

THE ART OF

SUPERHEROES

Discover the history behind
the icons of modern Mythology



THE ART OF

SUPERHEROES

**Discover the history behind
the icons of modern Mythology**

Exhibition Organization

Contemporanea Progetti S.r.l.

Via del Campofiore 106

50136 Florence

tel +39 055 6802474

fax +39 055 6580200

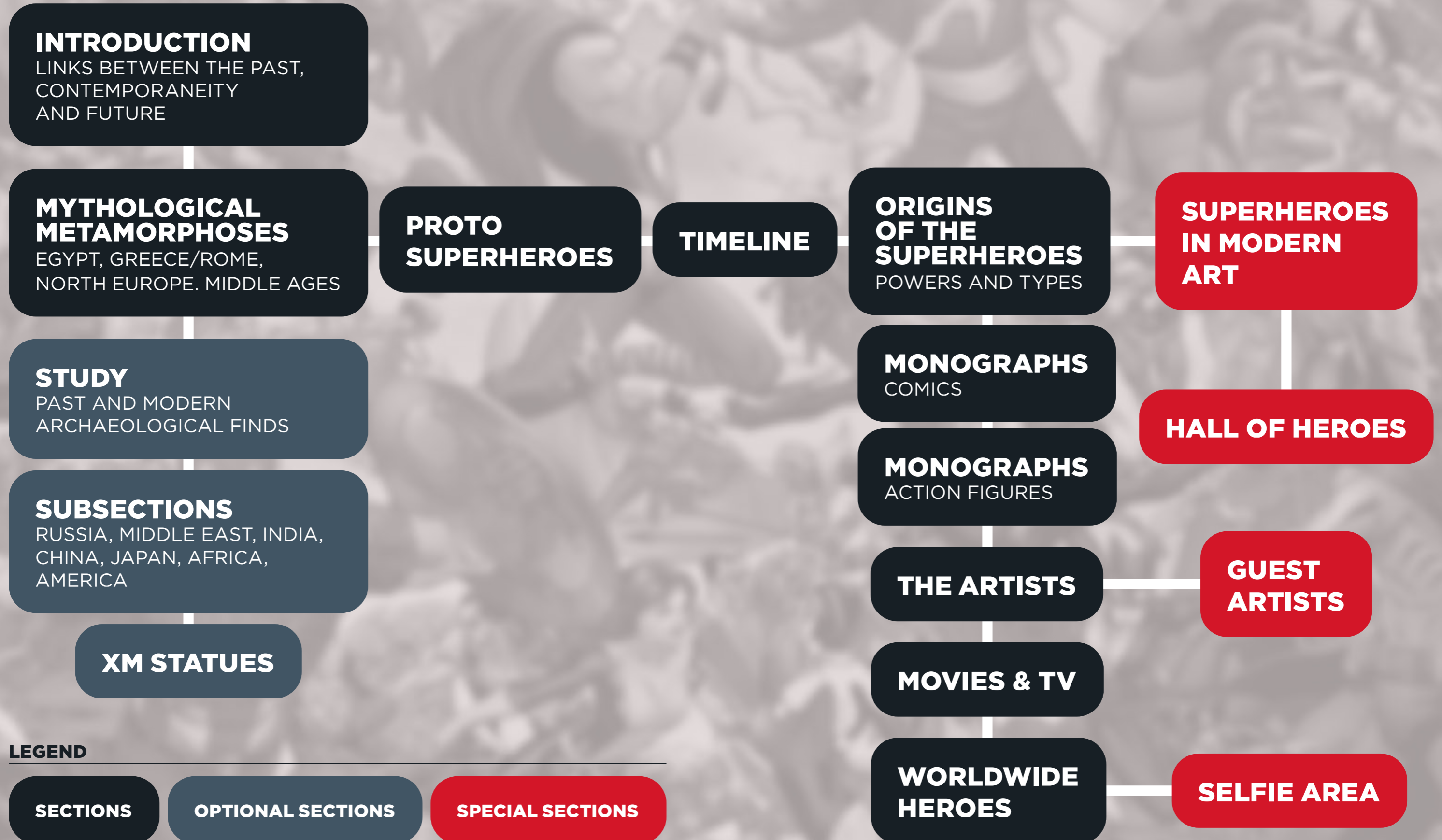
www.contemporaneaprogetti.it

f_merz@contemporaneaprogetti.it

© 2018 Fabrizio Modena Notions



EXHIBITION SCHEME



INTRODUCTION

LINKS BETWEEN THE PAST,
CONTEMPORANEITY AND FUTURE



CONCEPT

“Nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, everything is transformed” - Lavoisier’s postulate finds a perfect application beyond the world of physics, adapting to that gradual path of evolution and reconstruction that has carried the myths and legends of the past to our time, transforming precisely the shell but leaving the substance unaltered. Direct heirs of the gods and heroes of distant eras, Superheroes today represent the essential material for the transmission of simple and universal values, sentinels in defense of an increasingly fragile world in need of protection and comfort. With the creation of Superman, in 1938, the doors were opened to a universe of wonder and awe, populated by creatures with semi-divine powers or, even more commendable, by simple brave men determined to do their best to preserve justice and peace. Their nemeses are the most abject and obscure mankind can generate, nightmare with open eyes that feed on crimes and death, constant (and adequate) challenges to measure the value of heroes in tights determined to never give up.

The Art of Superheroes - the myth, the heroes, the artists invites you to explore this incredible world, where men and women are able to fly, read the mind, control time and the magnetic field, climb walls and manipulate magic. Everything is possible and the only limitation is the unbridled imagination of the artists - writers and designers - who in almost eighty years have come and gone to make a path, which was born to entertain the youngest, has gradually become more and more surprising, has gradually turned into a form of art and expression that is unique in its kind, which has crossed the boundaries of print media to arrive on television and then to cinema.

From the Amazons to Wonder Woman, from Frankenstein to the Hulk, from Robin Hood to Green Arrow, legends change their appearance but remain faithful to their propaedeutic mission to guide the new generations towards a better future, where action and battle are the other side of a medal that invites morality and responsibility.

The characters from DC Comics and Marvel Comics, the two publishing houses that invented the genre, are analyzed in the exhibition itinerary through a three hundred-and sixty-degrees study that highlights the multiple facets of works with surprising historical and cultural contents.

In a journey through time, *The Art of Superheroes - the myth, the heroes, the artists* reconstructs the evolution path of the characters in relation to the real world, recounts their origins and powers, deepens them by showing the original comics, the action figures and the trophies that made their stories neo-mythology.

Around the world, many countries have given their contribution to the Superheroes, offering different and contrasting visions, adding pieces to a now planetary mosaic and evidence of a common need without borders.

The tribute to the authors who made history with their own ideas and to the artists who were themselves inspired in a perpetual cycle of regeneration of the myth, acts as a corollary to an experience that has no age or culture limits, an in-depth analysis of intergenerational themes capable of exposing themselves to different levels of reading, a sign of an innate need to dive into that “sense of wonder” that has fascinated humanity since the dawn of time.

Fabrizio Modina
Curator of the exhibition

MASK AND CAPE

TICKET OFFICE

Superheroes symbols. The mask as a safeguard of its secret identity, the cloak to hover in flight suspended by the wind. These accessories will be honored to visitors (mask for adults and cape for children) to fully enjoy the experience of the exhibition.



THOR

God of Thunder

IX Century

Son of Odin, Lord of the Norse gods, Thor was the god of thunder, the strongest of the Aesir and he protected humans by brandishing his hammer Mjolnir, who always returned to his hand after being thrown at the monstrous giants of Jötunn. Bearded and powerful, he traveled on his chariot drawn by two goats between the celestial Asgard and Midgard, our Earth.

MYTHOLOGICAL METAMORPHOSES

EGYPT. GREECE/ROME. NORTH EUROPE. MIDDLE AGES

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

From the remote past we receive stories of men of extraordinary strength and capable of legendary enterprises. Extraordinary creatures to whom ordinary mortals looked with respect and fear, sometimes benevolent, sometimes wicked, engaged in an endless struggle that was told from generation to generation.

Religion becomes mythology, the gods merge with men and each story evolves over time, changing its appearance but keeping the spirit intact. These are the roots from which the Superheroes come, semi-divine sons of a centuries-old tradition that from an oral tale becomes comic, transmitting ever-present values in a light and popular form.



THE AMAZONS

Warrior Women

XXVI Century

An only women's people devoted to the arts of war, the Amazons were cited by Aeschylus in his tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, placing their city Temyscira in the territories of Anatolia. According to tradition, they were governed by two queens who separately administered the peace of the kingdom and the conflicts with neighboring peoples. It is said that to better utilize the bow, they themselves decided to mutilate the right breast, becoming perfect shooters.



