

Latinidad – 10/12: Mastering Comics

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1. Saludos

I'm puzzled as to why there seem to be many Latino comics illustrators but comparatively few Latino comics writers. Perhaps this is evidence of a need for a guidebook as inspiring, accessible, and comprehensive as Mastering Comics, the follow-up to the Eisner Award-nominated Drawing Words & Writing Pictures. Both books should be considered essential reading for all aspiring cartoonists. To learn more, read this month's Q&A with Matt Madden, co-author of Mastering Comics.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Matt Madden is a cartoonist who also teaches comics and drawing at the School of Visual Arts. His work includes 99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style, a collection of his comics adaptation of Raymond Queneau's Exercises in Style; a translation from the French of Aristophane's The Zabome Sisters; and Drawing Words & Writing Pictures and Mastering Comics, a pair of comics textbooks written in collaboration with his wife, Jessica Abel. The couple are also series editors for The Best American Comics from Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt. He is currently on an extended residency in Angoulême, France with his wife and their two children. You'll find recent news at <http://www.mattmadden.com/> and <http://dw-wp.com/>

Q: How did you get started as a cartoonist?

A: Unlike a lot of cartoonists, I didn't grow up dreaming of being a cartoonist. I read some comics as a kid but it wasn't until my teens that I really fell into the medium. There were no schools or guidebooks so I just taught myself how to write, draw, and design comics through trial and error. The comics world has a strong history of a self-publishing, from photocopied fanzines to full-

color hardcovers, and it doesn't have the stigma of vanity publishing that I see in the literary publishing world. So I simply began drawing comics and publishing them in little photocopied booklets that I would sell and trade through the mail and at comics conventions. Gradually my work got noticed by a few critics and editors and that led to my first two books, *Black Candy* and *Odds Off*, being published by small independent comics publishers.

Q: If you knew then what you know now, what would you have done differently?

A: I wish I had spent more time doing life drawing and generally concentrating on my drawing when I was starting out. I'm contradicting what I say as a teacher here: I do think it's valuable to dive into comics and start making work right away. There are so many skills to master in order to make comics that if you wait until you've learned each one you'll never get started! If I hadn't started making mini comics, I'm honestly not sure I would have had the motivation to keep going and keep improving. But all that said, at a certain point I realized that I was lagging in certain basics of drawing—the human figure in particular—and that was holding me back as an artist.

Q: What three mistakes should newbie cartoonists avoid?

A: Building on what I just said, I think it's a good idea to learn by doing and start making comics using whatever skills you have at hand, even if it's just stick figures or clip art. Some artists move on to more expressive modes while others find that a simple visual language is all they need. I meet a lot of young artists who get stuck at the stage of world-building: they have notebooks full of character sketches, maps, and family trees but they can't make the transition to telling actual stories. Finally, though comics are a highly visual language, too often I see writing in comics that is sub par, both in terms of its quality as prose or dialogue but also in its basic mechanics.

Q: Alternatively, what are three signs of a top-notch cartoonist?

A: One quality of many of the best cartoonists is a usually hard-earned capacity for understatement, both in drawing style and in storytelling. It's very easy to be over-the-top in comics and that's fun but it's an approach that lacks subtlety. (It's worth pointing out that that is fine and even preferable for some authors and readers, perhaps more so in comics than other media.) Most of the best cartoonists have a supple command of the often ironic interplay between word and image in comics. Finally, many of the artists I admire embrace their quirkiness in some way; rather than change their drawing or their subject matter to conform to some kind of norm, they cultivate that weirdness.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet him/her? If you don't have an agent, how did you come to be published by First Second?

A: My agent is Bob Mecoy and I first met him in the late 90s when he was still an editor at Crown and my wife Jessica had an appointment with him. I tagged along and he bought me a martini and asked me about my work—I hadn't published much at the time. About five years later, he called out of the blue. He had retired from editing and started a new career as a literary agent. He was calling to see if we would be interested in illustrating a book together. That project never panned out but it turned out that Bob had been following my project <http://www.exercisesinstyle.com/> online and really liked it. "You should sell it, then," Jessica said, half joking. "OK, let's meet tomorrow," he answered. He sold my project to Penguin as 99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style and then leaned hard on me and Jessica (whom he now also represents) to pitch a comics textbook which he then sold to First Second Books in 2005. To me, the lesson here is that whenever you meet someone you should be aware that they may come back around and be very important in your life, even if under a different guise than you expected.

Q: Aside from your book, Mastering Comics, what resources would you recommend to writers who want to learn more about comics?

A: First off, it goes without saying that you should have Drawing Words & Writing Pictures, the predecessor to Mastering Comics. It covers the nuts-and-bolts basics of how to make comics.

My book 99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style is used in a lot of comics, writing, and film classes as a guidebook to the richness of storytelling (sometimes in tandem with the book that inspired me, Raymond Queneau's Exercises in Style).

Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics is canonical for anyone interested in visual storytelling and communication. His more recent Making Comics has lots of useful insights for working cartoonists.

Ivan Brunetti's Cartooning Philosophy and Practice is an excellent step-by-step class in making comics.

Lynda Barry's books What It Is and Picture This have been a huge inspiration to people in all kinds of creative fields.

Finally, Gary Spencer Millidge did a very good overview of all the different stages of drawing and publishing a comic called Comic Book Design

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: Jessica and I are series editors of the Best American Comics from Houghton-Mifflin; the 2012 issue just came out with Françoise Mouly as this year's guest editors. As for my own work, I am currently shopping around a collection of experimental short comics that I have done over the last eight years or so. (No bites yet.) Now that I'm in France on a two-year residency, I'm determined to enter a period of high productivity so you can expect to see a bunch of new stuff from me in the years to come. I have no plans to do another textbook at the moment, but teaching will always be an important part of what I do.

