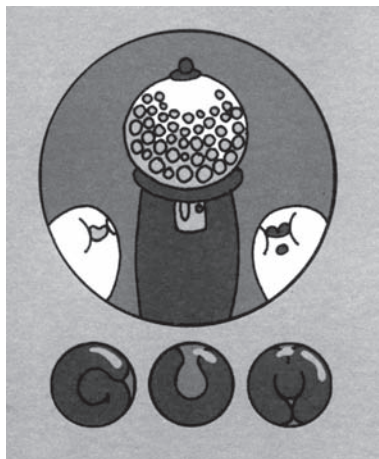


Comic & Zine Reviews

Mark Pawson

Two interesting zine-related events held in London recently provided me with the opportunity to pick up an armful of publications that I hadn't come across previously. Firstly, in April I went to **London Zine Symposium**, which for its second year was held in a big squat building on the north side of Russell Square. The twenty or so stalls were a lively mix of good ol' subversive anarchist literature and omnipresent punkness, together with comix/cs, graf/street art and personal zines, with anyone who turned up on the day able to find space to put their zine on display and several people walking around giving out free copies of their zines. There was a steady flow of interested visitors passing through the doors all day, some familiar faces I hadn't seen for a few years, and a couple of people who I'd corresponded with but never met who came up and introduced themselves. The stalls were accompanied by a programme of workshops, films, a cafe and bands playing on into the night – all good stuff.



So what did I take home from all of this? To begin with there was **Gum** by **Matilda Tristram**, a bubblegum-powered, wordless, psycho-sexual odyssey. **Gum** features two curvaceous characters, one male, one female, their faces featureless apart from their mouths, who meet by a bubblegum dispenser and start flirting and taunting each other by blowing big soft bubbles, which rapidly become overtly sexual as they take turns to blow pink breast- and penis-shapes before finally assaulting each other using the moist, pink genitalia-balloons. **Gum** ends in glorious release with an enormous pink bubble popping and spurting all over the page! It's beautifully printed in three shades of pink, with nice subtle touches in the illustrations such as a copyright symbol appearing as a reflection on a bubble. I always thought that the reason we weren't allowed to have bubblegum in our family as kids was because it would stick to hair and carpets – but now I'm

wondering if maybe that wasn't the real reason at all...



Nervous System 01 is an impressive debut zine, the crisp clean layout housing a curious mix of interesting photography-based articles alongside some tedious comic strips. There's a photo-diary piece covering Anthony's 38-hour journey from London to his mum's house in Canberra, Australia, which is nicely balanced by photos recording 64 seconds of Hachiko Crossing in Shibuya, Tokyo, the world's busiest pedestrian crossing. Also included is Gimme Shelter, an account of a Peterborough man who lived for almost 20 years in a small suburban wooden bus shelter. This local character, who continued playing golf on the local course, was nicknamed Nobby and gradually became a minor local celebrity. Over a generous seven pages in newspaper format, a series of identically-sized photos explore Nobby's growing reputation and eventual 'disappearance'. The overall subtlety of the layout of **Nervous System** and the careful observations of its chosen subject matter remind me of **Karen**.

Babylon by Bike.



Babylon by Bike by Negomi is a one-person diary of the anti-G-8 bike ride/adventure from Brighton to Gleneagles last year. Over the course of the 12-day journey Negomi examines her

personal and political reasons for taking part in this pollution-free protest action, which is unlike anything she's ever done before. Written on a good old-fashioned typewriter, not just using one of those ersatz typewriter computer fonts, and illustrated with watercolours, **Babylon by Bike** features memories of travels through the countryside and overnight stays hosted by sympathetic local bookshops alongside Negomi's nights alone in dark forests. The diary parts of **Babylon by Bike** are interspersed with bike maintenance tips and an article on Critical Mass Cycle Protests – which reminded me how much fun it was to go on early London Critical Masses. There's no contact details or price, so it must be meant to be left surreptitiously on bike carriers or handed out at Critical Mass events. **Babylon by Bike** ends with Negomi having her bike confiscated by the police who slap an 'I've met the Met' sticker on her coat! Please tell us if you got your bike back Negomi.



