

Sunday, October 21, 2007

Underdog visits underground comix fest.

First Amendment and the rest of the Bill of Rights. (From the public domain.) On September 30, I blogged about the October 13 whirlwind weekend of local appearances and performances by Bill Griffith, Andrew White and Ben Lo. Happily, I got to the Small Press Expo, where the shadow of Zippy creator Bill Griffith loomed large. Unfortunately, I missed attending another annual t'ai chi learning session with superstar teacher and practitioner Ben Lo, and missed hearing Andrew White perform jazz live. My main motivation for visiting the Small Press Expo -- which focuses on underground and alternative comics -- was to catch a glimpse of Bill Griffith. I got much more than I bargained for, having been second in line to meet with him immediately upon arriving in the exhibition hall. Bill Griffith is a class act. He very much likes and appreciates his fans. While keeping one eye on Bill and the other on my son -- who started walking back towards the sign-in area -- I thanked him for his sharing his amazing creativity with the world. I often forego seeking autographs, but was interested in having both the karma and artistry of Bill's. I e-mailed him the next day seeking his permission to upload his autograph, which he gave. I have e-mailed Bill before, also receiving specific replies that clearly were from him. Imagine such an accomplished creator who stays in such frequent contact with his fans; in fact, his webpage says an effort is made to answer within twenty-four hours. I also got a chance to hear most of Bill's slide show presentation later the same afternoon, which included Bill's initial efforts to become a "serious artist" and later efforts to make some easy money by offering his cartooning talents to Screw magazine. Bill talked about the origins of Zippy from one or more actual circus sideshow characters from many generations ago, at least one of which had "pinhead" in his name. Bill's mother was a science fiction writer, and his dad a stiff career military person; he thinks his personality displays some of both. Returning to the exhibition upstairs, I had to take the escalator and pass by a very formal wedding party, with the professional photographer snapping away while trying to crop out the very informally-dressed (to say the least) comics expo attendees passing by. It is rather strange if the convention hotel did not think to tell the wedding party that they might want to consider the crowd next door. At nearly every exhibition table was the actual creator of the material being promoted. Without exception, the many creators I met were very accessible to me and the other attendees, and seemed very happy to have a chance to interact with the alternative comic-reading public. High quality comics and accessories abounded. In addition to my meeting with Bill Griffith, I particularly enjoyed speaking with Ted Rall, whose work previously was carried in the Washington, D.C. City Paper. The Small Press Expo took place at the Marriott hotel about ten miles up the street from Georgetown in Washington, D.C. The West Coast probably has a parallel and larger annual shindig in San Francisco; meanwhile, I am very happy to have such an annual event just a few miles from where I live. I understand that proceeds from the event partially benefit the very worthy Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, which apparently has been at the forefront of defending the First Amendment rights of alternative comics. It is sad that such censorship exists in the first place. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in First Amendment at 00:10