DICK GIORDANO

THE ARTIST AS NARRATOR
or
TELL ME A STORY...*PLEASE!*

So you want to draw comics? And the first thing you have to learn is how to draw, right?

Well, no...not really!

Knowing how to draw well is helpful, to be sure, and I wouldn't for a second suggest that basic drawing skills aren't absolutely **essential**. But the first thing you have to learn is how to tell a story. All other opinions notwithstanding, the fundamental task of everyone connected with the creation of a page of comic art is to tell the story at hand. The writer, the penciler, the letterer, the inker, the colorist and the editor utilize their respective skills to attain a singular and common goal...the **telling** of a story. The degree of skill each brings to the task determines how successfully the goal is met. In this chapter, I would like to examine the role of the artist as narrator...the **teller** of the story.

First, let's make that distinction. The story-**teller** may or may not be the story-**writer**. That is quite irrelevant. The teller serves a completely different function from the writer even if they're the same person. All that is relevant is that the story-teller has full knowledge of all the details of the story to be told and possesses sufficient skills to make all the relevant information available to his reader in a clear, interesting and dramatic way. While this may appear to you to be a simple and obvious task, I can assure you that precisely the opposite is the case and the serious student of comic art must adjust to the real need to spend at least as much time developing story-telling skills as drawing skills. This statement becomes all the more true when you consider that every type of artist, save the designer who incorporates recognizable images into an overall design, tells a story with his art. The illustrator; the advertising artist; the sculptor must, of necessity, tell a simpler story because of different requirements and an inherent limitation of space. The illustrator (or sculptor or advertising artist) typically deals with only one image; or where he must produce multiple illustrations they are rarely sequential (where each illustration directly relates to the one preceding and the one following) and never deals with more than a fragment of the entire story

or message. The obvious exception here is the advertising artist who draws storyboards... but that **is** comic art in a sense and that is why the chapter on storyboards by Mel Greifinger is included in this volume. The cartoonist must integrate his pictures with the accompanying text to form the **entire** story. Only the complexity of the story that must be told, then, separates and defines the differences between the various art forms. I concede that some illustrators are incredible story-tellers given the limitations of the form. Those of you familiar with the works of Norman Rockwell will, I am sure, agree with me that what elevated the esteemed Mr. Rockwell over his peers was his almost overwhelming gift for telling wonderful, human and sometimes humorous stories of life in these United States with his drawings and paintings. Many of his peers drew or painted marvelously, maybe better than Norman Rockwell, but they chose to overwhelm their audience with technique instead of story-telling values. One hardly remembers their names. Good story-telling tends to separate the men from the boys and **great** story-telling creates legends of our times like Mr. Rockwell...or closer to home, Will Eisner. Will is a cartoonist considered by most pros to be a master at telling stories. Few are equally impressed by his drawing skills (though he really **can** draw!). But that seems not to matter. You still enjoy his work.

Many comic pros and not a few media observers have likened comics to film. And well they should. It's certainly a comparison I can't take issue with. If you're a film nut or have studied film, you're well on your way to recognizing the visual needs of a comic story and the various ways of organizing and choreographing information to present to your audience. There are differences, of course. Film integrates **sound** and images; comics, the printed word and images: each frame in a film is the same size as all others; comic frames (panels) tend to be a variety of sizes with vast differences between the largest and the smallest. After you get past these two major differences, the similarities between film and comics are more abundant than the differences, which are, generally, differences in detail. In the comic courses that I've taught at Joe Kubert's School of Cartoon Art, Parsons School of Design, and my own comic art workshop, I frequently peppered my lectures with terms more commonly used in film-making than comics and in my attempt to help you solve story-telling problems in this chapter, I may revert to form. If I use these terms it's because they work.

Now I have good news and bad news.

The bad news is that you won't earn as much money in comics as you can in film, if all things are **equal**, though I suspect that a good comic writer **may** earn more than a gaffer (whatever **that** is).

The good news is that a comic artist has far more control over his material than any one other person connected with the making of any film. A comic artist is his own:

A) Director
B) Cameraman
C) Costume Designer
D) Set Designer
E) Producer
F) Casting Director
G) Lighting Director
H) Researcher
I) Prop Master

And probably his own "best boy" to boot! Along with this almost total control there is a corresponding degree of total responsibility. You must do **each** of those jobs well enough to serve the needs of the story and to communicate with and entertain (and maybe inform) your audience. You should revel in the totality of that control. You should never ignore the responsibilities that control vests in you.

Okay, on to the nitty-gritty.

All art is problem solving and this is no less true of the art of story-telling. We tend to try to solve only those problems that we are capable of solving at a particular point in time. As you improve, you will find that your ability to first recognize and then solve problems of

greater and greater complexity increase proportionally in some manner related to how hard you work and how great is your desire to excel. Remember as an artist you **must** get better constantly or you'll soon get worse. You can't rest on a plateau for long.

Can I **teach** you to be a really good story-teller? Probably not. Much of good story-telling is intuitive, instinctive, personalized and as individual as your signature. I can, however, set down some guidelines for you that may help you recognize the problems and may suggest ways to solve them by using your own logic and artistic skills.

Rules:
The first rule of comic story-telling is: **show** the reader; don't **tell** him. That's a really good rule. It has to be...it's the **only** rule you'll get
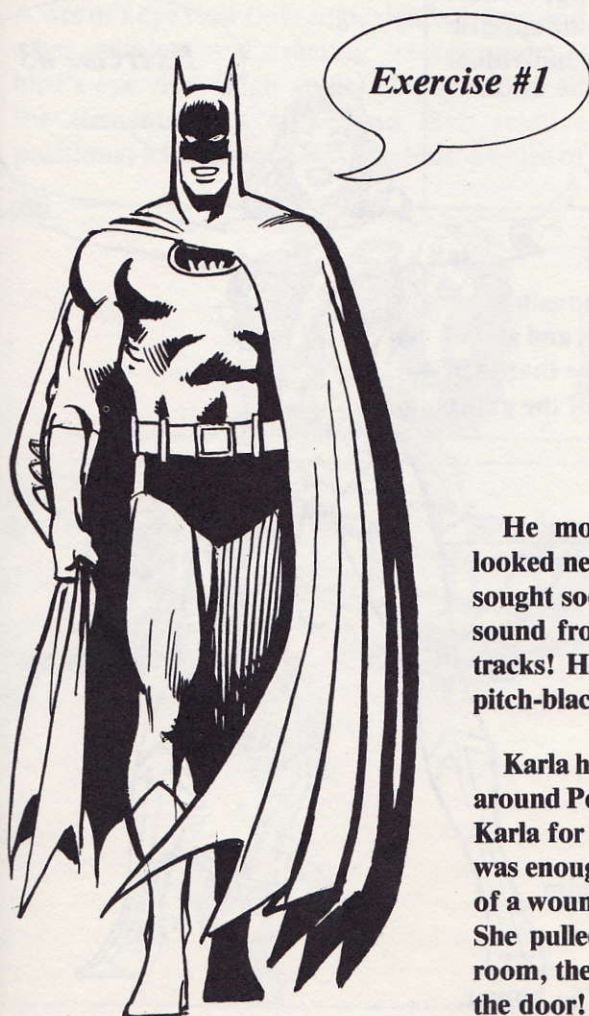
from me. Most rules lead to formula; most formulas lead to mediocrity. Decidedly **not** what we're looking for.