POSEIDON

Lord of the Seas

He is the undisputed lord of the seas, brother of Zeus and Hades, ruler of the largest part of the world. Quiet and peaceful, he can turn into a storm and a tidal wave and from the foam of the waters in which he swims with his beloved dolphins, he created the horse out of pure delight. The trident is his symbol and all sailors are devoted to him, worshipping him for the abundance in fishing and the generosity of the oceans.



HERMES

Messenger of the Gods

Among the favorite sons of Zeus, Hermes is as fast as the wind, the bearer of messages between gods and humans, furtive and lively, always elusive. As a psychopomp, he accompanied the spirits of the dead in the underworld, the only one able to access and exit of his own choice. So fast to be invisible to the naked eye, Hermes wears the winged petase on his head and the caduceus, the stick with intertwined snakes in his hand. He is considered the protector of traders, athletes, poets, travelers and even thieves.



STUDY

ARCHEOLOGY AND WORKS



“The Art of Superheroes” makes visible the common thread that links past and present (and certainly also the future) of myths by making an exhibition selection of all the forms of art and communication involved in this spontaneous transmission. Among the various contemporary works, it emerges the need to integrate ancient and archaeological finds, to seal the evident link between subjects and their iconographic mutation.

This approach also aims to share materials - generally visible in museums and exhibitions of exclusive historical connotation - to a wider public, especially students and families, stimulating thematic study and inviting them to visit institutional collections more frequently.

“I think people should benefit from all kinds of information, better if through entertainment, to broaden their vision of the world.”

George Lucas

EGYPT

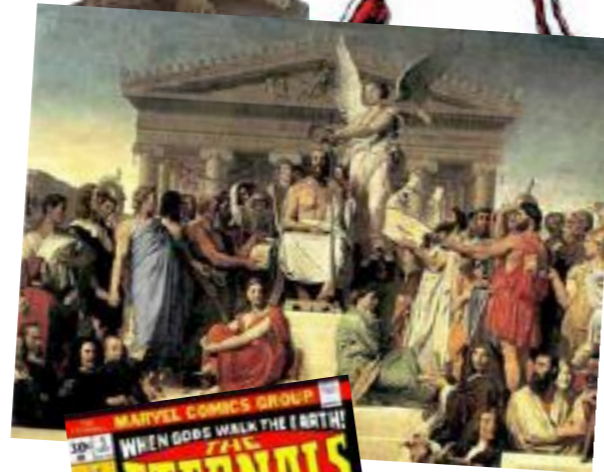
A land of mysteries and magic, ancient Egypt is a fundamental presence in Modern Mythology, where the narrative captures thematic cues related to esotericism and the occult. The afterlife and reincarnation are the binder of the complex saga of Hawkman, the hawk warrior who dies and is reborn in different places and times remaining faithful to his heroic intentions and endless love for her companion, also inscribed in this circle that can't be broken.

As the mummies populate modern horror nightmares, starting from the first black and white films, the divine pharaohs occupy the position of graphic matrix for colossal robots from unknown eras (such as the Lamurian Reideen), while the gods of the Nile emerge from the night of times like superheroes with arcane and impossible powers, like the Captain Marvel of *Shazam!*, Isis and the sorcerer Doctor Fate.



GREECE/ROME

An indispensable root of Modern Mythology, the epic and the history of the ancient Greek-Roman gods and heroes are dismantled and reassembled piece by piece to build a modern sanctuary of strength and virtue. The Olympic gods now dominate the sky, the earth and the sea as men and women with extraordinary powers, used for the good of humanity. On this structure is completely built the history of DC and Marvel Comics, the two publishing houses that created and developed the concept of superheroes starting from Superman, in 1938, modern Hercules. From the melancholy Silver Surfer that falls on the Earth like Icarus, to the intrepids who embark on desperate exploits aboard spaceships heirs of Jason's Argo, the cues can be traced back to a vision of three hundred and sixty degrees of a culture that has formed the imaginary common of an entire continent, showing the preliminary validity of constantly renewable stories.



GREECE/ROME

The strength of these icons is such as to inspire even Asian artists like the Japanese Masami Kurumada, who in his masterpiece *Saint Seiya* (*The Knights of the Zodiac*), casually shuffles rules and styles, creating a universe so ancient when contemporary, at the same time original and kitsch, and therefore not inscribable in any narrative and graphic genre previously seen. The Roman history adds a pseudo-realistic note that goes beyond the fashion of the peplum films in vogue in the Sixties, to consolidate the attraction of bloody contests and games, arenas of the future where alien gladiators challenge each other to the last breath.



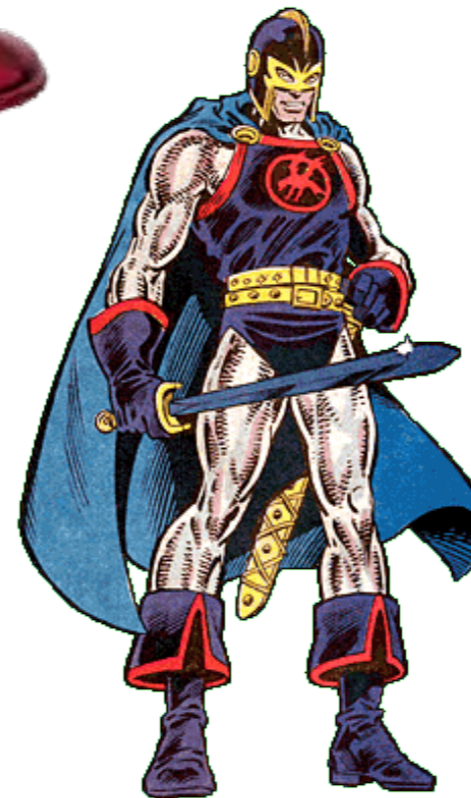
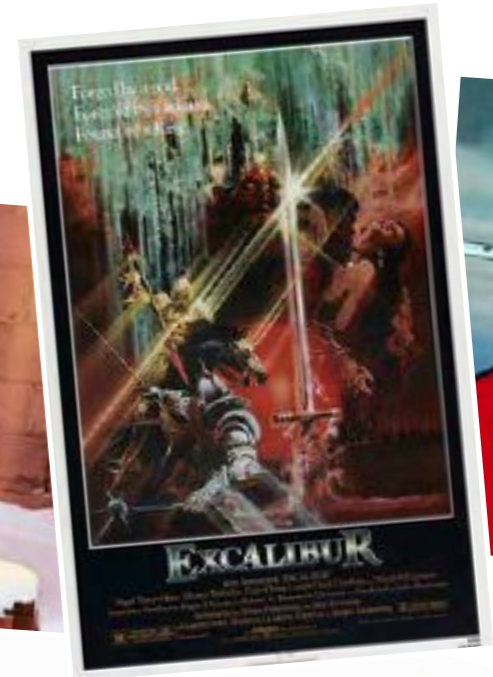
NORTH EUROPE

Norse, Scandinavian and Teutonic legends find new life in stories with a cold and savage taste, where bearded and mighty deities return among humans, generating storms and chaos. This is the case of Thor, the god of thunder cast in the role of superhero by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and recently become a movie star. Wagnerian poetry resonates in the deeds of modern Siegfried and Beowulf, fearless dragon hunters and executioners, yet, in contrast to the dramatic and extreme cut of the heroes from the North, there is a sparkling and light snowy world, explored in a more fairytale tone by works like *Frozen*, a recent Disney success.



MIDDLE AGES

The Arthurian tales of French-Breton origin cover another substantial area of study of Modern Mythology, second only to the Greek-Roman ones. If it is undeniable that the legend of King Arthur Pendragon has infused into every contemporary story of fantasy genre, it is also undeniable that the realistic contribution of the history and art of the Gothic season has helped to forge a specific universe with precise aesthetic canons. Armors, swords, steeds and castles are the primary topics of every genre story, declined in every possible version, both historically relevant and massively interpreted in a futuristic and imaginative version. From Excalibur to the *Star Wars* lightsaber, passing through Iron Man and the knights of *Game of Thrones*, each medieval element finds its legendary location so structured as to untie itself from the original matrix, in a game of continuous inspirations and regenerations. The most striking example is certainly *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, ingenious seed of a literary universe populated by heroes, monsters and magicians, from which J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* is confirming the persistence of a spontaneous energy capable of producing again and again bearers of the torch of myth through the generations.



