

Emil Ferris

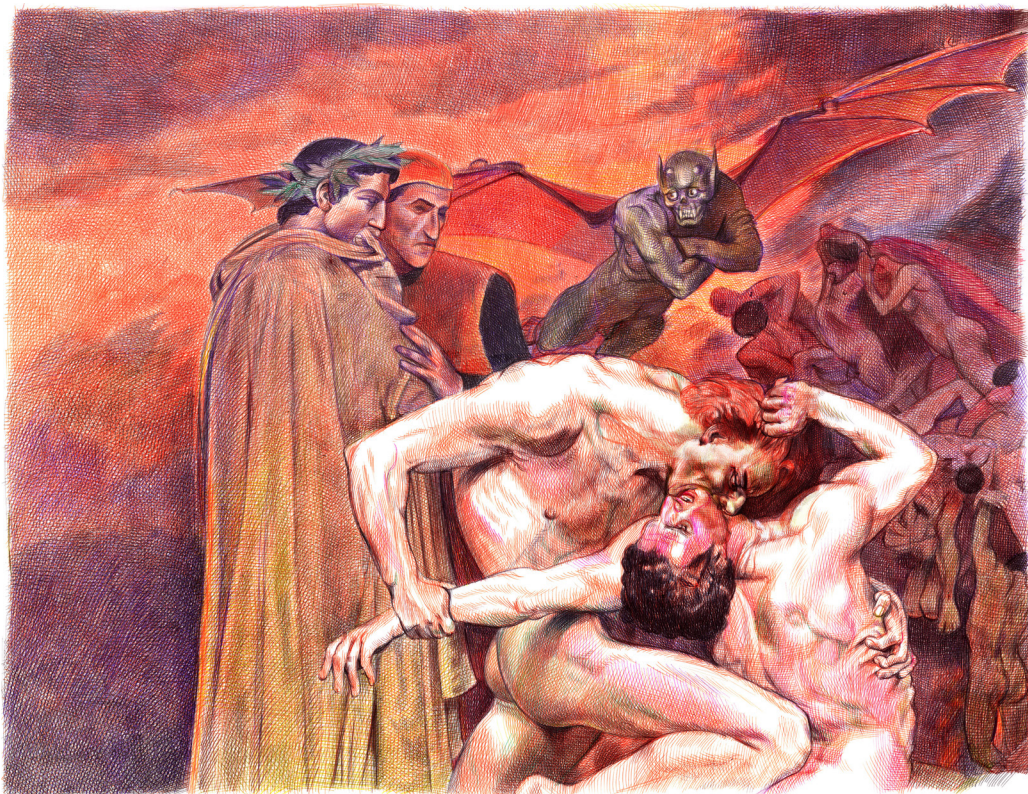
née en 1962, à Chiacgo (Etats-Unis)

On the occasion of Drawing Now Paris, Emil Ferris presents an exceptional work executed in ballpoint pen, her medium of choice. Far from being incidental, it lies at the core of her practice: a tool without erasure, engaging gesture through duration, repetition, and intensity.

This unique drawing stands as a pivotal image within her work. Inspired by *Dante and Virgil* by William Bouguereau, it offers a contemporary, more interior and embodied reinterpretation. Ferris condenses its energy into a dense, almost organic image in which figures appear to both confront and merge.

This work is part of an ongoing practice in which Ferris draws from art history—particularly from the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago—to nourish her visual universe. In the *Créature* edition of the first volume of *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*, she had already invoked *Oedipus and the Sphinx* by Gustave Moreau. Here, with Bouguereau, she extends this dialogue, transforming canonical images into visceral, embodied experiences.

The ballpoint pen imposes its own logic: an accumulation of lines, layers, and densities through which the image emerges over time. The drawing is not constructed; it is built up, carved, worked like a material.



Emil Ferris, *Dante & Virgil (Hommage à Bouguereau)*, 2025, stylo à bille sur papier, 61 x 48 cm ©Emil Ferris / courtesy Galerie Martel

BIOGRAPHIE

In 2017, this woman suddenly established her name in the art world with the publication of *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* (published in France by Monsieur Toussaint Louverture), for which she won a host of awards around the world, including three Eisner Awards in the United States in 2018 and the Fauve d'Or at the Angoulême Festival in 2019.

An artist with an atypical path, she grew up in the museum in Chicago, where she could spend hours in front of a single painting. While she says she learned to draw before she could walk, she also seems to have learned to read paintings and drawings before ever studying their codes.

Her inspirations include Magritte, Daumier, Otto Dix and Rembrandt. She also learned a great deal from the work of Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Art Spiegelman, Julie Doucet and Marjane Satrapi.

On her fortieth birthday, she was bitten by a mosquito and fell gravely ill. The virus left her paralysed in the lower limbs and caused her to lose the use of her right hand, the one with which she draws. It was thanks to her daughter, then six years old, that her reconstruction began from her hospital bed: by taping a pencil to her palm, she laid the first stones of her resurrection. Ferris slowly recovered her motor abilities and, in a wheelchair, passed through the doors of the Art Institute of Chicago.

She graduated from there and then immersed herself in the conception of the project of her life, *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*. The result, after six years of work, was an 800-page volume—a true literary UFO. The original manuscript, rejected 48 times in the United States, was finally published by the independent publisher Fantagraphics.

The publication of the book caused a media impact that no one—and least of all Ferris, then 55 years old—could have imagined. The graphic novel was acclaimed by critics on both sides of the Atlantic. Described by *The Guardian* as “one of the best graphic novels of the 21st century so far,” the work propelled the American artist into a new dimension.

The woman who had until then been an illustrator and toy designer became a true revelation in comics, acclaimed by the sacred monsters of the field such as Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware.

In France, the book sold more than 100,000 copies and triumphed at Angoulême. In June 2024, it won the Special 40th Anniversary Prize from the Association des critiques de bande dessinée, which named it the best album of the past twenty years.

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Armed with her ballpoint pens, she masters her technique with exceptional force. She plays with the limits of this medium, bringing intensity and depth to her drawing. The pen is used like a brush, leaving on the paper's surface a multitude of hatchings that reveal fascinating chiaroscuro spectacles. Her drawing, inspired by the American underground movement and considered rather "masculine" in the common imagination, is a profound celebration of art.

Her work is acclaimed by her peers, who consider her a historic revelation in comics. Through her line and the subjects she addresses, she imposes herself within an artistic world still too often regarded as male, and upends the very notion of the book and of narrative with aesthetic freedom and a powerful drawing of immediate impact. In 2024, her work was shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris as part of the major exhibition *La BD à tous les étages*.

The second volume of *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* was published on 8 November 2024 by Monsieur Toussaint Louverture.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

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