Now you're armed with a rule, your instinctive feelings about the needs of the graphic narrative (fancy phrase for story-telling), and, at least, a basic knowledge of drawing. All you need is a story to tell! I can supply that...sort of. These aren't exactly stories. They're more like story fragments or sequences. I've used the following three exercises in **all** of my sequential illustration/graphic narrative/story-telling courses. I will describe what you should do with each and I request that you finish them **before** going on with the rest of this chapter. I think you'll learn more that way, so try not to cheat! (Though nothing will happen to you if you do...)

Exercise #1

Draw the following two story fragments. Using as much room (as many panels) as you need and no more. Be as literal as you can be in telling these "stories." It is not necessary to restrict the number of panels you use nor is it necessary to finish a page. Where the story line ends, the page ends. **You may not use any balloon lettering.** The drawing area of each page should be 10″ × 15″. Any kind of paper. The critical criteria is: someone should be able to look at your drawings and be able to tell you exactly what is happening...and what that someone tells you should be very much like these two paragraphs.

He moved silently through the dark, deserted street. He looked neither right nor left. He knew he would find the one he sought soon enough. Halfway down the street, a barely audible sound from behind and to the left of him stopped him in his tracks! He whirled...and there, lunging at him from out of a pitch-black alley, was...

Karla heard Jane's footsteps in the hall just as she put her arms around Peter and kissed him. Surprised and confused, Peter held Karla for barely a second before pushing her away. That second was enough time. Jane stood in the doorway...The glazed look of a wounded animal on her face...the tears welling in her eyes. She pulled the ring from her finger, threw it angrily into the room, then turned and fled. Peter cried out to her and rushed to the door! But Jane was gone.
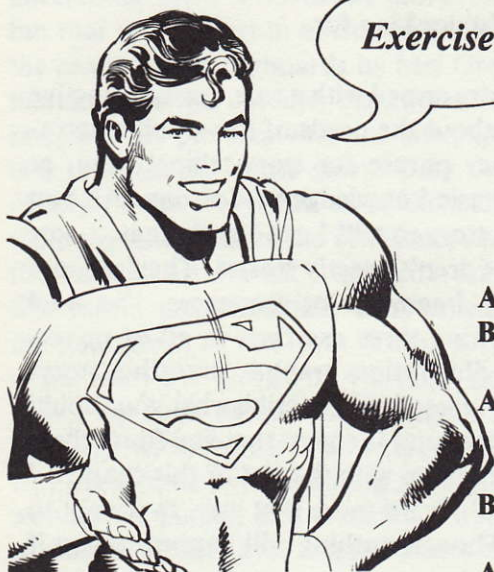
Exercise #2

Have you ever read several lines of a dialogue exchange between characters in a novel where the author chooses not to tell you what the characters are doing while they're saying these lines? Here's your chance to be creative. using the following lines of dialogue for inspiration, create as original a sequence as you can incorporating the dialogue. Remember, ''Talking Heads'' don't work well in comics. Critical criteria: Making ''dull'' at least interesting.

A. You want to see me?

B. Yes, George, please come in. There's something I'd like to discuss with you...

A. Yeah...? Well, make it quick...I got an appointment at Four...Way on the other side of town...an' I don't wanna be late.

B. Really, George, I find your lack of patience and self-control *most* trying. But no matter...I'll be brief.

A. Good!

B. George, you're aware of the...ah...operational problems we've encountered of late. Most perplexing...*Most* perplexing! The nature of those problems and the specific areas in which they occurred indicated that the individual responsible was an ''insider''

A. Uh-huh.

B. Someone familiar with the entire operation...

A. Uh-huh.

B. A trusted aide...a friend!

A. Look...get to the point. I...

B. I didn't want to believe that a friend was responsible for our problems...I really didn't! But a fortuitous and somewhat bizarre incident occurred and proved to me that such was the case! And provided me with the *name* of the guilty party! Now I *know* who did it!

A. Oh...?...Who...?

B. You, George...*You!*

Exercise #3

Draw any one of the following two ''fragments'' with a stationary ''camera angle'' and the other with the camera angle changing at your discretion. (You're the cameraman, remember?) You decide which fragment to do which way. Critical criteria: Use of ''camera angle'' as a story-telling device. I'll go over some of the common pitfalls and solutions for them at the end of this chapter.

He ran in terror from the thing that chased him Then, finally exhausted, he fell and lay still.

She was at ease in her environment until the unexpected sound behind her caused her to whirl in horror.
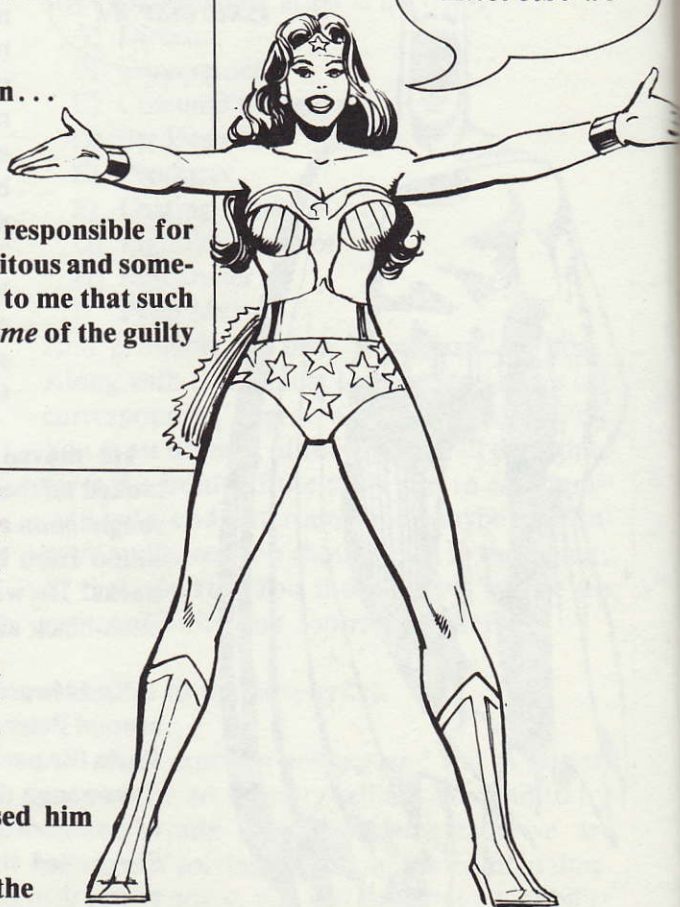
—Guide Lines—

I've not arranged these sub-chapter headings, or the ideas and suggestions contained in each, in any particular order. They're strictly random and I suggest you read each sub-chapter completely. The most important bit of information for you might be buried towards the end of the fifth sub-chapter.

