



# **FANTASTIC!** The Comic Art of Sandy Plunkett



detail: *Rocketeer Adventures*, vol.2 #1, pg. 2, 2011 © 2012 The Rocketeer Trust

 Kennedy Museum of Art

***FANTASTIC!* The Comic Art of Sandy Plunkett**

January 25 – June 2, 2013

## **Teacher Packet**





## Sandy Plunkett

Sandy Plunkett was born in 1955 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to artistically inclined parents. The family moved to Mexico for four years and then to New York City, where Sandy developed an affinity for drawing and a passion for comic books (especially Marvel) at a young age. Partly due to peer pressure, he lost interest in both upon entering junior high. For reasons even he finds difficult to explain, his passion was rekindled near the end of high school, and the notion of becoming a professional cartoonist was born.

Plunkett spent a year of college studying art but ultimately found his interests at odds with what the school had to offer. In the late 1970s, Plunkett found work within the comic industry at Marvel, DC, and Gold Key comics, working on such titles as *The Defenders*, *The Savage Sword of Conan*, *House of Mystery*, *The Unknown Soldier*, and *Boris Karloff Tales of Mystery*.

After more than a decade working with some of the largest comic book companies, and despite growing up in New York, Plunkett soured on life in the big city as an adult. With the advent of overnight delivery and increasingly efficient modes of communication, Plunkett realized he could continue his career from anywhere he desired. His choice? Athens, and the rolling hills of southeastern Ohio, where he has lived since 1990.

Plunkett is the first to acknowledge that he works at a relatively slow, contemplative pace that is often at odds with the volume of work and strict deadlines of the bigger comic book houses. After more than two decades in Athens, Plunkett supplements his now more occasional work on comic books with a wide variety of freelance projects, including posters, album covers, T-shirt designs, calendars, editorial cartoons, and drawings commissioned by admiring fans.

In 2010, Swallow Press published *The World of a Wayward Comic Book Artist: The Private Sketchbooks of S. Plunkett*, which includes a rich array of Plunkett's unpublished artwork as well as an extensive interview between Sandy and collector Tim Barnes.

Sandy continues to live in Athens and relies exclusively on his bicycle to run errands or to simply enjoy the back roads surrounding his adopted hometown.

- David Filipi, Guest Curator, Director of Film/Video at the Wexner Center for the Arts

## In His Own Words:

“I first discovered comics in third grade and then started to draw my own comics just like most every kid does who gets seriously into comics. But the possibility of actually drawing comics for a living seemed so far-fetched at the time that I didn't even consider it as a realistic possibility.”



Sandy Plunkett  
*Official Marvel Index to Fantastic Four*, vol.1 #6, 1986  
Inked by Kevin Nowlan  
Pen, brush and ink  
© and TM 2013 Marvel and Subs.

“Though it’s the pictures and the words that initially grab your attention when you open up a comic, it’s the storytelling, a fusion of the other two, that elevates comics into an endlessly beguiling narrative art form, one which has influenced innumerable film directors and fiction writers...”



Sandy Plunkett  
detail, “Switch Witch,” *Marvel Fanfare*, vol.1, issue #6,  
pg. 16, 1982  
Inked by P. Craig Russell  
Pen, brush and ink  
© and TM 2013 Marvel and Subs.

“For many comic artists, myself included, the most enjoyable part of producing a comic book story is the initial step, the point at which words are translated into drawings, the drawings brought together into a cohesive narrative.”

- Sandy Plunkett from *The Beguiling Art, FANTASTIC! The Comic Art of Sandy Plunkett*, catalogue for the Kennedy Museum of Art.

