

Graven Images: Jewish Graphic Novels & Comics

University of Florida
Department of Jewish Studies
Leela Corman, Instructor
lcorman@ufl.edu
718-687-7433

This class explores the many ways that Jewish artists have used the comics form to tell stories of Jewish history and folklore, suffering and triumphs, humor and fury. As “people of the book”, Jews are heavily represented in the history of the art form. Comics is a communication art, and because of its use of both words and imagery, it lends itself to virtually any subject, from fantasy to deep journalism and personal storytelling. We will explore all types of comics made by Jewish creators in the past century, and students will learn how to create their own comics. No previous drawing experience is required; this class is open to all levels. All I ask is that students be willing to come in and enjoy the experience of learning how to make comics. I will provide material and technical demonstrations to guide students through this process, so that students have all the tools they need to create.

Many assignments will be in the form of comics, rather than essays and term papers. Once again, it is not necessary to be an artist. One only needs to be able to draw stick figures and word bubbles to complete these assignments. It is my experience that people often possess art skills they did not know they had, and finding these through assignments such as these is a revelation. So please do not be intimidated. I will be there to help you create your comics.

There will also be weekly reading assignments, in class and at home. Be ready to read a lot of comics, and be prepared to discuss both the readings, and your and your fellow students' work. Assigned reading material will be posted on Canvas in PDF form, and occasionally as a URL. Please read all materials on a laptop or desktop, or in a printout, not your phone.

CLASS IN THE TIME OF COVID

A note about showing up for class: These are not normal times. We are experiencing a global pandemic that requires us to stay home whenever possible, socially distance, and otherwise remove ourselves from all of our usual public routines. This is weird. It would be irresponsible for me as your teacher to pretend that it is not. My goals in this class are for you all to have an intense emotional and intellectual experience, to fall in love with the subject matter, and to have a fantastic time making your own comics. I am not here to penalize you for anything, I'm here to cheerlead you making interesting work and enjoying really cool reading material. So, while of course I want you all there every week in our Zoom, if you're having a hard week I understand. There are alternatives to skipping class: you can turn off your video so you don't appear onscreen, you can attend from under a blanket, you can be in your pajamas, you can go totally in the opposite direction and dress up like you're going out somewhere amazing. You get the idea. Make yourselves very comfortable and treat my class as a place to explore and perhaps

escape for a bit, rather than another obligation you'll get in trouble for not fulfilling. Above all, please protect yourselves and everyone around you from COVID-19.

Week 1:

What Is It? And Who Are You?

- Definition of terms: All graphic novels are comics, but not all comics are graphic novels. What is a graphic novel, a graphic memoir, graphic journalism, and more. Discussion of specifically Jewish comics.
- Discussion of how we will use Jewish comics as a jumping-off point for our own work, not necessarily Jewish in theme.
- Overview of various ways of making comics, settling on autobio to begin
- In-class reading: Vanessa Davis comics about growing up Jewish in South Florida
- <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/belief/articles/funniest-nights>
- In-class assignment: Introduce yourself in a one-page comic, then share with the class
- Homework: assigned autobio reading, autobio comic in response

Week 2

- Discuss the hw and reading
- Begin looking at the past, pt 1: In-class reading of Jack Kirby's "Street Code"
<https://ryallsfiles.tumblr.com/post/164727169553/street-code-jack-kirbys-only-autobiographical>
Materials demonstration: how do you actually make a comic? I'll show you!
- Homework: Read Will Eisner's "To The Heart Of The Storm", create a one-page comic that tells a family story, as old as you can find.

Week 3

- Discuss the hw and reading
- The Past, pt. 2: Yiddish newspaper cartoons of prewar Poland & Russia
- Homework: Read selections of Eddy Portnoy's scholarly writings on this topic

Week 4

- Discuss the reading material
- The Past, pt. 3: In-class reading of selections from Liana Finck's "A Bintel Brief"
- In-class assignment: write a letter to someone important to you, trade with a classmate, and adapt into a one-page comic
- Homework: Read Joann Sfar's "The Rabbi's Cat"

Week 5

- Discuss the reading and watch the film adaptation of "The Rabbi's Cat"
- Homework: Read Crumb & Mairowitz's "Understanding Kafka"