MIDDLE AGES

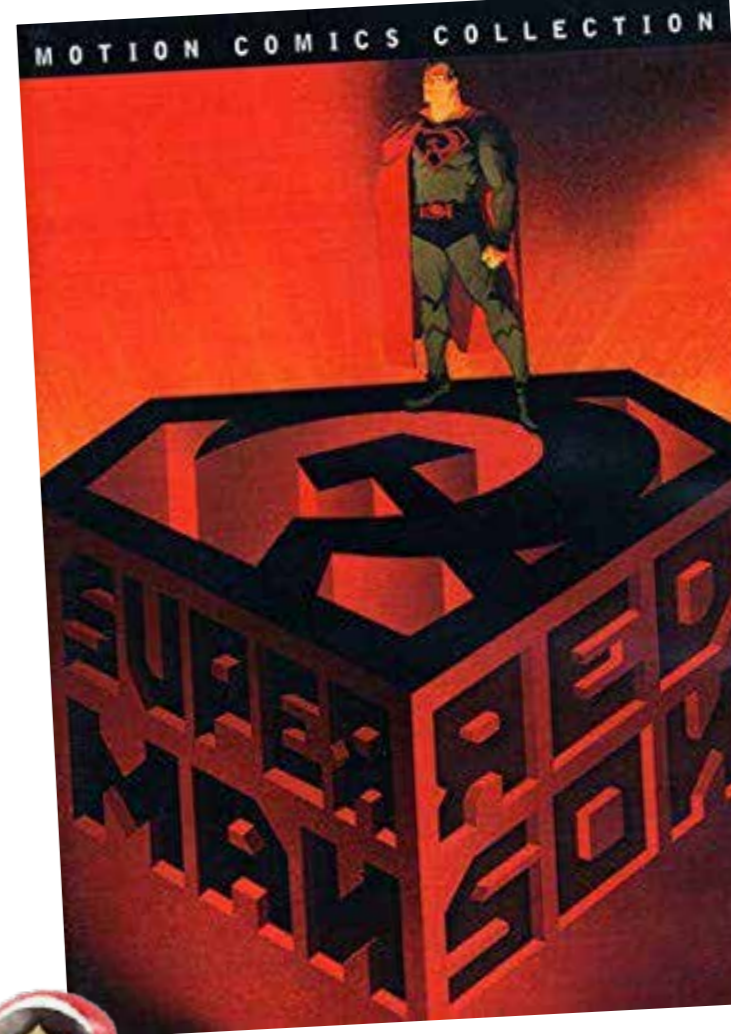


The Enchanter Merlin.



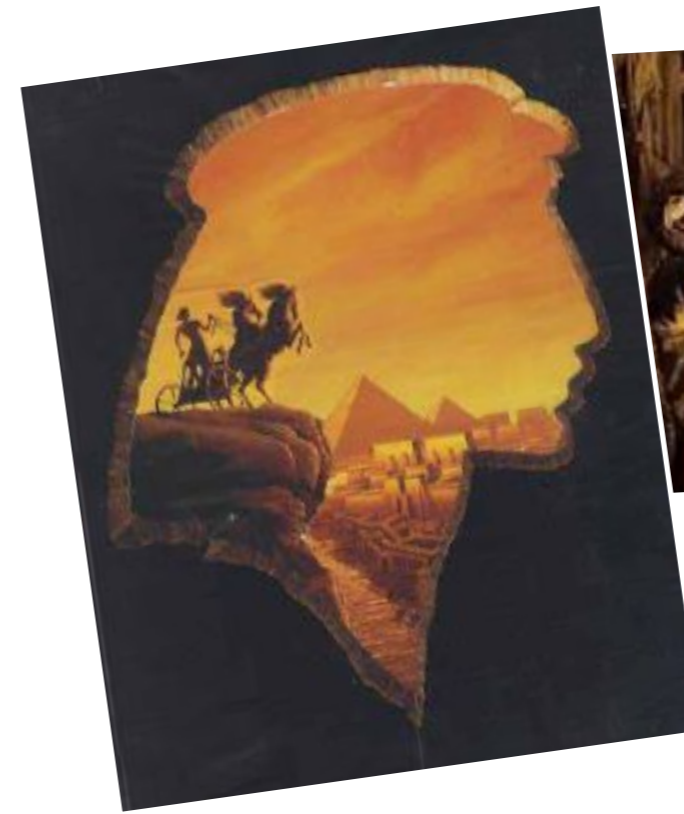
RUSSIA

The fact that most of the superheroes of Russian nationality were created by American authors has given them an antagonistic connotation that struggles to emancipate themselves from the Cold War, despite the continuous more inclusive rewrites. Somehow all generated more from the Soviet Union than from the much older local traditions, these characters are often spies and killers who decide to leave the motherland to marry the US cause and the American dream, just as Black Widow, main member of the Avengers. Set in an alternative universe, *Superman: Red Son* series breaks all the traditional canons imagining what would have happened if the rocket that brought the infant alien to Earth had fallen into U.R.S.S. rather than Kansas, lingering in a lucid analysis of the differences in perspective.

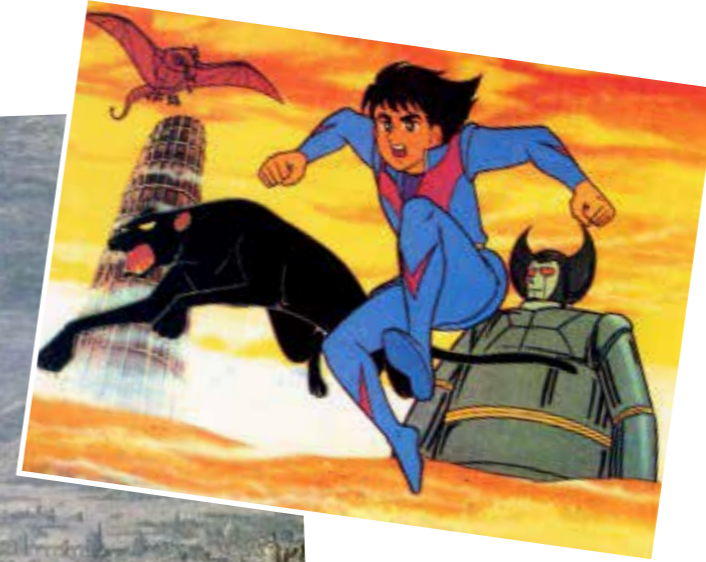


MIDDLE EAST

Container of legends from different countries and often in conflict with each other, the Middle East is distinguished by the gestation of ancient heroes, all heirs of the prototype par excellence, Gilgamesh. The Jewish tradition particularly affected Marvel Comics, which from the legend of David and Goliath got the tiny Ant-Man, then swollen into Giant-Man and then renamed Goliath. Like Samson with long hair, Doc Samson is a psychologist who undergoes gamma rays (the same ones that created the Hulk) and develops enormous strength and a bizarre emerald hair. The Prague Golem can be considered the archetype of every android and artificial creature in the modern world, just like the ghostly Vision of the Avengers, a machine capable of feelings that rebels against its evil creator Ultron, a sentient robot itself. Echoes of the *Bible* resound in the search for the Ark of the Covenant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the first chapter of the adventures of the Indiana Jones archaeologist, and reach Japanese productions, as seen in *Babel Nisei*, descendant of the alien who built the Tower of Babel. *The Thousand and One Nights*, the most famous collection of stories in the Arab world has been used several times in cinema, comics and anime but certainly the work that most represents it is *Aladdin*, the Disney feature film recently converted into a live action movie.



MIDDLE EAST



INDIA

Religion and mysticism totally influence the modernization of Hindu myths, captured in their most fascinating forms. In *Saint Seiya* (*The Knights of the Zodiac*) Masami Kurumada and Shingo Araki look at Hindu iconography, drawing impossible characters who, mixed with inevitable Japanese influences, are surprising for their unbridled originality. This border culture between two civilizations is sublimated by Tezuka in his *Buddha* manga, a fantastic rewrite of the *Illuminated* that combines Indian, Chinese and Japanese elements with extreme freedom.

