

① koyamapress.com/

Interview conducted July, 2010

KOYAMA PRESS

Formed in 2007, Toronto-based Koyama Press is a fantastic one-woman publishing venture focused on both financing and distributing independent comics and art projects. Each year, founder Anne Koyama collaborates with a select group of artists, providing these upcoming creators with tangible opportunities to see their best work in print.

In the short span of a few years, Koyama Press has gone on to build an acclaimed and eclectic catalogue of unique, high-quality material in a variety of formats, producing books, zines, comics, prints, t-shirts and art multiples of all kinds.

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① **Aaron Leighton** — from *Spirit City Toronto* ◀

by **Retchin Pump**

Let's open this discussion with a few questions exploring the origins of *Koyama Press*. When we first met, you framed your venture as a way to help out the artists you were interested in. You positioned *Koyama Press* as an alternate form of patronage. Talk about your history as a collector of art.

I collect art as I can afford it and am fortunate now to have a pretty amazing collection. I collect from the heart, only art that I like; if my collection grows in value eventually, it will be a bonus. I particularly like to support gallery owners who show emerging artists.

I wish it weren't so difficult to make a living in Canada as a visual artist. I can only imagine the output of some of the artists I know if they didn't have to spend some of their time working at what I call 'crap day jobs'.



① **Steve Manale's** version of the *Kickass Annie* logo icon, 2010 ▶



① cover of **Trio Magnus** — *Equally Superior* ▶

Can you tell us a bit about your thinking and your situation as you formed the project — how did *Koyama Press* officially come about?

I'm actually a former film producer who, after a serious illness, decided to make a change and work with a handful of local artists by sponsoring projects that would help generate income for them.

Clayton Hanmer (Cton) and Jon Vermilyea were among the first artists I sponsored. Clayton introduced me to Aaron Leighton and Steve Wilson; as *Trio Magnus* they do wonderful work together. I knew that I'd love to see a book of their collective doodles and that's how *Koyama Press* accidentally came to be.

You were very ambitious with the first book — 2007's *Trio Magnus: Equally Superior*. It's a full-colour, perfect-bound 10"x10" book with a bellyband on the cover — quite a debut.

Can you talk about the project?

I'd seen enough of *Trio Magnus'* work not to be worried about the content and design of the book. I had no

idea of what to expect since I had never done this before but was optimistic that I could find others who would love the work as much as I do. I wanted something that would draw me — and therefore others — over to the bookshelf and I think we succeeded. I sold my car and used the funds to help cover the printing of the book as well as to send the artists to Tokyo to launch the book at Design Festa in late 2007.

What did you learn from this initial release about publishing?

