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# All-star artists assemble to homage the complete Batman: The Dark Knight Returns #1

By Lan Pitts 6 hours ago

Allred, Chiang, Sook, Rossmo, and more return to pay tribute to Frank Miller's Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

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(Image credit: Ryan Ottley)

**Batman: The Dark Knight Returns** is a quintessential comic book read and has been placed upon colossal pillars of acclaim for more than 30 years. Frank Miller's tale of a broken Batman who takes



collected edition cover, have been imitated, homaged, and remixed by countless artists - in comics and not; but what about the actual story? The actual comic book pages?

For the past few months, several top-notch comic artists have been sharing on social media their individual redrawings of pages from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. The shadowy hand of a larger project could be felt, and Newsarama has discovered that it's the work of an art collector named Cristian Casares, along with artist representative Felix Lu of Felix's Comic Art.

The duo is in the process of commissioning modern-day comic artists to recreate the entire first issue of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. This follows similar group art recreations such as [Giant-Size X-Men #1: Tribute to Wein and Cockrum](#) and [Bartkira](#) - a recreation of *Akira*, but mashing it up with the characters of the *Simpsons*.



(Image credit: Frank Miller (DC))

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"The real root of it would be the two pieces I had done in 2015," Lu says. "For fun, I had Daniel Warren Johnson and James Harren do two of my favorite pages. I wouldn't even have thought about what Cristian is doing. He decided to take it to the most logical extreme and do the whole damn thing of issue one."

Artists confirmed to be involved in this still-ongoing project are Michael Allred, Jock, Cliff Chiang, Ryan Sook, Ryan Ottley, James Harren, Riley Rossmo, Michael Walsh, Andy Belanger, Moritat, and Matt Lesniewski.

"Cristian's got a large appetite and likes a lot of artists and happens to get lucky and a lot of my artists who usually don't do large scale said they would make an exception for *Dark Knight*," says Lu. "Even folks who were not available made themselves available. Cristian decides the pages and artist that does them and I think he did a great job. I helped him with a few choices, but he was very thoughtful and wasn't random about it at all."

Casares tells Newsarama that he's been collecting original comics art for the past decade, and points specifically to James Harren's

Lesniewski's page. I've been really digging his work and he's such a unique artist, that I felt like I had to have him on board. We have these amazing artists that grew up reading these books and so have drawn inspiration from Frank Miller and Klaus Janson, and thinking about that also played a part in why I wanted to recreate this fantastic first issue."

This idea of homaging Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* puts the original script, layout, and staging in a new context. But with a number of seminal comic book works to choose from ([Watchmen](#), anyone?), why did these two decide on this one? Well, we asked.

"Dark Knight Returns wasn't just another Batman story. It was the Batman story that changed everything, and it's the reason we have the Batman we have today," Casares says. "Before Miller decided to write *Dark Knight Returns*, Batman was totally different. It wasn't until Miller came along, really, that got a darker, grizzled, broodier side to the Dark Knight, which has stuck to this day. Without DKR there wouldn't be any [The Killing Joke](#), or the [Batman '89 film](#) or the [Nolan Dark Knight trilogy movies](#)."

"It was special the moment it came out," Lu added. "I've been reading comics for 46 years. 1986 was a heavy year not with just *Dark Knight* but with *Watchmen*. It is an important work that has been cemented over time. There's a lot of pretenders to that crown."

While Casares and Lu were long-time fans of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, some of the artists - while still fans - came to it much later in life.

"Well here's the funny thing, I didn't read it till later on in life," says Andy Belanger, who was commissioned to recreate page 35. "I think I was in my late 20s and I had missed all of [Miller's] *Batman* work and ended up having to play catch-up."

More into Heavy Metal magazine than superhero comics as a teen, Belanger recalls when he finally got to Miller's opus and how he saw another futuristic crime fighter within the pages.

"I was blown away by how much it reminded me of the first [Robocop](#) movie," he says. "When I think of *Dark Knight Returns* I often think about director Paul Verhoeven and who influenced who."

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(Image credit: Riley Rossmo)

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(Image credit: Andy Belanger)



resonates with fans over 30 years later.

