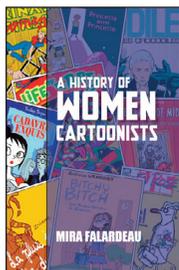


Review



A History of Women Cartoonists. By Mira Falardeau. Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 2020. 298 pp. ISBN: 9781771613514

In *A History of Women Cartoonists*, originally published in 2014 as *Femmes et Humour*, Mira Falardeau counters the question, “why are there so few women cartoonists?” (p. 22), by paying tribute to the legacies of fifty women cartoonists and animators from the United States, Canada, Francophone Europe (France, Belgium, and Switzerland), and the Middle East and Maghreb. In so doing, this work demonstrates the breadth of contributions and achievements women cartoonists made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, revealing how and why visual humour and second-wave feminism are key to their creative expression and work. Although the book does not specifically include webcomics, Japanese manga, and women mangaka, Falardeau’s historical survey does acknowledge the artistic and creative influences manga has had on younger women cartoonists in the West.

Organized according to their respective countries of origin, each set of profiled cartoonists is prefaced with a historical overview that contextualizes the cultural, social, and political context within which these women were situated and engaged with through their work. The fifty women profiled were chosen because, “they are the most iconic by the extent of their work, the recognition associated with it, the originality of style and the strength of their work” (p. 23). In making this determination, Falardeau draws extensively from databases and award organization records, cartoonist associations and societies, and artists collectives such as the American National Cartoonists Society (NCS), the Canadian Association of Editorial Cartoonists (CELA), and the Oscars. American cartoonists profiled include: Trina Robbins, Liza Donnelly, and Lynda Barry. Canadian cartoonists and animators profiled include both Anglophone and Francophone women: Caroline Leaf, Lynn Johnston, Kate Beaton, and Julie Doucet. Some of the women cartoonists and animators profiled from Francophone Europe are Nicole Van Goethem, Chantal Montellier, and Pénélope Bagieu. And lastly, some of the women cartoonists profiled in the chapter on the Middle East and Maghreb include Marjane Satrapi, Riham El-Hour, and Zeina Abirached. Each profile highlights the critical success of the cartoonist, the themes of their works, their artistic style, and their

contribution to cartooning or animation. Each profile is organized in an editorial fashion that includes an illustration by the cartoonist, a highlight of their visual humour, and concludes with an excerpt from a press interview about their perspective on women's position in cartooning.

By using historical and cultural analysis, Falardeau's examination illustrates the origins and developments of cartooning in each country with respect to second-wave feminism. Her analysis of Canadian cartooning, for instance, highlights the influences of American and European cartooning traditions, as reflected in Anglophone and Francophone comics and bande dessinée respectively, and the impact of second-wave feminism on cartoonists and their professional development. More importantly, Falardeau's examination draws attention and visibility to the often overlooked, or erased, experiences and work of women in cartooning and the creative industries. She provides three short case studies on the National Film Board of Canada, *The New Yorker*, and *Cartooning for Peace* as examples of affirmative action programs that have resulted in very positive outcomes in the fight against sexism. By emphasizing women's visibility, autonomy, and voices in relation to the second-wave feminist movement, Falardeau illustrates how women cartoonists have worked tirelessly to challenge sexism and advocate for equality and freedom of expression.

In addition to addressing the visibility of women cartoonists, Falardeau's analysis also focuses on the importance of visual humour used by women to represent their voice in cartoons and comics. She defines women's use of humour as a demonstration of revolt against male domination, thus connecting it with feminist political protest movements such as speaking out against the lack of women cartoonists nominated for awards and the hypersexualization of women characters in comic publications. In so doing, Falardeau demonstrates how, through the use of humour, women cartoonists communicate contradictions, isolation in their workplaces, and tokenization in their industries.

However, Falardeau's analysis of younger women cartoonists' feminist politics and cartoons is overly general. She claims younger cartoonists' works are not situated in a feminist framework, and are instead post-feminist and reproduce men's vision. This overly general contention essentializes feminism to the experiences and politics of white cisgender women, thereby negating the intersectional feminist politics reflected by younger women cartoonists such as Aminder Dhaliwal, Malaka Gharib, Gemma Correll, and Bianca Xunise. The works of these younger cartoonists explore the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class and have achieved success online, in print, and, in Xunise's case, have reached national syndication. As coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality focuses on overlapping forms of marginalization that are mutually reinforcing. In other words, examining inequality in cartooning only through gender reinforces other forms of dominant power. Put simply, by employing an analytical framework rooted in

second-wave feminism, Falardeau's analysis of visual humour and feminism centres whiteness and cisgender identity at the expense of not considering the intersecting marginalization that persists.

Overall, *A History of Women Cartoonists* provides a much-needed survey and recognition of women cartoonists and animators. The historical survey across North America, Europe, and the Middle East and Maghreb demonstrates how women cartoonists have always had an active role in the cartooning and animation industries. More importantly, Falardeau's analysis generates insight into how women cartoonists and animators have navigated their positionality as artistic professionals and feminists in spaces dominated by men. Falardeau maintains how critical it is for women to have space to express their views and to defend their ideas through humour. In doing so, Falardeau marks the social, cultural, and political progress women cartoonists and animators have collectively made through their work and advocacy for equality and freedom of expression. *A History of Women Cartoonists* is an accessible text appropriate for non-specialists and undergraduate students interested in the social and cultural context of cartooning and the field of comic studies. It is a celebration of women and encourages them to create their own narratives.

Reference

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

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