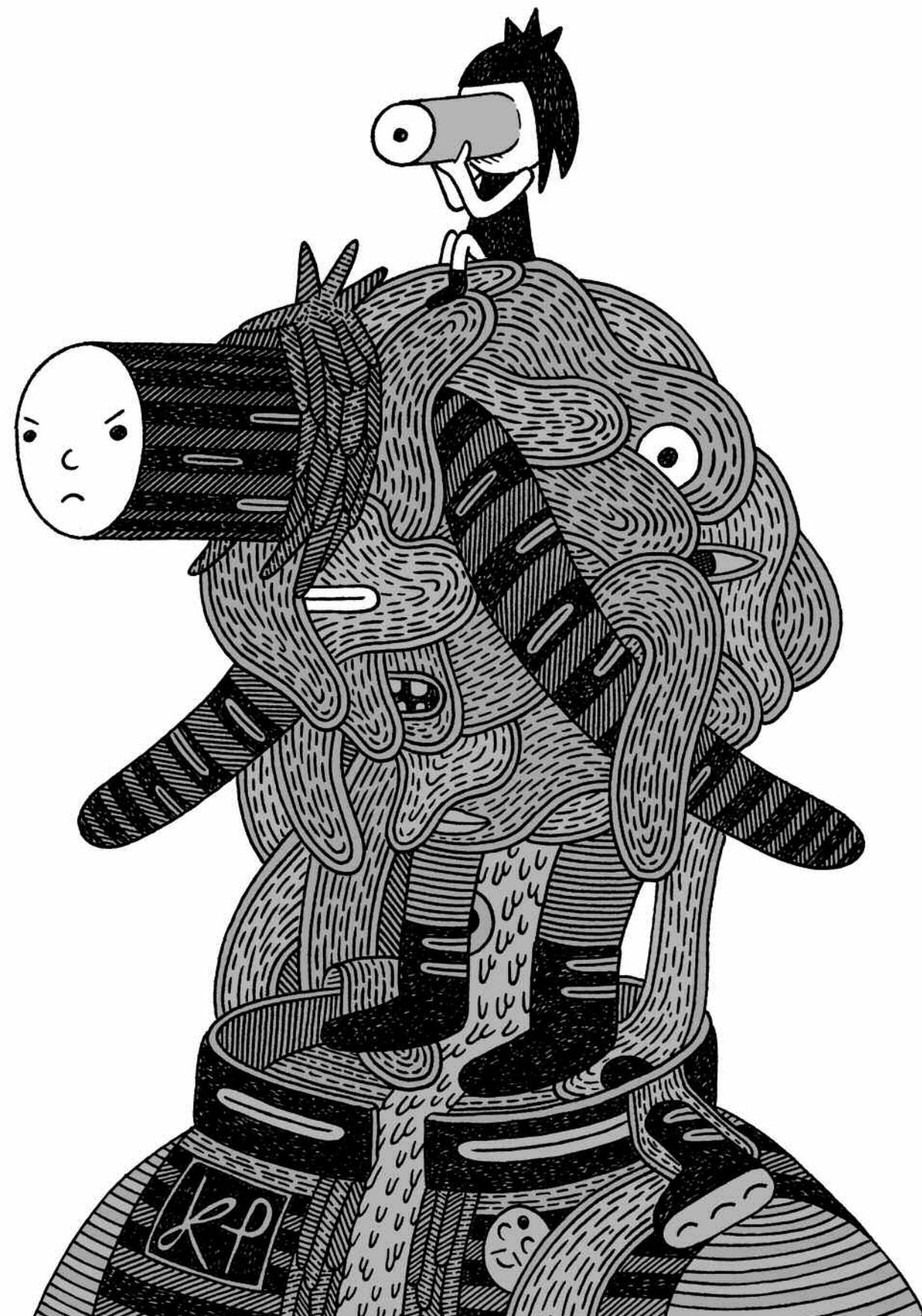
Since I was starting from zero, I sort of stumbled through the process but I suppose one thing I have going for me is that I'm not afraid to admit that I don't know things, so I asked a lot of questions. I still do.

That lead to a host of smaller collaborations with dozens of artists in the past few years. What is your philosophy as a publisher?

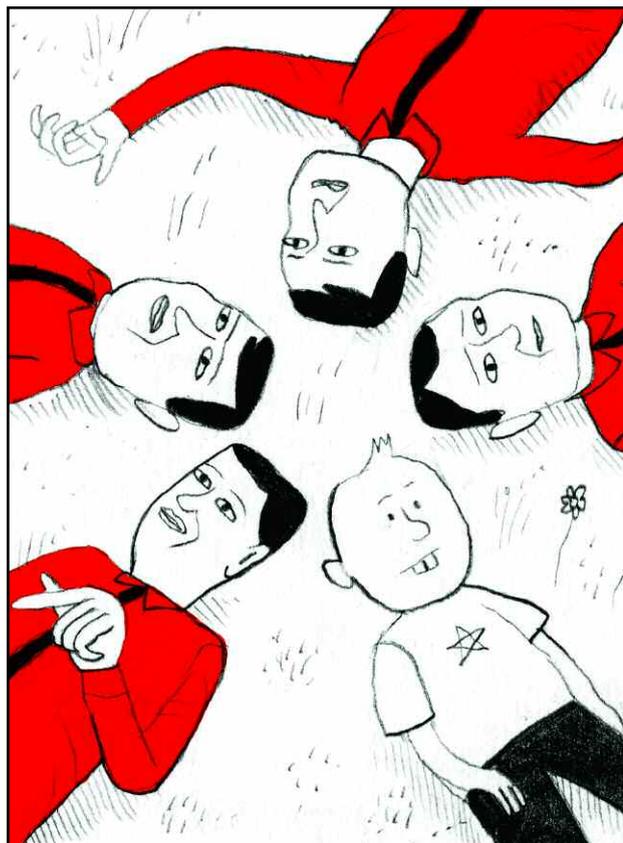
I'd like to continue to help break out some great new artists if I can. I derive great pleasure from introducing people to a new artist and their work. Much of art making is such solitary work that I like to get the artists out socially and have them meet others. I try to fund projects that will either promote the artist and/or actually make them some money.

I noticed that many of your offset publications are printed overseas. What are some of the challenges and benefits to working in this way?