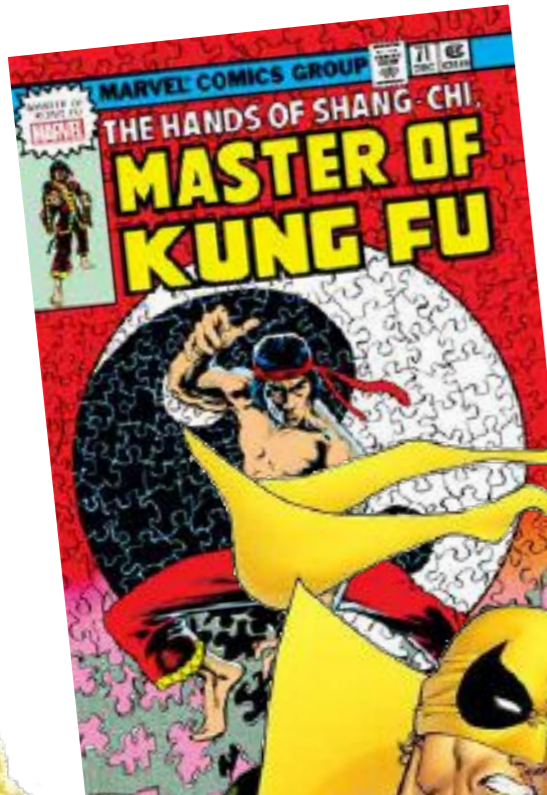


CHINA

Chinese influence in modern mythology moves on different levels of interpretation that arise spontaneously from traditional tales. *The Legend of the White Snake*, translated in the first color animated film of Japanese production (1958) and the epic poem *Journey to the West*, are certainly the most striking examples. The second, which arrived in Japan as *Saiyuki* and went totally integrated into local popular culture, generated an endless series of anime and manga, including Tezuka's *Goku no Daiboken*, the sci-fi version of Leiji Matsumoto *SF Saiyuki Starzinger* and above all *Dragon Ball* by Akira Toriyama. Symbol of Asia itself, the dragon becomes the archetype of monsters, heroes and even robots, but it is with the martial arts disciplines that China has the greatest influence on the Western imagination, giving life to superheroes Shang-Chi and Iron Fist, as well as the fighter Chun-Li from *Street Fighter*, the first female character to appear in a video game. Forced by contemporary economic power and a particularly entertainment-hungry public, even the most classic superheroes like Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman are joined by their Asian counterparts. Instead it remains an embarrassing and difficult character to manage the Mandarin, historical enemy of Iron Man bogeyman of Communist China and now censored in the name of political correctness.



CHINA



JAPAN

An intensive generator of modern mythology, Japan looks to its myths reinterpreting them with graphic and content results by a strong propaedeutic impact, so much that it has become a matrix of inspiration for other themes generated in the West. Keystone of the Japanese imagination, the samurais take on many forms, from Super Robots like Daitarn 3 and Gundam, to heroes and heroines who gracefully wield the deadly katanas, like the DC Comics warrior of the same name and Kill Bill's "Bride". The shapes of the helmets, the kabutos, and the shapes of the kimonos cross the ocean to inspire the fundamental figures of modern American mythology in the *Star Wars* saga, the dark Darth Vader and the Jedi knights. Not least, the ninja shadow warriors are reflected in the lethal Elektra and it is evident that the hand blades they used were crucial to the creation of the X-Man Wolverine.



JAPAN

There are also folkloristic and nocturnal figures such as the demons Oni and the monstrous Yokai, on which Shigeru Mizuki built his most important work, *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro*. The Japanese obsession for mechanics, which from the 18th century onwards produced intricate automata capable of performing complex movements and functions, converges in the design of modern robots, among which one in particular has become so well known that it is considered an ambassador of peace and friendship of the country: *Tetsuwan Atom*, the *Astroboy* of Osamu Tezuka.



JAPAN



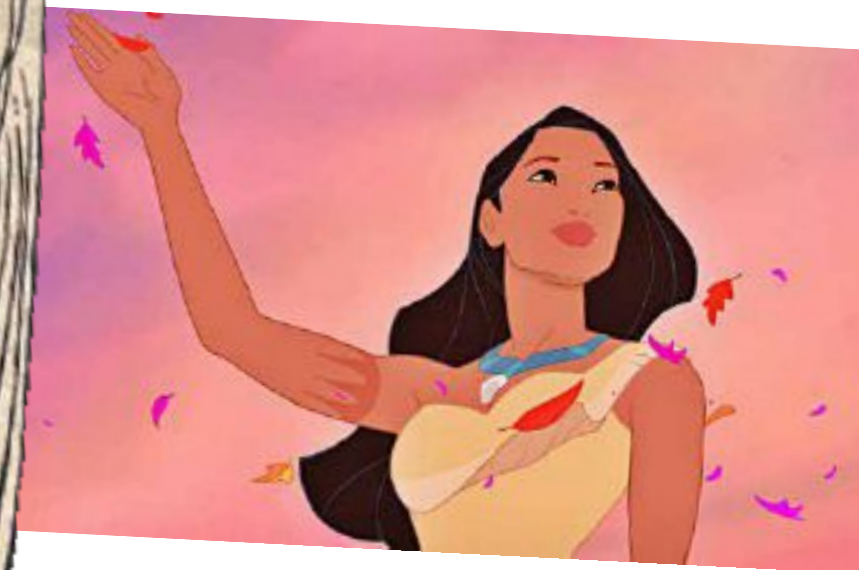
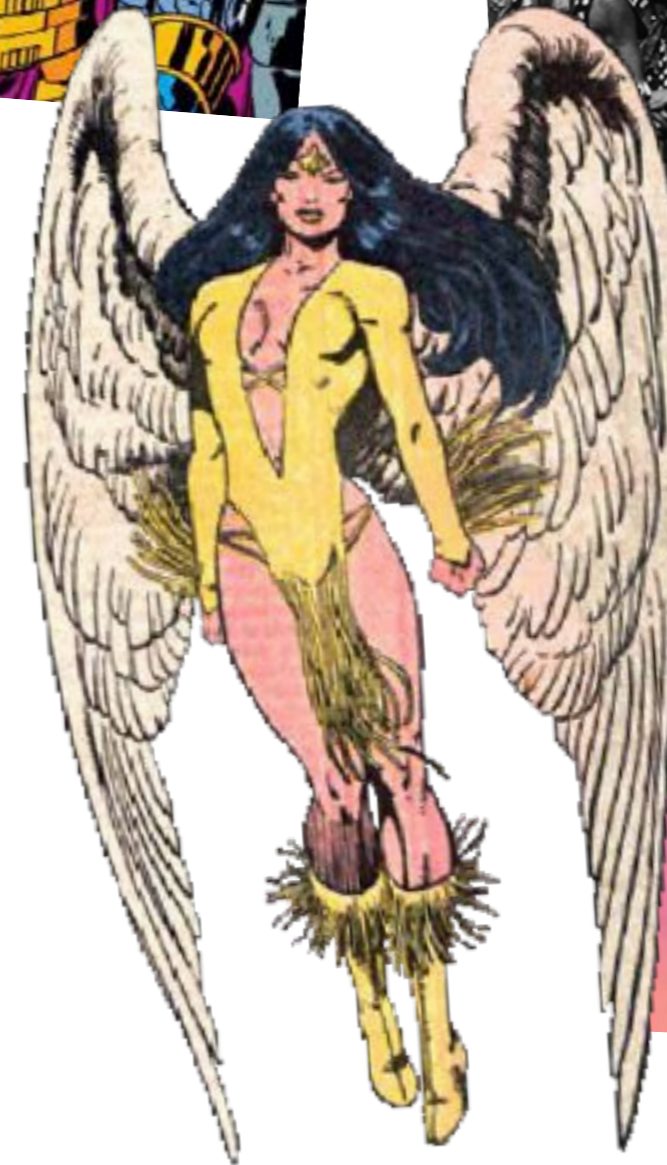
AFRICA

Black Panther by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the first black superhero in history (1966), explores social and racial issues by placing in the African geography the fictitious country of Wakanda, a hidden paradise that combines tradition and technology with visionary results still today modern, as confirmed by the success of the recent film, winner of an Academy Award for costumes. In addition to Storm, the mutant able to control the climate linked to Black Panther for a short period, other superheroes such as B'Wana Beast and Vixen share ties with Africa, drawing strength from the immense zoological heritage. The king of the jungle par excellence is the protagonist of an important work by Osamu Tezuka, *Jungle Taitei*, an animated series on which Disney's *Lion King* was entirely built a posteriori (so much to be considered a plagiarism).



AMERICA

The mysteries of the Mayan, Aztec and Incas civilizations offer the anthropological and graphic inspiration for some modern characters, such as Ajak from the *Eternals* and Aztek, as well as the legend of Eldorado is featured in several works, including the anime *Taiyo no Ko Esteban*. Heirs of the ancient inhabitants of the two continents, the Native Americans continue the legendary narrative inspiring with their uses and customs superheroes of the present and even of the future (like the alien Dawnstar), keeping the animist and shamanic component constant.



