

The notorious native, elevated to fine-art status, at last has a show here.

Crumb gets his due in Phila.

By Edith Newhall
FOR THE INQUIRER

Even 10 years ago, long after it had been turning up in galleries in major American cities and in Europe, comic art as "art" was still a hard sell. If it was art, purists reasoned, then all commercial art should be reconsidered for loftier status.

Nothing that drastic has happened yet. But comic artists — the darker the better — are increasingly visible in gallery and museum exhibitions. Case in point: the current Robert Crumb show at the University of the Arts' Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery.

It's about time the notorious native Philadelphian had a show here, and smart of Rosenwald-Wolf director Sid Sachs, who organized "Robert Crumb: My True Inner Self," to correct that oversight.

Crumb, who lives in France, has had regular one-person shows of his ink drawings as "art" at New York's Paul Morris Gallery for the last seven years; recently, he has exhibited at Rotterdam's Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Cologne's Ludwig Museum, and London's Whitechapel Gallery, among other places. Just last month, he and his wife, Aline, an illustrator, were profiled in the *New York Times*.

If you know Crumb from the comic books he contributed to, such as *Zap* and *ID*, several issues of which are on view in a glass vitrine, or from the documentary film *R. Crumb*, a poster for which is also on display, you have an idea of what to expect, although Crumb the fine artist is far less obscene than his



A page from Robert Crumb's early-1970s sketchbook. The show includes X-rated comic art and more recent, tamer drawings.

comic-artist self.

Crumb's drawings of the last 20 years — many of them executed on grease-stained res-

taurant placemats — are tame compared to some of his drawings and comics from the '60s, which are also on view here. They depict men and women, mostly at restaurants, and occasionally himself, with everyone's worst features exaggerated.

On the other hand, his drawings from the '60s, including a cover for a 1967 issue of Philadelphia's underground newspaper *Yarrowstalks* and an original ink drawing for *Head Comix*, whose lead characters are often sweet in appearance, can shock. (I'd recommend vetting this exhibition before taking children.) A large notebook from the early 1970s, which is not available for viewing except for a few pages that were scanned (I was able to look through the entire volume before the exhibition opened) contains some of the most X-rated drawn imagery and notations I've ever seen or read.

Having not known much of Crumb's comic work before, I was surprised to find myself preferring the early outrageous R. Crumb to the more civilized Robert whose work I'd previously encountered in galleries.

I'm still chuckling over the adventures of Mr. Natural and Flakey Foont and Mr. Snoid. But this exhibition leaves no doubt that Crumb's a fine artist.

University of the Arts, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, 333 S. Broad St., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays (Wednesdays to 8 p.m.), noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Through Feb. 27. 215-717-6480 or www.uarts.edu.

A savory reduction

The Woodmere Art Museum's 67th Annual Juried Exhibition is much smaller and more of a piece than its predecessors, a positive change that is clearly the result of the discerning eye of this year's juror, Polly Apfelbaum, a critically praised contemporary artist who teaches at New York's School of Visual Arts and had a retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art four years ago.

In fact, I'll assume the Abington-raised artist was given carte blanche to overhaul the annual as she saw fit. It's a streamlined one now, and not a moment too soon.

There is a wall installation (by Alexis Granwell); lots of photography, as there should be; a broad range of surface textures and materials in painting and sculpture; and an abundance of dry humor. One amusing byproduct of this shrunken show of 55 artists — down from a hundred or more — is that the number of



Jedediah Morfit calls this sculpture, with an internal audio system, "Listen, Listen." It's at the Woodmere Art Museum.

awards handed out now seems vast (there are a whopping 22 prizes).

Some of the exhibition's standouts include Richard Ryan's lyrical inkjet prints of what appear to be strips of color contact prints tossed in the air; Jedediah Morfit's enormous plaster-and-fiberglass sculpture of a man's head and a tiny figure of a Sumo wrestler; Michael Grothusen's two steel sculptures cut in the shapes of states and other real places as they appear on maps; Walter Plotnick's inkjet photograms; Walsh Hansen's witty facsimile of a sign; Kip Deed's painting of a disembodied hand pointing to rays of varying blues; Asuka Goto's color photograph of a woman standing on her kitchen's improbably warped floor; and Sean Sauer's haunting charcoal drawing of Eastern State Penitentiary's former convalescing ward.

Woodmere Art Museum, 9201 Germantown Ave., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays. Through March 4. 215-247-0476 or www.woodmereartmuseum.org.