The "camera" is your friend

The point of view ("camera" angle) that you choose to show the events that occur in each panel is most important. You must position the "camera" in such a way as to insure the reader seeing and understanding everything he must know as the story unfolds. The "camera" can remain stationary while the action moves around it or the "camera" can be mobile and actually participate in the story-telling process. A worm's eye view (low angle) lends drama and often eliminates distracting backgrounds; a bird's eye view (high angle) clearly shows all the elements in a scene and their relative positions; a long shot helps establish a sense of place; closeups are great for minute detail, reaction shots and facial expressions. Whichever you choose, take the time you must to make the right decision on how to shoot each scene. The reader only knows what you show him.

One good method is to run each scene in your "mind's eye", stop the action at each appropriate point and move your "camera" all around the scene looking for the best angle. Never impede story flow with excessive or confusing "camera" movement.

The importance of being credible
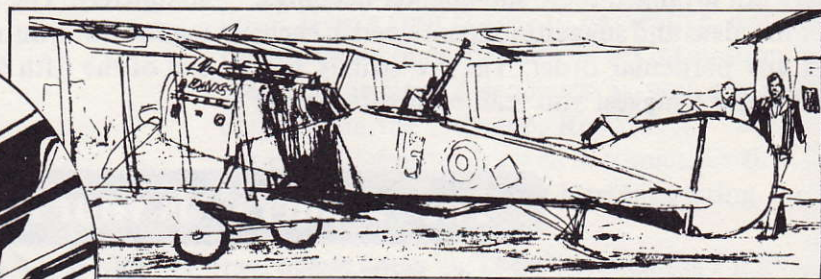
Snoopy and his dog house are not realistically drawn but readers believe they are real. They have credibility. And so must your drawings if your story-telling techniques are to work. Your reader must not question the credibility of your figures, backgrounds, hardware or actions. Questions or confusion interrupt story flow and your primary mandate is not to let that interruption occur. If your art style is realistic, everything must be real. Research it!

Get reference! There is nothing so distracting as seeing a realistically drawn figure in an unrealistic background or using improbable props. It is similarly disconcerting to have an ultra-realistic element in a drawing that is basically stylized. Neal Adams is a realistic artist. John Romita is a stylized artist. Both are credible artists though they approach drawing from diametrically opposed viewpoints.
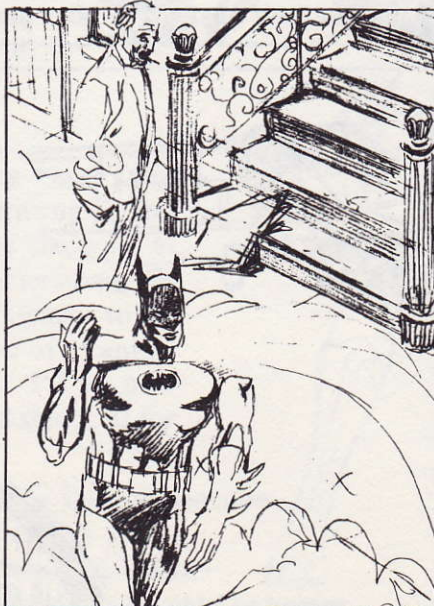
Movement: thru time and space (and elsewhere)

