

ASTOUNDING

SCIENCE
FICTION

20 CENTS
APRIL
1939
A STREET & SMITH
PUBLICATION



Charles Schneeman

Astounding Science Fiction

Richard L. Nelson Gallery & The Fine Arts Collection
University of California, Davis

February 22 through March 27, 1998

"Illustrations by Schneeman"

The above words always mean that a terrible struggle has taken place, and we're never sure who won. Sometimes the scrapheap is knee deep. . . . This is the struggle of being an artist: deciding what to draw, and then how to draw it.

I hope you like the final results.

— Charles Schneeman in "Work in Progress,"

This exhibition focuses on Charles Schneeman's illustrations for stories in and covers for *Astounding Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction* from 1935 to 1952. Over eighty works—ranging from quick studies to detailed drawings to final artworks and printed examples—are featured, and provide a fascinating record of Schneeman's impressive draughtsmanship and the various stages in his graphic processes. The majority of the works are selected from the "Charles E. Schneeman Papers," a recent gift to Special Collections in the UC Davis General Library by the Betty J. Lundeen Trust. Additional examples are lent from the Schneeman Family Collection.

The fusion of Schneeman's creative skills and imagination as well as his currency in science and technology significantly enhance the "astounding" stories. His works, also provide a fascinating anthology of science fiction imagery at mid-century. Many of Schneeman's visions remain fresh even today, with popular culture's immersion in science fiction and acceptance of remarkable developments in science and technology, and even anticipate later developments and imagery.

Astounding Science Fiction has emerged as one of the more important and influential "pulp" magazines in the history of science fiction. Many writers who have become classics in the genre, including Isaac Asimov, A.E. Van Vogt, E.E. Smith, R.A. Heinlein, Jack Williamson and others, were nurtured by the magazine. When *Astounding Stories* became *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1938, the editor, John Campbell, wrote: "Stories means nothing, explains nothing. . . . [T]he new title explains the unfamiliar something of what our material is." He continued that science fiction "takes an amount of imagination beyond the average" and to enjoy it "we must keenly appreciate it and be interested in tomorrow and tomorrow's tomorrow. . . . Science is the gateway to the future; its predictions alone can give us some glimpse of time to come. . . ." (*Astounding Science Fiction*, March 1938, p.37)

The quality of the imagery to illustrate the stories seems to have been equally important to the editor. Schneeman later recalled that Campbell "wanted more drama, design and human element, and less stress on gadgetry," and that he was "never satisfied with any artist, because he seems to fear that he will become static." (Letter from Schneeman to Alva Rogers, dated February 10, 1966, p. 2, in "The Charles Schneeman Papers.")

The excitement of tomorrow and technologies to come seems to have captivated the young Charles Schneeman. His interests in art and science developed early. He attended Pratt Institute in Brooklyn for formal art training, and received a diploma in art in 1933. Concurrently his interests in science fiction developed as well. In 1966, Schneeman recounted “a friend showed me an early copy of *Amazing Stories* in 1927 and it was my undoing. The world lost a chemist as I went down the science fiction drain.” (Letter from Schneeman to Rogers, p. 1)

In 1935, at the age of 23, Schneeman began to execute illustrations for *Astounding Stories* and in 1938 executed his first cover illustration for the magazine shortly after it had changed its title to *Astounding Science Fiction*. Schneeman himself recalled that “connecting with *Astounding* wasn’t easy. . . . I finally just happened to meet the art director” and “got a story soon afterwards, ‘Menace from Saturn’.” (Letter from Schneeman to Rogers, p. 1) Over the next two decades, Charles Schneeman would provide the artwork for covers and over 150 short stories and novelettes.

Charles Schneeman has received limited recognition as one of the more important American graphic artists in the earlier part of this century. Ron Miller (*Space Art*, 1978, p. 10ff.), for example, groups him with Howard Russell Butler, Frank R. Paul, Rockwell Kent and others. Alva Rogers (*A Requiem for Astounding*, Chicago, 1964, p. 38) identifies the late 1930s and 1940s to be the “Golden Age” for the publication and singularly names Schneeman as “an artist who would one day be considered one of the greatest black and white illustrators of science fiction.”

Schneeman’s most familiar illustrations are an impressive group of images accompanying the epic serial “Gray Lensman,” by E.E. Smith. The four-part story of the ultimate triumph of good over evil has become a classic in many science fiction circles. The hero, Kimball Kinnison, is always depicted as the intelligent, virile leader of the “massed military might of Civilization” in his adventures in search of the locus of Boskonian evil that carry him beyond Earth, even our galaxy, and into the universe. But what may impress us more today are his depictions of the repugnant “cold blooded race of the Eich,” passages describing intergalactic travel and communication by wearing “thought screens,” or conferences of alien scientists that become confrontations,

with Kinnison “soothing ruffled ego.” Such images also seem to exemplify the editor’s specified desire for greater “drama, design and human elements” in the illustrations.

