

Art Spiegelman: The Sky is Falling

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When Art Spiegelman, Pulitzer Prize winning creator of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, left his Soho home early on the morning of Sept 11, 2001 he witnessed the unforgettable sight of an airplane plowing into the World Trade Towers. Instinctively, he ran to his daughter's high school just blocks away from what would soon be called "ground zero" where, amidst the pandemonium, he found her shaken but safe. It was then that the towers collapsed. As the billious cloud of smoke and debris shrouded West Side Drive, for Spiegelman, time seemed to stand still. A few days later, still caught in a mental state of suspended animation, he started writing and drawing *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a comic strip journal of observations. Designed as a ten-part broadsheet comic, it was published in monthly installments in a few newspapers in Europe and the Jewish Forward in New York. As the strip evolved, Spiegelman invested references to pioneer comic strip characters and artists from the turn-of-the-century, some whom worked only blocks from the site of the towers on legendary newspaper row. It was his way of coming to grips with the enormity of the event through a comic language that had long provided solace during other critical times in his life. In September 2004, the ten original strips and ten vintage strips about New York by such masters as Windsor McKay, Fred Opper, and Lionel Feininger, were made into a unique board book wherein the roots of Spiegelman's life's work intersects with the here and now. In this interview, the artist talks about *In the Shadow of No Towers* and the controversy surrounding it.

Heller: Given all the public attention *In the Shadow of No Towers* is receiving, despite some negative and even snarky reviews, it has become an amazing platform for you, has it not?

Spiegelman: Instead of yelling at a TV set, I get to talk. Although it wasn't my intention all along, once I put out a book I figured I'd go on a book tour between now and election day—so it is more like running for office than being on a book tour.

Heller: You say that the soapbox was not your initial intention, but, at least in the back of your mind, was there a political motivation when you started doing the comic strip?