Simply, it's cheaper to have books printed overseas. I am not completely comfortable taking the work out of the country, but if it's a choice between being able to publish and help one artist by printing locally or two by going overseas, it's still a no-brainer for me. Having said that, I will be going with a Canadian printer for an upcoming book so I'll probably go back and forth in the future to strike a good balance for my conscience.



① **Luke Ramsey's** version of the *Kickass Annie* logo icon, 2010 ▶

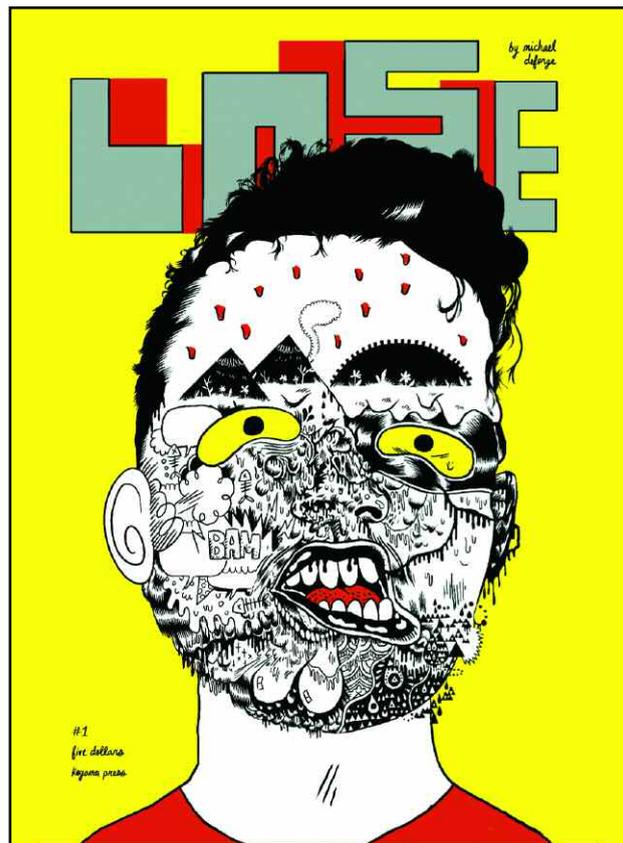


▲ ① *A Very Kraftwerk Summer*
by **Christopher Hutsul**;
cover of *LOSE #1*
by **Michael DeForge**

① *St. Gnok print*
by **Trio Magnus** ▶

In the past year, you've begun to participate in the distribution chase. Can you tell us about some of the struggles of getting the work out there?

When you are a small press with only a small number of titles, very few retailers will take a chance and buy your books outright. So for *Equally Superior*, I schlepped all the heavy books in my pack to every store I thought would like it. I am a huge supporter of small, independent bookstores so this came in handy as I



was a familiar face at some of them. Stores such as Magic Pony and The Beguiling in Toronto have been very supportive from day one.

I sold the books at small local fairs like Canzine and the Toronto Comic Arts Festival (TCAF) where *Trio Magnus* and I did well the first year. I've often said that I'd rather poke my eye out than do sales but it's simple to me — you're either going to like the book or you're not. If you are not into it, I'm not offended.

As of July of this year, AdHouse Books have taken on distribution of some of my titles through their new distribution arm, which is amazing. Last Gasp out of San Francisco has some of my titles and I'm in talks right now with another U.S. distributor. Drawn & Quarterly carries my books in their store now here in Canada, which is a dream come true.

All the slogging seems to have paid off; I'm excited about the books reaching a far wider audience now.



Let's talk about your relationship with artist Michael DeForge. As you know, we love his work here at *Carousel* — we released a silk-screen edition back in 2007, and he's appeared in our pages many times. How did you come to release his solo anthology series, *Lose*?

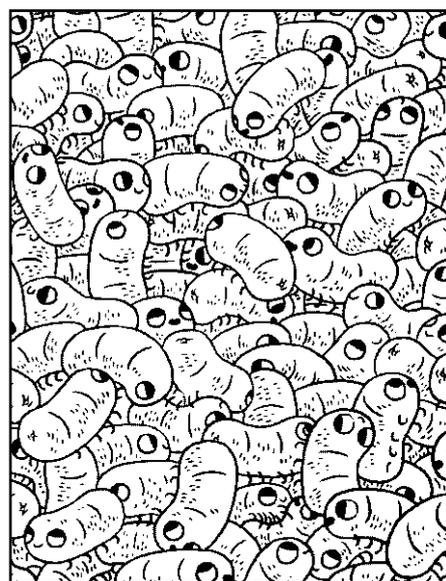
I have insomnia and when normal people are happily sleeping, I am looking at artists work online. Via the internet, I found Michael's gig poster work and then his comics and loved them. I tracked him down on Facebook and he was kind enough to add me; I later recognized him from his Facebook pic when he walked by my table at TCAF in 2009. The rest is history. We managed to put out *Lose 1* and *2* within a year because he is a workhorse.

