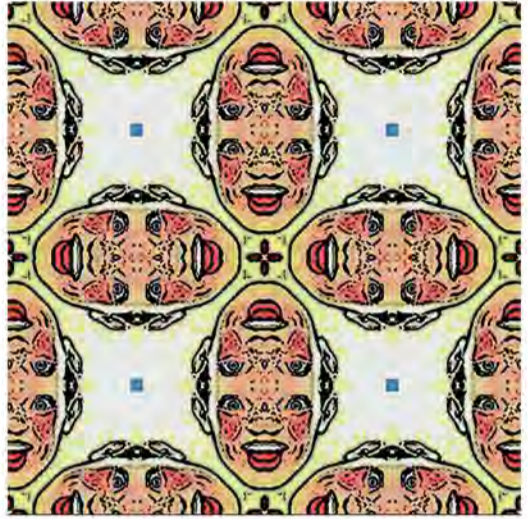


# "The Delinquent Comic Art of Wascally Wee Willy Harroff" opens at the Edwardsville Arts Center

by Steven Spencer

published February 9 2018 4:00 PM  
 updated February 10 2018 7:42 AM

Listen to the story



EDWARDSVILLE - William Harroff will be exhibiting his comic book inspired art work on canvases, tiles and prints at the Edwardsville Arts Center in a showcase entitled "The Delinquent Comic Art of "Wascally Wee Willy" Harroff," which opens from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. tonight and runs until Friday, March 16.

The focus of Harroff's exhibit was inspired by a fear throughout the country that reading certain comic books were leading children to a life of delinquency.



"There's a forgotten piece of American history that took place in the early 1950's at the same time as the communism scare," Harroff said. "There were comics that were being called out for being too extreme and leading to juvenile delinquency. That's what a very prominent psychologist, Fredric Wertham, erroneously claimed. Parents were up in arms and of course upset."

Wertham's book "Seduction of the Innocent" was written after he had determined that one commonality between the juvenile delinquents he visited were the comic books they were reading. Wertham claimed that these horror and crime comics led children to commit the actions depicted in the books. His findings led to the Comics Code Authority, resulting in several publishers going out of business and "all the good stuff getting swept aside," Harroff said.

"Comics were everywhere at the time. Everyone from adults down to kids were reading them," Harroff said. "If you had grown up when I did, parents for the first time looked at kids with suspicion. All the parents were afraid they were helping to create juvenile delinquents in their homes. That's why I follow what Dr. Wertham said. I take Wertham's pseudo-scientific arguments to the extreme by applying his bogus method of removing micro-sections of horror and crime comics then transforming them into crazy kaleidoscopic patterns for today's audiences."

Harroff said he's always had a passion for comics since childhood and still does to this day. One book he's currently reading is DC's Doomsday Clock.

"I adore comics. There's practically no kind of comic that I don't love," Harroff said.

Charlotte Johnson, Harroff's wife and fellow book artist, co-organized the show which is being dedicated to the memory of Dr. John Adkins Richardson. Richardson was not only one of Charlotte's professors at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville but also a friend and mentor to Harroff and his wife.

"He was a brilliant scholar and professor who loved comics," Harroff said. "In fact, much of his amazing comic career had to be closeted away from his academic life in order to avoid his colleague's criticism. One of his books, the Complete Book of Cartooning, is still in print and was a bestseller for decades. He was the 1975 Guest of Honor at one of the first St. Louis comic book conventions, Grafcon, and was also the cartoonist for the first published graphic novel of Michel Moorcock's Elric of Melnibone."

"The Delinquent Comic Art of "Wascally Wee Willy" Harroff," opens tonight from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and will be open until Friday, March 16.