

Monday, September 12, 2011

Gaithersburg artist isn't 'tooning' around

Newspaper featuring local comics distributed around town

by Cody Calamaio, Staff Writer

Comic artist Michael Auger is part of a movement that thinks outside the strip.

To break the pervading belief that comics are just costumed superheroes or syndicated serials like Dilbert, Auger and the other members of the artist group DC Conspiracy publishes a local all-comics newspaper called "Magic Bullet."

"Usually people are used to seeing comics as an afterthought stuck in a newspaper," says Auger, 36, of Gaithersburg. "You get an entire page of a newspaper to let the artist go hog wild to create some crazy stuff."

Auger was the cover artist of the most recent edition of "Magic Bullet" that premiered at the Small Press Expo held last weekend in Bethesda. The publication's title is a nod to the Washington Wizards basketball team's original name — the Washington Bullets — and created by the more than 50 local artists of the DC Conspiracy group.

The publication is usually geared toward adult readers, and touches on a variety of topics from political cartoons to dark and quirky characters, Auger says. His contribution inside the edition illustrates a poem by Adam Umak about a cannibalistic serial killer.

In Japan, comics geared toward adults are more commonplace, while mainstream American comics still center on the superhero material that is fodder for blockbuster movies. "People still think of comics as kids stuff," Auger says. "There is a whole 'nother world out there."

"Magic Bullet" is self-published by the DC Conspiracy, and members raise money through the website Kickstarter.com where donors are mailed a free copy. Editions also are handed out at Metro stations, comic book stores and bars.

For Auger, the publication is a way to "wake up" Metro riders to think outside the box. "Who needs coffee when you can read some really offbeat comics?" he says.

Since becoming a part of the DC Conspiracy, Auger has "dabbled into darker realms," but still spends much of his time creating "very lighthearted" material such as animals representing letters of the alphabet. A graduate of the Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio, he makes his living as an artist doing graphic design, logos and commissioned artwork such as comic portraits of people's dogs.

Some of his work will be on display at the BlackRock Center for the Arts during the "Small Scale" exhibit of small art in various media running Oct. 5 to Nov. 11. Auger was also one of the artists featured in the graphic novel "Trickster: Native American Tales: A Graphic Collection" that features Native American folklore told by storytellers and illustrated by artists.

"With comics, it is very hard to make a living doing that," he says. "It's more of like a labor of love."

To see examples of Auger's work, visit www.arty4ever.com.



Submitted Artist Michael Auger is one of the people behind "Magic Bullet," a comic newspaper being distributed at Metro stations.