As your characters move thru their story, you should be aware of the need to define the time and space they move through. You can show how far down the street Captain Sooper-Dooper leaped if you a) Establish the length of the street in a long shot; b) Establish where on that street the leap started; and c) Where on that street the good aptain came down. Into the bargain you may also impart to your reader a sense of the time the leap took. Viola! Movement thru time and space. Obviously, it will not always be this easy to accomplish, but by recognizing the need to **try**, and working with that basic notion, you'll be surprised at how often you can add that extra dimension to your work by making your story more interesting and more complete. And really, your reader **should** know whether that nifty five page fight sequence took from dawn to dusk or five minutes and whether the battle raged across the skies of the entire U.S. or just over 42nd Street. Think about it. A lot.
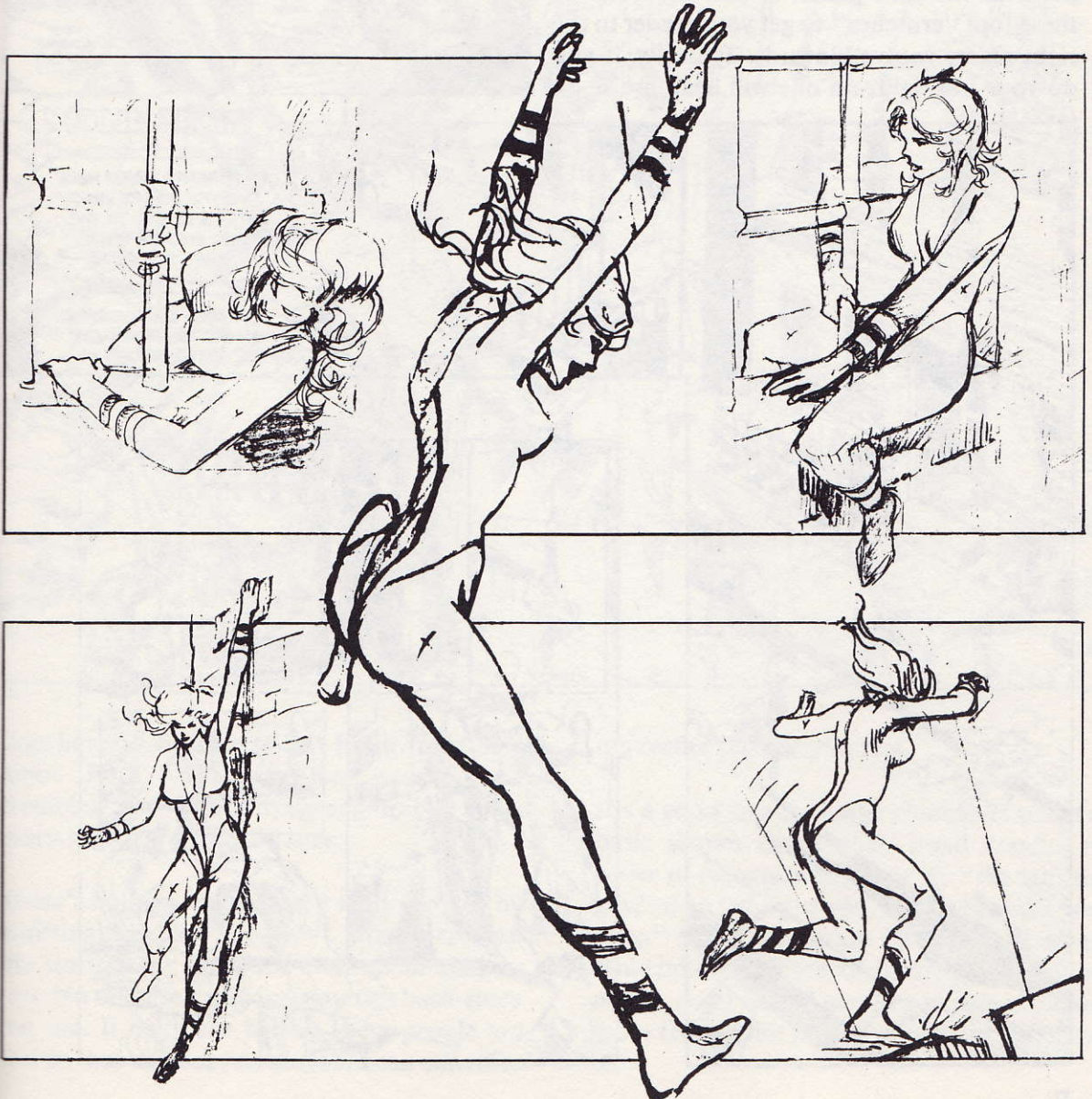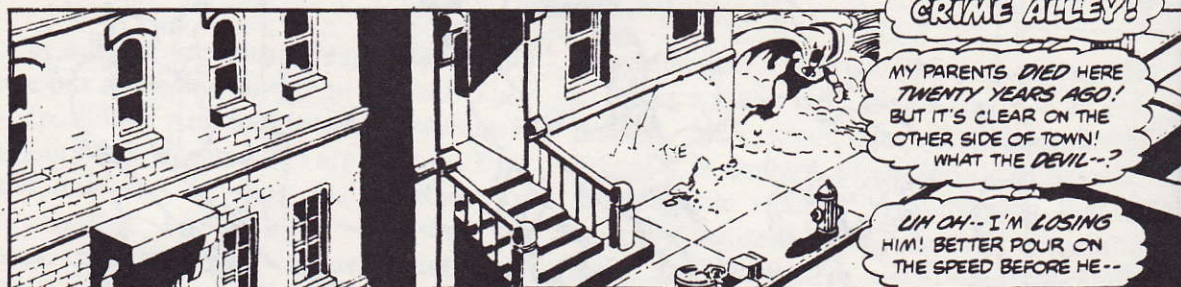
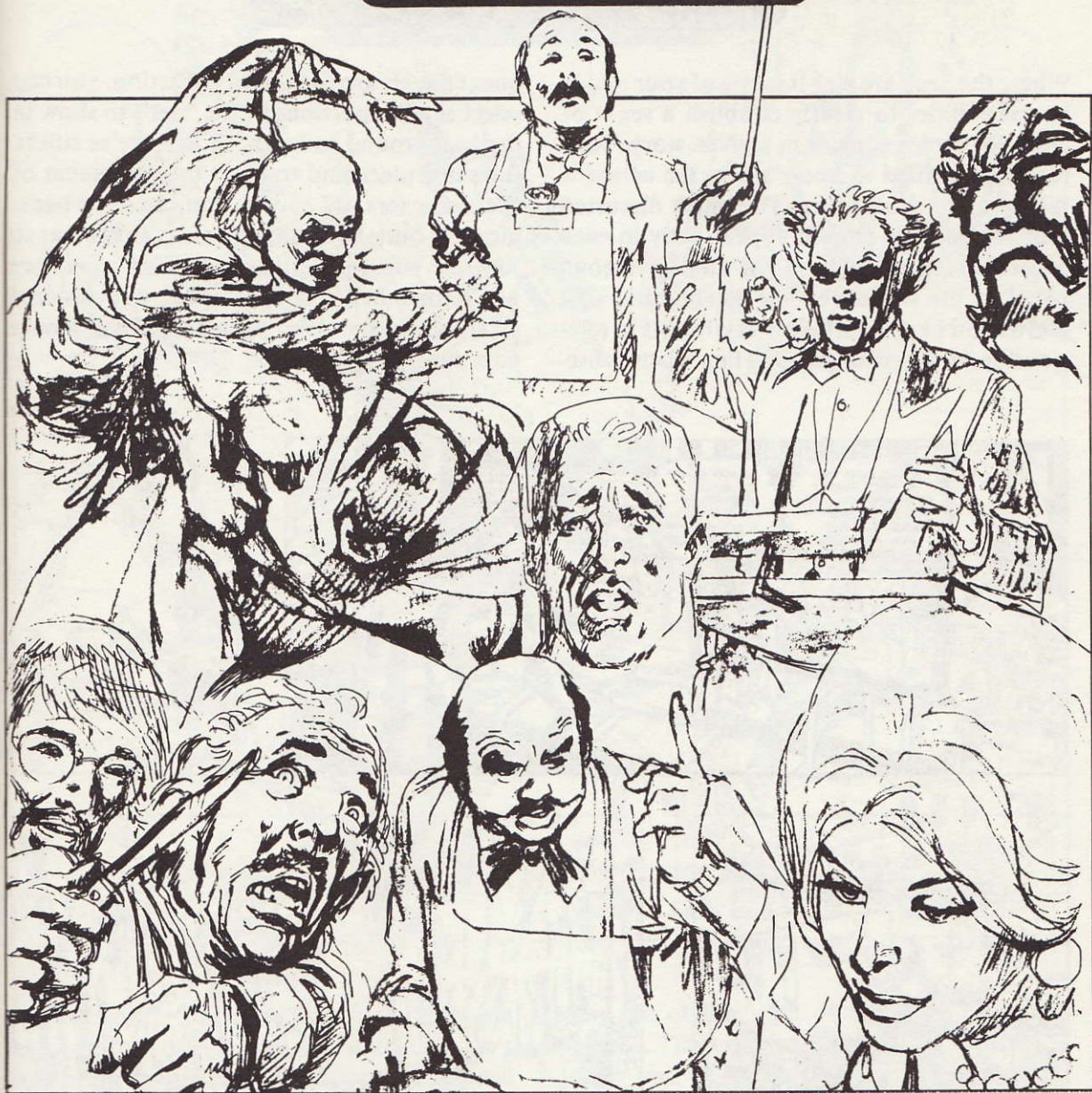## Directing traffic... and the eye.

Fact: Every comic book page needs a traffic cop. "It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it"—and that someone is you! You must lead the reader's eye around the page so that he gets all the information he needs...in the proper order. To do this you can manipulate balloon placement, action directional flow, panel layout, art composition and even, as a last resort, simply have your characters point the way. But never, **never** resort to those silly "arrows" that point to the next panel. If you need one of these fool "crutches" to get your reader to the right place, you've blown it. Typically, if you do your job right, no one will heap praise on you. It's your job to do it right. Foul up and everyone will be on your case. Positive results are ambiguous. Not everyone will know **why** your story reads well—but **you** will!

ONE DOWN-- ONE TO GO...!

CRIPES! HOW'D I GET INTO THIS?!

GOTTA GET OUTTA HERE--!!

RUNNING INTO THAT FOG BANK--? HE'S SO PANICKED HE DOESN'T REALIZE THE ALLEY DEAD-ENDS UP AHEAD!

HE'S RUNNING STRAIGHT INTO--

CRIME ALLEY!

MY PARENTS DIED HERE TWENTY YEARS AGO! BUT IT'S CLEAR ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN! WHAT THE DEVIL--?

UH OH-- I'M LOSING HIM! BETTER POUR ON THE SPEED BEFORE HE--

Designing characters

You have to be able to tell Keith from Seymour. Both must be a) Real people (i.e., credible) and b) Easily recognizable from every angle, at every distance.