To view more of Sandy Plunkett’s work, go to: <http://plunkettart.com/gallery/gallery.htm>

## The Comic Book Industry and Artists Influential in Plunkett's Career

The comic book industry originated in the United States during the late 1800s. The first comic books were actually packaged reprints of popular newspaper comic strips. As the comic book industry expanded throughout the 1930s, it developed a cultural and economic identity very different from newspaper syndicates. Comics began featuring ongoing narrative stories, complex characters, moral anecdotes and contests between good and evil. In 1938, comics introduced a red caped man with extraordinary superhuman powers known as Superman. He became the first comic superhero and set the stage for many other iconic characters to follow. The comic industry has experienced periods of highs and lows due to factors including political, social and economic changes as well as competition from other forms of entertainment. Since the late 1970s, comic companies such as Marvel and DC have licensed several popular characters to be used in movies and television series, both providing new forms of revenue for comics and widening their fan base by exposure in different media.

**Billy DeBeck (1890 – 1942)** began drawing cartoons for newspapers to finance his studies at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. His success prompted him to leave school and make a career as a comic strip artist, working in several papers including the *Youngstown Telegram* and the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*. DeBeck's work featured scratchy lines and a technique traditionally called "big-foot" style, which gave his characters big feet and bulbous noses. His most popular creation, *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*, remains a comic favorite.

**Bud Fisher (1885 – 1954)** studied at the University of Chicago and went on to work as a journalist and sketch artist in the sports department of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He started *Mutt and Jeff* in 1908, which became the first successful daily comic in the US. The title characters – described as "two mismatched tin horns" – were humorously characterized and often referred to local events, making them highly relatable to the everyman. The *Mutt and Jeff* comic strip was so popular it became the basis for several films, stage shows, musicals and comic books.

**Hal Foster (1892 – 1982)** proved to be one of the most innovative comic strip artists of the 20th century. *Prince Valiant*, which has run since 1937, features the adventurous battles of a 5th century Arthurian knight against witches, giants, sorcerers and dragons. Foster is noted for introducing new illustrative techniques to comics, including realistic depictions, sophisticated compositions and narrative captions for dialogue and backstory instead of balloons.

**Frank Godwin (1889 – 1959)** began his career at the age of sixteen working for the *Washington Star*, where his father was city editor. He later became a comic artist and prolific illustrator for clients such as Texaco, *Liberty Magazine* and the Boy Scouts of America. *Rusty Riley* ran from 1948 to 1959, and told the story of an orphaned youth training to be a jockey. Godwin's work is admired for his unique tonal style and his ability to create depth in facial expressions.

**George Herriman (1880 – 1944)** grew up in Los Angeles and moved to New York shortly after graduating from high school. While working as an illustrator and engraver for the *New York Evening Journal*, he created *Krazy Kat* as a character in his strip *The Dingbat Family* in 1910. By 1913, *Krazy Kat* was featured in his own strip, which ran until 1944. The strip became influential to later artists for its use of heavy dialectic dialogue, dynamic characters and dramatic desert and canyon inspired landscapes.

**Frank King (1883 – 1969)** began his newspaper career at the *Minneapolis Times* working in drawing and retouching. He later moved to Chicago and created Sunday strips for the *Chicago Examiner* and the *Chicago Tribune*. He was the first to introduce the concept of real time continuity to his characters and plots, showing a change of age over generations. In 1919, he introduced *Gasoline Alley*, which featured innovative use of perspective and angles and made astute observations on small-town living and modern family life. The immensely popular strip was published in over 300 daily newspapers with an estimated readership of more than 27 million.

**Winsor McCay (1867 – 1934)** began his career by making poster art for circuses and theatrical performances, and later became an illustrator for newspaper comic strips. His most famous included the comic strip *Little Nemo* (1905), which took place mostly in the main character's dream world. McCay was well known for a distinct and precise graphic style and his work's reach into the 'moving' world of animation.

**George McManus (1884 – 1954)** acquired his first job as a comic artist at a Missouri newspaper called *The Republican* in 1904. He went on to work for several other major newspapers in New York, creating such comics as *Spareribs*, *Gravy*, and *Love Affairs of a Mutton Head*. His most famous strip, *Bringing Up Father* (1913), became highly successful and ran for over 90 years. McManus is known for his bold, clean-cut cartooning lines as well as his strong sense of composition. His work represents an important transition between the slapstick humor of the early comics and the situation comics of the 1920s.

