

CULTURE

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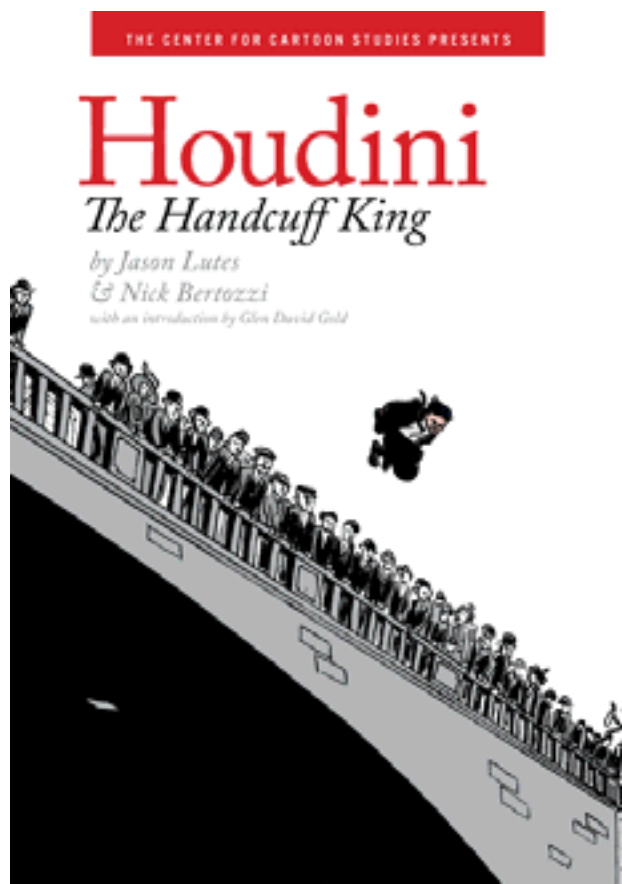


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Just like magic

The Center for Cartoon Studies publishes its first graphic novel: *Houdini the Handcuff King*



“It is great to be able to give our students the opportunity to earn income while at the same time being introduced to an industry that can help support them while they continue to work on their comics and graphic novel projects.”

— Michelle Ollie

By Joe Milliken
Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

Since its inception in the fall of 2005, The Center for Cartoon Studies (CCS) in White River Junction, a two-year cartooning school and studio concentrating on the creating and marketing of comics and graphic novels, has grown by leaps and bounds under the direction of co-founders James Sturm and Michelle Ollie.

In a short period of time, CCS has cultivated an impressive advisory board that is a relative “who’s who” of cartoonists and publishers: Steve Bissette, co-creator of *Saga of the Swamp Thing*; Denis Kitchen, president, Kitchen Sink Press; Eric Reynolds of Fantagraphics; and industry giants William Horberg of

Wonderland Films, Diana Schutz of Dark Horse Comics, and Will Eisner, the creator of sequential art.

Earlier this month, CCS introduced its first book in a series of graphic novels for young readers, titled *Houdini the Handcuff King*.

Created by cartoonists Jason Lutes and Nick Bertozzi (from Seattle and New York respectively), the premise of the book is to present a snapshot moment in the life of Harry Houdini and focus on only one specific incident in an effort to enhance the intrigue that surrounded the talents and accomplishments of a man who, at his peak, was arguably the most famous person in the world.

“I was paid to learn at the knee of one of my favorite cartoonists,”

Bertozzi said. “In fact, I show his thumbnails to my students as the Gold Standard for clear cartooning. Working with him was a little intimidating at first.”

In traditional graphic-novel style, the large panels and bold illustrations reveal Houdini as he prepares and then executes one of his most famous stunts, a death-defying leap off Boston’s Harvard Bridge while handcuffed.

The bold artwork effectively transcends the various emotions; a nervous excitement from the gathering crowd, detailed facial expressions, suspenseful anticipation, and even a hint of anti-Semitism, when it is revealed through the comments of a policeman that Houdini was of Jewish descent.

An introduction into the life of Houdini as well as a collec-

tion of panel discussions are also included in this 96-page, hard-bound edition, giving the reader a clearer picture of the magician’s personal life including his wife Bess and right-hand man Beatty, and the frenzy surrounding the crowds and newspaper reporters who followed him.

CCS also recently announced a creative partnership with Sunrise Greeting Cards, which will showcase the work of several CCS cartoonists beginning in 2008.

“It is great to be able to give our students the opportunity to earn income while at the same time being introduced to an industry that can help support them while they continue to work on their comics and graphic novel projects,” Ollie said.

The school will host its first commencement ceremony on

May 19, with an estimated 20 students participating.

The institution’s first commencement speaker will be cartoonist-icon Patrick McDonnell, the creator of the daily comic strip *Mutts*. McDonnell’s comic strip appears in some 700 newspapers around the world. *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz once declared *Mutts* one of the greatest comic strips all time.

In an increasingly visual and graphic U.S. culture, the art of cartooning and the age of graphic novels is seeing a resurgence through the explosion of imported comics and a global fascination with cartoon animation.

As the only college-level training program of its kind in the United States, CCS hopes to ride the cusp of this ever-growing animation wave of success.