeit* and *The London Review of Books*. A book version of these highly political works was published by Pantheon in the United States, appeared on many national bestseller lists, and was selected by *The New York Times Book Review* as one of the 100 Notable Books of 2004.

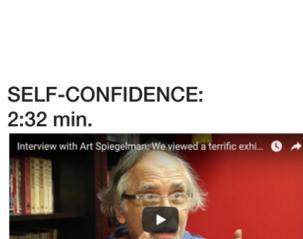
Spiegelman's work also includes a new edition of his 1978 anthology, *Breakdowns*. It includes an autobiographical comix-format introduction almost as long as the book itself, entitled *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!*; as well as a children's book (published with *Toon Books*), called *Jack and the Box*. In 2009, *Maus* was chosen by the Young Adult Library Association as one of its recommended titles for all students (the list is revised every 5 years and used by educators and librarians across the country). McSweeney's has published a collection of three of his sketchbooks entitled *Be a Nose*. A major exhibition of his work was arranged by Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, as part of the “15 Masters of 20th Century Comics” exhibit (November 2005). In 2005, Art Spiegelman was named one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People and in 2006 he was named to the Art Director's Club Hall of Fame. He was made an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France in 2007 and—the American equivalent—played himself on an episode of “The Simpsons” in 2008. In fall 2011, Pantheon published *Meta Maus*, a companion to *The Complete Maus*. It is the story of why he wrote *Maus*, why he chose mice, cats, frogs, and pigs, and how he got his father to open up (the new book includes a DVD of the transcripts of Art's interviews with his father; it is not a graphic novel, but it is populated with illustrations, photos and other images). *MetaMaus* was awarded the 2011 National Jewish Book Award in the Biography, Autobiography, and Memoir category. In 2015, he collaborated with renowned French artist JR on *The Ghosts of Ellis Island*. Spiegelman has also edited a new book about the artist Si Lewen titled *Si Lewen's Parade: An Artist's Odyssey*.

In 2011, Art Spiegelman won the Grand Prix at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, marking only the third time an American has received the honor (the other two were Will Eisner and Robert Crumb). The honor also included a retrospective exhibition of his artwork, shown in the Pompidou Center. The exhibition then traveled to the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Jewish Museum in NYC, and the the AGO Art Gallery of Ontario. The accompanying book is *CO-MIX: A Retrospective of Comics, Graphics, and Scraps*. His project, *WORDLESS!*, a multimedia look at the history of the graphic novel, had its world premiere at the Sydney Opera House in October 2013 and its US premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in January 2014. In 2015, he was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

The videos below are organized by topic and run between 60 seconds and 11 minutes. Click on any video. You must be connected to the Internet to view the videos.

SELF-CONFIDENCE:

2:32 min.



We viewed a terrific exhibit of your Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel “Maus” at Vancouver’s great museum, The Vancouver Art Gallery. Have you had any exhibitions that were larger in scope than that exhibition?

CRITICAL THINKING:

1:28 min.



When the Jewish Museum in Manhattan wanted to frame Maus drawings with vibrantly colored matts, hung on pistachio walls, you pushed back and urged them to use 50 shades of gray.

INSIGHT & INSPIRATION:

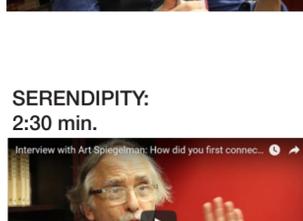
11:01 min.



When I first looked at your book about Si Lewen, I thought you had created a book about a fictitious person that was actually you.

SERENDIPITY:

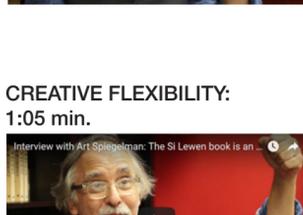
2:30 min.



How did you first connect with Si Lewen?

CREATIVE FLEXIBILITY:

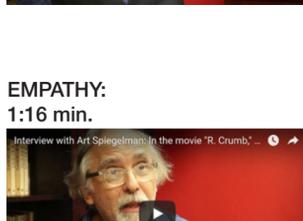
1:05 min.



The Si Lewen book is an “accordion” format that can be opened from either side. Has that been done before?

EMPATHY:

1:16 min.



In the movie *R. Crumb*, which focuses on cartoonist Robert Crumb, we meet Robert's brother, who also has artistic talent, but is more over the edge of the sanity line. Would you put Si Lewen in that category in his later years?