**Alex Raymond (1909 – 1956)** studied at the Grand Central School of Art in New York, and began his career by working as a ghost artist for King Features Syndicate on several well-known comic strips. In 1933, he began his own strip, *Flash Gordon*, which displayed his photorealistic style and sophisticated shadow work. The strip was praised for its exciting and fast paced adventures in elaborate, fantastical worlds and for a brilliant artistic style with vivid visual storytelling.

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[http://www.mania.com/history-comic-book-superheroes\\_article\\_116423.html](http://www.mania.com/history-comic-book-superheroes_article_116423.html)

<http://www.americanartarchives.com/godwin.f.htm>

<http://www.bpib.com/illustra2/foster.htm>

## **Comic Terminology**

**Collected Edition** - This refers to a trade or graphic novel that collects several issues from an ongoing title into one thick book. Sometimes Collected Editions are branded with titles like Showcase and Essential.

**Continuity** - The current accepted history of ongoing comic book titles. Titles have many different creative teams over the course of their publishing history (and some comics have been published as a singular title for several decades), but it is expected that the current creative team will be aware of what has happened in past issues and what is happening in other titles. This enables them to tell a cohesive story.

**Comic strip** - Usually this refers to comics like those that you see in newspapers.

**Crossover event/series** - A "crossover" event or series is a term used in mainstream American comics. It may refer to one continuous story that takes place in multiple books, where the story "crosses over" from one title to another. It may also refer to a series or a story, which involves characters and/or settings from multiple titles, and is implied to have a great impact on many books, characters, and their future stories.

**Floppy** - The word floppy refers to the traditional comic book that you find on your newsstands or comic book shop. These are the kinds of comic books that have a soft paper cover and will essentially hang limp when held by their binding. These comic books will "flop" when shaken and this is where the name floppy or floppies comes from.

**Indie/Independent** - A book that is published by someone other than the DC and Marvel comics companies or their subsidiaries.

**Inker** - The person who goes over the penciler's work in India ink so the pencil lines are not lost when it is published.

**Letterer** - The person who puts the text, word balloons, sound effects and dialogue boxes in a comic.

**Penciler** - The person who does the initial sketches for a piece of comic art. They draw the characters, the background scenery, and the panels and (usually) decide the layouts.

**Splash Page** - A piece of art that takes up one full page or two pages. It is not broken up into panels and is one snapshot of a scene.

**Universe** - Universe usually refers to the world in which stories are based. For example, all DC published books take place in the DC universe, so characters can interact with each other across their titles. The same is true of Marvel published books.

**Writer** - the person who writes dialogue and plans the story in a comic.

## Parts of the Comic

**The Panel:** This is the basic unit of a comic book page, consisting of a single illustration. It is most often contained within a square or rectangular frame, although circular panels are not uncommon, and irregularly shaped panels are also possible. Panels allow comic book action to be broken up into distinct moments in time.

**The Gutter:** This is the space on a comic book page that is outside the panels. The gutter is most often narrow and uniform, and does not contain any other graphic elements. However, objects or speech balloons within the panels can stick out to some degree.

**Balloons:** These come in two basic kinds: speech or dialogue balloons, and thought balloons. Speech balloons are (usually) round, and contain the text of what a particular character is saying. Thought balloons depict what a character is thinking, and are conventionally drawn with lumpy edges, like clouds. Balloons (and by extension comics themselves) are called fumetti ("clouds") in Italian, because they were originally made to look like the characters were breathing out the words as they spoke.

**Splash Balloons:** These special balloons have jagged edges, and enclose important or dramatic text, such as the title of a comic on a Splash Page, after which they are named.

**Splash Page:** This is the first page of the story, usually consisting of a large or full-page illustration.

**Pointers:** Also called the "Tails" of speech balloons, these indicate which character is speaking the words in the balloon. For that reason, they point at the mouth or head whenever possible. Thought balloons have "Bubbles" that lead to the character that belongs with them.

