



Art Ops: How to Start a Riot

Shaun Simon , Mike Allred (Illustrations)

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Reggie Riot is no one's idea of a cultural savior. The latchkey child of a busy single mother, he's grown up to be a resentful slacker whose idea of high culture is getting stoned and admiring the graffiti in the alley where he scores his weed.

His mother, however, is not your average working parent. She's the head of a secret organization called Art Ops, whose mission is protecting the artistic treasures of the world—which have a lot more life in them than a casual observer might realize.

Reggie has always shunned his mom's high-culture scene, but a devastating encounter with the shadowy forces menacing the world's masterpieces has left him with a permanent expression of the chaotic power of art flowing through his very veins.

So when Art Ops itself suddenly vanishes without a trace, leaving its final rescue—*La Gioconda*, the Mona Lisa herself—out in the cold, it's up to Reggie and his motley crew—including a masked super-powered operative who writes sitcom scripts on spec, a girls-just-wanna-have-fun '80s music-video icon, and a suburban clerk from a mall-punk clothing chain—to come to the rescue.

But do they have what it takes to stand up to the dark side of human creativity?

From writer **Shaun Simon** (co-author of *The True Lives of the Fabulous Killjoys* with My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way) and artists **Michael Allred** (co-creator of *iZOMBIE*) and **Matt Brundage** (*The Spirit: The New Adventures*) comes **ART OPS VOL. 1: HOW TO START A RIOT**, collecting issues #1-5 of the ongoing VERTIGO series and featuring a special sketchbook section from Allred and Brundage.

Art Ops: How to Start a Riot Details

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From Reader Review Art Ops: How to Start a Riot for online ebook

Denver Public Library says

I'll admit it: I am a sucker for Michael Allred's art. Even if Allred is just doing the cover art, that comic is now a must-read for me, and even better if he's cranked out work for the whole book.

Art Ops reminds me of everything I loved about the Invisibles: cult references, deconstruction of the superhero genre, zany plot devices, an aesthetic of absurdist magical-realism and a radical acceptance of characters that fall outside of gender binaries. Plus the book seems fueled by some very fun and edifying LSD experiences, mixed with a send-up of suburban khaki and bland "sad-dad culture," and enough art history references to keep a person running to the wikipedia.

The book is funny, it's weird and it may make you question why the hell (most) everyone in this world of ours dresses so square and normie-normative? Where is the style, where is the art and playfulness? Squares are over! Enter the age of fourth dimensional strangeness.

Get Art Ops from the Denver Public Library

- Mikel

Jana says

I received a free copy from the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

This had a really interesting premise, but I wasn't a fan of the execution - I ended up quite bored instead of invested and didn't really click with the characters or the art.

Paul E. Morph says

A secret organisation that deals with art crimes? Said crimes are along the lines of people in paintings escaping their frames and walking around in the real world getting up to what I believe is known as 'hi-jinx'? Agents of the organisation having art-related powers? Gorgeous artwork by the Allreds?

This book was created with me specifically in mind, wasn't it?

In that case, I'd be remiss if I didn't give DC/Vertigo a big thank you, because I loved this book. It had one of the most original concepts I've seen in a long time, which counts for a lot these days. It had me grinning from ear-to-ear the whole time.

My initial thought was to give this book four stars, but then I asked myself what I was docking it a star for and couldn't think of anything, so five stars it is! Bring on volume two!

Sam Quixote says

The Art Operatives protect art from people who want to steal and destroy them, literally taking the subjects of the paintings out of the canvas into real life and putting them into a kind of witness protection! But one day nearly all of the Art Ops disappears suddenly and it's down to the Art Ops head's son, Reggie Riot, to partner with a superhero character to save the Mona Lisa from destruction.

This comic sounded like a lot of fun but it turned out to be utter pants. The premise is garbage - this idea that art is literally alive is just stupid. Zapping a painting like the Mona Lisa with something and taking out the person inside, who's alive and speaks English and is ok with the modern world and knows they're living in a painting and are made of paint but are somehow human and have somehow been conscious for centuries and so on is too broad and inadequately explained.

