

A Splendid Night at SMOCA June 24

Written by David M. Brown

Comics monsters with self-esteem challenges, sculpted-plaster movie seats and a Splendid opening: Plan to visit The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art on the Scottsdale Civic Center Mall the evening of June 24, 7–9 p.m. The event is free.



To celebrate its summer 2011 arts calendar, SMOCA has invited the principal artists of three current exhibitions as well as a group introducing the new 1,800-square-foot Splendid store, which opens June 17 at Scottsdale Fashion Square. Founded in Los Angeles in 2002, Splendid showcases fashionable T-shirts and other apparel for the family.

Exhibitions showcased the evening of June 24 at SMOCA include tandem comics exhibitions, *Us Versus Them* and *Masters of Collective Reality*, both appearing through Oct. 2, and the second installment of museum's Architecture + Art series, *Extended Collapse*, through Oct. 16.

Representing the comics shows will be Phoenix artist Jon Haddock. At the same time, Annie Han and Daniel Mihalyo, artists and architects from Seattle's Lead Pencil Studio, will appear for their Architecture + Art installations.

For the Splendid store, Crafting Community, a Los Angeles-based collaboration of artist Karen Kimmel's Kimmel Kids and Stacy Bernstein and Tait Chatmon of Kid Concierge, will be in the small gallery — soon to become the new "SMoCA Lounge" — helping museum guests craft one-of-a-kind scarves, bracelets and other accessories from recycled strips of vibrant fabrics.



The next day, June 25, 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m., in front of Macy's at Fashion Square, Crafting Community also plans similar interactive family workshops to celebrate the Splendid store opening.

"We are delighted to welcome the first-to-market Splendid store to Scottsdale Fashion Square," says Kate Birchler, the center's senior manager for marketing. "Splendid is a great brand most noted for its quality of fabric, and we're excited how they plan to introduce their product to the Scottsdale Fashion Square shopper with an interactive crafting event, where families can create crafts with the fabrics. We love the energy this will create for the new store."

Opening attendees can speak with the guest artists, who will answer questions about their work.

In two portions, Han and Mihalyo's *Extended Collapse* installation examines the museum's former existence as an urban five-plex cinema. In one gallery, two sculpted seating arrangements appear with projections of Valley cityscapes. An adjacent gallery houses a large-scale sculpture reminiscent of a movie theater marquee combined with various building fragments.

Curated by Cassandra Coblenz, the Lead Pencil Studio installation highlights the architectural conditions and development choices associated with construction in a boom economy and the ramifications of these decisions during extended down cycles such as the current one.

"We want *Extended Collapse* to inspire thought about opportunities, about multiple visions for our built spaces," Coblenz says. "We hope people leaving this experience will consider the implications of our development decisions — about both failed uses of space as well as how our design decisions can generate better ones in the future."

Conceived by Haddock, *Us Versus Them* displays his work, which explores the individual's experience and society's collective reality, and *Masters of Collective Reality* celebrates the achievement of nine comics artists whose technical virtuosity and idiosyncrasies Haddock admires.

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Sponsored by the SMOCA Salon, *Masters of Collective Reality* showcases selected work of comics legends Fred Guardineer, Rory Hayes, Joe Sacco, R. Sikoryak, John Stanley, Jim Woodring and Basil Wolverton, as well as new artists such as Matthew Allison and Jennifer Diane Reitz.



Matthew Allison, *Calamity of Challenge* (cover), 2010-11. Digital reproduction. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. © Matthew Allison



Jon Haddock, *Come Down Neville* (detail), 2010. Digital image, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. © Jon Haddock.



Jon Haddock, *Legion*, 2011 (installation view); Papier-mâché and casein; Approximately 36 x 16 x 12 inches each; Courtesy of the artist Jon Haddock



R. Sikoryak, "The Crypt of Bronte" from *Masterpiece Comics*, 2009. Digital reproduction. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. © R. Sikoryak

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Annie Hand and Daniel Mihalyo, Lead Pencil Studio, *Under the Surface*, 2008, charcoal and acrylic on paper, 57 x 71 inches. Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Lead Pencil Studio. ©Lead Pencil Studio.

Though widely differing in coloring, characterization, narrative and theme, each artist employs the comic to examine personal, cultural and political inequities, explains Haddock, guest curator for the exhibition. They invite us into world of their own design, a mythology, and for the short time we experience that world, it becomes reality for us, too.

The earliest piece, from 1935, is by science-fiction specialist Wolverton, and, into the 1940s, Haddock has chosen work by Stanley and Guardineer, who transformed previously created characters into fresh stories.

In the 1960s, Underground Comix artist Hayes rejected all attempts at censorship or restraint, a kind of visual Lenny Bruce. Sikoryak reexamines the values of classic literature by presenting them in the form of the popular comic, and Sacco unites reportage and autobiography by compressing war zone experience into the comic frame.

Contemporary comics artists are offering new approaches, Haddock explains. Allison, for example, places supervillains in pedestrian situations and creates monsters with low self-esteem, and Woodring and Reitz have developed sensitive protagonists, often struggling with isolation and alienation.

Approaching similar themes, Haddock's installation, *Us Versus Them*, considers the divergence of the comic reader's own world from the fantasy world of comics. One recurrent theme is the experience of comic fandom. For example, a series of papier-mache/casein pieces depict the iconoclastic male comics reader, including sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick.

That evening, June 24, Crafting Community offers museum opening guests a variety of opportunities to create pieces for their worlds. Activities include the *Sew Splendid Cart* in which families "Throw Themselves into Summer" by customizing Splendid throw pillows. And, *Fun with Fabrics* is a fabric and beading workshop for customizing scarves, necklaces, headbands, bracelets and key fobs through braiding, twisting and knotting Splendid fabrics with multi-colored beads.



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Debuting in October 2010 in Palm Springs, Calif., as a family weekend getaway, Crafting Community encourages family togetherness through the artistic reuse and repurpose of natural materials. For that event, Splendid joined as a partner, explains Julia Austin, public relations director

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for the company.

“Crafting Community brought the Splendid brand to life in such a way that attending families had the opportunity to have a unique hands-on experience with the brand and its fabrics through creative art workshops, activities and at the ‘Sew Splendid’ pop-up shop on-site,” she says.

Coblentz worked with Kimmel to create an art piece for a recent exhibition, *Southwest Net: Drawing Outside the Lines*. For this, Kimmel visited Scottsdale to work with fourth grade students at The Phoenix School for the Deaf. Through Kimmel’s Art of Exchange Workshop and original artist stencils, the group created a site-specific interactive installation for SMOCA.

“When we decided to head to Scottsdale it seemed there was no better fit than to partner with SMOCA, an organization in the Valley that strives to bring culture, unique experiences and expose children to art and culture,” Kimmel explains.

Notes SMOCA’s director, Tim Rodgers: “Our two comics exhibitions and the new Art + Architecture installation have been conceived just for SMOCA, so you won’t be able to see these works any place else.”

“The comic-inspired exhibitions boast a sofa, bean bag chairs, comic books and a life-size bear costume,” he adds, “and the special crafting activities in conjunction with the new Splendid store make it a well-rounded evening, full of new ideas and experiences — perfect for adults, and the kids will like it, too.”

For more information about the exhibitions and the June 24 evening event, see www.smoca.org.