XM STATUES

CULT OBJECTS

Beyond toys, Superheroes embody the epic ideal of beauty and perfection, becoming the subjects of limited-edition statues dedicated to collectors who celebrate their innate artistic and historical value.

XM
STUDIOS PREMIUM
COLLECTIBLES





PROTO SUPERHEROES

FLASH GORDON

1934

Born from an idea by Alex Raymond, the brave Flash Gordon defends the Earth from the clutches of the cruel Emperor Ming from planet Mongo, helped by the scientist Dr. Zarkov and his beloved Dale Arden.

His enormous popularity earned him a television serial (which inspired George Lucas' *Star Wars*), numerous movies, including one from 1980 with Queen's soundtrack and adaptations for animated series, the most recent dates back to 2007.



BEFORE SUPERHEROES: THE MYSTERY MEN

During the Thirties, comics featured brave and reckless men, who used technology and magic to maintain peace. They were friendly shadows with masks and amazing devices, heroes who prevented criminals and mad scientists from conquering the world.

MANDRAKE

1934

Created by screenwriter Lee Falk and artist Phil Davis, the elegant Mandrake controls magic and prestidigitation, fighting organized crime and supernatural entities. He lives in a residence equipped with the most advanced technology located on the top of Xanadu mountain and is aided by the African strongman Lothar. His name has become synonymous of capacity outside the norm and is referred anytime it is required to go beyond the impossible.



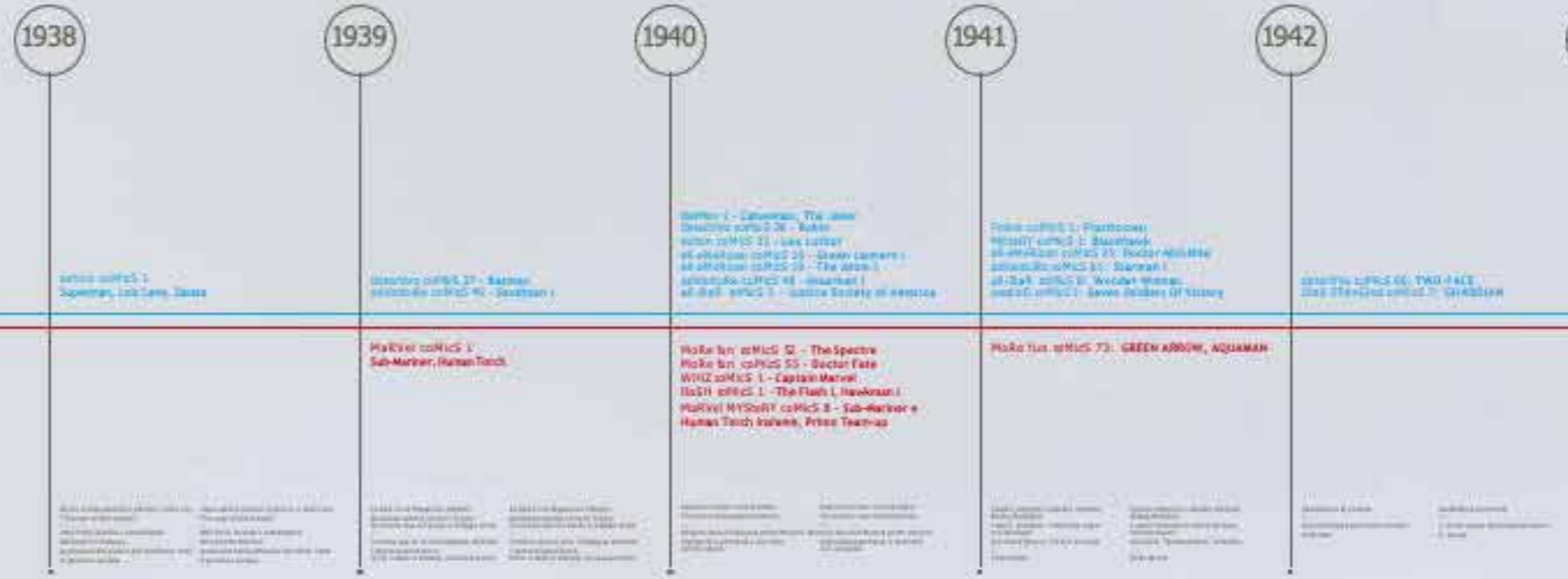


TIMELINE

TIMELINE

From 1938 to 2020, the history of the world is intertwined with the history of Superheroes: Marvel and DC travel in parallel in a journey of creativity that goes beyond the boundaries of time and space.

The major world events compared to the great moments in the history of Superheroes comics.

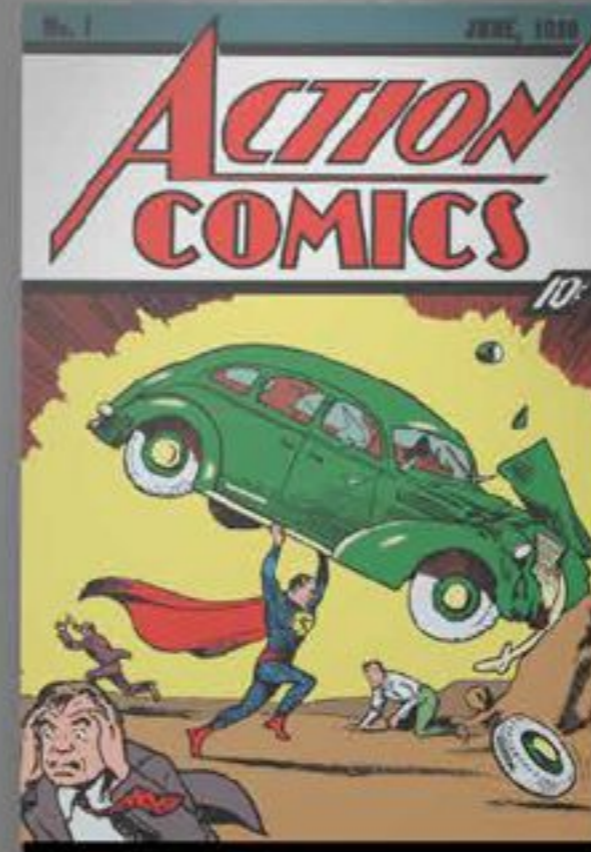
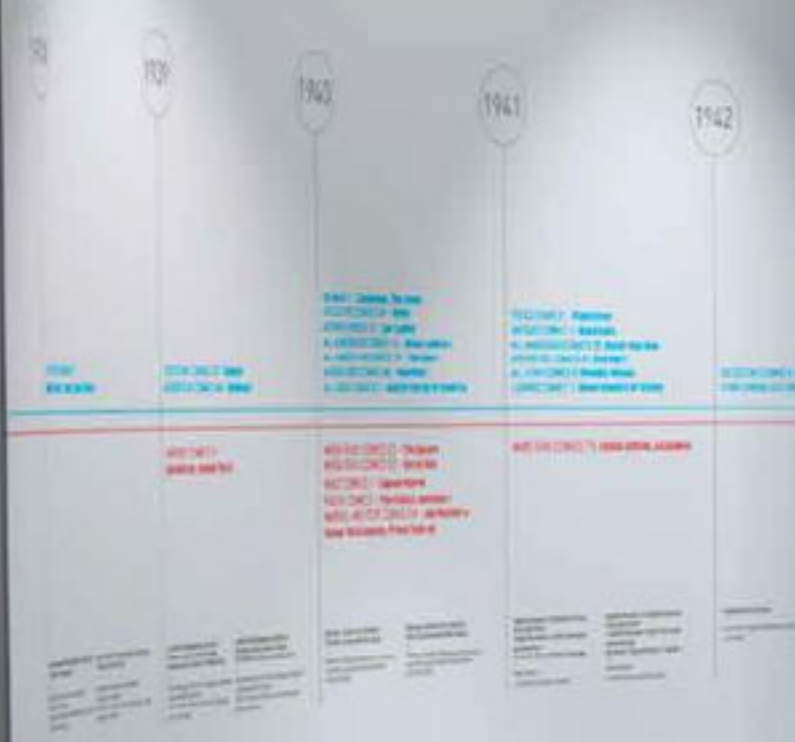


COMICS

COMICS

Born as humorous strips at the bottom of daily news, comics are emancipated starting from the Thirties, becoming independent books dedicated mainly to childhood. From mass product to sequential art, comics will become a narrative media with enormous potential.