I think Shaun Simon is trying to mimic comics like *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* which features literary characters as real people. Except, as far as I recall, the LXG literary characters were always real people, they weren't created and brought to life by artists somehow, so the concept falls apart in *Art Ops* where all of the artistic creations are clearly the product of artists.

Then there's the idea that saving a part of a painting - the figure of the Mona Lisa rather than the background detail - is all you need to do to preserve them. Aren't masterworks celebrated because every part of it contributes to the overall effect? And what about those works of art that don't have a human subject like John Constable or El Greco's landscapes? Once again the concept fails.

The villain of the story is an "ugly" piece of art that wants to destroy "beautiful" works of art because everyone looks at them and no-one looked at her. She's drawn to look like a cubist piece of art and she goes around making every other piece of art "ugly" like her. And this is another problem I have with this concept: great art does not equal conventional beauty every time nor is cubism necessarily considered ugly by everyone; "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", art is subjective, etc. Goya, Munch, Picasso, Fuseli, to name a few, all created critically acclaimed works of art that have stood the test of time, none of which you could say feature attractive people but that doesn't make the paintings worthless. This comic is so ass-backwards in its views on art!

More than that the Art Ops feel weirdly antithetical to the idea of art - "policing" art, ensuring it "follows the rules". Doesn't a lot of great art come from artists breaking the rules of their time? We wouldn't have Pollock paintings if someone told him he had to paint with brushes and create visuals that are easy to understand. "Protecting the public from dangerous art" reeks of censorship when the Art Ops are supposedly the good guys. Writer Shaun Simon stretches to make this dumb idea work by saying that, errrr, someone painted a picture of a guy called Jack that was, ummm, evil and he escaped and went on a killing spree in 1888 Whitechapel! Incompetent writing.

Moronic artistic ideas aside, the story itself is meandering and dull. The Art Ops disappear and that's it - the remaining characters do nothing to find them but nor did I care or want to see them found. Reggie Riot (awful name), our protagonist, is a whiny douche with mommy issues who behaves like a bratty teen despite being in his twenties, failing to win over the audience with his obnoxious personality or seem even faintly like a real person. The Mona Lisa running around the place becoming a punk rocker wasn't fun, it was boring and completely pointless - no part of Shaun Simon's script was worth reading; it was muddled and the issues were poorly structured.

Appropriately for a book about art, Mike Allred's art is the only positive thing about *Art Ops*. The Body's design was awesome (the superhero character who escaped from the pages of a comic), and, while I despised him, I liked Reggie's arty arm. Laura Allred's colours too are outstanding and gorgeous as always.

Shaun Simon basically read Grant Morrison's *Doom Patrol* and *The Invisibles* and said "Me too!" except his series is total crap. Boring, infantile, stupid, *Art Ops* is the latest in a long line of disappointing Vertigo releases - don't bother.

Paul Spence says

"*Art Ops*" has a clever concept, and much of the art is intricate and impressive -- but the narrative squanders these benefits. The comic imagines a group of operatives that can take works of art out of their frames into the real world, but the only work to appear in this first volume is the Mona Lisa, who is rendered without any real personality -- she does not differ at all from the other 21st century characters of the story. (It's explained that she's been out of her frame many times before, but it is never said why, nor why these past experiences don't seem to have impacted her.)

The protagonist is "Reggie Riot", a cookie-cutter post-punk who goes on infantile acts of rebellion with Mona Lisa, such as tying up a store owner for insisting that they leave because they're not buying anything. He says things like "[my dad] split before I saw the light at the end of the birth canal" and "I could save one kid from the jaws of conformity". He's just plain annoying.

What's oddest about "*Art Ops*" is that the concept is underutilized. For some reason, one of the heroes is a teen pop singer from the '80s, who has nothing to do with the visual art theme. (The narrative suggests that characters from video can "escape" into reality, too, but this notion isn't continued -- everything else is about static visual art.) The other heroes and villains also come from fictional works, not real pieces like the Mona Lisa.

This could have been a good book -- I'm not sure why the creator made the choices he did.

Keith says

Pretty easily, this is the best comic I've read this year. I picked up a few single issues when they were released and didn't see much in it aside from Allred's art, which is always a knockout -- but between this and his *Silver Surfer*, I decided to go with the hot girls and space aliens (always a safe choice).