"I was around 10 or 11 when I saw it, I remember being completely floored by what a superhero comic could look like," says the artist. "Something that happens in comics and really any form of entertainment is that when something works you press into it. Occasionally to the point of stagnation. It's difficult to break out of what you know works because you're trying to be sure you produce or read or view quality material.

"So when something comes along that works in a new, visceral, inexplicable way, it is shocking and thrilling and many other adjectives."

Sook says that on the original release, Dark Knight Returns did something that not a lot of comic books were able to do at the time.

"It came out with an enthusiasm and energy that had been lacking in any American comics at the time but it, unlike many other groundbreakers in their day, has retained its impressive energetic visual nature for decades. That's a rarity. That's why new people and long time fans alike love it."

Cliff Chiang has worked almost exclusively for DC for the past two decades, and sees Dark Knight Returns as a legacy - and something worth revisiting.

"The legacy of Dark Knight Returns is that you can always learn from or appreciate new things in it," Chiang says. "It's a landmark; the first time a large audience engaged with superheroes and more complex storytelling ideas. It's a challenging read in many ways, and the vision and ambition of the creators are what makes it so successful and enduring."

"These are seasoned creators, all at the top of their game," Chiang continued. "[They're] collaborating on something really special and it's fascinating to forensically dissect how the page works. I'm finding that to be especially true as



(Image credit: Michael Allred)



(Image credit: James Harren)





saw this Batman: Dark Knight Returns homage project as a challenge, but for different reasons.

(Image credit: Jock)

Belanger's page, for example, had less action and was more about dialogue.

"It was interesting to get this page because it's kind of what we call a 'talking head page.' Sometimes though they are very difficult because it all comes down to acting," Belanger explains. "As an artist, you have to be mindful and focus on how you're posing and setting up your characters to portray the emotions in the dialog. I really zeroed in here on what Miller was saying and it was fun to sort of cast the roles in a way. Those were the sort of challenges. How am I going to make that feel different but still very much the same."

Cesares and Lu chose the page for him specifically, but Belanger says he wasn't told why they thought this page would fit him best.

"I don't know if I would be the first guy you'd come to for a page like this, but I thought it was a challenge and there's a way for it to be really successful," the artist says. "Everybody wants that giant action shot or something, for me that he suggested something quieter, I thought it was kind of cool."

For Sook, this wasn't just a re-creation but a chance to push himself.

"I would have just copied it exactly but it seemed to me that to do an 'homage' version requires my necessity to push some of myself and my style into the homage. That's really the fun of this," the artist explains. "To see how I or any of the other artists might handle things stylistically. Some things I could push and others are so spot on that you couldn't improve on what's there. So it's a really fun exercise to try and walk that balance beam."

Chiang, a former DC editor, took an interesting approach - imagining himself back in the mid '80s being asked to draw this page for Miller's original first issue.



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(Image credit: Michael Walsh)



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some small touches of my own."

Obviously, since Batman is copyrighted, trademarked, and owned by DC (and parent company AT&T), Casares isn't going to attempt to publish this collection of original art as a book - but he does like to dream.

"There were never any real plans for this besides it being in my collection for me to look at. I love sharing and seeing the art people own, so I am uploading it to my [ComicArtFans.com profile](#) for anyone and everyone to take a look whenever they want, but, again, beyond that, I never had any expectations for this to blow up like it has."

"I see people on Twitter and stuff asking if it will be collected, or how cool an Artist's Edition of this would be, but that is beyond me," he continues. "Would I love to see something like that happen, though? Absolutely!"

Although this Batman: The Dark Knight Returns homage project is not yet complete, when asked if he'd consider doing something similar for another book he jumped to say "Yes!"

"I don't know when or if I would be able to, realistically, but if I were to, I already know what the next comic book I would recreate like this."

(Image credit: Ryan Ottley)

Lan Pitts  

Lan Pitts likes watching, talking, and writing comics about wrestling. He has mapped every great taco spot in the DC and Baltimore areas. He lives with his partner and their menagerie of pets who are utterly perfect in every way.

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