1938

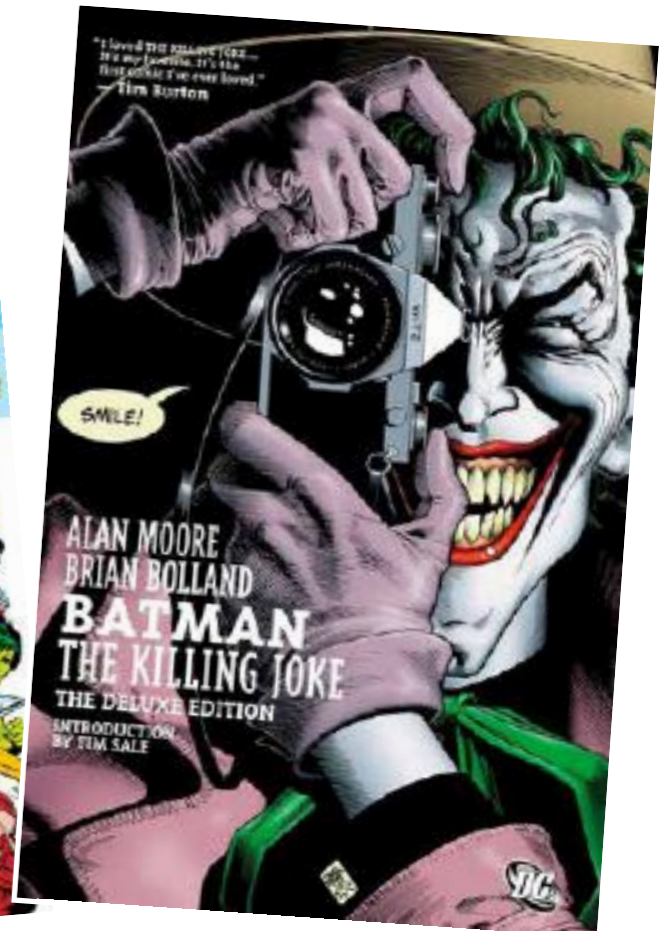
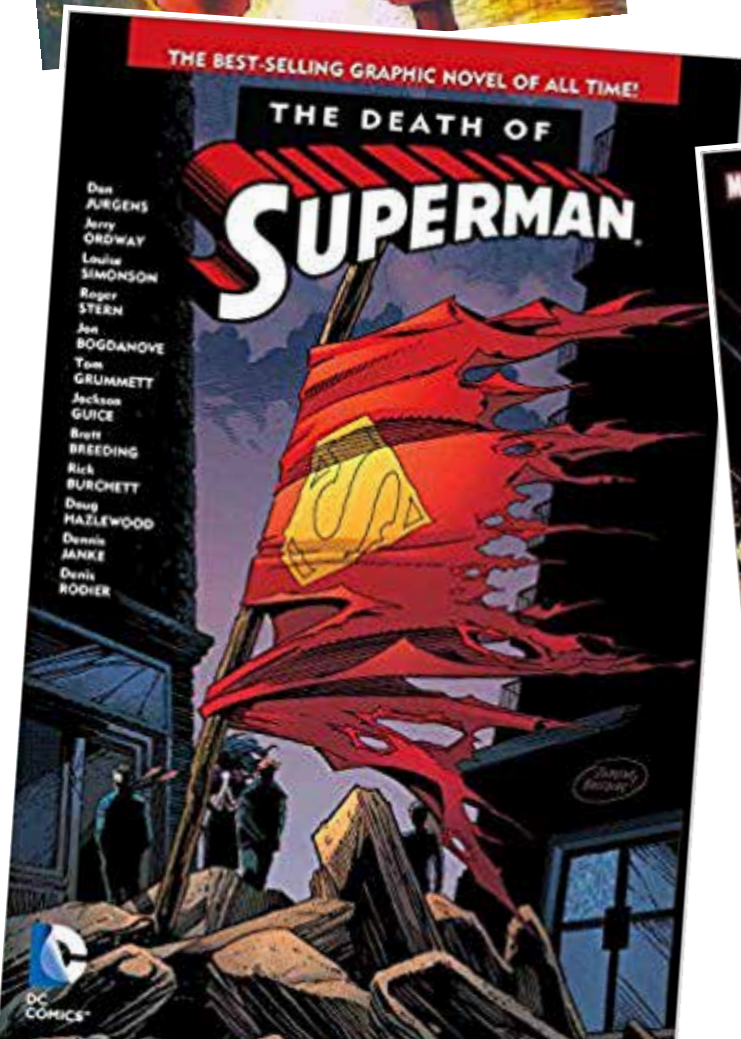
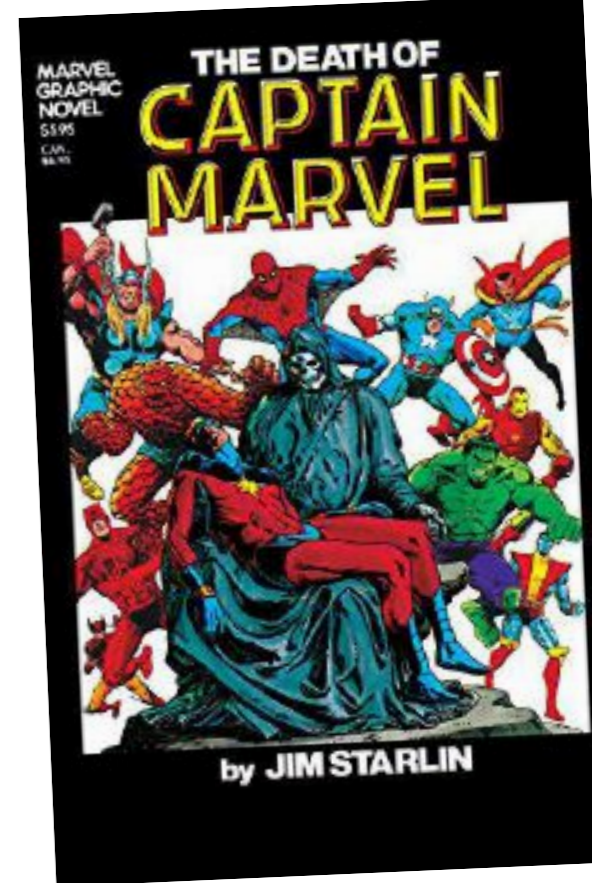
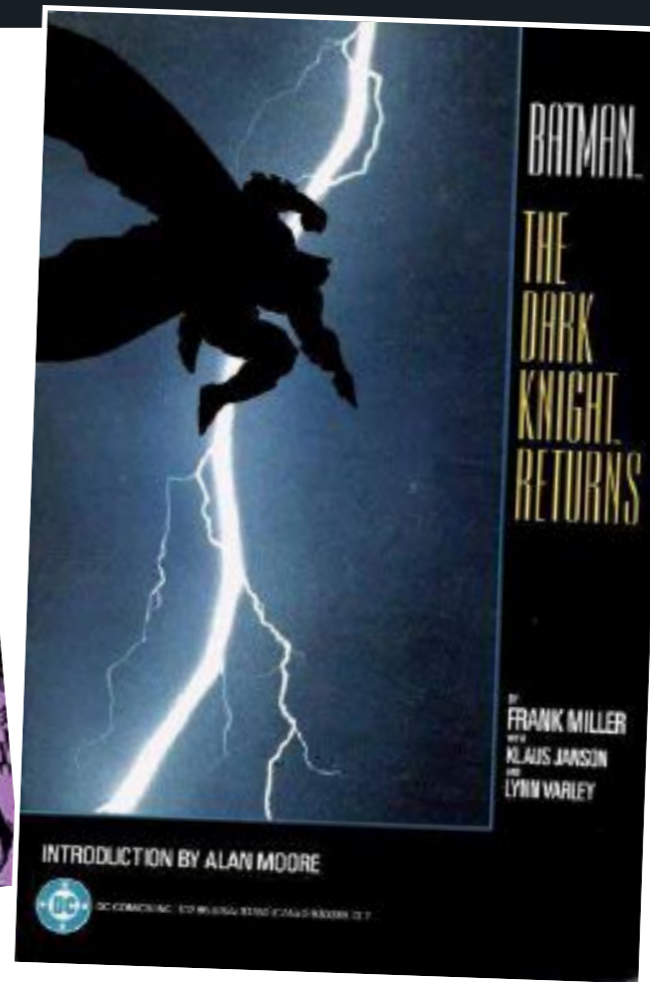
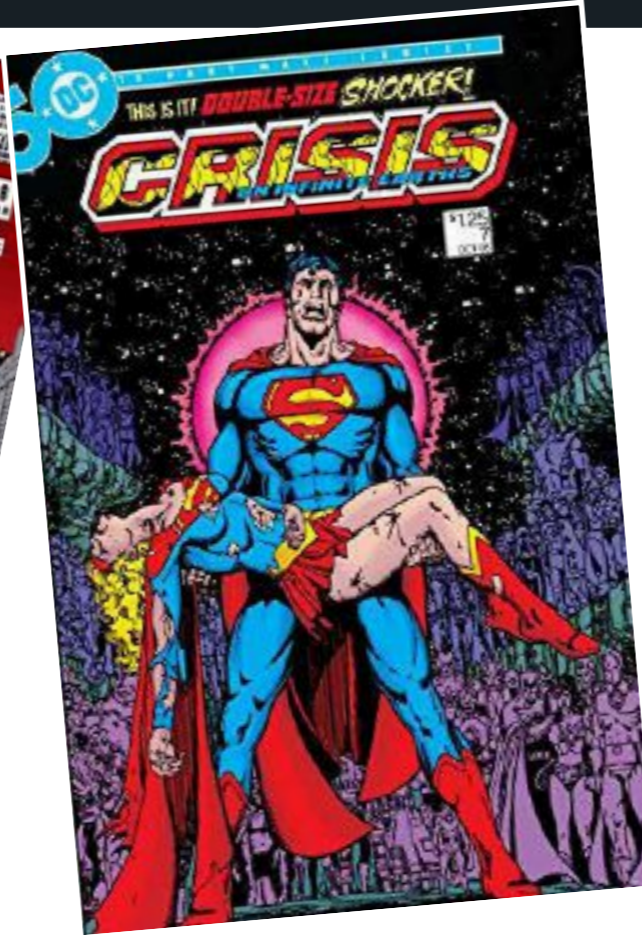
Superman was born on Action Comics, issue 1 of June 1938, from a Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's idea.

