

Gary Hallgren's pop art on display at Taber Art Gallery

HOLYOKE - In 1971, Gary Hallgren joined a band of radical cartoonists in San Francisco called the Air Pirates. The group's self-published comic books, the "Air Pirates Funnies," took aim at the mighty Walt Disney Company with savage parodies of its beloved characters.

Despite support from free speech advocates like Village Voice critic Nat Hentoff, a judge ultimately found the Air Pirates in violation of federal copyright law. To this day,

despite a five-decade career as a pop artist and illustrator, Hallgren remains on permanent injunction and is banned from using Disney characters in unauthorized ways. He considers all others to be fair game, however.

The Taber Art Gallery at Holyoke Community College presents a retrospective of Hallgren's comics, paintings and sculpture, now on display through Feb. 21.

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"Pop art can be about more than art or culture," Hallgren says in an artist's statement. "It can be about that most universal of themes: the human condition. Familiar newspaper comics characters can carry much symbolism on their black-and-white backs after being infused with the gravitas of easel painting."

Hallgren's freelance illustrations and parodies have appeared in such mainstream publications as *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *Premiere* and also *National Lampoon*, *Mad*, *Marvel Comics*, *Screw* and many others in between.

"Gary's bold designs, distorted realities, finished and unfinished surfaces, canonized humor and joy of painting are clearly present in this exhibition's selections from his expansive body of

work," said Taber Art Gallery director Amy Johnquest.

Since 2003, book illustration has been a mainstay for Hallgren. He illustrated *You: An Owners' Manual*, by doctors Mehmet Oz and Michael Roizen, which was published in 2005 and has sold over a million copies in hard cover. He continues to supply finished drawings for the "Hagar The Horrible" comic strip.

Hallgren holds a bachelor's degree in painting and design from Western Washington State College. He lives in Granby.

The Taber Art Gallery at HCC is open Monday through Thursday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during regular school sessions. It is free and open to the public and located through the HCC Campus Library lobby on the second floor of the HCC Donahue Building, 303 Homestead Avenue. For more information, people may contact Amy Johnquest, director of the Taber Art Gallery, at 413-552-2614.