

Story unfolding page by page

By **ELISSA BARNARD**
Arts Reporter

Nova Scotia figurative painter Mathew Reichertz is inspired by comic books and garbage for an amusing yet poignant storytelling exhibit at Studio 21.

So far we only get part of the story. The giant comic-book paintings in this exhibit, *Garbage*, are three pages in what will be a 15-page story.

The giant pages painted in oil on styrene are immediately engaging in their familiar, illustrative look, everyday subject matter and seemingly effortless handling of paint.

Garbage is a central issue of our time in terms of the amount of garbage we produce and what we consider to be or not be garbage.

Is the dead cat that fire-girl Christina picks up considered garbage? Certainly not to her. She sits sadly on her bed and stares out to a window where a dog stares back at her.

Reichertz starts the story with a man, modelled after himself, playing with his dog on a fenced-in field. The motion is wonderfully delineated as the dog chases after a Frisbee. Reichertz includes

labels like “bad tooth” with a line pointing to the dog’s jaw and “psoriasis” for the man’s hand.

When the dog poops, the man scoops it up but disaster strikes. He has a hole in the bag.

Page 2 is a more sinister, gothic image with a comic-book hero in the girl with the head of flame. She stands on a dark city street, sees a dead, black cat in the middle of the road and goes to lift up the cat.

Page 6 is a funny — though frightening — look at garbage day. A red pickup truck is either dumping or about to pick up bags and bags of garbage at curb side, bags that are playfully linked by dotted red lines to the truck. A fly goes “zzz” and a cat sniffs at the green garbage bags, wonderfully, breezily drawn in paint.

In his 2006 *The Fight* series, Reichertz painted a dog (this same one) and two men fighting in Halifax-area landscapes. “Narrative has been a driving force in my work for a long time,” he says, “but this is the first time that I am working with a recognizable narrative form — the comic book.”

He plays around with the positioning of speech bubbles and with different points of view on the same scene. Reichertz also ex-



Dog Study, an oil-on-styrene painting by Mathew Reichertz, is in the Halifax figurative painter’s narrative exhibit, *Garbage*, at Studio 21, 1223 Lower Water St., through Wednesday.

hibits small paintings that he calls prologues and footnotes. One of the prologues features the black cat, still alive, sitting on the street’s white centre line unaware of its impending doom.

Other small paintings are studies of the flame-headed Christina, an unforgettable creation who makes *The Adventures of Shark-boy and Lavagirl* seem tame.

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