But *Art Ops* in its collected form is fucking fantabulous. It made me realize how much I've been longing for Vertigo to publish an old-school Vertigo book -- something drenched in weirdness and cool, something that felt like the print version of MTV's *Liquid Television*. While Vertigo has never been a faulty home for comics, there's simply nothing that compares to what they were in their early days -- Sandman, Hellblazer, Shade, Transmetropolitan, *Doom Patrol* (and *Preacher* and *Animal Man* and...)

Just an unreal -- an *unreal* -- pile of amazing books.

Art Ops is not only dripping with the magic of Vertigo's glory days, but it also benefits from the production

value of modern comics. Not only is it an insanely beautiful book, but it is also irreverent and strange, with just enough gristle and what-the-fuck moments to offer that unique mix of pleasure and discomfort that make weirdo comics the best kinds of comics to read. *Art Ops* is *The Invisibles* if *The Invisibles* weren't so nauseatingly pretentious, and if it had cared a little more about the reader and a little less about the grandness of itself. It's *X-Men* with a sheen of pop-glam-splatterpunk. It's Allred being pushed to the limits of his Allred-ness (and it's also a damn fine bit of writing, though I have no experience with Simon's past work).

If you don't like this comic you are dead. Or at least you are dead to me.

Imogene says

Warning: contains pretentious intellectualism, gratuitous use of Georges Bataille, sarcasm, and slight spoilers.

What would happen if art were to come alive?

What if art wanted something more?

I've had a conversation with my favourite professor, and a theoretical, ideological argument with my favourite sister about the the idea that art can be violence. Said sister comes from the perspective that any and all actions can be considered art. I'll agree to a point, but only when the action/ moment/ image becomes separate from the every day action/ moment/ image by the acknowledgement of the observed and the observer of its separation. Once separate, it becomes imbued with symbolism, subjectivity, and the history, emotions, and psychological state of the artist as well as the viewer. Georges Bataille, French philosopher and something of a misogynist, wrote a pretty fabulous book on the idea of eroticism. In it he states that eroticism is born of breaking taboos and the separation, or dis-continuum of normality. It occurs when an individual (or two, three, or however many you choose) acts in a way that is not for survival, security, or stability, but in a way that is purely for pleasure and sensation, for satisfaction and satiation, and the violent, uncontrolled release of orgasm. In experiencing the moment and the stirring of emotion and sensation, there is a dis-continuum from the everyday self, and the connection to something beautiful and numinous. It's the difference between an act of animal reproduction, and one of sensuality, passion, and joy.

It can also be what happens when an individual experiences art. It is powerful, evocative, filled with the moment, the experience, and as Bataille puts it the "transition from the normal state" to the "partial dissolution of the person" as they have been.

Art is powerful. Art is important. And in the hands of Shaun Simon and Mike Allred, art is alive and pretty pissed off.

Art Operations is a clandestine organisations whose job is to both protect and police works of art, and to protect the public from art that is too dangerous. Such as the portrait of a dude named Jack who escaped from his frame in Whitechapel in 1988. Of course. However, art has decided to fight back. Scarlett, a rather minor work, has escaped in order to create chaos, to demand independence and freedom, and she's willing to do anything to achieve it. Like try to kidnap the Mona Lisa, and turn the Statue of Liberty into a grotesque. And somehow take out the entire population of the Art Ops.

The only things standing in Scarlett's way, are Mona, a long-forgotten comic book character known as the body (There will be NO punching of world-famous works of art!), and the son of the now-missing head of

Art Ops. Who after a tragic accident involving attack by graffiti, just so happens to part art himself. This is probably my favourite part of this book. The protagonist, Reggie, is clueless, cranky, with one foot in both worlds. He's liminal, stuck in between, neither on nor the other and pretty confused and pissed off about it. He's also in a state of constant conflict with himself.

He's also a bit of a dick. Which I love.

