

violence-embedded conception of masculinity dominates American perceptions of sports and athletes. As echoed in the case of Kevin Durant, Serazio suggests that indifference to pain and self-sacrifice constitute the main pillars of American masculinity in sports. As a consequence of this masculinization of sports, Serazio further argues that female athletes also face the distortion of their image, because their presence threatens the “masculine” image of American sports. In the meantime, with a few exceptions, female media professionals are excluded from the field and not welcomed by their colleagues.

Following this discussion of commercialization and gender issues, Serazio discusses the depoliticization of sports and its backlash in chapter 5. Although sports leagues and media highlight the nonpolitical essence of sports, Serazio contends that athletes of different backgrounds—particularly African American and female—attempt to use their profession as a platform for protest. This argument is largely substantiated by an examination of the achievements and protests of the US women’s national team in the FIFA Women’s World Cup in the summer of 2019.

In his final chapter, Serazio reviews the additional impact of a variety of political and cultural bodies—including the government, the media, and even fans—in the formation of American sports culture. In doing so, Serazio also provides a definition of what he calls “the power of sports.” “It tells us,” Serazio writes, “who we are, at the individual, local, and national level, furnishing the character we crave and the status we fetishize” (292).

Based on interviews with athletes, sports journalists, and other “insiders” in the ever-expanding world of professional sports, Serazio’s volume successfully provides an internal perspective of the interference of multiple “powers” in American sports.

Shu Wan
The University of Iowa

Comic Art in Museums. Edited by Kim A. Munson. UP of Mississippi, 2020. 386 pp. \$99.00 cloth. \$30.00 paper.

In the 2000 film *Unbreakable*, Elijah Price describes to a customer the value of an original drawing, carefully matted and displayed on

his gallery wall. The strong jaw and realistic depiction of Slayer and Jaguaro in this fictional world are, to him, “a classic depiction of good versus evil.” But when it is revealed that the gift is for a four-year old boy, Price erupts. “This is an art gallery, my friend. And this,” he says, staring menacingly into the would-be buyer’s eyes while pointing at the drawing, “is art.” In M. Night Shyamalan’s film, the question about the cultural worth of comics is not up for debate.

When Thomas Craven wrote *Cartoon Cavalcade* in the midst of WWII, the debate about comic books was just about to begin. In his influential text, he argued primarily for the comedic value of comic strips, collecting work he claimed displayed a distinctly American sense of humor. Forty years later, Lawrence W. Levine argued in *Highbrow Lowbrow* that, even though comics and other forms of mass entertainment were popular and accessible, they certainly possessed value and artistic merit. Perhaps now, a generation later, the debate about the merits of sequential art has subsided. Now it is time to see how we got here. Kim A. Munson’s new collection, *Comic Art in Museums*, makes the case that the gallery and museum space were important sites that shaped our understanding of sequential art as just that—an art. As M. Thomas Inge notes in the book’s introduction, this is a vital first step. Munson then delivers a collection essays with a narrow scope; included in the collection are curators, scholars, and artists, who have done the work of the last seventy-five years to promote and validate comic art. Building on her contribution to the recent collection *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, Munson shows how museums remain hallowed ground and curators the gatekeepers. If the funnies, intended to be flipped through by adolescent hands, were suddenly and very carefully matted and placed on the walls of the world’s historic institutions, then they could be seen as legitimate. Their exhibition and the public commentary are the focus here, and Munson’s volume gathers many of the prominent voices who helped hang the art on the walls, run museums of their own, and organize the shows—as well as their critics.

The anthology is divided into sections that chart the evolution of comic art in gallery spaces and museums, beginning with a helpful overview and examination of the aesthetic concerns for hanging work on the walls, as well as overviews of the defining eras, roughly the

postwar years (of both WWII and Vietnam) when comics were reassessed as art. Reflecting the high/low topic at hand, Munson pulls selections from magazine and newspaper articles as well as blog posts more so than academic journals. This means many of the pieces are quite short, lacking some of the depth that an academic anthology might provide. Thankfully, Munson fills in some of the gaps with her introductory notes on each section and a few interviews with prominent figures like Carol Tyler.

The high profile Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, cocurated by Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik in 1990, and the 2005 show, *Masters of American Comics*, cocurated by John Carlin and Brian Walker at the Hammer Museum, figure prominently as well. Arguably the Armory shows for comic art, separated by a generation, provide enough fodder for debate even decades later. *Masters* exhibited fifteen male artists, and prompted Trina Robbins's rundown of those excluded in her article, "Here Are The Great Women Comic Artists of the United States," updated for this volume to reflect the continued (though improved) divide.

Analyzing comics as museum objects, critics ask what defines the work of art—the original drawing, or the final printed comic? Is the fragmentation of a *Blondie* strip preferable in order to highlight the graphic quality? Or is the full display of R. Crumb's *Book of Genesis* preferable when possible? Debates about matting and captions, how many panels to show, whether or not to include a lengthier section of narrative or rely on splash pages—even the color of the walls are discussed in a particularly wonderful aside by Art Spiegelman (no pistachio). Their status as art is also discussed in economic terms—the price at auction, whether at Christies or on eBay. If a Will Eisner drawing can fetch seven figures from collectors, then the art world takes notice. Cultural legitimacy is reinforced by economic viability. These are the details that focus the collection and will prove of interest to students and future curators alike.

Perhaps more important are the responses to the lack of representation on the walls. Towering figures like Eisner, Spiegelman, and others get frequent attention, but isolated articles included on underrepresented groups, black and female artists and international exhibits round out the collection. If there is a critique, it is that much more can be said about these artists—Nell Brinkley, Rose

O'Neill, the entire group of artists included in the *Black Ink* show—for their work reminds us that the canon must be redefined.

The story will continue beyond the scope of these pages. The Library of Congress recently wrapped *Comic Art: 120 Years of Panels and Pages*. Munson herself cocurated *Women in Comics: Looking Forward and Back* at the Society of Illustrators this year, with a substantial portion of the show coming from Trina Robbins's personal collection. These exhibitions continue the work done in this volume, expanding the canon and celebrating these pieces as what they are: art. In this collection, Munson takes us inside the courtroom of the museum where, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, the nature of art is on trial. Valuable for both fans and academics alike, this collection provides the groundwork for debate in future graduate and undergraduate courses on sequential art, museum studies, and art history.

Robert Ribera

Portland State University