“When the Life magazine editors saw the film and saw examples of his work they found that Robert’s art was somewhat avant-garde at the time and decided not to run the story.” —Harry Benson

“Underground treasures

“One of the most impressive sketchbook collections you are likely to ever see.” —Complex.com
Set Vol. 1–6 includes the signed print “Gurls! Sex!” in portfolio.

Crumb talks

The famously elusive cartoonist opens up to us about life at 69 and why there will be no more sketchbooks

The sketchbook series really starts with the first drawings with rapidograph pens, 1964. I was working at the greeting card company and I met this young girl artist, Liz Johnston, and she told me to start drawing with pens, forget about the pencil. She showed me how you can go around with your sketchbook and draw from real life. I wasn’t attracted to her, and that’s part of the reason we got along so well. We went around drawing together while she talked about Buzzy Linhart. She was involved with this folk musician, a Cleveland hero, and she was always heartbroken because he was running around with other girls. We’d be drawing, and she’d be talking about Buzzy. I’d carry (the sketchbook) everywhere. From 18, I guess. I was also writing — I kept diaries also on and off during that period — so I lived on paper. I lived through the book, and behind it. I couldn’t talk, so I just drew. It was not about attracting people. It was about hiding behind it. Before I was well known, I was such a geek, such a goofball that people were indifferent to what I was doing. Once in a while people would say, “Oh, let’s see what you’re drawing. Oh, that’s good. Hey, these drawings look good.” But I got embarrassed if people noticed and drew attention to the fact that I was drawing. Now I can’t do it at all anymore because I’m too famous. People say, “Oh, look, the great R. Crumb is drawing.” They always want to see what I’m drawing. They ask me for the drawings and then big discussions always start about how much my drawings are worth. I just feel like tearing it up.

Wilson's work that was totally outrageous. He just didn’t hold back anything, and, I thought to myself, well, why hold back? I didn’t even think about what the audience reaction would be. I just felt that somehow I was crazy, I was nuts. Maybe I was a bit of an exhibitionist. Like, a guy who exposes himself by opening his overcoat. I showed a young hippie girl Snatch Comics when it was first published around 1969. Without saying anything, she handed it back to me very gingerly like it was a turd or something. Then I got famous. I remember Art Spiegelman introducing this beautiful 17-year-old girl. She had no idea about my work, but Spiegelman said, “Oh yeah, Crumbie’s a big famous hippie artist.” That was all it took.

All my characters were developed in the sketchbooks. Mr. Natural, that first appears in a sketchbook, back in the ’60s, so that’ll be in the next set, Volumes 1 to 6. In 1966 I was at my friend Marty Paul’s house, he had this black radio station on in Chicago. Some jive instrumental plays and the announcer says, “That was Mr. Natural.” Based on the
“Crumb is the Brueghel of the second half of the 20th century.”

Robert Hughes, essayist and art critic

Robert Crumb. The Sketchbooks 1964–2011

had the drawing of him holding up a kitty (Volume 9). Sophie was a little kid at the time. I only appear in the sketchbooks when I was a little kid with my sketchbooks, and you'll see a lot of her. When I look at the sketchbooks now I can recognize myself through them. I get a very self-satisfied feeling of the richness of the world. But, you know, it’s like somebody else did it. I barely can even look at them now, I know myself, in this moment, with the panorama of what’s in those sketchbooks. When you go through hundreds of pages of it, yeah, eventually you’re going to see just about every corner of where I’m about, for better or worse. We moved to France before the movie Crumb came out. We had no idea what a big impact it would be for me, how much attention it would get. It basically brought on more media pestilence and more Crumbsploitation. Everybody wanted to be loved, desperate to be loved. Then when the fame started: OK, now I’m loved. Now they’re loving me to death over here. They’re killing me.

Frenzy of crumbsploitation

ezanovely started drawing this little tiny comic strip about this bearded sage. There’s a holy man character in these volumes I never actually drew for comic books. He only appears in the sketchbooks (Volume 9). Sophie was a little kid at the time and she called him Roamin’ Dodo. I had the drawing of him holding up a kitty and Sophie said, “doesn’t he like the kitty?” So I went that in the sketchbook. Sophie was a big influence when she was a little kid with my sketchbooks, and you’ll see a lot of her. When I look at the sketchbooks now I can recognize myself through them. I get a very self-satisfied feeling of the richness of the world. But, you know, it’s like somebody else did it. I barely can even look at them now, I know myself, in this moment, with the panorama of what’s in those sketchbooks. When you go through hundreds of pages of it, yeah, eventually you’re going to see just about every corner of where I’m about, for better or worse.
“You’ll find everything from unseen doodles depicting punters at cafes to sprawling cartoons strips and uncharacteristically orthodox still-life drawings.” —Shortlist, London
Each book in the set contains 224 pages, for a total of 1,344 pages of prime Crumb from the artist’s early period (vol. 1–6) till 2011 (vol. 7–12). Each set includes a handwritten introduction, many pages of original color works, and 50 redrawn images distinctly different from the original works. Each set in this 1,000-copy limited edition also includes a signed, authenticated color art print.

Set Vol. 7–12 includes the print “The little guy that lives inside my brain” in portfolio.