There's nothing duller than a story peopled by indistinguishable "nobodys". I like to create a life story in my mind for even minor characters. No one else needs to know this back-story but me. It helps me believe these people are real so that maybe, just maybe, I can convince my reader that they're real.

It's a good idea to design characters based on basic shapes rather than small details. It's easier to recognize Seymour as "the tall, thin guy," than "the guy with blue eyes and a hook nose." Small details are difficult to draw the same time after time, distinctive "shapes" are not. A good test is: would you recognize Seymour from Keith if both were drawn in silhouette?

Wanted: A sense of place

Where the heck are we? It is one of your major responsibilities to clearly establish a sense of place for each sequence in a given story. Your reader is entitled to know **where** the action is taking place at all times. The much discussed establishing shot should appear early in each sequence...preferably in the first or second panel of the sequence. The establishing shot allows you to show where everything is in relationship to everything else. Then when subse- quent panels are tighter on the action, you can select smaller portions of the "set" to show in the background to establish that we're still in the same place and to chart the movement of the characters. Of course, you can leave back- grounds out of occasional panels altogether so long as you regularly re-establish where we are. Remember, you must repeat the process of establishing a sense of place for each sequence or scene.

In search of a good, dumb artist
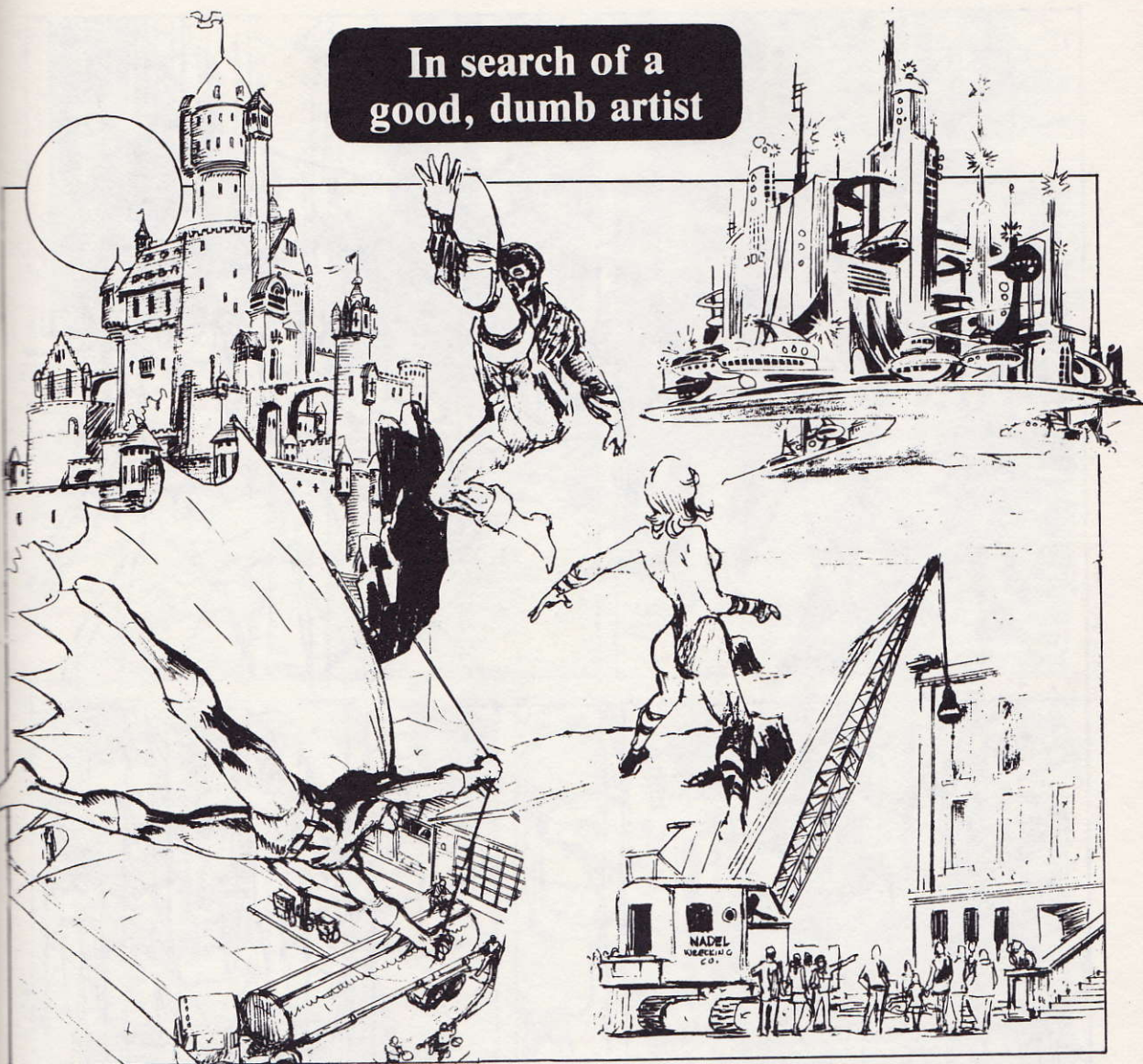
I often remark that there's no such thing as a **good** dumb artist. **I know** that statement can't be true but I also know that a good knowledge of the world around you...science; world affairs; history; politics; business; literature; and particularly the arts is essential to your skills as an artist. Knowing how things work, recognizing human responses, acquiring a sense of history of drama, of timing will add immeasurably to your enjoyment of your world and to the abilities you can draw on at a drawing board.

Read—a lot! Newspapers, magazines, books, everything. Observe closely. Be aware of not only the obvious but of what lies below the surface. The knowledge thus accumulated will make you a better cartoonist and a better person. As I mentioned earlier, all art is problem solving and if your quest for knowledge helps you to solve one drawing or story-telling problem a day...that's 365 problems solved a year...3650 in 10 years and—well, I don't have to go on, you get the idea.
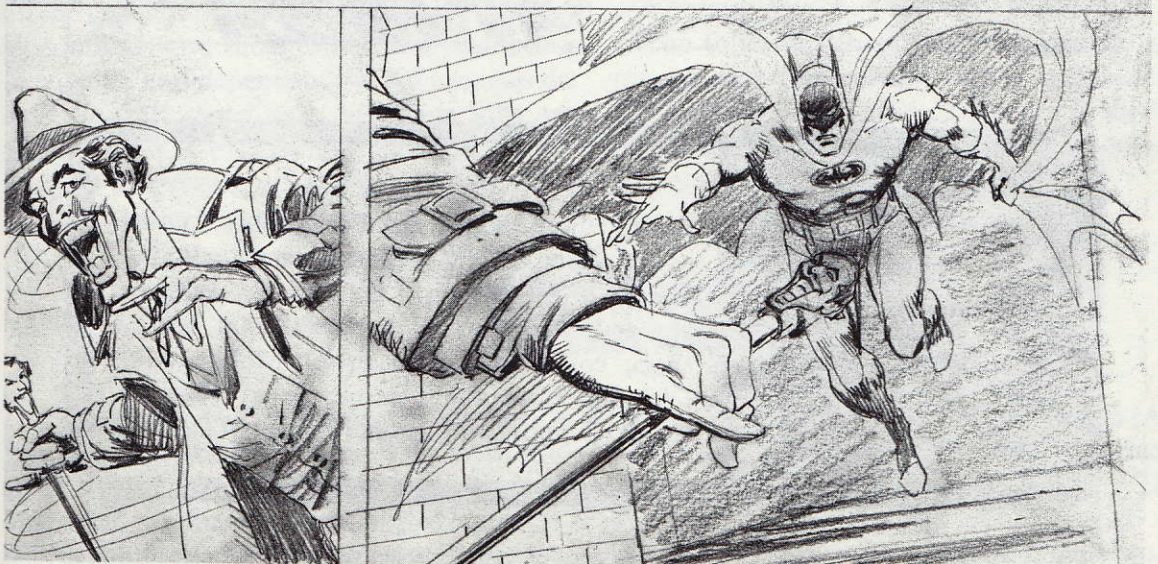
And if you, or someone you know, is a **good**, dumb artist...**don't** be smug! You'd be better if you worked on your smarts!