3. Workshops

The Comadres and Compadres Writers Conference

WHAT: Meet agents and editors who have a proven track record of publishing Latino books. Get an insider's perspective on how best to navigate the particular challenges--and opportunities--faced by Latino authors. Join a vibrant national community of writers, who are traveling from as far away as California, Florida, and Mexico to attend. Made possible through the generous support of AT&T, PubIt!/Barnes & Noble, and Scholastic.

WHEN: Saturday, October 6

WHERE: Medgar Evers College, 1638 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, NY (at Crown Street)

WHO: Speakers include Michelle Herrera Mulligan, Editor-in-Chief of Cosmopolitan Latina, Nicholasa Mohr, author of the classic novel Nilda, and Sonia Manzano, author of The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano and beloved actress who played Maria on Sesame Street. In addition, leading agents and editors will conduct one-on-one sessions with attendees. For a complete list of participants, please visit the conference web site below.

REGISTER: Pre-registration is strongly encouraged, especially if you want to book a one-on-one session with an agent or editor. Visit <http://www.lascomadres.org/lco/lco-eng/events/2012/NYCWC.html>

List of upcoming workshops:

<http://www.marcelalandres.com/workshops.html>

4. Resources

HOW EDITORS THINK

"I read How Editors Think in one sitting and was engaged from beginning to end. It is well written, highly informative, and humorous—I found myself laughing out-loud in a few spots! Thanks for sharing the secrets of the trade."

—Mayra Lazara Dole, author of *Down to the Bone*

Inspired by my experience as a former Simon & Schuster editor, *How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You* reveals what it really takes to get published. For more information, visit:

<http://www.marcelalandres.com/E-book.html>

NY COMIC CON

Dates: October 11-14

New York Comic Con plays host to the latest and greatest in comics, graphic novels, anime, manga, video games, toys, movies, and television. Their panels and autograph sessions give fans a chance to interact with their favorite creators. For more information, visit <http://www.newyorkcomiccon.com/>

ARTE LATINO NOW SEEKS SUBMISSIONS

Deadline: October 12

Arte Latino Now invites U.S. Latino artists to submit new media, visual arts, performing arts, and creative writing. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/9suavpx>

THE STORY BEHIND THE SPICE WRITING CLASS

Registration Deadline: October 31

In this two-session class, you'll work on excavating the rich stories behind your special family recipes, and preserve that history for generations to come.

Bring two of your favorite recipes along with a couple of family photos for inspiration. For more information about the class, visit <http://geminiink.org/>

and for more information about the instructor, visit [http://](http://www.ednacamposgravenhorst.com/)

www.ednacamposgravenhorst.com/

\$5000 POETRY COLLECTION PRIZE

Deadline: October 31

The Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize offers \$5000 and publication by the University of Arkansas Press for a poetry collection. For more information, visit <http://www.uapress.com/geninfo/poetryguidelines.html>

SEEKING SHORT STORIES

Starting: November 1

Unmanned Press seeks storytelling that exhibits literary skill, sharpness, and originality for their short fiction series, Short of the Month. Unmanned actively seeks to publish a diverse set of voices and is committed to advancing the work of emerging and underserved fiction writers. For more information, visit <http://www.unmannedpress.com/>

E-BOOK AWARDS

Deadline: November 15

The Publishing Innovation Awards honor the most innovative e-books in 14 categories. For more information, visit <http://www.publishinginnovationawards.com/>

ELSEWHERE LITMAG

Deadline: November 15

Elsewhere Litmag seeks fiction, poetry, non-fiction and visual art that deals with marginalization in some form or another. For more information, visit <http://elsewherelitmag.com/submissions/>

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS FICTION CONTEST

Deadline: November 15

A prize of \$1500, publication in the journal Louisiana Literature, and an all-expenses-paid trip to the New Orleans Literary Festival is given for a short story. For more information, visit <http://www.tennesseewilliams.net/contests>

CUNJUNCTIONS MAGAZINE

Bard College's literary journal Conjunctions is now reading for their In Absentia issue in which they will explore the presence of absence, the losses that gain on us, the black holes in our everyday lives: the darkness as well as the light that blinds. This will be an issue of missing persons, phantom limbs, sensory deprivation, amnesia, lost masterpieces, broken artifacts, islands that sink under the skin of the sea. Stories, poems, and memoirs will take vanishing and vacancy as both their subject and their form. For more information, visit <http://www.conjunctions.com/about.htm>

JUST PUBLISHED: LOST IN THE LIGHT

One October morning in 1932, Vicente Sorolla entered the white house on the hill and was never seen again. Now, Detective Dori Orihuela restores her

dream home while recovering from a bullet wound and waiting to go back on duty. Then one afternoon, Vicente materializes out of her butler's pantry and asks her to find a woman named Anna. Dori wonders if she's not only about to lose her badge, but also her sanity. Mary Castillo's new novel, featuring the wild Orihuela family that first delighted readers in *Names I Call My Sister*, weaves romance, history, and mystery into an unforgettable story. For more information, visit <http://www.marycastillo.com/>

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER ONLY WHEN SHARED

Please forward Latinidad® widely.

For more resources, visit <http://www.marcelalandres.com/resources.html>

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Visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/marcelalandres/>

“The reason I love comics more than anything else is that the longest story will be just a few pages. With a novel, it takes so many pages to get to one thing happening.”

--Sergio Aragonés

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Marcela Landres

Author of the e-book "How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You"

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