

Charles Bukowski and the Art of Robert Crumb

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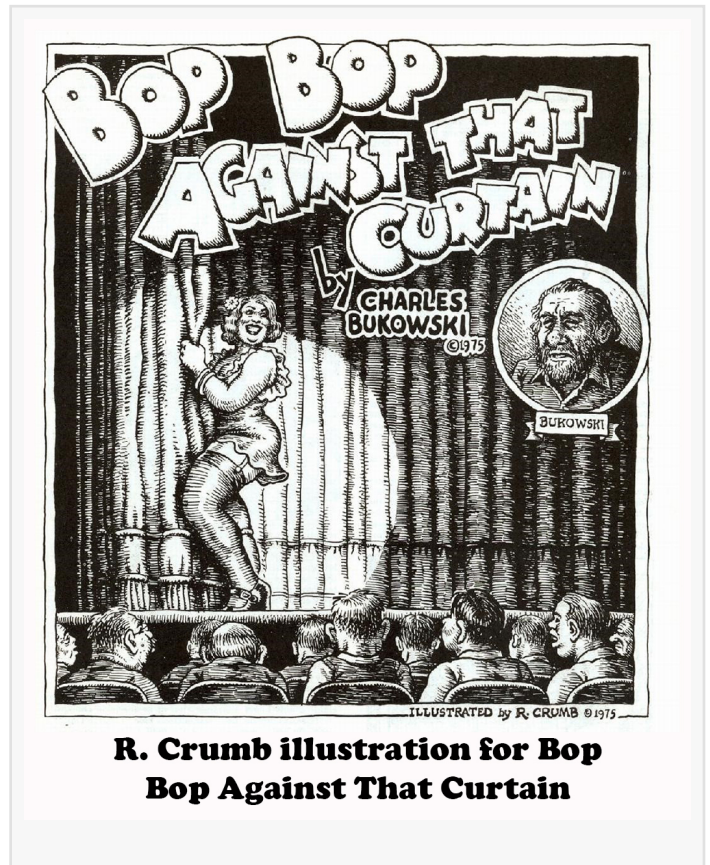
CHARLOTTE, NC, UNITED STATES, September 15, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With the birth of his "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" column in 1967, Charles Bukowski suddenly found his work sharing the same pages with counterculture writers and artists. Because he was in his late 40s at that point, Bukowski didn't feel much camaraderie with the younger cultural movements, but he didn't outright dislike them either. He viewed this new underground movement as well-meaning, but naïve in a world he had seen crush earlier generations.

One counter-culture artist that Bukowski had seen and appreciated was Robert Crumb. He most likely first saw Crumb's work in *Underground Digest*, a magazine out of New York that published syndicated content from 31 newspapers and magazines that were members of the "Underground Press Syndicate". Only two issues were produced, but both Bukowski and Crumb's work appeared prominently in each.

Since Crumb spent his time primarily in San Francisco with other Underground Comix artists, their paths didn't cross until 1972 when they met at a party in Los Angeles. The party was hosted by Liza Williams, a successful record executive and on-and-off girlfriend of Bukowski.

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Bukowski's first collaboration with Crumb would take place three years later. By 1975, the popularity of the Underground Comix scene was fading in the United States. In an attempt to



R. Crumb illustration for Bop Bop Against That Curtain

revitalize the movement, Art Spiegelman and Bill Griffith published a new magazine named "Arcade: The Comics Revue". The well-produced magazine aimed to keep the Underground Comix movement relevant by creating an adult-focused magazine that appealed to a mainstream audience. Seven issues were published from 1975 to 1976 and featured well-known artists such as Crumb, Kim Deitch, Spain Rodriguez, and S. Clay Wilson -- as well as Griffith and Spiegelman themselves. For content, they tapped writers such as Bukowski, William S. Burroughs, Paul Krassner and J. Hoberman.

Published in 1975, [Arcade 3](#) featured a Crumb cover drawing of a bohemian-looking character walking through a city landscape on a windy fall day with a balloon caption reading, "This, to me, is sheer poetry!!" Inside, Crumb illustrated the Bukowski short story, "BOP BOP AGAINST THAT CURTAIN", which first appeared in the Bukowski book, "South of No North". This short story is a humorous coming-of-age tale where a young Bukowski spends the afternoon with friends who eventually end up at a divey burlesque theater.