It's the Zero Year of the creation of Superheroes.

An original copy of this comic book is now valued at over three million dollars.

MONOGRAPHS

COMICS





MONOGRAPHS

ACTION FIGURES

MONOGRAPHS

The history of the Superheroes told through action figures and comics: the changes in costume, the various graphics, secret identities, dates and other indications necessary to understand a vast universe, which continues to evolve in over eighty years of existence. A two-dimensional and three-dimensional archive of a multitude of heroes, selected among the best examples that have made the history of these characters.



THE ARTISTS

TO WRITE AND TO DRAW: THE ARTISTS

Born almost as a kids play, over the years Superheroes have become a testing ground for the creativity of brilliant artists who through their pens and pencils have been able to give life to a pulsating universe of creativity and innovation, breaking every rule and constantly evolving the genre adapting it to the changing times. Like their creations, these artists have themselves become stars celebrated by readers for the quality of their work.



Stan Lee



Steve Ditko



Jerry Siegel &
Joe Shuster

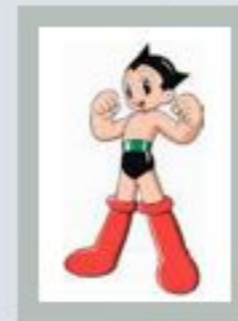
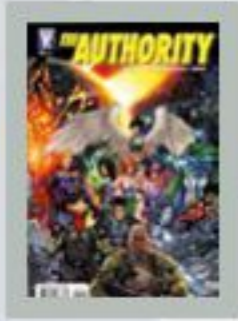
MOVIES & TV

From black and white cinematic beginnings to the blockbusters of the last decade, Superheroes have gone beyond the two-dimensionality of printed media to win over a global audience not accustomed to reading comics. Protagonists of a narrative trend that has conquered Hollywood,

Marvel and DC's characters have also been protagonists of historical television serials and cartoons, which have contributed decade after decade to consolidate their fame in the eyes of a widely intergenerational public.



WORLDWIDE HEROES



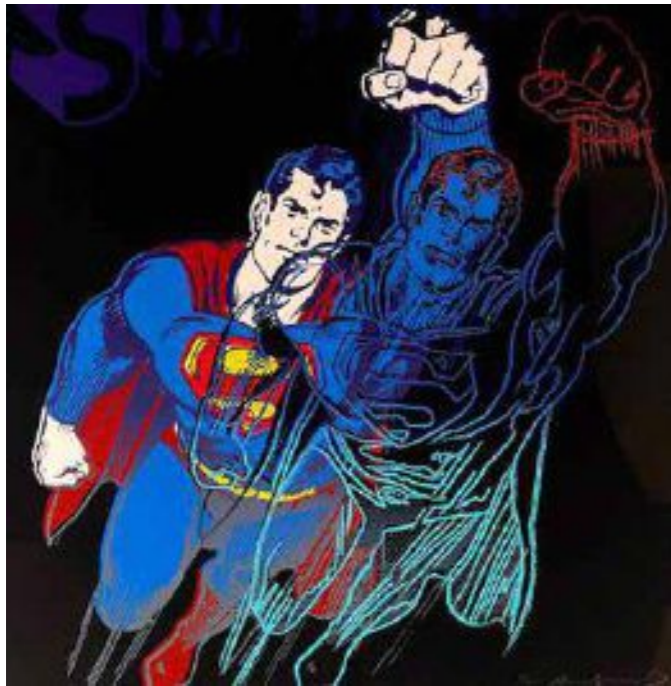
WORLDWIDE HEROES

Not only Marvel and DC: in addition to the elite of Superheroes, there are less mainstream characters that from U.S.A. - products of independent labels - to Europe, reaching as far as Japan, they have carried the flag of universal values high in the world, strengthening around the planet a chain of ideas and visions that mutually feed each other. In many countries, through comics, manga, cartoons and cinema, Superheroes carry out the task of identifying the lights and shadows of local society, often becoming symbols of their own country exported abroad.

SUPERHEROES IN MODERN ART

Superheroes have inspired some contemporary artists, who have extrapolated their mythological essence by filtering it through their personal plastic and pictorial vision. Icons to celebrate, deconstruct, mythologize and demythologize,

perfect bodies that become neoclassical shells on which to intervene in a provocative and highly expressive form. Minor art that inspires major art in a perpetual cycle of mutual influences.



ANDY WARHOL (Reproduction)



ROY LICHTENSTEIN (Reproduction)



ADRIAN TRANQUILLI (Not contacted yet)



NATHAN SAWAYA (Not contacted yet)



SACHA GOLDBERGER (Contact for purchase of works)



EUGENIO RECUENO FOR LAVAZZA (Ok by Lavazza)

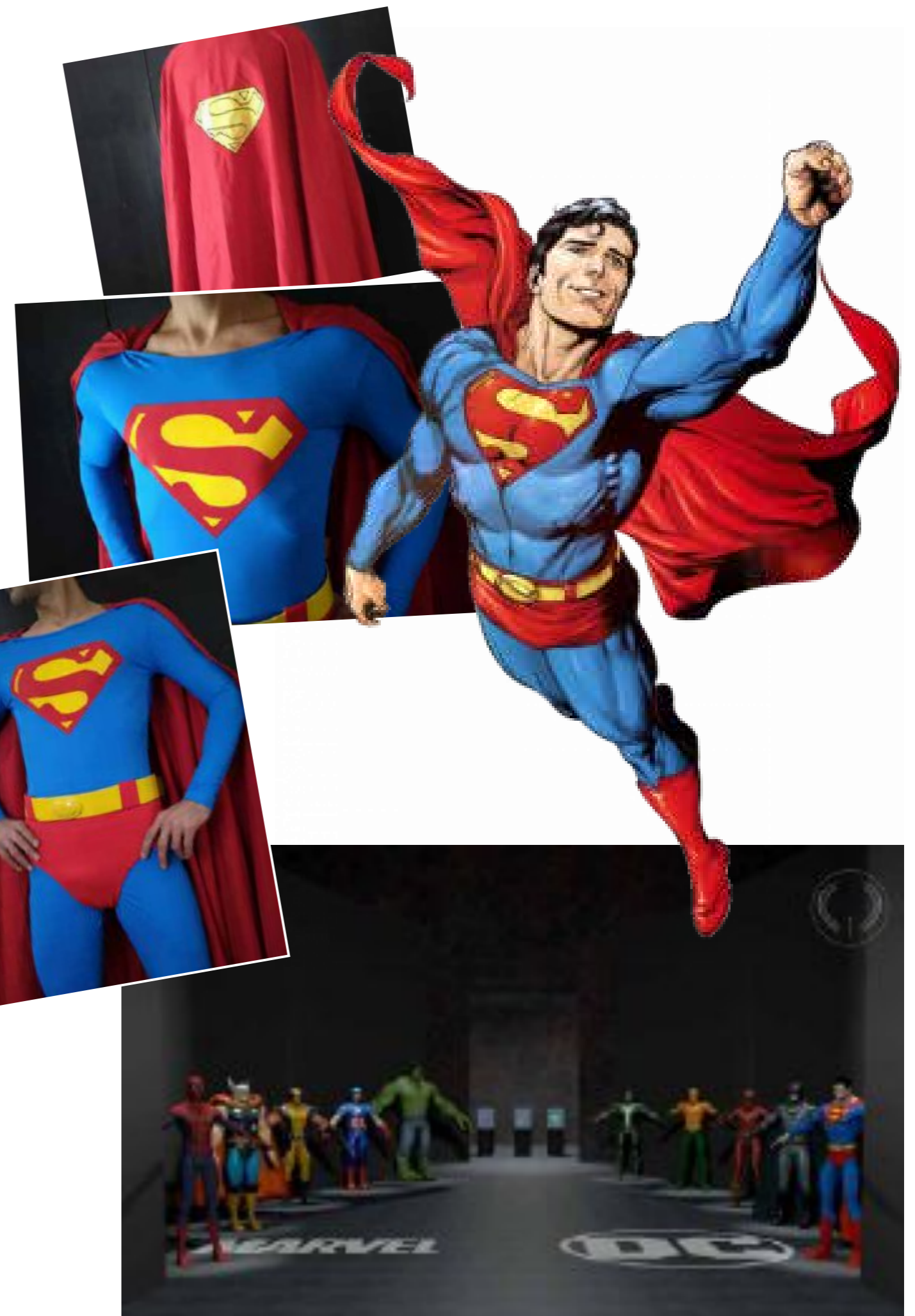
MORPHING PROJECTIONS:



