Arts & Humanities

“MAD” Man

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Al Jaffee’s back-page Fold-In from MAD no. 313, September 1992. TM and © EC Publications, Inc. Used with permission. Visit www.madmag.com.

If you’re anything like Karen Green ’97GSAS, Columbia’s graphic-novel librarian, you spent many childhood hours on the floor of the drugstore reading *MAD*. You often turned right to the magazine’s three-paneled back page to see what colorful send-up of the culture lay waiting to be discovered by means of a neat-o folding trick that revealed a punch line in the form of a new picture and message. In this way, you came to know the name Al Jaffee, creator of the *MAD* Fold-In. And if you *are* Karen Green, you’re thrilled beyond words (and pictures) to have acquired last fall, on behalf of Columbia, the archive of one of America’s most treasured humorous

cartoonists.

Jaffee, who is ninety-two, began drawing the *MAD* Fold-In in 1964. He's finishing up his latest one this very moment. All told, he's worked continuously at *MAD* for nearly sixty years, teaching generations of American preadolescents how to fold paper, and sharpening the eyes of their older siblings to the duplicities of advertising, politics, and authority in general — a pursuit for which the Fold-In was particularly well suited. "I love making a paragraph or a sentence serve two purposes at the same time," says Jaffee from his East 56th Street studio. "I love that challenge."

Jaffee grew up in the Bronx, where as a teenager in the 1930s he'd spend hours drawing with his friend, future *MAD* cartoonist Will Elder. "What shaped my outlook was hanging out with other people who had a similar sense of humor," Jaffee says. "I was not a *fan* of anything per se; I was an observer. Willie and I would do cartoons of our neighbors and show our work to each other."

According to Green, Columbia will receive all materials associated with Jaffee's "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions" pieces for *MAD*, materials from the Fold-Ins, non-comics-related art, unused or rejected ideas, and other Jaffeenilia. Jaffee hopes that visitors to the archive will find that "*MAD* made a decent contribution to the discourse in our society by capturing, in a humorous way, some of the nuttiness in which we indulge."

Though Jaffee is a dean among comic-book artists, he doesn't want to be put on a pedestal.

"Cartooning was the only way I could figure out how to make a living," he says, and laughs. "It's sort of justified my dissolute existence."



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