Good luck!—and thank you and good afternoon.
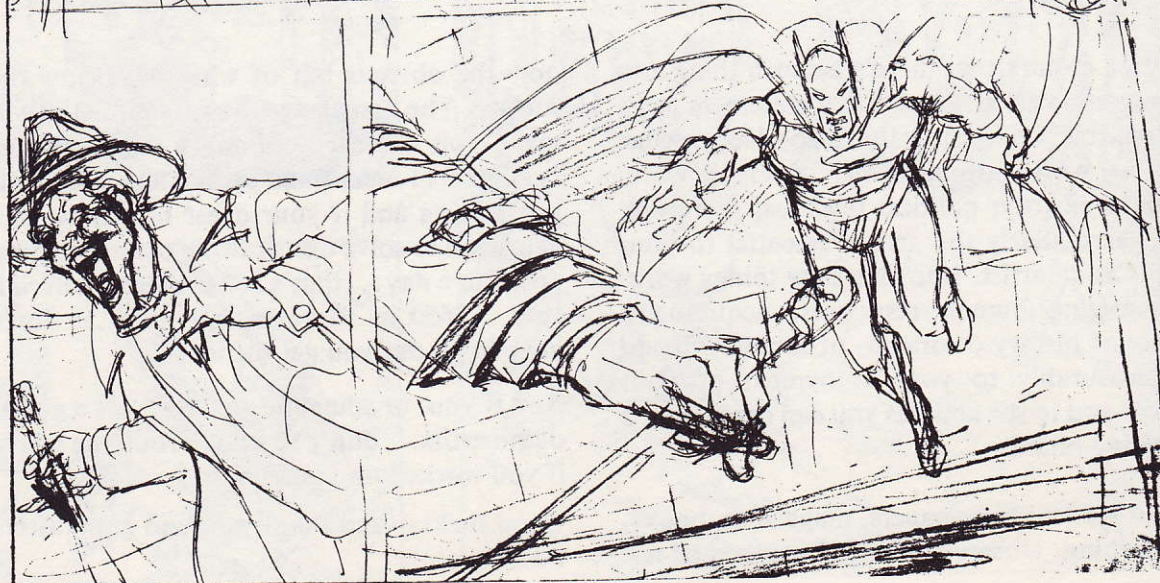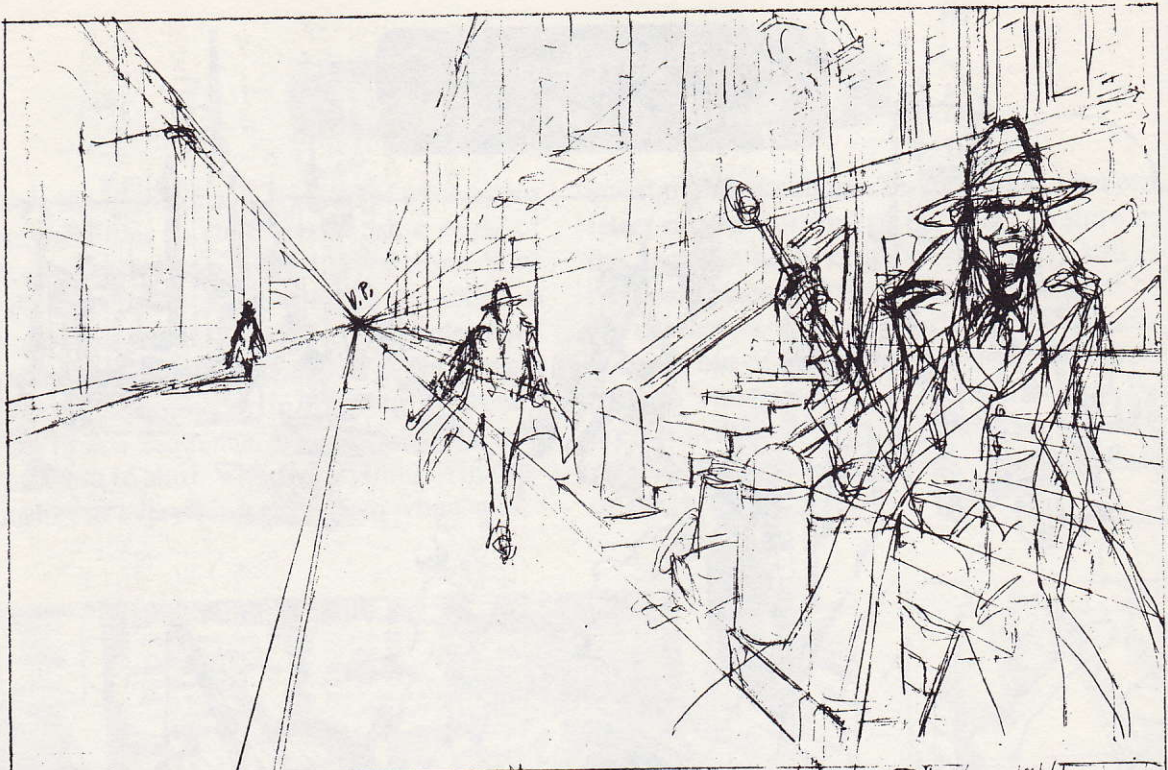
Dick Giordano
Artist, editor and teacher. Perhaps best known as the inker of Neal Adams' award-winning Green Arrow/Green Lantern and Batman series. In addition to the Comic Art Workshop, co-founded with Frank McLaughlin, Dick has also taught comic art at The Joe Kubert School and Parson's School of Design.

MEL GREIFINGER

DRAWING COMICS FOR T.V.
Or: How To Draw T.V. Storyboards

Introduction

The business of drawing for a living does not resemble the romantic image portrayed in the movies or TV. Like most ventures, making a successful career of drawing TV storyboards requires organization, discipline and a degree of artistic talent. An orderly intelligent approach goes a long way in a business of deadlines and pressure. To survive in a business that often depends on word of mouth recommendations, you must establish a reputation for quality and dependability. Ad agencies do have on-staff sketchmen, but these jobs are limited, so it is wise to approach storyboard work as a freelance artist. If you can build a

solid satisfied client list, you can be working most of the time, and make considerably more than a staff artist.