HALL OF HEROES

The greatest protagonists of Marvel and DC caught in all their glory, real presences able to arouse strong emotions. An exhibition of dummies and statues in 1/1 scale completed by display cases containing some of the most precious and powerful objects in the universe, imaginary treasures that have contributed to the legend of the superheroes.

Coming from a private collection, the historic superheroes outfits have been recreated with haute couture techniques by theatrical and cinematographic costume artisans, equipped with accessories and props digitally processed, in a mix of sartorial tradition and ultra-modern technology loyal to every single detail.



GUEST ARTISTS



SELFIE AREA

BE A SUPERHERO!

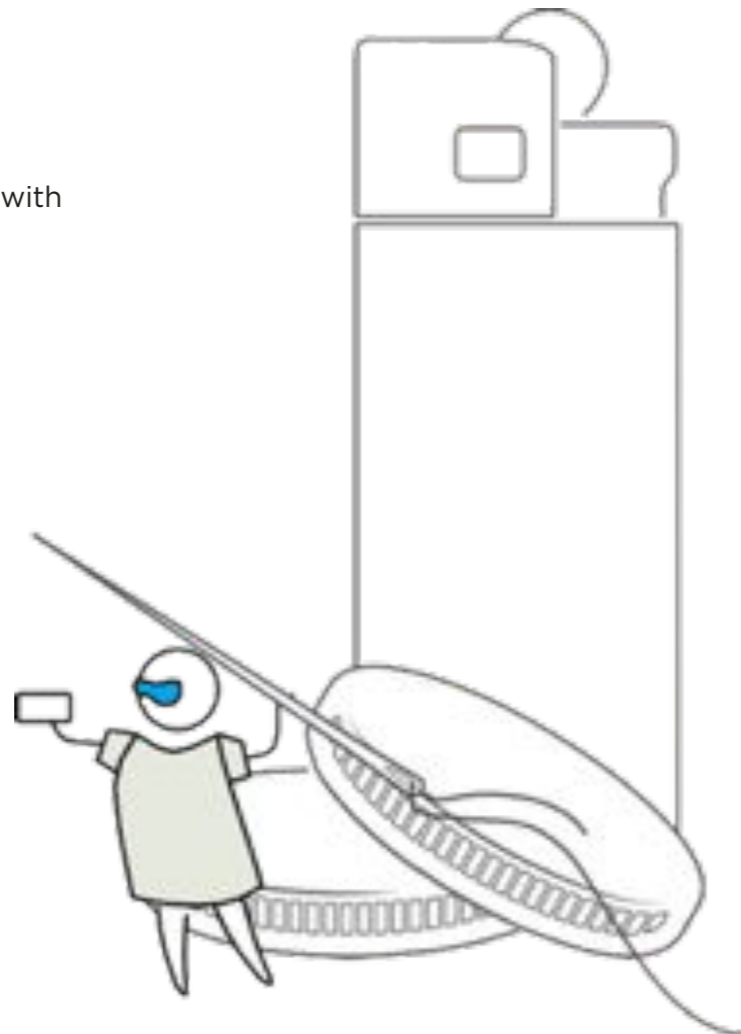
Enter the world of Superheroes and become one of them!

The impossible becomes reality with a little imagination. Using some classic movie tricks, the visitor is invited to experience the emotion of the set, getting involved with the more playful side of the comics.

A selfie area to show off your superpowers.

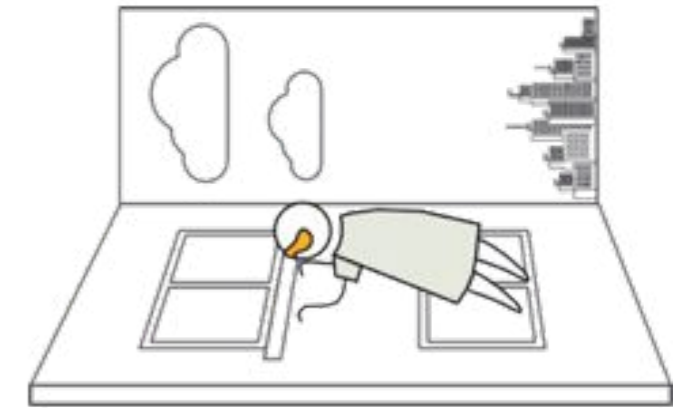
ATOMIC DIMENSIONS

Become teeny tiny and explore the world with the eyes of Ant Man and the Atom.



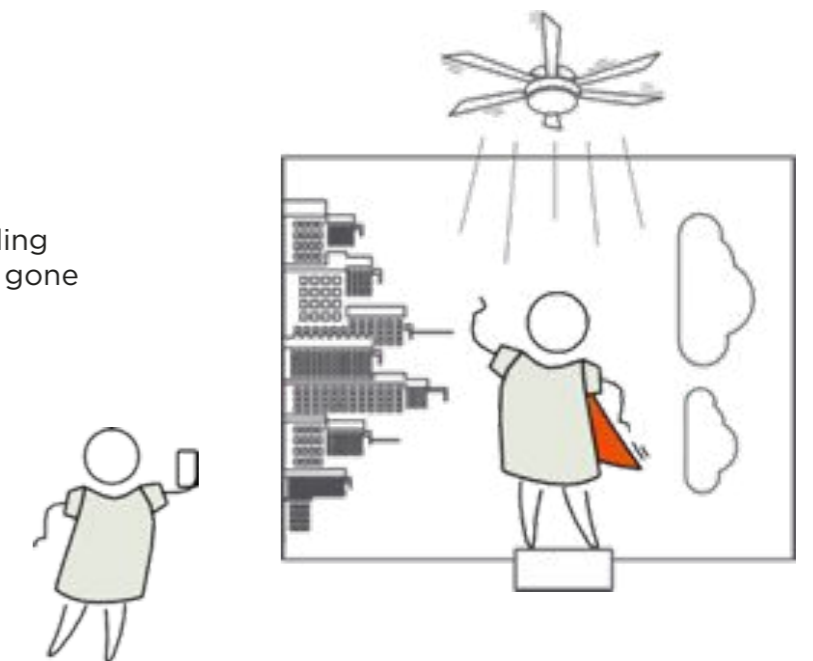
CLIMBING THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

Like Batman and Spider-Man, overcome your fears and climb up the tallest buildings in town using only a rope or your web.



UP UP AND AWAY!

Close your eyes and take off! Fly away with Superman and Iron Man for a thrilling adventure up there, where no man has gone before.



CONCEPT: FABRIZIO MODINA
ART WORK: PIERO TOSI
BOOK GRAPHIC: PIER FRANCESCO MARTINI

ALL PICTURES © RELATED OWNERS
Iron man at VectorStock



CONTEMPORANEA PROGETTI srl
Via del Campofiore 106
50136 Florence
tel +39 055 6802474
fax +39 055 6580200
www.contemporaneaprogetti.it
f_merz@contemporaneaprogetti.it