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JOHN WESLEY *Hungarian Dog Wrestler*, 2002, Gouache on paper, 26" x 35"

‘Comic Inspirations’ at Adam Baumgold By KEN JOHNSON

Many artists never outgrow their childhood love of comics and the funny pages. Some produce comic books themselves; others make fine art under the influence of cartoons. Both types commingle in “Comic Inspirations,” a rousing show of drawings, paintings and collages by more than two dozen artists at Adam Baumgold.

In the comic book category is a finely drawn page from Robert Crumb’s “Uncle Bob’s Mid-Life Crisis” (1983), which has the artist conversing with a friend about his marital ennui. Charles Burns’s “Big Baby: Fantagraphics Cover” (1999) turns to scary and funny surrealism in a starkly black-and-white image of a boy playing with his monster toys. Kim Deitch’s “The Search for Smilin’ Ed” (2011) portrays a maniacal comic artist at his drawing board working on a large page titled “Consider the Beaver,” while in the background an angry cat standing on one leg protests: “Hey! I can’t hold this pose all day!”

Works in the fine art department are no less piquant. In “Superwoman vs. Cake” (1996) by Peter Saul, a disproportionately buxom superheroine flies determinedly toward two slices of frosted layer cake, both of which sport male genitalia. John Wesley’s sweetly peculiar “Hungarian Dog Wrestler” (2002) depicts a hulking man in gym shorts wrangling six puppies. Veering toward abstraction, a series of small panel paintings, “Popeye and Olive” (2002), by Richard McGuire, has that sailor and his girlfriend reduced to bulbous and tubular forms in blue on white. In addition to these are choice pieces by the Chicago Imagists Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson and Ray Yoshida. Prepare to be deeply amused.