**Haworth, Kevin. *The Comics of Rutu Modan: War, Love, and Secrets*.
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The first full-length study in English of a comics artist as transformative as Rutu Modan (b. 1966) is surely something to be celebrated—all the more so when it appears in the University Press of Mississippi's prestigious Great Comics Artists series and the author is a critic as incisive as Kevin Haworth. Twice recipient of the Eisner Award, Rutu Modan is Israel's most acclaimed graphic novelist; her wrenching and wryly humorous books feature brilliantly plotted and emotionally layered stories touching on themes such as loss, trauma, history and memory, and the secrets, loves and conflicts of family members. Modan's works are brimming with quirky, idiosyncratic, exasperating and utterly believable characters who spring to life in her brightly colored panels. The delicate realism of her visual imagery owes to her famous dedication to verisimilitude, including the occasional use of actors to play out scenes before she creates them on the page. Modan has taught at Israel's legendary Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, her comics have been serialized in the *New York Times* among other international venues, and her complex graphic novels, *Exit Wounds* (inspired by the aftermath of a gruesome suicide bombing) and *The Property* (an intergenerational Holocaust story set in Warsaw combining tragic and comic overtones), have been highly praised for their nuanced portrayals of the contact zones between cultures as well as the intricacies of human relationships.

Haworth's deeply researched book begins well, with a historical chronology of the Yishuv and Israel that interweaves milestones in Modan's family history and career. While his book is titled *The Comics of Rutu Modan*, Haworth conscientiously examines groundbreaking collaborations with other artists; important figures such as Igal Sarna, Asaf Hanuka, Yirmi Pinkus (with whom she founded the groundbreaking Actus Tragicus comics collective shortly after Yitzhak Rabin's assassination) all make notable appearances in these pages, ultimately providing a rich overview of the fecund growth

and inspiration of Israel's comics as a vibrant cultural phenomenon that illuminates the joys and traumas of Israeli life. Modan emerges as an unusually modest and accessible artists, grateful to her international following, and who has selflessly nurtured many other emerging comics artists (Haworth doesn't exaggerate when he credits her with having "practically pulled the Israeli comics scene into existence" [3]). Encompassing a great deal more than just the story of one artist, Haworth offers keen insights into politics and national culture, including the unusual afterlife of classic Zionism even in the most subversive forms of comics art, at one point speculating that the Zionist ethos of *livnot u-lehibanot* (to build and to be built) and the challenges of building the new inform the hardscrabble efforts behind the "egalitarian, work-sharing model of making comics" in Israel (39). As such, the Actus Tragicus group seems an inspiring paradigm of how artists, facing dire economic constraints, might succeed commercially while preserving their individual visions, from which others might learn.

Throughout, Haworth is attentive to the indelible relation between Modan's familial history (the grandchild of Polish emigrants who fled the Holocaust) and art. The book's six chapters adhere to a chronological, rather than thematic scheme, which to my mind offers the most optimum approach for both general readers and comics scholars alike. Accordingly, Chapter 1 describes the milestones of Modan's early life (army service, artistic training and first exposures to European and American comics art) while also providing an intriguing survey of early comics in Mandatory Palestine and the early years of statehood, with special attention to the pedagogical role of comics in Hebrew children's literature and the surprising dominance of female talent including the canonical poet Leah Goldberg and others (so unlike the almost exclusively boys club of American comics in the same era!), and Chapter 2 offers a fascinating immersion in the important story of the emergence of Modan's distinct feminist sensibility as an artist, her transformative collaborations (including the wildly popular Etgar Keret), the formation of Actus Tragicus and the provocative responses of its young artists to a reality shaped by war, occupation and terrorism including Modan's groundbreaking collection, *Jamilti and Other Stories* (her first wistful foray into what has emerged as a prominent theme that Haworth identifies as "missed opportunities for connection"). Chapters 3 and 5 bookend

compelling discussions of Modan's major works to date, *Exit Wounds* and *The Property*, juxtaposing their trauma-inflected realism with the allure of creating comics art for children and their parents, shorter sequential works including a memorable foray into comics journalism addressed in Chapter 4. Like many others, Haworth considers *The Property* to be Modan's most sophisticated work to date, with its divergent narratives of traumatic history, brilliant characterizations, gripping drama and biting ironies (the narrative, he argues, is in part a critique of the "desired outcomes and preplanned memories" of Israeli Holocaust tourism" [138]). In the concluding chapter, "The Return of Uri Cadduri and the Future of Israeli Comics" Haworth brings us up to 2014 and a promising new publishing collaboration with Yirmi Pinkus which resurrects a beloved Hebrew comics character of the 1930s featuring Leah Goldberg's witty rhymes and bring new comics art to a younger Israeli audience.

Haworth is clearly a well-informed admirer of Modan's oeuvre, illuminating myriad aspects of her creativity including a distinct affinity for both explicit as well as more muted permutations of bizarre aspects of the human condition, mortality, and the grotesque, her early recognition that the macabre presented a vital way to mediate the impossible realities of the Israeli quotidian (her important early inspirations include the work of Edward Gorey as well as the often dark, unsettling tradition of European comics) among other important dimensions of her work forming an artistic continuum. Succinctly addressing pivotal technical dynamics such as the strong influence of Hergé's (Tintin) direct binary visual style (known as clear line) Haworth argues Modan triumphantly transforms the latter into an aesthetic that is much more psychologically complex and emotionally resonant, achieving "spaces of sublime intensity" (90).

Haworth pays heed to an impressive range of Modan's work and makes a compelling case for its singularity. But when considering Rutu Modan's most sustaining legacy as an artist and as a human being, he hints that her real work is not only "about aesthetics. Instead, it is about how to exist in an artistic community. The romantic notion of the artist who answers only to his or her vision, not to practical concerns or to others, holds no appeal for her.... As a woman in a traditionally male field (less so perhaps, in Israel, where she has helped develop other female artists, but still), she may have adopted

a strategy of alliance building to promote inclusion. As someone who grew up in a communal environment...at a time when communal life was still a primary Israeli value, she may have a comfort level with cooperative practices that are less common in other countries” (157). For those of us perhaps too accustomed to the facile worship of individualist artistic achievement in capitalist societies, there is much to appreciate in Modan’s feminist vision of artistic community. To Haworth’s credit, often lets Modan speak for herself on that and many other matters so that the artist emerges in her full complexity as a risk-taker and iconoclast, but also an exceptionally likeable human being, modest and humorously self-deprecating in spite of her global reputation.

This consistently engrossing study is deeply informed by thought-provoking interviews and Haworth’s own in-depth conversations with Israeli comics historians such as Assaf Gamzou and of course, Rutu Modan herself. As one would hope, Haworth has selected numerous illustrations demonstrating her work’s exciting range, accompanied by his brilliant close readings, and even historical exemplars of early Israeli comics. Ultimately, he touches on an absorbing range of surrounding forces shaping the identities and work of Israeli comics artists, including the roles of militarism and terror, and the artistic consequences of striving to accommodate the pressures of the wildly divergent ideological biases of European, American and Israeli markets. In short, this is an exemplary study, not only of comics scholarship but important contextual aspects of Israeli history and culture in ways that render thoughtful revelations about the sometimes fraught and sometimes productive relation between Israeli artists and their society. While Modan will hopefully create new works for years to come, *The Comics of Rutu Modan: War, Love, and Secrets* will surely serve as the essential introduction to her work and deserves recognition as an outstanding overview of the development of the Israeli comics scene from the early days until the present, and finally for the pleasures of reading the author’s own highly appealing prose and comics analysis that manages to be both erudite and refreshingly jargon-free.