



Denys Wortman's New York: Portrait of the City in the 30s and 40s

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A rescued archive of vintage New York City from a forgotten ash can artist

After cartoonist, educator, and editor James Sturm discovered the vintage book *Mopey Dick and the Duke*, he set off to find out more about the author, the deceased and unknown cartoonist Denys Wortman. Sturm immediately took note of the masterful drawings—casual, confident, and brimming with personality—and wondered how this cartoonist escaped his radar. After some online sleuthing, Sturm connected with Wortman's son, who relayed that an archive of more than five thousand illustrations was literally sitting in his shed in dire need of rescuing. For more than thirty-five years, the illustrations had been fighting such elements as hungry rodents, rusty paper clips, and even a blizzard. Wortman's son also had drawers full of his father's correspondence, including letters and holiday cards from William Steig and Walt Disney. Original artwork by artists and personal friends—including Peggy Bacon, Milt Gross, Isabel Bishop, and Reginald Marsh—were also saved. The fact that Wortman's luminary peers held him in the highest regard, coupled with his artistic prowess, makes his absence from both fine art and comics history puzzling. So Sturm and Brandon Elston set out to create a beautiful tribute to the forgotten master.

Denys Wortman's New York is not only a tribute to Wortman; it is a tribute to New York, the city that sparked Wortman's voracious creative output. From coal cellars to rooftops, from opera houses to boardinghouses, Wortman recorded the sailors, dishwashers, con artists, entertainers, pushcart peddlers, construction workers, musicians, hoboes, society matrons, young mothers, secretaries, and students who collectively made the city what it was and is today.

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