Anyone seriously considering art as a career, would be wise to learn the storyboard techniques, as an arm of their career. It could produce a steady income, while they develop an art form that would take more time to be income producing, and self-sustaining.

The following chapter is all about the approach and development of TV storyboards for the professional market. The key to surviving is to get good. It is the *only* guarantee a freelance artist will ever have.

Context

The title given to people who render storyboards is "Sketchmen". That is the artist who takes the very rough layout from an art director and produces a good finished comp layout for the ad agency client to see and approve.

Then, and only then, are the components (Art and type) brought together. The same process is used for producing TV commercials. The sketchman either gets a rough panel of sketches, or is given a script, and must work

from scratch to produce a storyboard for client approval.

Just because the public calls the designer, portrait artist, retoucher and sketchman, "artists," it does not mean the skill to do each is interchangeable. Doing storyboard art is a particular art form, and its specific needs must be mastered before anyone can function as a professional. The real advantage, is in the relatively short time it takes to develop the skills necessary to make a living at it.

The freelance artist is usually paid on a per frame basis. The larger agencies have a set price for storyboards, depending on the size they are rendered. As the frame art gets larger,

so does the price. Smaller organizations may not pay the same rates and may not even have a set price and your fee might have to be negotiated.

The degree of tightness or detail are also a factor in the rendering. It is sometime required to make either loose or tight renderings. An artist who can work tight, can usually loosen up. The same might not be true for someone used to only working loose. It is advisable to develop a tight technique if you want to be a viable freelancer. An artist's ability to survive will often depend on how well he develops as a businessman since he will be dealing in the open marketplace.

art directors sketch

Equipment

The proper tools for drawing TV storyboards will make it easier for you to get the job done quickly and competently. Since time is always a factor, the right equipment is essential to getting the job done right and on time. The following is a complete list of tools and equipment needed to stock a studio for a storyboard artist. *

1. Drawing pencils — Numbers 6H, HB, 2B, 5B
2. Kneaded erasers
3. Tracing pads — Various sizes
4. Felt Tip Markers Pads — Various sizes
5. Various Sets of Markers in Color and Greys (From wide to razor-fine points)
6. Rapidograph-type pens — Various point sizes

7. Opaque Gouache paint set and palette
8. Red sable brushes — Pointed tips
   Numbers 00, 0, 1
9. Light Box
10. Opaque Projector — Table or floor model
11. Drawing table with metal straightedge and light
12. T-Square
13. Triangle and ruler
14. TV frame pads — Various sizes

15. Workable fixative
16. Reference file

NOTE: Many of these tools are required for comic book artists (see "The Illustrated Comic Art Workshop; Volume 1) and if you've already set up a studio to draw comics, you'll require only a modest additional investment to equip yourself to draw TV storyboards.

Types of Markers

When rendering storyboards, various problems require different size markers. Each one requires a different approach and method of handling.

- Wide-tip (soft-tip) A felt tip about ¼ inch wide. Produces smooth and broad strokes.

- Pointed-nib (Semi-soft) A felt tip with the ability to produce a variety of widths.
- Fine-point A sharp, hard tip of felt or nylon. Works like a pen when new. The point is susceptible to wear.
- Fine-line A ball-point or hard nylon tip, used for drawing details.

Wide Tip   Pointed Nib   Fine Point   Ultra Fine   Hard Nylon Point   Chisel Point

Using The Markers

The marker is a modern tool, perfectly adaptable for the demands made on it for rendering fast, colorful pictures. Markers are used because of their ease in handling and simplicity. The versatility of this instrument gives it the ability to combine with other media to produce easy, fast renderings and bright pictures. They can describe and visualize ideas in the simplest of terms, without sacrificing clarity and the essence of the image.

The wide tipped marker can produce a stroke of color from ¼ inch to ½ inch in width. It is ideal for filling in larger areas.

Broad strokes can be used to define an area quickly and simply, as well as showing the direction of shapes.

The markers that produce thinner and finer lines are used to define shapes and develop textures. A marker line is controlled by the size and condition of the nib. A line defines an edge that separates a mass from a space. It delineates detail and gives an object dimension by the use of texture in form. There are two basic types of textures used in fine line drawings. Lines for crosshatching and dots use spacing to make form.

Wide Tipped
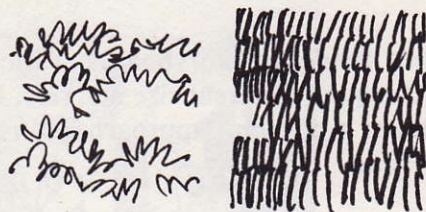
Texture

Tone
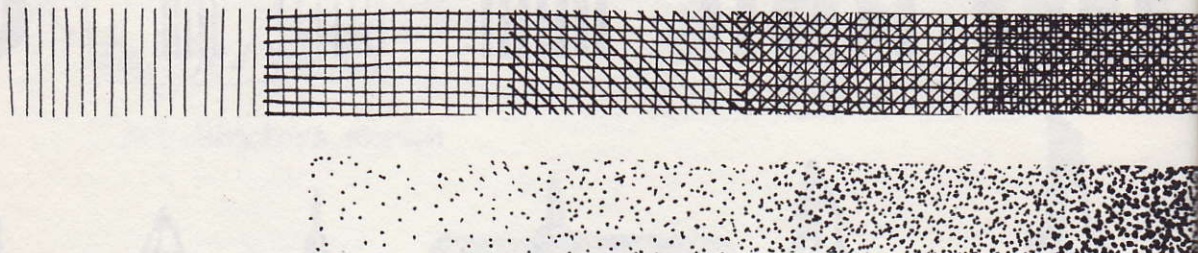
Drawing the Frame

A rough drawing is worked out on tracing paper and refined until all problems are resolved. Turning the finished tracing over, is a good way to check for mistakes.

If working from a script and not an art directors roughs, a first rough tissue might be

needed to block in first ideas, just for a sense of position and continuity. When you are satisfied that the sketch is true and consistant to the commercial message, you can then develop a finished clean drawing.

The finished tracing is put down on the

lightbox and taped to the glass. The finished rendering is either done on a sheet of prepared pads with TV frames already printed or on a sheet of layout marker paper and cut out separately.

Art supply store sell TV panel sheets of various sizes. The art is mounted in sequence behind each frame, then mounted on a stiff board, ready for presentation to the client.

Below each picture frame is a blank area where the dialogue for the frame is typed in. Any information that the producer must know for that frame is also included.
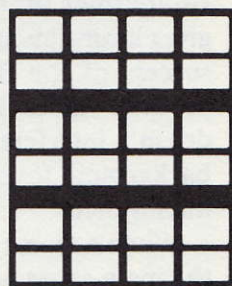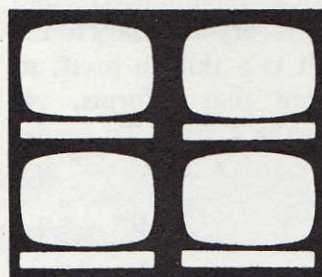
Drawing the Figure

If I had to give any beginners one piece of advice on having an art career, I would tell them to learn to draw the figure. It's probably the most difficult thing to learn in art, therefore the area of most opportunity, to become a professional artist. The three things art directors look for to determine the skill of an artist, is the drawing of the head, hands and feet.