Savage Messiah by Laura Oldfield Ford is now up to issue #4, is an ongoing psychogeographic drift through a godforsaken arse-end of East London that remains beyond the regenerative power of Olympic millions. Illustrated with sketches for Laura's paintings and punctuated with quotes from Vaneigem, Genet and Baudelaire, it's a psychogeographic journey through bad boozers, legions of Ketamined-up skinheads, rave-scene drug-dealing treachery and shitty squats. I ran into Laura at a gallery opening last week and when she mentioned going for a drink afterwards I suddenly had visions of spending the evening in a Savage Messiah-style pub brimming with menace, cheap pills and fighting, lagered-up locals. I was glad that I'd already arranged to share a bottle of wine with some jewellery designer friends in the recently poncified Royal Oak.

Paul Petard's comics have always been modest black & white print



jobs but with **Paul's No Good Comics** his production levels have increased amazingly. The contents are still the same daft doodles and political ponderings as always, but this time around they're fancily printed in two colours and come wrapped in a black cover embossed in silver.



At some point during the Symposium someone thrust into my hands a copy of **Beat Motel**, an energetic upbeat punk zine straight outta Ipswich, crammed full of zine/gig/festival/record reviews, interviews, personal columns and a few barely forgivable reprints of internet gags. Columns include 'Tour Diaries', 'Confessions of a Till Monkey', instructions on 'How to give a cat a pill', and a continuing discussion of the clean-living straight edge punk lifestyle. **Beat Motel** combines coverage of the local Ipswich band scene with plenty of active input from contributors, giving it a bit of a *Maximum Rocknroll* feel, and at £1.50 for 80 pages it's a bargain as well.

For twelve years the indefatigable Chloe Eudaly has run **Reading Frenzy** – Portland, Oregon's premier zine & small publication emporium and venue for innumerable readings and exhibitions. Chloe was over in London recently for a well-deserved break, and hosted an evening of readings, videos and a viewmaster slideshow at the Chamber of Pop Culture/Horse

Hospital. Time-served zinester Dishwasher Pete, currently living in Amsterdam, came over especially to do a reading (fans of his much-loved *Dishwasher* zine and even some of you young uns who've never seen a copy should be pleased to know that a compilation book is due out later this year). Chloe brought over a suitcase full of publications from Portland and here's a few of the things that caught my eye: Moe Bowstern leads an interesting existence, straddling two very different worlds. She spends each summer as an artist/activist in some big American city while in winter working on commercial salmon fishing boats off the small Alaskan island of Kodiak, and the main theme of her **Xtra Tuf** #5 is the 2002 Kodiak fishermen's strike. After accepting the steadily declining salmon prices being offered by the local canneries for years, at the start of the 2002 fishing season the Kodiak fishermen refused to go to sea until they were offered a decent price for their catch. Moe looks at how this strike was organised and the difficulties it involved in reaching a consensus amongst the small, close-knit community of fisherman whose individual livelihoods are directly tied to their boats and the limited salmon fishing season. She attends meetings and produces posters, interviewing union workers, fishermen and strikebreakers, and her exhaustive 190-page account is backed up with historical information, a helpful glossary of fishing terminology and diary pieces by Moe which clearly show how much she loves the salmon fishing lifestyle and the salt-of-the-earth (sorry) characters she works alongside. **Xtra Tuf** is \$5.00 to you and me, free to commercial fishing women, and it's an objective, fascinating, thoroughly researched and well written glimpse into another world/lifestyle. I'll definitely pick up the next issue, and I hope there's more about what Moe gets up to in summer, and I'm not just



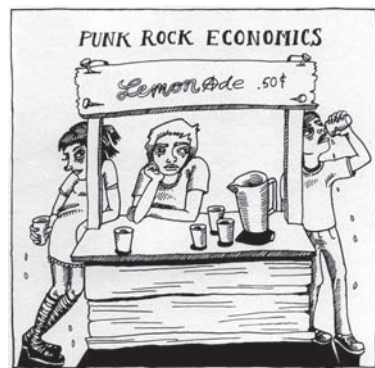


saying that after seeing the video of her naked urban cycling performance at the Reading Frenzy evening!

