

ARTFORUM

R. Crumb

MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE LA VILLE DE PARIS

11 avenue du Président Wilson

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As the father of comix, R. Crumb is a near-mythical figure in American counterculture. The illustrated escapades of Mr. Natural, Fritz the Cat, Big Baby, and other memorable characters are droll sociopolitical commentaries that flout American puritanism. From underground comics championing the hippie movement (free love! LSD! women's lib!), to a solicited yet never published *New Yorker* cover featuring a hand-holding lesbian couple in front of a squirming marriage license clerk (*Marriage License*, 2009), Crumb's style and cultural references are distinctly American. It is not surprising, however, to find that his current retrospective is in Paris. French audiences have enthusiastically received Crumb's incendiary—often pornographic—comix for decades. (To boot, Crumb has made his home in a village in the south of France for the past twenty-plus years.)

This extensive exhibition boasts some seven hundred drawings from the 1950s to 2011, supplemented by vitrines of ephemera (comic books, toys, posters, and records). Crumb's oeuvre is presented chronologically, starting with drawings done circa age seven in collaboration with his older brother. Both Crumbs were ardent fans of Disney comics, and the influence is clear: In a 1960 drawing, an anthropomorphized feline (perhaps an early, prepubescent iteration of Fritz the Cat, who was based on the Crumb family's pet) lounges on a bed, innocently enjoying an ice cream cone.

Typical Crumb motifs are called out throughout the exhibition. Works are clustered into subgenres with wall labels such as "underground," "unsavory heroes," and "Crumb en France." An entire room is dedicated to the artist's most ambitious project yet, an illustrated *Book of Genesis* (2005–2009). This magnum opus, displayed here in its entirety, is based on diverse sources including the King James Version of the Bible and Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments* (1955). Thankfully, even when treating a sacred text, the artist's humor and style remain true: God resembles Mr. Natural and Eve is a classic Crumb heroine—thick-limbed, buxom, and bootylicious.

— Mara Hoberman



R. Crumb, *The Playful Attitude of the Model*, 2002, ink on paper, 14 x 10 1/2".

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