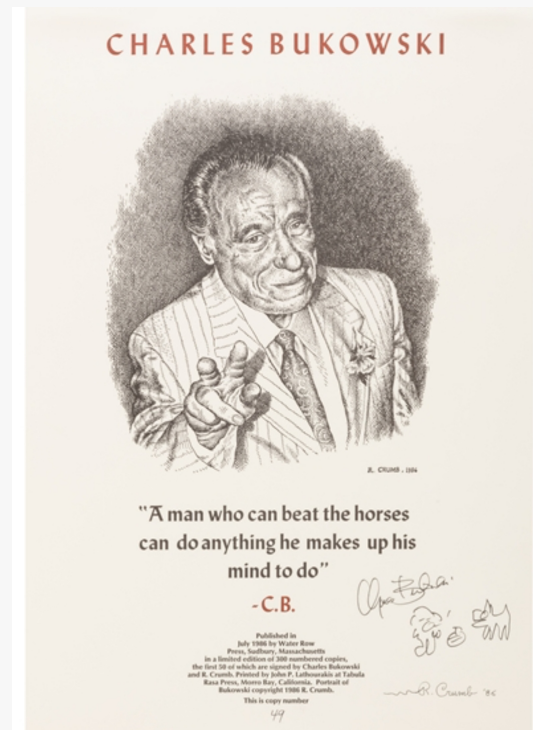
Crumb's drawings for BOP BOP have a grainy, nostalgic feel that Bukowski likely appreciated. The black and white illustrations show kids fighting in a front yard and playing pinball with cigarettes and mugs of root beer. Crumb's MC in the seedy theater is a Jimmy Durante type character that makes you smile just looking at him. And while Crumb was already producing sexually charged illustrations of women, the portrait of the dancer swinging her large behind is more comical than sexual.

Bukowski and Crumb's next two collaborations were produced by Bukowski's long-time publisher Black Sparrow Press.

Published in 1983, "Bring Me Your Love" is a short story about a man visiting his wife in an insane asylum, while his new girlfriend stays back at the hotel. Although the story is a fictional tale, the story is likely based on Bukowski's former



Bring Me Your Love



R. Crumb portrait of Bukowski

R. Crumb portrait of Bukowski for Water Row Books

girlfriend Linda King. When Harry shows up to see Gloria at the asylum, he's exhausted from the long drive – likely a reference to the trip Bukowski took to see King for a final time in Arizona. At the end of the story, Harry fights for the phone with his girlfriend when Gloria calls the hotel room – a scene that often played out in Bukowski's apartment when King called.

"There's No Business", published in 1984, revolves around an aging comedian named Manny who just doesn't have it anymore. The story can be seen as a reflection of Bukowski's own anxiety about growing older and losing his edge. In reality, this a sharp story that includes many of Bukowski's fundamental elements: Alcohol, gambling, money trouble and fighting. Manny's interactions with the audience also mirror Bukowski's banter with the audience at his own readings.

As with "BOP BOP AGAINST THAT CURTAIN", Crumb's drawings have a nostalgic feel to them. But like the plot, the drawings reflect an aging vaudeville on its last legs.

In 1986, Crumb did a new portrait of Bukowski. Based on a photo of Bukowski at his wedding, the drawing was produced as an 18"x12"print by Jeffrey Weinberg of Water Row Books. Below the portrait is the Bukowski quote, "A man who can beat the horses can do anything he makes up his mind to do." There was a special edition of 50 copies that were signed by both Bukowski and Crumb.

Crumb and Bukowski's final collaboration began in 1997, three years after Bukowski's death.

The deluxe version of "[The Captain is Out to Lunch and The Sailors Have Taken Over the Ship](#)" was published by Black Sparrow Graphic Arts. It was a large book, measuring approximately 14.5" x 11.5" and featured five full-page colored serigraphs, each signed by Crumb in pencil. It also contained an additional five unsigned black and white printed illustrations. Only 175 copies were produced, all housed in a beautiful red cloth slipcase.

A second version of the book was published in 1998. This version was not as elaborate and measured a normal size of 9.5" x 6.5", but it contained all the illustrations in the earlier version, only this time in black and white. The exception was an iconic [Crumb portrait of Bukowski](#), printed as a color serigraph in a special edition of 426 copies.

It's been 30 years since Bukowski's death, but Crumb continues working. He recently released the "Shape Up!", a tribute to his late wife Aline Kominsky, an illustrator herself. His work is currently featured in the "Comics 1964–2024" exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

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