Stolen Sharpie Revolution – A DIY Zine Resource by Alex Wreckk is a good ‘start here’ guide to making your own zine. It’s the same size and colour as *The Little Red Schoolbook*, and starts off with the real basic, Doh! stuff of artwork, layout, photocopying and stapling your publication, before moving on to slightly more advanced techniques like papermaking, screenprinting, stencils and basic bookbinding, followed by the essentials of selling, exchange and networking and ambitious projects such as zine tours, libraries and resource centres. I was impressed that it includes a section on the essential but oh-so-often omitted stage of revising and editing your publication. There’s a 50-page resource section, which isn’t a great deal of use unless you live in the USA, but which does effectively give some idea of the scope and scale of this type of publishing activity currently taking place. I even learnt something from **Stolen Sharpie Revolution** and will have a go at bookbinding with (unused) dental floss. Does anyone know where I can get cinnamon red or minty green floss? Oh, and if you’re wondering what a *Sharpie* is, it’s a ubiquitous brand of American permanent felt-tip pen.

DIY in PDX, a compendium of current do-it-yourself activity in Portland, is just the right balance of encouraging practical information, inspiring interviews

and thoughtful pieces about the motivation behind the DIY ethic. It’s all quite grown-up, mutually supportive, community-minded DIY activity with thankfully very little of the dull indie-punk scene/ghetto stuff. As well as the *de rigueur* zines, clothing, and records, **DIY in PDX** details Portland’s anyone-can-join choir, community radio, recording studios, home film processing, ‘how to start your own public



computer centre’, hipster craft fayres, scrap re-use projects and an Independent Publishing Resource Centre. Editor Iris’ approach to compiling **DIY in PDX** is: ‘I’ll jump on my bike and cycle round and talk to all the interesting people I know’. It’s completely DIY, but for as long as I’ve known (25+ years) Portland has been a bolthole for interesting persons and activities, such as mailart pioneers ‘Blaster’ Al Ackerman and David Zack, so it would have been interesting to have an article tracing this lineage. Hmm, somehow I can’t help thinking that maybe there’s just a little bit too much of all this zines/DIY/self-publishing activity going on in Portland?

Mark Beyer has absolutely nothing to do with Portland, but was a regular contributor to *Art Spiegelman*’s seminal avant garde 1980s comic anthology *Raw* magazine. His **Beyer’s Beasts** stationery set features some of the characters that populated his Amy & Jordan strips in *Raw*. Even without any text or dialogue, the primitive yet detailed designs on these envelopes and notepaper still manage to convey the tetchy, neurotic weirdness of Beyer’s comics. You won’t be using these to write thank you letters to your Nana! Dark Horse Deluxe have put out a series of stationery sets by other cartoonists and illustrators, which are OK but not really impressive. However, this set goes the extra mile with small touches such as Beyer’s obsessively drawn patterns being used inside the envelopes. Reviews of writing paper – whatever next? As comic shops rapidly turn into toy and merchandise emporia with just a couple of racks of comics downstairs, maybe in the next *Variant* I’ll be reviewing action figures, lunch boxes, shot glasses, drinks coasters, blank journals and CD wallets, all of which feature in the Dark Horse Deluxe product line.

Publish And Be Damned self-publishing fair grew from 30 stalls in 2004 to 60 in 2005 and will be even bigger and better this year – I’ll certainly be there. **Publish And Be Damned** takes place in London on Sunday 30 July, free admission. Check website for the location.

London Zine Symposium
londonzinesymposium.org.uk

Gum, Matilda Tristram, £4.00,
www.afootbooks.com

Nervous System 01, Anthony,
£2.00, www.myspace.com/
mynervoussystem

Babylon By Bike, Negomi,
28pages, no price,
no contact details given.

Paul’s No Good Comics,
Paul Petard, £2.00(?),
ppetard@hotmail.com

Savage Messiah,
Laura Oldfield Ford, £2.00,
savage.messiah@hotmail.com

Beat Motel, £1.50,



www.beatmotel.co.uk

Reading Frenzy, 921 SW Oak St,
Portland, OR 9725, USA.
www.readingfrenzy.com

Xtra Tuf #5,
Moe Bowstern, \$5 (free to
commercial fishing women),
microcosmpublishing.com

Stolen Sharpie Revolution,
Alex Wreckk, \$4.00,
microcosmpublishing.com

DIY in PDX, ed. Iris Porter,
\$15.00, 112pgs + CD,
tincansound.com

Beyer’s Beasts stationery set,
Mark Beyer, www.darkhorse.com

Publish And Be Damned
www.publishandbedamned.org