

Q. What is a "graphic novel"?

A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly they are long comic books. (I'll get back to the rest.)

Q. What is a "comic book"?

A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes: A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comics" (also known as "comix."). Comics is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by



images



used in

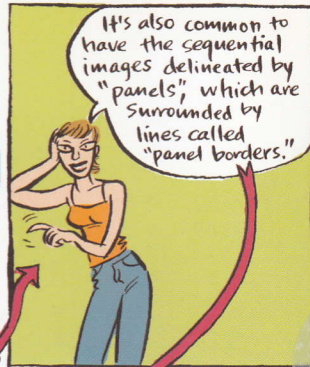


a sequence...

... and that's it. However, comics also often feature such things as

"word balloons..."

... and sometimes, "thought balloons."



It's also common to have the sequential images delineated by "panels," which are surrounded by lines called "panel borders."

These techniques aren't necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or super-heroes. But I'll get to that in a minute.

Here's how to read a comic:

1. Just as in our written language, you read the elements of a comic starting with...
2. ... the upper-left corner of a page, and then you read across to the right...
3. ... before proceeding down to the next row...
4. ... and then the next.

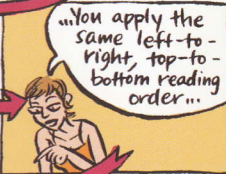


comics are a nested system.

When you finish reading...



... everything within one panel...



... you apply the same left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order...



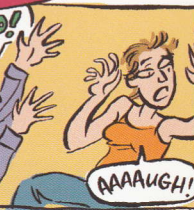
... to the panels themselves!

'hee hee!'



You even use the same rule for actions within a panel.

BOO!



AAAAUGH!

The Language of Comics:

Original Drawings from Jessica Abel's *La Perdida* and Matt Madden's *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style*

October 22 to December 9, 2007

Opening reception:

Saturday, November 3, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Matt Madden will present a slide lecture on his work immediately preceding the reception at 4:30 p.m. in Stark Learning Center, Room 166.

This exhibition was organized by the Richard F. Brush Art Gallery at St. Lawrence University.

Front: Jessica Abel, *What is a graphic novel?*, 2002
Giclée print

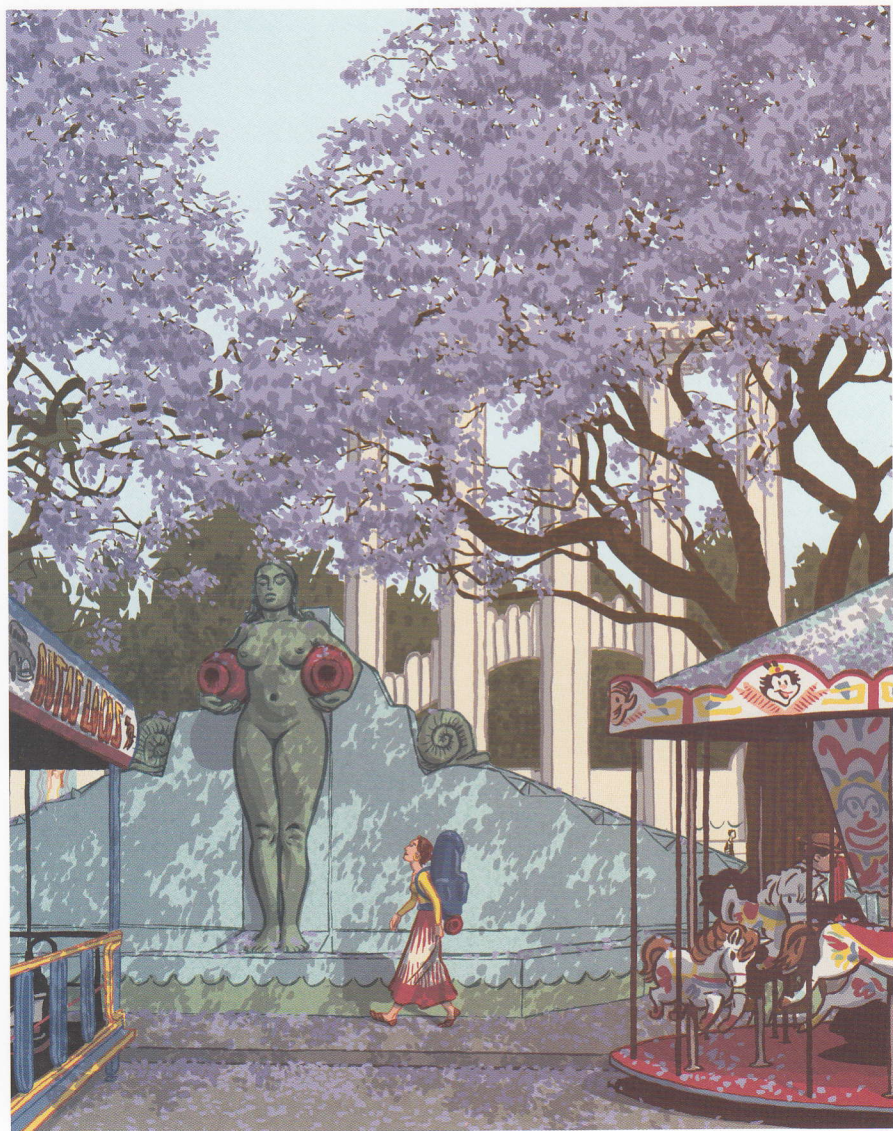
Jessica Abel is the author of *Soundtrack* and *Mirror, Window*, two collections of stories and drawings from her comic book, *Artbabe*. Her graphic novel *La Perdida* won the 2002 Harvey Award for Best New Series and was nominated for an "Essentiels de la BD" award at the 2007 Angoulême Comics Festival in France. She is currently collaborating on another graphic novel, *Life Sucks*, and is finishing up a textbook about making comics with Matt Madden. She teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Matt Madden started self-publishing minicomics in the early 1990s. He has created two graphic novels, *Black Candy* in 1998 and *Odds Off* in 2001. Matt teaches at the School of Visual Arts and reviews comics for *Bookforum*. His latest comics appear in *A Fine Mess*, a series published by Alternative Comics. *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style* was published in 2005 by Penguin Books.

