

COMICWORKS

Produced by Mindscape

Distributed in the UK by MirrorSoft

Needs at least a 512 Macintosh

Price £69.95

Reviewed by Howard Brown

DON'T be put off by the name ComicWorks, as this superb graphics package can do almost everything FullPaint and MacDraw can. Even if you never use it to create comics, with its excellent word processing capability it makes a very flexible page make-up program.

All drawing is done on an 'easel' with the familiar MacPaint tools and each easel and the drawing it holds becomes a separate object which can be moved anywhere on the page. In creating a picture the background, objects and characters are drawn on individual easels which can be stacked and flipped through one by one. Each easel is then positioned in a panel so that the images sit one on top of the other. Their order can be changed using the 'bring to front' or 'send to back' commands and many effects can be used using the 'Ink' option to change the way they matte together. Positioning an easel is made very easy with the 'transparent paper' command.

Text is handled in a very similar manner. Instead of easels you create and edit text in a 'balloon'. Having chosen your style of balloon, text is typed into it and automatically wraps around to fit. You can later change the balloons shape and size and the text reshapes itself to the new dimensions. A text filled rectangular balloon with an invisible border makes a column of text. Line these columns up with the help of the 'grid maker' and you've got yourself a page make-up program. All text in a balloon can be edited just as in MacWrite at any time.

There are so many good features built into the program which have improved the MacPaint tools. The brush shapes can be customised or any portion of the screen image can be grabbed to use as a brush. If you need to scale a selected area the 'Set Scaling Amount' command allows you to shrink it to as little as 1% or expand it to 999%. The airbrush tool is one of the best and allows you to create very subtle effects as it is adjustable from 1 to 96 pixels across, is random and has variable density.

ComicWorks FatBits adds three levels of magnification; small, medium and large bits to allow you to work in detail on your drawing. There's also a very useful 'ThinBits' command which shows the whole page on one half of the screen. All of the tools and commands work in this mode - very useful for page layout as you can move panels, easels and balloons all over the page.

Included with ComicWorks are two discs of superb comic art by Mike Saenz, creator of Shatter, the first comic book produced on the Mac. There's also Art Grabber +, a desk accessory which allows you to grab MacPaint documents without leaving the program. And still more - there's a printing utility called PosterMaker which can expand pages or portions of pages up to 3200%. Paste the printed sections together and you could produce a poster as large as 26 by 21 feet!

As far as printing goes, ComicWorks was designed primarily for the ImageWriter, as printing a complex page with lots of images and text on a LaserWriter can be very slow. However, if you use a LaserWriter font you can print at the full 300 dots per inch and the graphics will be printed as a normal bitmap and can be smoothed or not.

I personally found the program very exciting and fun to learn, although it does require a lot of hours to learn its many features. Comic books are the ultimate combination of text and graphics, involving free-form placement of words and images - a real test of a desktop publishing program. If you do a lot of graphic work ComicWorks provides the flexibility to be creative on the page and priced at £70 it's a real bargain.

Also note that Graphic Works, from the same people at the same price, has the same facilities but is aimed at the business market and so comes with a different set of templates and examples.

Howard Brown is a freelance Graphics Designer who works for book publishers, film companies and designs packaging etc.

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