Week 6

- Discuss the hw
- In-class assignment: choose a Jewish writer to research, begin to thumbnail a comic about them
- HW: create a finished comic about this writer

Week 7

- Discussion of hw
- Begin section on the Shoah. Pt.1: Discussion of The MAUS In The Room, in-class reading of Art Spiegelman's "Prisoner On The Hell Planet", discuss comics as trauma response and as political engagement.
- HW: Read Miriam Katin's graphic memoir "We Are On Our Own"

Week 8

- The Shoah pt. 2 Discuss the reading
- Slideshow of Jewish Weimar-era artists, the Neue Sachlichkeit artists, and art created in lagers.
- In-class assignment: Using the resources of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Project, find a WW2 story to adapt into a comic.
- HW: Complete thumbnails (final will be have more time), view <https://international.eyefilm.nl/life-or-theatre.html>

Week 9

- Discuss thumbnails and how to bring them to a finish, using color
- In-class reading: Selections from Emil Ferris' "My Favorite Thing Is Monsters"
- Hw: Finish comic. Read Rutu Modan's short comic "The Property".

Week 10

- Begin the Postwar period. Pt. 1: discussion of refugee and survivor artists. In-class reading of Bernie Krigstein's short comic "Master Race"
- Continue discussion of comics as political engagement. Begin thumbnailing a comic about an issue that troubles you and matters to you.

Week 11

- Postwar pt. 2: guest lecturer Tom Hart will deliver a presentation on EC Comics, MAD Magazine, and the Jewish tradition of dark satire in comics
- HW: read selections from MAD

Week 12

- Postwar pt. 3: Jewish Women Cartoonists of the underground: Aline Kominsky Crumb, Trina Robbins, Diane Noomin etc.
- In-class assignment: personal storytelling, thumbnail phase
- Hw: finish this personal story comic, read selections from Twisted Sisters

Week 13

- Postwar pt. 4: Discuss the hw and move on to more contemporary comics by Jewish women: Lauren Weinstein, Vaness Davis, Sarah Glidden, etc.
- Demonstration of how to make a minicomic, with finished examples.
- Hw: read Sarah Glidden's "How To Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less". Scan all comics made in class and deliver to group dropbox.

Week 14

- Discuss the hw reading
- Create a minicomic of your best work! I'll show you how. Note: I'd like to hold this class at Sequential Artists Workshop, on South Main, because we have a full minicomics making setup there.

Grading Criteria

Attendance & Class Participation: 50%

Completion of all drawing & reading assignments: 25%

Completion of final project: 25%

PLEASE NOTE: No one will be graded on their *proficiency* as artists. Grading of all drawing assignments will be based on completion and comprehension of the assignment.

The Numerical Grading Scale is as follows:

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 68-69

D: 63-67

D-: 60-62

F: <60

Grading Criteria is as follows:

- A-range –90s -- Excels – Full command and facility with material with the ability to place it within larger historical/literary context and to make arguments based upon it.
- B-range –80s –Good –Solid understanding of material but without complete facility or ability to make arguments based upon it.
- C-range –70s --Fair –Some understanding of major themes, lack of command with detail, or some understanding of detail but lack of contextual understanding.
- D-range –60s --Poor –Enough factual understanding to pass, but little to no contextual clarity.
- F-range –Fails –Lack of university level quality.

Class Policy On Phones and Tablets:

Unless required due to disability, all electronic devices must be turned to silent mode and stowed in your bag, away from your work area. It is extremely important that you be fully present and undistracted in class. The only other exception to this will be when we need to do research within internet archives or for in-class readings that are in PDF form. Unless you are unable, notes must be taken by hand, on paper, and drawing assignments completed by hand, as well.

Academic Honesty:

The University of Florida Student Honor Code is located at this link:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluations:

Students in this class are participating in the pilot evaluation of the new course evaluation system called GatorEvals. The new evaluation system is designed to be more informative to instructors so that teaching effectiveness is enhanced and to be more seamlessly linked to UF's

CANVAS learning management system. Students can complete their evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals.

Academic Resources:

4E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learningsupport@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>. Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. [http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/Writing Studio](http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/WritingStudio), 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>