

Courtesy of Gina Kalabishis and Catherine
Asquith Gallery
www.ginakalabishis.com
Title: Comic Man (Bernard Caleo)

comics and the graphic novel

an interview with cartoonist bernard caleo

One cold, windy day [an exception in these parts], we took a trip down to Phillip Island to meet cartoonist Bernard Caleo. Bernard, although living in Melbourne with his family during the week, enjoys their house in Ventnor in Phillip Island most weekends. Ventnor is a beautiful part of the world, with jaw dropping views out to sea and back across the Gippsland and Melbourne coastline. During the week, Bernard is a mild mannered employee of the Melbourne Museum where he works with his wife in the public programs department. After hours however, Bernard dons a cloak and takes to the underworld of the comic industry.

His love of comics came at an early age. He discovered Tintin at his local library. In the 1990s he attended the London Cartoon Centre to learn the formal art of cartoon design. Unlike some, the drawing ability did not all come naturally, and a lot of time was invested in developing those skills - which is a continual process.

Bernard self publishes his own limited edition comic series called *Mongrel* which is a twelve issue, monthly comic that is mailed out to subscribers and available in niche retail outlets. Bernard explains:

"...It tells the story of three groups of people (one of which is 'The Uncanny Expats' - Germaine Greer, Barry Humphries, Clive James and David Malouf), all of whom are converging on Wollongong, where this

question will get answered: "Is Australia real? Or is it a story, a fiction, a tall tale, a yarn?..."

Funding for the comic was attracted through the popular "crowd funding" site pozible.com - which, if you have never heard of before, is well worth a look.

In addition to the comic series, he is also working on 'Graphic Novels! Melbourne!' Which is a feature documentary being made in conjunction with filmmaker Daniel Hayward. The film's goal is to examine the 'graphic novel' (long comic book) culture that has taken off in Melbourne over the last few years. The film investigates the lives and work of four Melbourne based graphic novel authors.

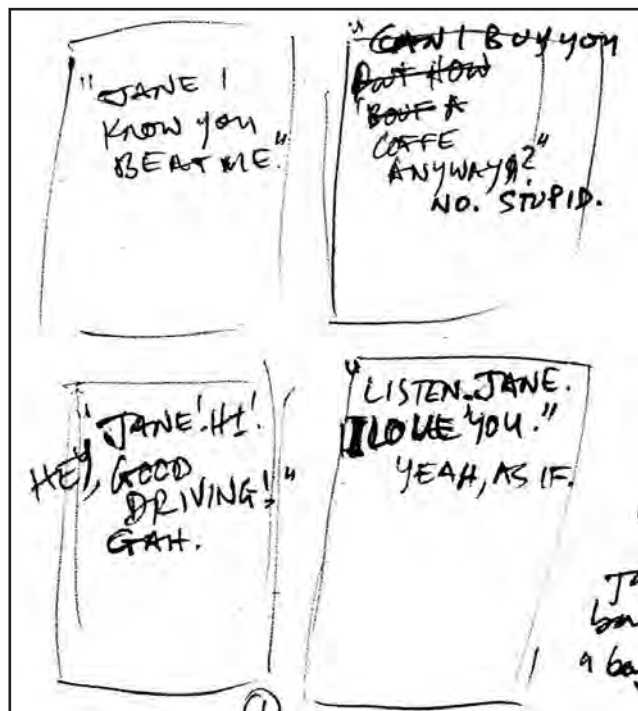
So where next for Bernard? Well, he has an interest in exploring Kamishibai - which is "paper theatre" story telling from the 1930's in Japan. It is a box, set up on

the back of a bicycle which used to travel through the streets of Tokyo, and every point that it pulled up, a gathering of children would form around the miniature stage, to watch the theatrical presentation. The time was also well used to sell sweets to the children. Images of "ice cream van" are conjured in my mind...

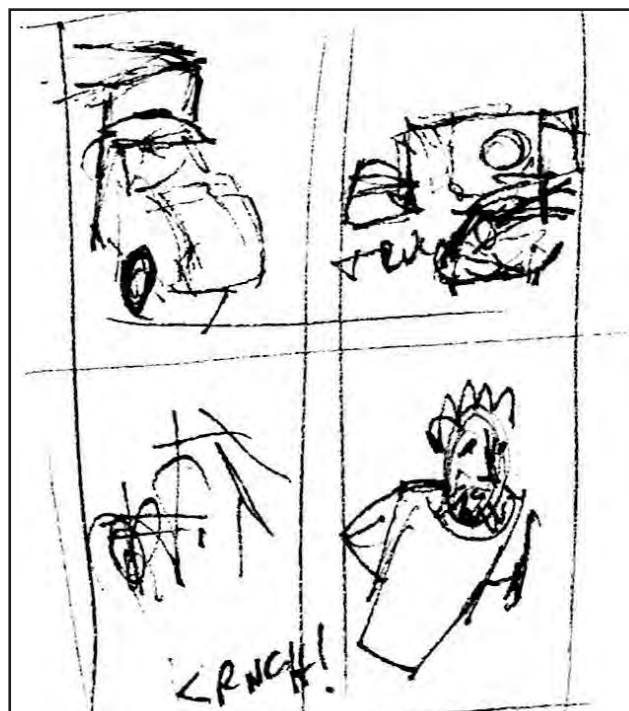
Interested to learn more about Bernard and his work? Head on over to cardigancomics.com - which is his main website. He's an interesting chap.

"This issue is set in Renmark in South Australia, which I've never visited, but Google 'streetview' is a great reference tool"

BERNARD EXPLAINS HIS COMIC WRITING PROCESS



Stage 1: Each issue of MONGREL is only eight pages long, so when I was roughing out the issue, I decided that I needed Tom to have some dialogue, if only with himself. I needed to set up his unrequited love for the main character in this issue, Salvation Jane.



Stage 2: Once the words felt right, on the next draft I could focus on the way the truck would enter the first panel and in the second panel, how Tom would park his truck alongside Jane's. If it doesn't look like that very clearly, its because these are just shorthand notes to remind myself what I want to draw when I get around to the actual page.



Stage 3: The actual page, about half way through - these 'pencils' have been worked over twice now, the lettering has been inked, and the next step is inking the pictures, always the most enjoyable part of the process for me. This issue is set in Renmark in South Australia, which I've never visited, but google's 'streetview' is a great reference tool.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY ABOUT COMICS

The business of comics and graphic novels is an interesting one. Australia's comic industry started in the 1900s with the comic 'Vumps' and in 1910 with the introduction of the first of the colour comic books. The 1930s were dominated by comics imported from the UK before the Second World War and the Depression slowed growth of the industry. Around the time [and as a result] of World War II, the Australian government placed a ban on imported American comic books and the local Australian comic book industry began to flourish. This continued after the war and became the golden age with creations including *Yarmak*, *Captain Atom*, *Crimson Comet*, *The Panther*, and *The Phantom Ranger*. The period later becoming known as the 'Decade in the Sun'. In 1959, import restrictions were relaxed again and the flood of American

comics took over again. A resurgence was seen again in the 1970s and from then on has populated two primary and loyal categories: being popular with children and the ever growing adult following, driven particularly by the USA businesses like DC Comics and Marvel. In recent years, there has been a resurgence in cult publications in the form of one off and limited edition zines and also hand produced comic novels such as *Mongrel*. In Melbourne, there are five or six popular specialist comic book shops, providing a platform for people to sell; buying and trade their collections. And the great thing about this is that anyone can have a go. Grab a pencil, a pad and start your own. Or for the tech savvy, I am sure there is an App for that! Who knows where it might take you.



TO BE CONTINUED.....