Lose is DeForge's first significant attempt at longer-form comics. It's dark and playful, what reviewer Sean T. Collins refers to as "a slightly more avant-garde version of what you might see on a post-millennial Nickelodeon cartoon". The project has been well received, and just won the Doug Wright Award for Best Emerging Talent. What has this attention meant for *Koyama Press*?

I know that it's raised the company profile in the wonderful world of comics. Although I loved comics when I was young, I was busy not reading comics for



many years and my recent re-entry into that world is totally due to Michael. He continues to turn me onto other fantastic comic artists. That was how I hooked up with Chris "Elio" Eliopoulos. Michael and I have a similar sense of humour and I love working with him. I really wanted a big publisher to pick him up after *Lose 1* and by the time *Lose 2* was released he was getting the attention I felt he deserved.



As it turns out, DeForge is a comic geek at his core — it's obvious from his output that he's quite invested in the history of the medium. Many of his short sequences involve distorting the stuff of comics, peeling at the skins of famous characters in order to bring out something new or jabbing at mainstream superhero myths in the name of parody. Do you worry about the potential copyright issues in DeForge's free use of mainstream material?

Yes, initially I did, which is why I urged him to add the "apologies to ..." line in the book. I'd hoped that any of the original creators who might see it would be flattered and not want to beat up a really small publisher.



Despite the success of *Lose*, comics aren't necessarily your focus. *Koyama Press* releases a range of offset publications, but also helps artists to release zines as well as multiples, shirts and other assorted ephemera. What's with all the eclecticism?

I guess it goes back to the diversity of the kinds of art that I like. I love to work with the fine artists and illustrators as well. I want a consistently good quality product but that doesn't have to be a book; some people might not buy a book but will grab a t-shirt by that same artist. I love Allister Lee's silkscreened prints on acid blotter paper and Daryl Vocat's beautiful *A Boy's Life* print folio. I love that people who cannot afford Nick DiGenova's original art can buy his book *WunderKammer No. 1* for less than \$10. Few people know that Nathan Jurevicius has a large



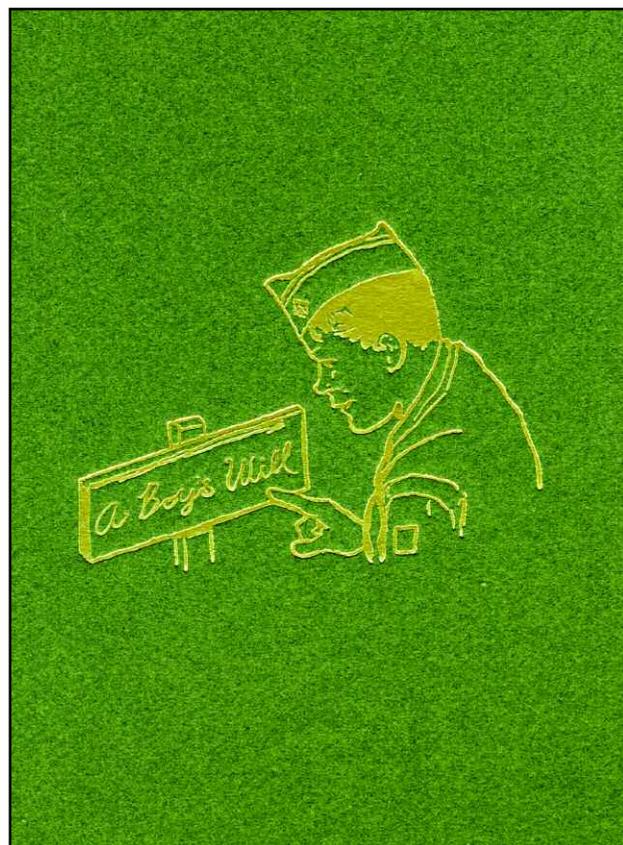
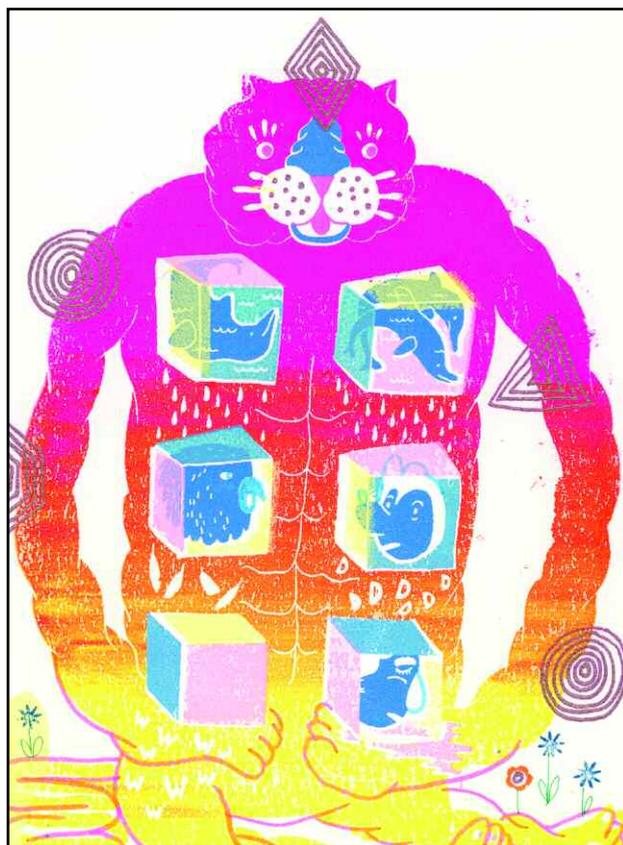
print available in addition to his ScaryGirl line of toys and other work.