Schneeman’s later comments on his graphic techniques, and specific examples are both instructive and somewhat ironic. He wrote: “Of the various techniques I have used, I think brush is best, with simple line or dry brush shading, [e.g., The] Mutineers and Gray Lensman. . . . The sketch has much to do with the finish. It can be in wash, pencil, or brush and ink. This causes the variety. . . .” He also added: “Illustrating any story is a challenge, especially a popular author’s work. The worry is that I won’t give it the treatment it deserves. . . . I feel that way still about Gray Lensman.” (Letter from Schneeman to Rogers, p. 3)

Charles Schneeman’s most famous cover was for the April 1939 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*. Illustrating Nat Schachner’s novelette “Worlds Don’t Care,” the cover immediately attracted more attention than the story that was described on the table of contents page as “When the plague strikes – Worlds can’t care where the victims go.” It was the merit of the cover that received a special editorial in the issue. (p. 30)

Schneeman’s original painting, inscribed “Saturn Seen from Japetus,” was used as the final artwork for the cover and numerous working studies survive as well. Collectively they provide insight into the artistic evolution of the cover. The editorial gives further understanding into the scope of Schneeman’s research for the project. It states: “Done with the help and advice of the Hayden Planetarium astronomers, [the cover] represents as great a degree of accuracy as is possible to our present knowledge. Since many facts regarding the satellites of Saturn remain vague, certain details are based on reasonable hypotheses.” The editorial also notes that “Japetus was chosen as a viewpoint – with author Schachner’s co-operation” primarily because the larger of Saturn’s satellites “is sufficiently out of the plane of the rings to make possible a view showing the broad expanse of the rings.” The editorial concludes: “The coloration of Saturn is as near to absolute accuracy as a dozen authorities on the subject make possible. Schneeman, in doing this unquestionably excellent job, spent many hours of research in libraries and conferences. . . .”



above: *Final artwork for “Mathematica Plus,” dated 1936 (illustrating the novella by John Russell Fearn in Astounding Stories, May 1936, pp. 100-101), crayon, pen and ink on pebble board. From the “Charles E. Schneeman Papers,” Special Collections, UC Davis General Library.*

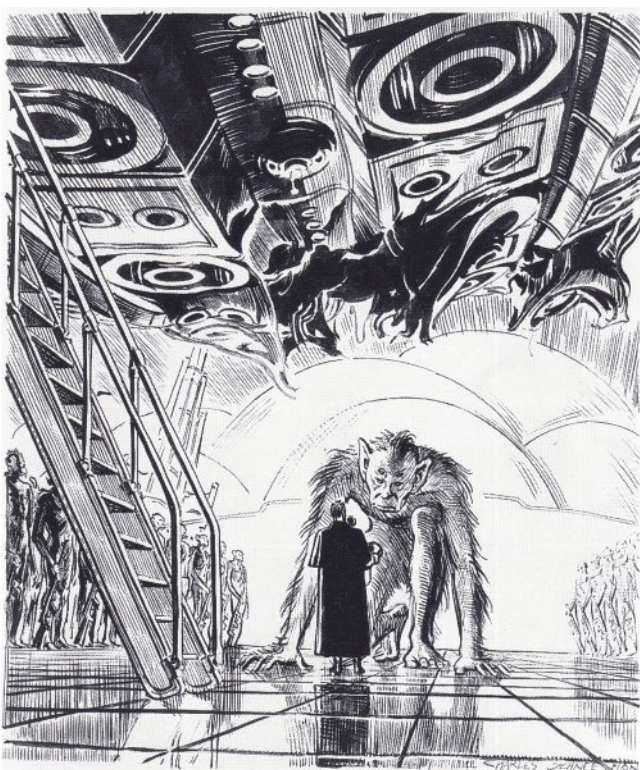
right: *Illustration for “Greater Than Gods” (from the novelette by Catherine Lucille Moore as C.L. Moore in Astounding Science Fiction, July 1939, p. 149), offset lithography. From the “Charles E. Schneeman Papers,” Special Collections, UC Davis General Library.*



Yet the world of the other cube. There was peace and thought and—a slow, comfortable decay!



above: Illustration for and press proof for "Gray Lensman" (illustrating Part I and Part II of the four-part serial by Edward E. Smith as E. E. Smith, Ph.D. in Astounding Science Fiction, October 1939, p. 16, and November 1939, p. 36), offset lithography. From the "Charles E. Schneeman Papers", Special Collections, UC Davis General Library.



left: Final artwork for "The Mutineers" (illustrating the novelette by L. Ron Hubbard as Kurt von Rachen in Astounding Science Fiction, April 1941, p. 146), ink on card stock. From the "Charles E. Schneeman Papers," Special Collections, UC Davis General Library.

cover: Press proof of cover for Astounding Science Fiction. April 1939 (illustrating the novelette "Worlds Don't Care" by Nat Schachner), ink over color offset lithography. From the "Charles E. Schneeman Papers", Special Collections. UC Davis General Library.