I'll give Art Ops a 7/10. Allred's artwork is great, and totally meta. The relationships between the characters, human and art alike are fascinating. I'm looking forward to finding out what is going on with the mysterious disappearance of the Art Ops. I want to see how Reggie copes with his dual self. And I am seriously excited by the final page reveal of Reggie's dad, Danny Doll! Who is he? What is he? Is he human? Art? Both? Is this why Reggie is the way he is? And how did the whole thing work between his parents. Vol. 2: Modern Love, is apparently going back to the beginning, and answering the questions about what happened between Danny Doll and Agent Regina Jones.

Yes, Regina named her son Reginald.

Go, Art Ops. Go Simon and Allred. Go Meta-narrative. Go crazy and hilarious moments like this one.....

Mona Lisa: I need to be out in FRONT of people. I need to be SEEN. I'm the goddamn MONA LISA!

(BTW, If you liked this one, You'll totally like Mike Carey's Unwritten)

HFK says

Art Ops is an fairly interesting take on the concept of art being alive, not due to the unoriginal idea, but rather how this story is easy to interpret in various different ways, depending on your own relationship with art.

So, what is my relationship with art? It is a bit mixed and seasonal. I have visited many museums, read tons of books, know the basics of the art world, the basics of the famous artists and works, the usual knowledge that many has and should have. I can appreciate different art forms, I support the freedom of art as well as artistic ability to product unconventional art. Hurt feelings or supposedly bad influence is not a reason to ban art, but I do support that an artist is brought to justice if his or hers art has required injuring or killing unwilling objects that are protected by the law.

This brings to my mind an Finnish artist who killed a cat and masturbated on it to show that during the said longish video people will be more devastated by his actions than all the other sufferings of wars and humanity shown in said video. He was, of course, absolutely right on with the reactions, and was also convicted of animal torture. Rightly so.

I do not always understand every art project that comes on my way, and I do not need to, that is the beauty of artistic freedom. I do not find particularly anything brilliant or eyeopening of creating art from pubic hair of multiple different sources as I see it way too easy, but naturally support and celebrate the freedom of someone being able to do so without being hanged and banned over it.

My daughter is very artistic in her nature, which is why I have supported her inner needs and desires by

paying big money for her to be able to attend art school of her own choice. This art school is more of an hobby to her, but it has introduced her history and definitely helps her find her own style, offers more varieties and experiences than I as a parent could.

What I do, however, is to show her heritage, her culture through our native art, because native art is what thrives me on. In my travels around the world and different countries, I will find the small galleries, the ones that show the history of the country, the history of the city, the history of the people. I have no desire to hunt down the big, famous works. Additionally, very much for this reason, street art is my thing. I can surely see this world in deeper level when I watch a wall painted in the 70's and by just taking few steps can see a wall painted in 2016. It resonates and tells me great deal more than the beautiful Mona Lisa at Louvre.

This is my job as a parent, the art school can teach the fancy parts and sides of each art form my daughter desires to learn, which seems to be quite many. I am glad of that.

Against this background, *Art Ops* resonates with me as a story that shows how art is viewed through the eyes that decide what art is the real shit and what art is not. The appreciation of big names, big objects, the variety of different art forms. The need to control live art as a metaphor of banning, the artistic freedom. How Mona Lisa as a object is worth of protection by the secret art-police, but the underground scenario art vanishing is just an unfortunate accident caused by a rascal kid. Equality of art is not there, and that is how this story reads to me.

I especially adored how well street art was captured by the story. It is shown as bad, rebellious and most definitely as a form of vandalism, something that is in need of monitoring, exactly how it is often viewed by the common population. It was almost impossible not to get kicks out of Mona Lisa being ruined by modification that was all the way Picasso if nothing else.

Art Ops is not an perfect work, but it does a fine job and let's the art sing to its fullest.

Nadja says

A very cool premise.. Art is alive! I really liked the edgy and colourful artwork and I'm curious how the story will continue.

Sesana says

(Received from Netgalley for review.)

