**Self-confessed!**

**The Inappropriately Intimate Comics of Alison Bechdel**

Fleming Museum, East Gallery

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Alison Bechdel is an original. She is also the chief archivist of her own life in pictures. The foundation for her instantly recognizable drawing style is easily seen in her early childhood drawings of men displayed near the “Cartoonist’s Introduction” to *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For* in her, career-spanning exhibition at the University of Vermont’s Fleming Museum.

Wearing the unique mantel Cartoonist Laureate of Vermont, Bechdel is also a MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant winner, indicating that her boundary busting work makes an impact beyond that usually assigned the label of *cartoon*. Bechdel granted curator Andrea Rosen and collections manager Margaret Tamulonis unfettered access to her work, allowing them to include preparatory drawings as well as full-page reproductions from her landmark comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* that was syndicated in over 50 alternative papers from 1983 to 2008. The drawings, with their ghosts of pencil beneath the meticulously inked scenes, breathe with life. We see the remnants of the artist’s hand in the touches of whiteout left behind at the edges of the frame.

Words hold equal visual weight with the drawn imagery on the page. Her life-story is the starting point. This is true for her best-known work including *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic,* the 2006 graphic memoir of her coming out that unravels her complex relationship with her father. It became the Tony-award winning musical of the same name. A reconstructed model of the set for the musical is included in the exhibition. In 2012, Bechdel takes on the mother/daughter dynamic with *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama.*

A few large-scale, linear, self-portraits drawn in black on brown craft paper displayed hanging like a scroll are an anomaly; they are unpublished and purely image based. They appear to show the artist at an impasse and may have been done to loosen-up. A fascinating selection of reference material, sketches, and photographs provide insights to Bechdel’s process.

Bechdel’s appointment as a James Marsh Professor-at-Large at UVM supports the Fleming’s mission as a teaching museum. The artist will participate in workshops and panel discussions that are open to the public from February through April.

~ By Cynthia Close ~