Charles Schneeman: Biographical Notes

Charles Schneeman was born in Staten Island, New York, in 1912. In 1922, his family moved to Brooklyn where he graduated from Erasmus High in 1928. He then attended the Pratt Institute (where he received a diploma in 1933), and did additional work with Harvey Dunn at the Grand Central School of Art; he also studied figure drawing with George Bridgeman. Afterwards, the artist noted that his training consisted of “endless work. . . in sketch groups and subways and everywhere.”

During his years at Pratt, Schneeman helped pay his tuition by executing sketches for *Greenback's Science and Invention*. He also contributed illustrations to *Wonder Stories*. From 1935 to 1941, he was one of the more frequent contributors of illustrations for *Astounding Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*.

In 1940, Schneeman was drafted into the Army Air Corps and was stationed at Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado. He continued to develop his graphic skills and interest in new technologies as an illustrator for Army Air Corps technical manuals. During this period, he also continued to produce limited science fiction graphics for *Astounding Science Fiction*.

After his release from the armed services, Schneeman, with his new bride, returned to New York briefly and worked as an illustrator for the *New York Journal-American*. He also provided illustrations for romance magazines and occasional works in the science fiction genre. Subsequently, he worked for the *Denver Post* and moved with his family to California in 1950 to accept a position with the *Los Angeles Examiner*. Residing in Pasadena until his death in 1972, Schneeman's works were included in street fairs, various galleries and exhibitions at the Pasadena Art Museum and Los Angeles County Museum.



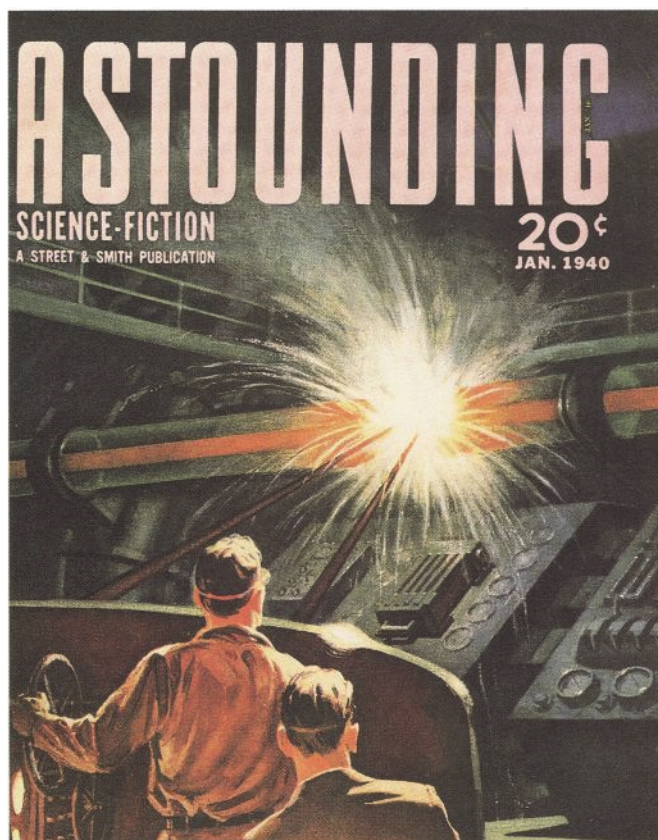
Credits

The exhibition has been organized by the Richard L. Nelson Gallery at UC Davis in cooperation with the Department of Special Collections, UC Davis General Library. The exhibition was curated by Price Amerson and Deborah Gangwer. The “Charles E. Schneeman Papers,” an archive of over 500 items, were researched and catalogued by Katherine Parker and Deborah Gangwer under the direction of John Skarstad, head, Department of Special Collections. Registration and additional research for the exhibition were provided by Carol Rosset. Preparation of the materials for exhibition was executed by Paula Tichenor. In addition, the cooperation and contributions of the following are gratefully acknowledged: Boston University Libraries, Marilyn Sharrow, Diane Forrest, Jan Conroy, Laurie Lewis, Paul and Barbara Schneeman, and Betty J. Lundeen.

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above: Cover of *Astounding Science Fiction*, January 1940 (illustrating the novelette “Neutral Vessel” by Harl Vincent), color offset lithography. From the “Charles E. Schneeman Papers”, Special Collections, UC Davis General Library.

left: Study for above cover, graphite, ink and watercolor on paper. From the “Charles E. Schneeman Papers”, Special Collections, UC Davis General Library.