As a publisher, how have your tastes have changed in the past few years? At this point, what motivates you to take on a new project?

The impetus is the same in that I have to love the work; what has changed is that I now look at each product a little differently, in terms of what I think will sell. That influences decisions about book covers and overall design. I may take a little more of an editorial role now since I have a bit more experience getting the books out there now.

Recently over a period of about 2 weeks, your "Kickass Annie" logo was playfully remixed and reinterpreted by a range of artists — it was fun to watch this happen online, it seemed to occur quite organically. How does this burst of creativity reflect the community that you've nurtured?

Toby Yamamoto prints my t-shirts and he coined the 'Kickass Annie' name for the icon. I'd commissioned a few people to do their versions of the original logo icon that Aaron Leighton did for me; initially it was to be a few illustrations to hang on my office wall. After that, some of the drawings were gifts and it just spiraled from there. They may go into a little book or zine eventually. I think the quality of the artwork reflects the talent that's out there and everyone's willingness to work on what I thought would be a fun project.



◀ ⓘ Clockwise from upper left:
Melinda Josie
Jon Vermilyea
Daryl Vocat
Ginette Lepalme

Can you tell us anything about forthcoming Koyama Press projects?

I'm really excited to be working on some new comics with people like Chris "Elio" Eliopoulos, Dustin Harbin, Hellen Jo, Steve Manale and Steve Wolfhard. Michael DeForge will start working on *Lose 3* soon, and there is a forest-themed anthology book in the works that Michael and I are co-editing. I have fine art projects in the works with Jeremy Jansen, Lukas Geronimus, Niall McClelland and a couple I can't announce yet. Tin Can Forest's (Marek Colek + Pat Shewchuk) book *Baba Yaga and the Wolf* will be out in October. Diego Bergia and I have been working for a couple of years now on a book/show project to be launched this November. ✨



ⓘ Special thanks to Koyama Press and all of their participant artists for providing us with a range of works to include with this interview.



Koyama Press :
— Books + Zines

Books

- Trio Magnus: Equally Superior*
- Precious Gems* – postcards by Team Macho
- Wunderkammer No. 1* by Nicholas DiGenova
- Lose 1 and 2* by Michael DeForge
- A Very Kraftwerk Summer* by Christopher Hutsul
- Attack From Space* by Jon Vermilyea
- Milky Way Shuffle* by Chris "Elio" Eliopoulos
- Pobody's Nurfect* by Wowie Zonk
- Spirit City Toronto* by Aaron Leighton
- Baba Yaga and The Wolf* by Tin Can Forest
- Wowie Zonk 3*
- Diary Comics 1* by Dustin Harbin
- Grey Supreme 1* by Mark Laliberte

Zines

- Princes of Time* by Jon Vermilyea
- New Paper* by Niall McLelland
- Parade of Humanity* by Michael Comeau
- Wilding 2* edited by Fiona Smyth
- Islands Fold* - Luke Ramsey
- Pizza Time* by Jon Vermilyea