
In 1990, after one year and twenty-one issues of drawing his self-published, predominately autobiographical, minicomic *King Cat Comics*, John Porcellino took it upon himself to defend his minimalist, rough-hewn drawing style, which had drawn the ire of some of his readers. The young, twenty-two-year-old cartoonist, in a seven-panel comic called *Well Drawn Funnies*, which eschews the normal conventions of cartooning in that it contains several text-only panels, defines the development of his style as follows:

A big turning point [in his artistic career] came when I discovered that a crappy line, scratched on paper, was infinitely more ‘realistic’ than the most labored rendering…Anyhow, if the world is a piece of shit, art that denies that is in essence a lie. It is more important to me to make art that is an honest expression of life than it is to make pictures people think are well drawn.¹

Twenty-one years later, Porcellino has won multiple awards and accolades and his place as a do-it-yourself comics pioneer and masterful cartoonist is undeniable. The ragged nature of his drawing has tightened and refined over the past two decades, but the immediacy and potency of his line work and graphic storytelling ability has not been tempered.

Porcellino captures the minutiae of everyday life with the sensitivity and insight of a poet. The desire of his young self to present an “honest expression of life” is as much an alternative comix and punk ethos, as it a tenant of the American Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau. In Thoreau’s seminal *Walden* – which recounts the two years Thoreau spent living by his own means in the cabin he built by Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts – the poet and naturalist, who embodied DIY well before punk, stated:

It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look … Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour.²

Porcellino, who translated *Walden* into the comics in 2008, has made the moments of his life “worthy of contemplation” with his literal life’s work *King Cat Comics*. However, he has now turned his inimitable style, his ability to “carve” the medium of life, onto the lives of others, and is working for the first time in collaboration with the graphic novella *The Next Day*.

*The Next Day*, which is published by Toronto-based multimedia production and publishing company Pop Sandbox, is constructed from intimate interviews with survivors of near-fatal suicide attempts. It is a unique graphic novella in that it is a hybrid of documentary film and comic book, co-written by former social worker Paul Peterson and filmmaker Jason Gilmore. Along with the graphic novella, *The Next Day* was developed

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¹ John Porcellino, “*Well Drawn Funnies #Ø,*” *King Cat Classix* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2007), 90.

simultaneously as a separate interactive animated documentary online, allowing audiences the opportunity to create their own path through the original audio interviews combined with animations based on Porcellino’s illustration. As opposed to the vast majority of Porcellino’s artistic output, *The Next Day* is the stories of others and a collaboration between many. However, Porcellino’s deft handling of life’s moments is as potent as ever, as is his ability to affect readers through abstraction. Collaboration and adaptation have not curtailed the cartoonist’s creativity; rather, working with Gilmore and Peterson, Porcellino has allowed the lives and voices of the survivors –Tina, Ryan, Chantel, and Jenn – to be expressed and heard not with sensation, but with honesty and sensitivity. In *Walden*, Thoreau expresses that “[t]o affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts;” here Gilmore, Peterson and Porcellino have affected the quality and value of the next.

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