## Comic Books versus Graphic Novels

A comic book is a staple bound magazine, usually no more than 30 pages, that tells a story using sequential art. The stories are serialized, so that readers must continue to buy subsequent issues to find out what happens next. Both the graphic novel and the comic book tell their story primarily with pictures and some words, but graphic novels can be any length and tend to cover one story that is complete within its pages. The length of the graphic novel allows it to present stories of greater intricacy and profundity than a comic book. Graphic novels are typically bound in more durable formats than familiar comic magazines, using the same materials and methods as printed books, and they are generally sold in bookstores and specialty comic book shops rather than at newsstands. Unlike comic books, graphic novel sequels are new, complete and entire stories with the basic novel components of beginning, middle and end while comic books cover only a part of the story.



Sandy Plunkett

left: *Rocketeer Adventures*, vol.2 #1, pg. 1, 2011, Brush and ink with Zip-A-Tone overlay  
© 2012 The Rocketeer Trust

right: *Rocketeer Adventures*, vol.2 #1, pg. 8, 2011 Pen, brush and ink  
© 2012 The Rocketeer Trust



## The Graphic Novel Classroom

### Powerful Teaching and Learning With Images

The following activities, notes and suggestions are excerpts from *The Graphic Novel Classroom* by Maureen Bakis, a practical guide that shows middle and high school teachers how to incorporate graphic novels into their classrooms.

#### Chapter 1 **Looking at the Comics Medium** Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*

❖ *Suggested Activity:* Communicate with Images and Drawings

Get into groups and elect one person from each group to leave the room. Each group receives a scenario that the remainder of the group must draw together - NO WORDS. The person elected to leave the room will return when the group is done drawing and they will try to describe the scenario with words. Example scenario: a blind man mowing his lawn while his seeing-eye dog relaxes in a hammock.

❖ *Definition:* Comics: juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

❖ *Participation:* How Much of You Is in What You See?

“...comic art invites readers to be ‘in’ the story, therefore fostering more intimate engagement with the text.”

❖ *Teaching Metacognition - Questions:*

- What are you doing when you read comics?
- What cognitive processes are at work as you view images?
- Are you processing an image of an object or an idea?
- How do the various types of icons relate to one another?
- How does an icon convey meaning?

#### Chapter 3 **Looking at the Big Picture** Will Eisner's *A Contract With God and A Life Force*

❖ *Generic Questions Applicable to Any Graphic Novel:*

- How did you feel when you saw \_\_\_\_\_ image or read \_\_\_\_\_ words on this page?
- What did you think when you saw \_\_\_\_\_ image or read \_\_\_\_\_ words on this page?
- What personal experience influenced how you felt or thought as you did?
- What specific aspect of the text caused you to feel or think as you did?
- If you formed a hypothesis about an image you saw, what assumptions and preconceptions is your hypothesis based upon?

Bakis, M. (2012). *The Graphic Novel Classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Collins.

Eisner, W. (2006). *A Contract with God and A Life Force*. New York: W. W. Norton.

## **Standards addressed in *FANTASTIC! The Comic Art of Sandy Plunkett*:**

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS K - 12**

#### **Kindergarten**

- Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.
- Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.

#### **Grade 1**

- Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.
- Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.
- Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

#### **Grade 2**

- Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.
- Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

#### **Grade 3**

- Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
- Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

#### **Grade 4**

- Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).
- Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

#### **Grade 5**

- Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).
- Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

#### **Grade 6**

- Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
- Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

### **Grade 7 – 8**

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

### **Grade 8**

- Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
- Evaluate the advantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.
- Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

### **Grades 9-10**

- Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.
- Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### **Grades 11-12**

- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

## **VISUAL ARTS K - 12**

### **ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:**

**Personal Choice and Vision:** Students construct and solve problems of personal relevance and interest when expressing themselves through visual art.

**Critical and Creative Thinking:** Students combine and apply artistic and reasoning skills to imagine, create, realize and refine artworks in conventional and innovative ways.