I have observed some students leave off the feet or hands, while drawing from the model. I suppose they feel it will be worked out at some future time, after they have solved the mystery

of the rest of the anatomy. Head, hands and feet must be accurate and the only way to learn, is to concentrate on doing them again and again.

You must be able to draw pretty ladies and handsome men, if you want to do commercial artwork. Many books have been written about this subject and a serious student would be wise to focus attention on learning to draw the figure. I cannot stress enough how important it is.
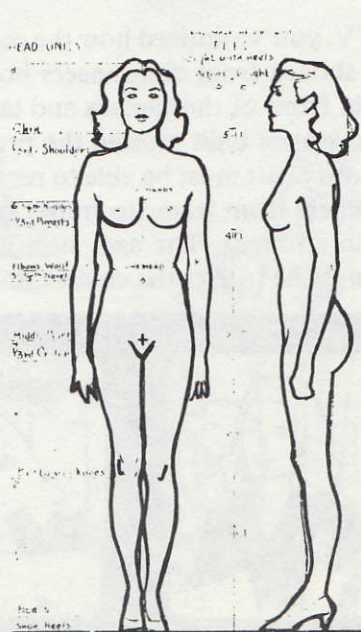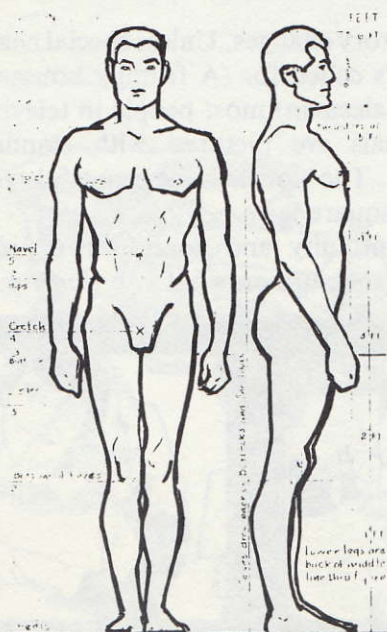
Backgrounds

Establishing the situation in a commercial that gives it time and place, is very necessary to the success of the film. It is a skill in itself, to produce a background that informs, yet doesn't interfere with the action. To render background for storyboards requires skill and intelligence.

When a frame calls for a busy scene behind the main character (As a street or department store) it is essential not to overwhelm the figures. The less put in to describe the background, the better. If two lines will describe something, you don't put in six. Color is added in the simplest terms, avoiding many shades and value changes. When there is a flat background behind the main figure, it is wise to avoid bright overpowering chrome.

Using a finer point on your rapidograph pen is one way to draw in background. It gives the scenery a feeling of receding, while still describing the situation. Simplicity is the key here.

Continuity

If you watch TV, you've noticed how the commercials have shifted from announcers holding a product in front of the camera and talking about it, to stories built around the product. A storyboard artist must be able to render the same characters from frame to frame, and be consistent in all areas. The age, size, hair style, clothes must be true as the camera angle and story changes. Unless special characterization is called for (A frumpy housewife or an oily salesman) most people in television commercials are pictured with standard good looks. The women have beautiful eyes and the men square jaws.

Continuity and good drawing depend in good measure on what you *don't* put in. The

art rendered for storyboards must have a crisp, clean look. Heavy overworked drawings get in the way of selling the idea. You should put in only what is required to describe the scene and is consistant with the previous frame. If the artist is working from a script, he cannot jump from angle to angle when the script calls for a smooth transition. Bouncing around by varying camera angles is acceptable in comic books, but not for TV. The artist must have a working understanding of what the cameraman sees and the problems in producing a TV commercial, both financial and technical.

Reference Files or Morgue

The professional artist has only his work to sell and time is money. Time spent looking for reference materials is coming out of the artist profits, so everything is done to minimize wasted time looking for information. Therefore keeping an ongoing reference file is a very necessary part of being a self-employed artist. The easier it is to find the pictures you need, the less time spent away from the drawing board. The more cross-indexed and refined a reference file is, the quicker the job gets done.

What is suggested is a bank of four drawer filing cabinets, with an ample supply of folders with name tabs. Let is be known to whoever you know that you are saving pictures of everything, and could use their help. Have them save magazines, calendars, newspapers or anything that has pictures. Then start clipping pictures of everything from A to Z. Make a pile of them and every once in a while find time to file them.

Every file folder should have a subject title, and as your career is ongoing, new subjects will be added, as new areas are developed. What this means is if you have a file on "Flowers" and an assignment brings you many more pictures of roses, a separate file is started for "Roses".

Guessing at what things look like is not professional, and you receive no points for "making it up". Keeping an active reference file is smart and keeping it updated is a good working habit.

63
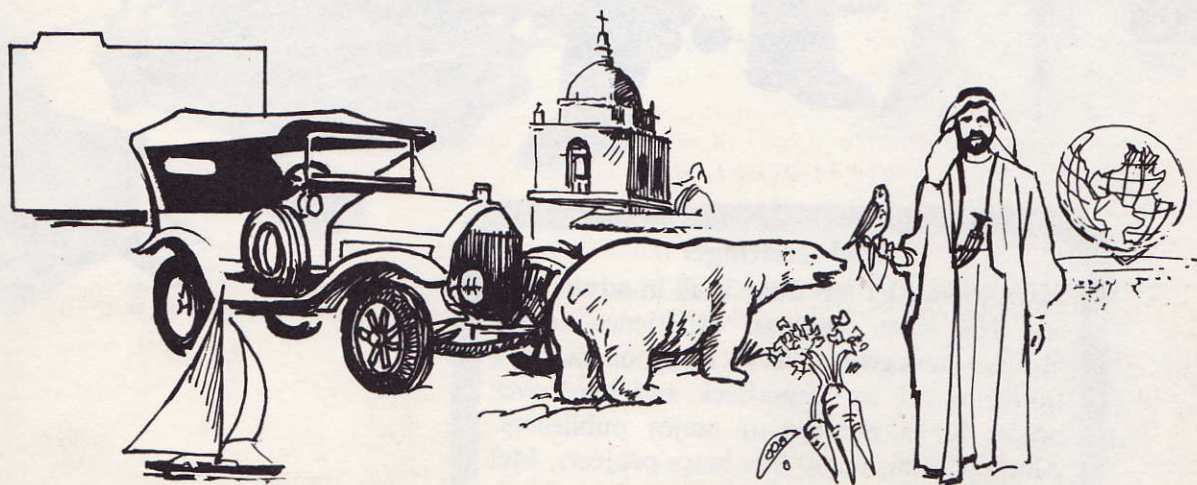
Mel Greifinger

Since 1956, Mel has done it all in advertising art. His wide range of experience covers product renderings, T.V. storyboards, and full-color art for paperback and hardcover books for a number of major publishers. Along with his many free-lance projects, Mel has found time to teach at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

SKY MARE

PUBLICATIONS