What a miss. At first glance, the premise sounded interesting. Unfortunately, it's half baked. First, there's the concept of "saving" art by relocating the human figure inside it. Which means, I guess, that art without human figures is somehow less real? Put aside, I guess, how totally cool the people in the paintings are with being people in paintings, and with a modern world they really shouldn't know much about. Ok, whatever. Now let's get to the villain, who's apparently motivated by the fact that people looked at her painting less because she's "ugly". She's drawn in a sort of cubist style, which we all know is totally unpopular and that

absolutely nobody spends hours obsessing over the works. Oh, wait, they totally do. It's very strange that this book equates (morally) good art with conventional notions of beauty, and (morally) bad art with anything that isn't strictly representational. It's a bizarrely regressive view of art. If I felt like the author was setting up that view to knock it down, that would be one thing. It would be a point a few decades past its prime, but I could follow that. I sincerely don't get that sense here.

Aside from that, the main character is obnoxious and I cringed every time he was on the page. Most of the characters are at least a little annoying, but that's mostly because they're blandly characterized. Mona Lisa in the real world could be any number of previously sheltered princesses, and there's absolutely nothing about her that follows from being a centuries old painting. Main character Reggie Riot (ugh, seriously?) is on a totally different level. He's the sort of juvenile wannabe punk who thinks it's hilarious to tie up a cashier because he doesn't like the clothes sold in the store she works in. I wanted to slap him.

There's an interesting premise in here, but it isn't executed very well, and the views on art are weirdly outdated.

Cory says

RIYL Doom Patrol.

Sean Gibson says

Interesting premise? Art is alive, and there's a secret team of operatives that keep the figures in the art (such as noted minx Mona Lisa) safe from nefarious forces who would use them for, um, nefarious purposes. So, check.

Great art? It's the Allreds. So, yeah. Check.

Solid writing? Yeah, it's solid. Check.

This didn't set my pancreas aflame with giddiness, but it was a solidly crafted and visually arresting story, so worth checking out if you are in the mood for something a little bit off the beaten path. We'll call it 3.5 stars.

furious says

Eh. The premise is so-so (art is really alive + caper stuff). The characters seem like they are cobbled together from elements of every Mike Allred book you've ever read. Designs, too. Everything looks as great as you expect, but nothing about the total package was very exciting or ground breaking. I love Allred, so I'm glad to have read it, but it feels like it was written someone who was trying to write a Mike Allred book. I don't think I'll be reading volume 2 anytime soon.

Kristen Burns says

3.5 Stars

Full Review:

I received a free copy of this graphic novel via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

So I just wanna start off this review by saying the main character in this graphic novel is part human, part graffiti. If that doesn't get your attention, I don't know what will. That's like 80% of the reason I decided to read this.

Seriously, it was like:

- 80% the main character has graffiti for an arm.
- 19% art by Michael Allred, the same artist who did iZombie.
- 1% oh, yeah, I guess the story sounds good too, and since I took art classes for numerous years in middle and high school and always said I wanted to have a career that involved art (that never happened), I like to pretend I actually know anything about the topic even though in reality I'm actually one of those people who goes to art museums and says things like, "That's just a black circle on a canvas. I could paint that myself."

Ok that last part may have been a bit off topic, but this really was a fun, unique graphic novel, and you don't need to know anything about art or famous artwork to enjoy it. I wasn't sure how I was going to feel about the actual premise of a secret team keeping famous works of art safe, but it turned out to be an action-packed storyline, and the characters kept it entertaining rather than serious or stuffy.

Speaking of which, Reggie was a hard character to like, but I found myself liking him anyway. He was really rough around the edges... and the middle—he cared more about drinking, drugs, and fighting than anything else really—but he's had a tough life. He was still a good person underneath his roughness.

As for the artwork, of course that was amazing.

The only real problem I had was that I was a little confused sometimes about exactly what was going on. It could've been the ARC formatting, it could've been the way it was written, it could've been me, I'm not really sure, but it was usually just small things and thus not something that ruined the story.

So overall, Art Ops Vol. 1 was creative in its premise and beautifully illustrated, and it was fun seeing pieces of art come alive in the real world! I do plan to continue the series as I think I'll get even more into it as I get to know the characters more.

Recommended For:

Anyone looking for a graphic novel with a unique premise, fans of Michael Allred's artwork or just art in general, and anyone who likes rough-around-the-edges characters.

Original Review @ Metaphors and Moonlight

Steve says

I received this from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

1 star. And that's all I have to say about this one.