**Authentic Application and Collaboration:** Students work individually and in groups to focus ideas and create artworks that address genuine local and global community needs.

**Literacy:** As consumers, critics and creators, students evaluate and understand artworks and other texts produced in the media forms of the day.

## VISITING THE KENNEDY MUSEUM OF ART

We are looking forward to your Museum visit! It is helpful for visitors to know what to expect when they arrive. The following guidelines will help you understand Museum rules:

Use your senses.

You WILL be using looking and listening skills.

You WILL NOT be using your sense of touch. The oils on our hands can damage works of art, even those made out of stone or bronze.

Talk about what you see in the Museum – but remember:

Be respectful of other visitors in your tone of voice and your language.

Please turn your cell phones off while in the Museum – including teachers and chaperones.

Teachers and chaperones are expected to engage in gallery activities along with their students, and address any disciplinary issues that arise.

Any writing or drawing activities in the galleries should be with pencils.

Backpacks should be left in the front hall.

No food, gum, or drinks are allowed in the galleries.

Photography is allowed in some exhibitions. Please ask Museum staff if you are allowed to take pictures in the gallery.

Photos of student groups may be taken during your visit to the Museum. If students do not have a blanket permission to be photographed, please distribute the following permission slip. Please advise Museum staff if students are not allowed to be photographed.

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### Permission to Photograph

I hereby give permission to photograph my child \_\_\_\_\_

during their visit to the Kennedy Museum of Art. This permission includes (but is not limited to) use in Ohio University publications and web pages as well as local newspapers.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

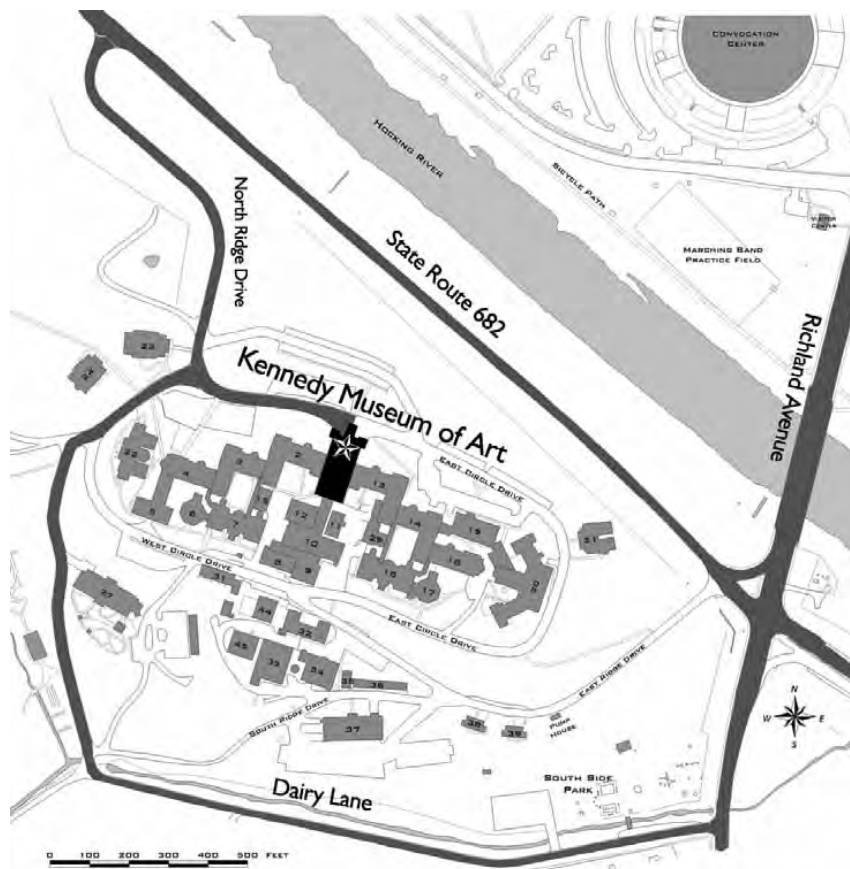
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## GETTING TO THE KENNEDY MUSEUM OF ART

