



# Staten Island Advance

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## Meet Staten Island's comic book crusader

*The path to Spider Man runs through the Sistine Chapel, the Uffizi Gallery and the Accademia, according to illustrator, instructor and student Robert Geronimo*

By MICHAEL J. FRESSOLA, Arts Editor

The 25-year-old New Springville resident discovered years ago that the most gifted comic-book artists had formal training in anatomy, figure drawing and art history. He has patterned his own education accordingly.

This winter, he spent a month in Florence, immersed in the high Renaissance.



In May, the Wagner College graduate expects to receive a master's in art history from Brooklyn College. He'll start his doctorate in the same discipline at the City University Graduate Center as soon as possible.

"There are no jobs out there," he reasons. "I might as well stay in school."

His credentials might bring work as an art historian. He is certain, however, that they will facilitate a Geronimo comic book (or more formally, "sequential art") imprint. He has had professional assignments, "Secret Agent X" for Moonstone Books and "Samson Turner and the Legend of Hercules" (Boulevard Books).

He and a production/writing partner, Gregory Mannino, have established a company, Ascalon Press. Geronimo is at work currently on the "Tales from the Grim" for Ascalon. In one of the stories, a gang of zombie-like "Tricksters" teach a schoolyard bully a lesson he's not about to shrug off anytime soon.

For the time being, Geronimo may do much of the production work himself. But in established studios, comic books materialize on an assembly line. A skilled draftsman or "penciller," draws the narrative, an "inker" emboldens the pencil line, and a colorist adds color. The text goes in last. Badly placed, "it can ruin everything," he says.

He is not surprised when laymen and non-fans disparage the comic-book/superhero/fantasy world. By way of refuting them, he can cite the burly patriarchs and muscular angels of the Sistine ceiling of Michelangelo. The similarities, of saints and superheroes are easy to see.

He likes to say that if Giotto (1266-1337), the great Florentine painter of the late middle ages, were alive today, "he would be drawing comic books." (Giotto was the first Italian painter to abandon the stiff rules of Byzantine style for a recognizable natural style and paintings that present detailed narratives).

In Florence, Geronimo discovered the “Saint George” (1411) of Donatello. On his blog it’s headlined as “his favorite sculpture.” This is a thinking man’s version of the legendary warrior, erect and resolute, minus the dragon he reputedly offed.

Geronimo believes the figure embodies perfected human capability, “strength in the face of adversity.

Change the clothes and haircut, and lose the shield and who is this St. George? The Man of Steel.

## **WONDER WOMAN RECLAIMED**

Geromino master’s thesis examines the history of Wonder Woman, who was a powerhouse pre-feminist archetype when she was created by Harvard-trained psychologist, artist and inventor William Marston (he patented the polygraph) in 1941.

Marston was an impassioned part-time comic book artist and had progressive ideas about feminism decades before the movement gathered force. He imagined his Wonder Woman as a figure of superhuman strength and power who often wins battles and admirers by the sheer force of truth and love.

Artists who draw use life-drawing sessions the way dancers use ballet classes, to stay in tune. On Thursday evenings, Geronimo may often be found at in the uninstructed life class that the Art Lab runs for much of the year in one of its studios on the grounds of the Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden.

He teaches two popular Saturday courses in comic-book drawing for children and teenagers.

He’s not sure who’s learning more, himself or his students.

“Teaching is the best thing to do in terms of keeping up your skills,” he said.

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## **GET HOOKED ON COMICS**

*Robert Geronimo comics book and sequential art classes. Kids 8-12 focus on learning basic anatomy. Teens 13-17 focus on proportion, weight, balance, line, light, shadow and the importance of good visual storytelling.*

**When:** Saturdays, 10 a.m.-noon (kids) & 12:30-2:30 p.m. (teens); beginning in April 7

**Where:** Art Lab, on the grounds of the Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden, 1000 Richmond Terr., Livingston; 718-447-8667

**How much:** Kids: \$165 (\$158 members). Teens: \$211 (\$200 members).

**More information:** Visit [ArtLab.info](http://ArtLab.info) for details