The Weight of a Line

ART AND COMICS // YVAN ALAGBÉ, JESSICA CAMPBELL, AND EDIE FAKE

By Coco Picard
An age-old mode of artistic research involves bringing a sketchbook to a museum and sketching a painting or drawing in order to understand its operations. Such efforts can yield different insights at different times. The following graphic review follows a similarly intuitive but careful endeavor, looking at three contemporary comic book artists, Yvan Alagbé, Jessica Campbell, and Edie Fake, who also engage the field of contemporary art. Each artist interrogates their own political concerns from sexual politics to gender identity, racial identity, and forgotten histories, using unique mark-making and material strategies that resonate conceptually with the emotive and political landscapes they engage. As a result they capture something of our moment: a deep frustration for society’s habits, a frustration that nevertheless unearths new forms of potential.

In addition to his own accomplishments as a cartoonist, Yvan Alagbé (b. 1971, Paris) spearheads multiple publishing efforts, including a contemporary art review he cofounded, *L’oeil carnivore*, a magazine, *Le Chéval sans tête*, and a comics publishing house, Amok. In 2001, Amok partnered with the publishing group Fréon to establish the Franco-Belgian collaboration Frémok, now a major European graphic novels publisher. Alagbé’s graphic novel, *Yellow Negroes and Other Imaginary Creatures* (New York Review of Books, 2018) was recently translated into English. Jessica Campbell (b. 1985, Victoria, Canada) is an artist and humorist based out of Chicago; she is the author of two graphic novels, *XTC69* (Koyama Press, 2018) and *Hot or Not: 20th Century Male Artists* (Koyama Press, 2016), and, working in performance, fiber, painting, and drawing often uses carpet remnants to create stand-alone, figurative artworks. Edie Fake (b. 1980, Chicagoland) is a painter and graphic novelist who envisions and explores the potential of queer spaces—imagined, personal, and historical. He is the author of two books, *Gaylord Phoenix* (2011 winner of the Ignatz Award, Secret Acres), and *Little Stranger* (Secret Acres, 2018).

Just as typeset critics must internalize and reflect the work of a given artist or author in their writing, this review aims to explore a parallel effort through drawing and handwritten text—creating a graphic reflection of the artists’ work. Bear in mind that each drawing of an artwork or comic panel is a failed copy of the original, a copy that has been translated through the hand of the author.
THE WEIGHT OF A LINE

I am always interested in the line between this and that.

What might first appear literal or practical will, on closer inspection, reflect a bias—a set of terms or filters filtering daily life.

Take, for example, the 2016 exhibition, "Playboy Architecture, 1963-1979," a show that presents the magazine as a major proponent for mid-century architecture.

Like borders between countries, these priorities aim at irreputability—they need to be convincing, they want to be doubtless.

Things are changing. The water is rising, disciplines blur.

They have stacked the old statues on top of file cabinets to keep them safe, but it is not enough...
Jessica Campbell plays the game with art history!!

And now with her color comic complete with a cover ripping on the "eternally steamy" "les demoiselles d'avignon" complete with scratch off things you can too!

Campbell's work volley between her position as an artist today and historic precedents; sometimes she produces black and white comics. In other instances, she uses textiles - weaving pictures out of carpet.

These carpet works are sensual; you want to touch them but cannot. This resonates with the content also. Campbell regularly highlights a undermined latent, everyday misogyny. The figure/ground relationship is further complicated by carpet fibers that make any outline literally "fuzzy" and undefined and unstable.

In a recent exhibit, Campbell created the "Carl Chapel" juxtaposing autobiographical panels from Campbell's life alongside those inspired by fellow British Columbia artist Emily Carr (1871-1945). Entering this low-lit room, viewers are asked to consider the parallels and differences of generational nurture.

In her graphic novel, "Xenot," Campbell looks to a future in which she is the last survivor on Earth. She is discovered sleeping in a coffin by future females in search of their own survival.
EDIE FAKE ALSO UNCOVERS...SHIFTERIES-
RECOVERING THE FACADE
OF LONG LOST FEMINIST
LESBIAN WATERING HOLE IN A SERIES OF DRAWINGS
HE LATER COMPILED IN A BOUND BOOK.

FAKE'S WORK CONTINUES TO PLAY WITH THE ILLUSION OF SPACE.
PUSHING + PULLING AGAINST THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL PICTURE
PLANE WITH ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITIONS THAT ALMOST SEEM
IMPOSSIBLE.