La Perdida tells the story of a young woman's misadventures and her desire to live an authentic life. Carla, an American estranged from her Mexican father, heads to Mexico City to "find herself." She crashes with a former fling, Harry, who has been drinking his way through the capital in the great tradition of his heroes, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. Harry is good-humored about Carla's reappearance on his doorstep - until he realizes that Carla, who spends her days soaking in the city, exploring Frida Kahlo's house and learning Spanish, has no intention of leaving.

When Harry and Carla's relationship of mutual tolerance reaches its inevitable end, she rejects his world of Anglo expats for her own set of friends: pretty-boy Oscar, who sells pot and dreams of being a DJ, and charismatic Memo, a left-wing, pseudo-intellectual ladies' man. Determined to experience the real Mexico, Carla turns a blind eye to her new friends' inconsistencies. But then she catches the eye of a drug don, el Gordo, and from that moment on, her life gets a lot more complicated, and she is forced to confront the irreparable consequences of her willful innocence.

Image: Jessica Abel, Cover drawing for *La Perdida*, 2006
Offset printed jacket sleeve

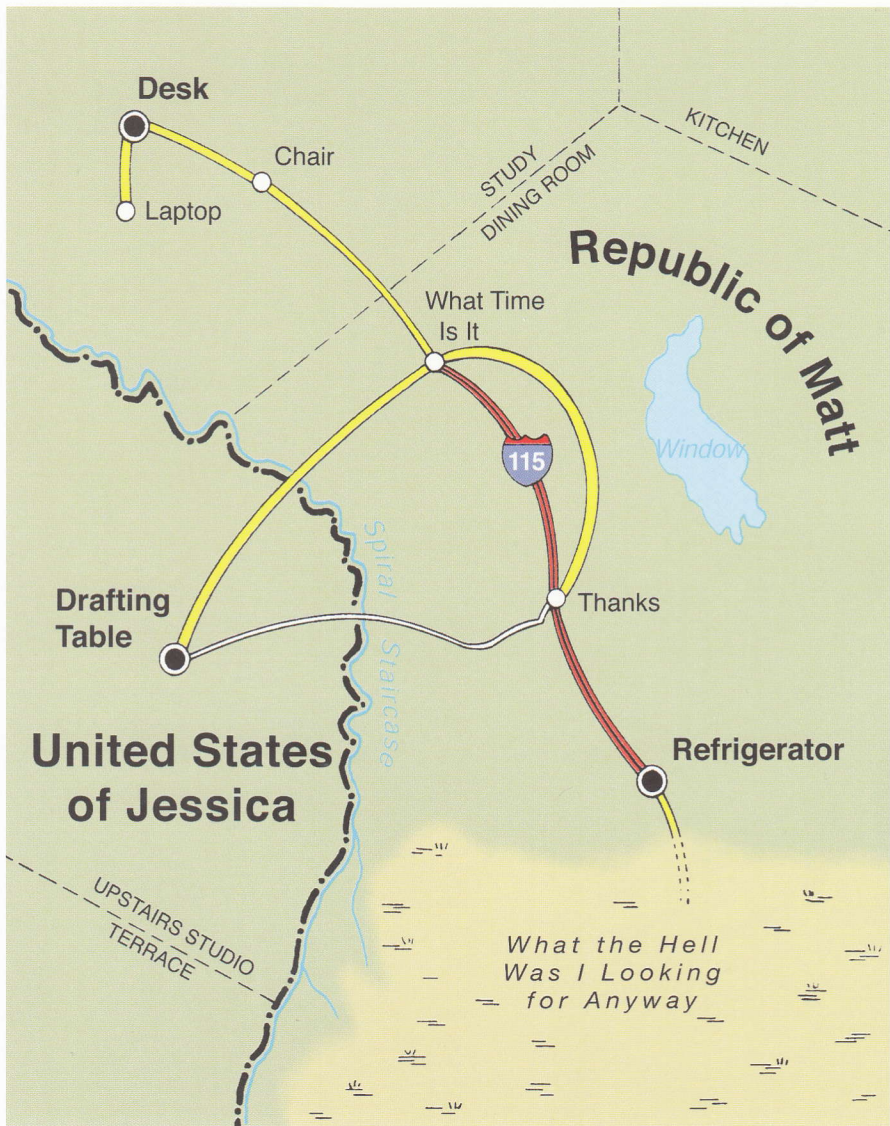


99 Ways to Tell a Story was inspired by Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (1947), in which he spun ninety-nine variations out of a basic, two part text relating two chance encounters with a mildly irritating character during the course of a day. He told the story in every conceivable tense, then in free verse, as a sonnet, as a telegram, in pig Latin, as a series of exclamations, in an indifferent voice...you name it, he did it.

In my book each comic presents the same story—recounts exactly the same events—but takes a different approach to telling the tale. You will find varying points of view, different styles of drawing, homages and parodies, as well as interpretations that may challenge your idea of what exactly a narrative is. For example, can maps tell a story? How about a full page of advertisements? I'm not suggesting that there's a definite answer, only that it's exciting to consider how many different ways a story can be told, how art and text interact, and how these comics relate to other visual and narrative media.

—Matt Madden

Image: Matt Madden, Color map from *99 Ways to Tell a Story*
Giclée print





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