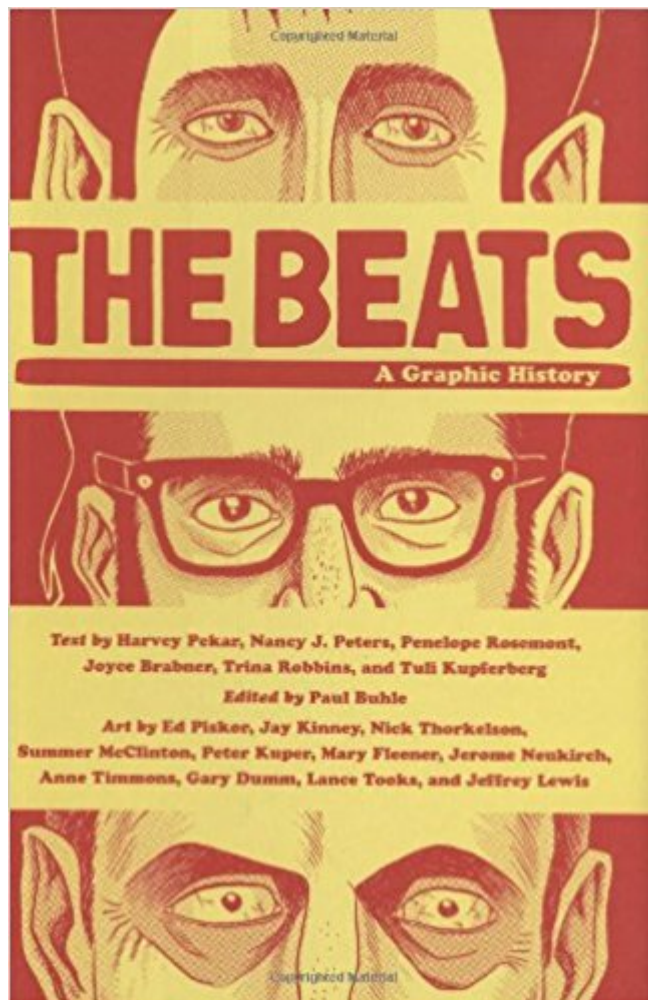


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The Beats: A Graphic History



Synopsis

In *The Beats: A Graphic History*, those who were mad to live have come back to life through artwork as vibrant as the Beat movement itself. Told by the comic legend Harvey Pekar, his frequent artistic collaborator Ed Piskor, and a range of artists and writers, including the feminist comic creator Trina Robbins and the *Mad* magazine artist Peter Kuper, *The Beats* takes us on a wild tour of a generation that, in the face of mainstream American conformity and conservatism, became known for its determined uprootedness, aggressive addictions, and startling creativity and experimentation. What began among a small circle of friends in New York and San Francisco during the late 1940s and early 1950s laid the groundwork for a literary explosion, and this striking anthology captures the storied era in all its incarnations—from the Benzedrine-fueled antics of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs to the painting sessions of Jay DeFeo's disheveled studio, from the jazz hipsters to the beatnik chicks, from Chicago's College of Complexes to San Francisco's famed City Lights bookstore. Snapshots of lesser-known poets and writers sit alongside frank and compelling looks at the Beats' most recognizable faces. What emerges is a brilliant collage of and tribute to a generation, in a form and style that is as original as its subject.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In *The Beats*, as in *Students for a Democratic Society* and *Macedonia*, Pekar is dealing with pivotal events that shaped his life and times on and off the streets of Cleveland. In these works are essential companions to *American Splendor*. Readers are fortunate that a talent like Pekar is

allowed a platform to explain why what happened to millions in his era happened. It would be hard to truly understand Pekar and the peers he generally speaks for, common folk, without some background on the context. Pekar puts on the same glasses he uses to discern his own life to discern this group. His vision is intentionally stripped of fawning, platitudes, and the intellectual apologetics that often dominate accounts of the more famous beat characters. The fusion of music, literature, film, politics, and just enough, but not too much mass media, is what grabbed us and changed our lives. Pekar tells the story the way we heard the story, and saw parts of it, in the 50's, 60's, and 70's. Other than in often hard to find Beat writings, which tended to make big names like Kerouac seem a constant romantic wanderer, minimizing the sad, right-wing, drunken momma's boy, all we heard were bits and pieces about their lives. Certain books we were fortunate enough to find, like Lawrence Lipton's *The Holy Barbarians*, focused on Beat unknowns and presented a lifestyle that was alluring as well as repellent. (Though Ginsberg is inspiring at times, Burroughs makes me want to get a government job and go to church.) This tension made most of us, after brief flings in hippiedom, spend our lives as VA file clerks, teachers, social workers, nurses, small business coffee house and used bookstore owners. Pekar eloquently depicts this tension in simple panels, such as on page 20, with Kerouac's mom saying, "Welcome back!"

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