THE BODY ISN'T LITERALLY PRESENT
BUT IMPLIES AS WITH "THE FITTING
ROOM" WHICH AMPHIBIENS THE WAYS IN
WHICH THE SEMI-PUBLIC + SUPPOSEDLY
NEUTRAL SPACE OF A SHOPPING ROOM
IS INCAPABLE OF DEPICTING
ANYTHING CHEERSING. THE MIRRORS OF
THE PIECE ARE NON-REFLECTIVE,
SMOOTH + SASS, REFLECTING THE
VIEWER'S POSE OF ENTRY.

THE UNDENIABLE BEAUTY OF THE IMAGE:
THE TENSION OF TIGHT, GEOMETRIC
SYMMETRY + LUSH COLOR. PUT THE
VIEWER AT Ease?

ENPOWERING THEM
WITHIN THIS HALL
OF MIRRORS.

BOOKS LIKE CALENDAR PHENOM - THE LITTLE STRANG
ER INCLUDE ANIMATED CHARACTERS SEEKING
SEEKING TRANSCENDENCE, ETC. LAYING EXACT POTENTIAL.
UNLIKE HIS ARTWORKS, FIGURES IN FAKE'S
BOOKS SEEM UNAMBIGUOUSLY BY THE PAGE, CAPABLE
OF MOVING FREELY. IT'S INTERESTING ALSO TO THINK
ABOUT HOW DIFFERENTLY THESE TWO FORMS - PINK
ART & COMICS - CIRCULATE DIFFERENTLY.

TRADITIONAL ARTWORKS ARE SOMEHOW MORE PUBLIC,
OR PERHAPS MORE FOR THAT REASON FAKE'S
INDIVIDUAL DRAWING REFLECTS DIFFERENTLY:
HIS BOOK ARE MORE INTIMATE,
ENABLING A ONE-ON-ONE RELATIONSHIP WITH
QUESTIONING NATURALISM + MOVEMENT ORGANIZED
THROUGH ABSTRACT LANDSCAPE.

MAYBE THE DESIRE FOR CAPTURE - CALL IT HOPE,
DETERMINATION, LUST - AN INNER PRESSURE THAT
PUSHES AGAINST, AROUND - THROUGH HARD LINES - MAYBE THIS IS THE THING THAT DRIVES
US ALL FROM INSIDE OUT.
WHEREAS FAKÉ's PICTORIAL COMPOSITIONS ARE COMPOSED OF UNBROKEN UMBRA LINES THAT OFTEN BIND THE PICTURE PLANE, THOSE OF YVAN ALABÉ CONTINUALLY FALL APART, FLEETING IN AND OUT OF REPRESENTATION TO PRODUCE A PERSUASIVE SENSE OF INSTABILITY.

YVAN ALABÉ

THE NYRB RECENTLY PUBLISHED AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ALABÉ'S "YELLOW NEGROES & OTHER IMAGINARY CREATURES" - A COLLECTION OF COMICS THAT LOOKS AT RACE, POLITICAL HISTORIES, & IMMIGRATION IN PARIS.

EACH PANEL IN THE BOOK IS COMPRISED OF THICK INK DRAWINGS THAT EMPHASIZE THE CONTRAST OF POSITIVE & NEGATIVE SPACE.

SKIN TAKES FLUCTUATE ACCORDING TO THE MIND & IDEOLOGICAL DYSTOPOSIATION & CHARACTERS.

ALABÉ'S EXPERT DRAFTSMANSHIP MAKES THE READER AS KEEN TO LOCATE THE FIGURE AS THE CHARACTERS ARE TO LOCATE THEMSELVES LIKE FAKE, THERE IS AN ONGOING SEARCH FOR INTIMACY LIKE CAMPBELL, AN ENDURING DILEMMA BETWEEN FIGURE & SURROUND, ALABÉ'S UNSEARCHING PORTRAYAL SHOWS THE OVERLAP OF COMPLEX LIVES & HISTORIES EVEN THOSE SEEMINGLY DEVOID OF VICTIMARIES.

THE AIR IS COLD, BEAUTIFUL, THIS STUNNING PICTURE EMPOWERS WITH A SOUDAIN URGENCE, ALONG AGAIN THE SITUATION LIKE A RING OF AMANZI.