

# ALISON BECHDEL

## education

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B.A., Studio Art and Art History, Oberlin College, 1981

A.A., Simon's Rock Early College, 1979

## teaching

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**James Marsh Professor-at-large**, University of Vermont, 2013-2019

The Marsh program brings people of international distinction to campus for multiple one to two-week residencies during a six-year appointment to “invigorate the intellectual and cultural life of the University.” During my term, I parachuted into classes in a wide array of departments—including English, History, Political Science, Creative Writing, Education, and Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies—to discuss my work. I also met several times with students at the Honors College, did a few public presentations, and led a workshop on “graphic medicine” for residents at UVM’s Larner College of Medicine.

**Visiting Hurst Professor**, Washington University in St. Louis, 2015

One-week residency during which I met with graduate creative writing students about their manuscripts.

**Fine Arts Work Center**, Provincetown MA, 2013-2014

I led intensive week-long workshops in graphic memoir for about a dozen students. They wrote, drew, printed, and bound a minicomic.

**Mellon Residential Fellowship for Arts Scholarship and Practice** at The Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, University of Chicago, 2012

I co-taught a 3-credit course called “Lines of Transmission: Comics and Autobiography” with Hillary Chute, a member of the English department. We taught a combination of comics theory and practice to a class of twenty-five students, half graduate and half undergraduate. I guided them in producing an edition of finished, bound, autobiographical minicomics.

**Center for Cartoon Studies**, White River Junction, VT, 2007-2013

I mentored several students working on their final projects for an MFA in cartooning.

**Associate Fellowship at the University of Kent (UK) Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality**, 2006

Led a one-day workshop in autobiographical cartooning and gave a public presentation.

## books

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*Spent: A Comic Novel* (Mariner Books, upcoming, 2025)

*The Secret to Superhuman Strength* (Mariner Books, 2021)  
*Are You My Mother: A Comic Drama* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012)  
*Best American Comics 2011* (Editor) (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011)  
*The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008)  
*Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006)  
*The Indelible Alison Bechdel; Confessions, Comix, and Miscellaneous Dykes to Watch Out For*, 1998 (Firebrand Books)  
Eleven collected volumes of my comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, 1986-2005. (Firebrand Books, 1986-2000, Alyson Books, 2001-2005)

## other publications

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*Love Letters: Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West*. Introduction. (Vintage Classics, 2021)  
*Stuck Rubber Baby*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, by Howard Cruse. Introduction. (First Second, 2020)  
*Charlotte Brontë Before Jane Eyre*, by Glynnis Fawkes. Introduction. (Disney/Hyperion, 2019)  
*Approaches to Teaching Bechdel's Fun Home*, edited by Judith Kegan Gardiner. Afterword. (Modern Language Association of America, 2018)  
*We Ate Wonder Bread*, a memoir by the cartoonist Nicole Hollander. Introduction. (Fantagraphics, 2018)  
"Why Comics? A Question" (*PMLA* 134.3, 2016)  
"Public Conversation: Alison Bechdel and Hillary Chute" (*Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2014)  
*The Art of Jaime Hernandez: The Secrets of Life and Death*, by Todd Hignite. Introduction. (Abrams Comicarts, 2008)  
"Vermont," *State By State: A Panoramic Portrait of America, 50 Writers on 50 States*. Edited by Sean Wilentz and Matt Weiland (Ecco, 2009)

I have written and/or drawn for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Granta*, *New York Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *Slate*, and *McSweeney's*, among other publications. My work has been widely anthologized.

## illustrations

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Cover for the Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition of Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (2023)  
*Coffee with Freud*, by Brett Kahr. Illustrations throughout. (Karnac, 2017)  
*Tea with Winnicott*, by Brett Kahr. Illustrations throughout. (Karnac, 2016)  
*Making It: A Woman's Guide to Sex in the Age of AIDS*, by Cindy Patton. Illustrations throughout. (Firebrand Books, 1987)

## awards and achievements

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Le Grand Prix du Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême, finalist (a lifetime achievement award for a complete œuvre), 2023

Golden Crown Literary Society Trailblazer Award, 2023

*T: The New York Times Style Magazine's* list of the 25 most influential works of postwar queer literature, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, 2023

Washington University International Humanities Prize, 2022

PEN Oakland's Josephine Miles Award for Excellence in Literature, *The Secret to Superhuman Strength*, 2022

Los Angeles Times Book Prize, finalist, Graphic Novel category, *The Secret to Superhuman Strength*, 2022

Le Prix Médicis Étranger, long list, for *The Secret to Superhuman Strength*, 2022. (The first time a graphic novel was nominated for this prize.)

