

The New York Times

Marie Severin, Versatile Comic Book Artist, Dies at 89

By **Daniel E. Slotnik**

Sept. 3, 2018

Marie Severin, a multifaceted comic book artist whose confident hand drew most of the greatest heroes in the Marvel Comics pantheon at a time when women were rare in that field, died on Wednesday at a care facility in Amityville, N.Y. She was 89.

She had had a stroke, said Scott Edelman, a friend and former Marvel colleague who confirmed the death.

Ms. Severin was a consummate comic book artist, engaged in most parts of illustrating a comic book, which involves penciling outlines of the characters and scenes, finalizing the images in ink and then coloring them in.

She started in the industry in 1949 as a colorist for EC Comics, working with her brother, John Severin, an artist known for his realistic war and western comics. She was one of a handful of female artists who gained prominence during comics' so-called Silver Age, from the mid-1950s until the early '70s.

In an interview for the book "Marie Severin: The Mirthful Mistress of Comics" (2012), by Dewey Cassell and Aaron Sultan, Ms. Severin said that even though she had felt welcome at Marvel, "you had a separation."



In a spoof of a Marvel comic book panel in 2015, Ms. Severin and Scott Edelman, a friend and former colleague, evoked the Hulk, one of many characters she drew. Irene Vartanoff

"I just didn't feel like one of the guys, and I didn't want to," she continued. "It's not that I was put in that position; it was just the way I felt, too. When we were working together, fine, but no socializing."

Ms. Severin's career at Marvel gathered steam in the mid-1960s, after Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko introduced superheroes like the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man. She drew covers for Marvel titles like Daredevil, Iron Man, Captain America and often amended, retouched or updated other artists' work.

The comic book writer and scholar Mark Evanier described Ms. Severin as a "utility infielder" who contributed to Marvel in innumerable ways, often with little recognition from the public.

"A lot of the great Marvel covers of the '60s and '70s were her design, and nobody knew it," Mr. Evanier said in a telephone interview. "This business is not known for giving credit."

Among Ms. Severin's most notable superhero work were runs of Doctor Strange, The Incredible Hulk and The Sub-Mariner. She also worked with her brother on Kull the Conqueror, a fantasy character created by Robert E. Howard, who is better known for Conan the Barbarian.

Ms. Severin and Frank Giacoia were credited with this Marvel comic book cover from 1968.
Heritage Auctions

Ms. Severin also designed the first Spider-Woman, drawing her with a skintight red-and-yellow costume. The character had her own comic book from the late 1970s until the early '80s and has since been revived in different variations.

Although comic artists tend to specialize in specific genres, Ms. Severin was also a skilled humorist. In the late 1960s she drew many stories for a Mad magazine-style comic called "Not Brand Echh" which featured parodies of Marvel characters, like the Silver Burper and the Inedible Bulk. She also caricatured her Marvel co-workers in drawings that were not intended for publication.

"You really did not work at Marvel until Marie drew an insulting caricature of you and pinned it up," Mr. Evanier said. "People treasure them."

One colleague she drew was Stan Lee, Marvel's longtime editor in chief and the creative force behind many of its titles.

"She could do humor, she could do horror, she could do adventure, she could do cartoons," Mr. Lee was quoted as saying in "Marie Severin: The Mirthful Mistress of Comics." "She could do almost anything you asked her to do and she did it all beautifully, like the true pro she was."

Ms. Severin was credited with this Marvel cover from 1967.
Heritage Auctions

Marie Anita Severin was born on Aug. 21, 1929, in East Rockaway, N.Y. Her father, John, who had immigrated from Norway, was an artist who studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and designed packaging for Elizabeth Arden cosmetics. Her mother, Marguerite (Powers), was a homemaker who designed and made her own clothes.

Both parents encouraged Ms. Severin and her brother to draw, and she became an avid reader of adventure books by authors like Edgar Rice Burroughs. She grew up on Long Island and in Brooklyn and graduated from an all-girls Roman Catholic high school in Brooklyn before briefly attending Pratt.

After her stint at EC Comics she worked briefly in the 1950s at the company that later became Marvel. But she was laid off and spent some years drawing educational illustrations for the Federal Reserve Bank of New York before she returned to the company in the 1960s. She worked at Marvel full time until the late 1990s, then drew as a freelancer and became a regular at comics conventions.

Ms. Severin's brother died in 2012. She has no immediate survivors.

When Ms. Severin began at EC, the company was known for lurid horror, science fiction and crime comics, which helped inspire a congressional inquiry in the 1950s into the supposedly corrupting influence of comic books on boys and young men.

Congress might have consulted Ms. Severin for help. Mr. Evanier, the comics historian, said her colleagues had called her "the conscience of EC."

"If she thought the comic was too gory or sexy," he said, "she would darken the colors."

Follow Daniel E. Slotnik on Twitter: @dslotnik

9/5/2018

Marie Severin, Versatile Comic Book Artist, Dies at 89 - The New York Times

A version of this article appears in print on Sept. 5, 2018, on Page A22 of the New York edition with the headline: Marie Severin, 89, Versatile and Rare Female Comic Book Artist