The Kennedy Museum of Art is located in historic Lin Hall at The Ridges on the Ohio University campus. Take State Route 33 to Exit 17 (St. Rte. 682 North-Ohio University exit). Go through the roundabout at Richland Avenue and continue on St. Rte. 682. Turn left on North Ridge Drive, then turn left at yield sign. The Kennedy Museum of Art is on the right. Buses may drop off students under the portico at the museum entrance, then park in the upper or lower parking lots on the left.

## PARKING

Chaperones arriving in personal vehicles should park in one of the specifically marked Kennedy Museum of Art Visitor Parking spaces in the parking lot directly across from the Museum, or in a metered spot. (Meters are strictly enforced at all times designated on the meter.) Other parking in the lots is restricted to vehicles with Ohio University "Purple" lot passes and is strictly enforced until 3 p.m. on weekdays.



## **BUS FUNDS REQUEST FORM**

School bus funds up to \$100 per visit to the Kennedy Museum of Art are available through funding from the Friends of the Kennedy Museum of Art on a first-come, first-served basis.

Expenses over \$100 may be requested in special circumstances, but need additional approval.

Schools must make their own transportation arrangements and then mail or fax this completed form to the Kennedy Museum of Art. Payment will be processed upon completion of the visit and received in approximately three weeks.

For further information, please contact Sally Delgado (delgado@ohio.edu) or Lisa Quinn (quinnl@ohio.edu) at 740-593-0953.

Date of visit to Kennedy Museum of Art:

Name of School:

Name of teacher/coordinator:

Grade of students:

Number of students:

Number of buses:

Amount requested (Amounts over \$100 must be pre approved by special process):

Please break down the amount if you know the following:

Cost of bus driver:

Mileage cost:

Name the check should be made out to:

Address the check should be sent to:

Please mail or fax the completed form to: Sally Delgado or Lisa Quinn  
Kennedy Museum of Art  
Lin Hall, Ohio University  
Athens, OH 45701  
Fax: 740-593-1305

(KMA)

Received on \_\_\_\_\_ Processed \_\_\_\_\_

**Programming associated with *FANTASTIC! The Comic Art of Sandy Plunkett***  
January 25 – June 2, 2013

All programs take place at the Kennedy Museum of Art, unless otherwise noted.

**Guest Curator Walk & Talk**, Friday, January 25, 5 – 6 pm  
Dave Filipi, Wexner Center for the Arts Director of Film/Video

**Opening reception**, Friday, January 25, 6 – 8 pm

**“Black Comic Book Superheroes”** Lecture by Dr. Michael Gillespie, OU Assistant Professor in School of Interdisciplinary Arts, School of Film, and Department of African American Studies  
Thursday, February 21, 6 – 7 pm

**Noon Talk: Gallery Q & A with Sandy Plunkett**  
Wednesday, March 13, 12:10 – 12:50 pm

**Workshops with Sandy Plunkett:** \$45 (includes materials).  
Free for OU students with pre-registration

**Rendering for Comics**

Saturday, March 16, 1 – 3 pm

This workshop will introduce the participants to the traditional methods of rendering for comic strips and comic books using India ink. The tools will include dip pen nibs, markers and brush with attention paid to rendering for good reproduction.

Free for OU students with pre-registration

**Comic Page Layouts**

Saturday, April 13, 1 – 3 pm

The first steps of translating a story idea into a comic. We will look at the basics such as perspective and composition, and how to use them for clarity and dramatic effect. The participants are encouraged to bring samples of their work for a critique examining their use of these elements.

**A Conversation with Sandy Plunkett**

Interview with Jared Gardner, Professor of English and Film Studies and Director of Popular Culture Studies at Ohio State University

Thursday, April 11, 7 – 8 pm, The Ridges Auditorium