La Sélection Officielle du Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême: *Fun Home*, 2007, *Are You My Mother*, 2014, *The Secret of Superhuman Strength*, 2023

New England Book Award, Nonfiction category, *The Secret to Superhuman Strength*, 2021

Vermont Book Award, Creative Nonfiction category, 2021

Eisner Hall of Fame, 2020 (a comics professional award)

Harvey Hall of Fame, 2019 (a comics professional award)

*The New York Times* list of the 50 best memoirs of the past 50 years, *Fun Home*, 2019

Walter Cerf Medal for Outstanding Achievement in the Arts, a Vermont Governor's Arts Award, 2018

Cartoonist Laureate of Vermont, 2017-2020

Hans W. Loewald Memorial Award from the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education, 2017

Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences, Fellow, 2017

Austen Riggs Erikson Prize for Excellence in Mental Health Media, 2015

Honorary Member, Sigma Tau Delta, international honor society for students of English, 2014

Lambda Literary Foundation Board of Trustees Award for Excellence in Literature, 2014

Distinguished Psychoanalytic Educator Award from the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education, 2013

Bill Whitehead Lifetime Achievement Award from The Publishing Triangle, the Association of LGBTQ People in Publishing, 2012

San Diego Comic-Con International, Inkpot Award, 2012

Los Angeles Times Book Prize, finalist, Graphic Novel category, *Are You My Mother?* 2012

Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Nonfiction from The Publishing Triangle, *Are You My Mother?* 2012

*Time* magazine's top ten books of 2012, *Are You My Mother?*

Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction from The Publishing Triangle, *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For*, 2008

MoCCA (Museum of Cartoon and Comic Art) Festival Award, NYC, 2007

Best Book of the Year, *Fun Home*, *Time* magazine, 2006

*Entertainment Weekly's* number one Nonfiction Book of the Year, *Fun Home*, 2006

National Book Critics Circle Award, finalist *Fun Home*, 2006

Eisner Award for Best Reality-Based Work *Fun Home*, 2006

American Library Association, Stonewall Award, *Fun Home*, 2006

Judy Grahn Nonfiction Award from the Publishing Triangle, *Fun Home*, 2006

Lambda Book Awards for Lesbian Memoir/Biography: *Fun Home*, 2006; *The Indelible Alison Bechdel*, 1998

Lambda Book Awards for Humor: *Dykes and Sundry Other Carbon-Based Life-Forms to Watch out For*, 2003. *Spawn of Dykes to Watch Out For*, 1993. *Dykes to Watch Out For: The Sequel*, 1992. *New, Improved Dykes to Watch Out For*, 1990.

## **fellowships and residencies**

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Lakes International Comic Art Festival residency, UK, 2022  
Hedgebrook Writer-in-Residence, 2015  
MacArthur Fellowship, 2014  
Civitella Ranieri Fellowship, 2014  
Guggenheim Fellowship, 2012-13

## **honorary degrees**

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University of St. Andrews, Scotland (upcoming, 2024)  
Skidmore College, Doctor of Letters, 2018  
Middlebury College, Doctor of Letters, 2016  
Oberlin College, Doctor of Humanities, 2015  
Smith College, Doctor of Fine Arts, 2015

## **public speaking (partial listing)**

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Green Mountain Book Festival, Burlington VT, keynote and panelist, 2023  
Hopwood Lecture, The Helen Zell Writers' Program, University of Michigan, 2023  
Livre Sur la Place book fair, Nancy, France, panelist, 2022  
La Maison Poésie, Paris, 2022  
Hauser Forum, Mahindra Humanities Center, Harvard University, 2022  
PEN World Voices Festival, 2021  
Edinburgh Book Festival, 2021  
Keynote, Association of College and Research Libraries conference, 2019  
The New Yorker Festival, with Judith Thurman, 2017 and 2012  
Breadloaf Writer's Conference, conversation with Oskar Eustis of The Public Theater, 2016  
Aspen Institute, 2016  
Penny Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series, University of Michigan, 2015  
Brooklyn Academy of Music, Conversation with Ben Greenman, 2015  
Keynote, Queers and Comics conference, CUNY, 2015  
Description conference, Columbia University, panelist, 2015  
SXSW, with Maria Hinojosa and Joshua Oppenheimer, 2015  
Seattle Arts and Lectures, 2015  
Atlantic Live, with Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori, 2015  
Keynote, National Council of Teachers of English conference, 2015

Sydney Opera House, All About Women conference, panelist, 2014  
 Wheeler Center, Melbourne, 2014  
 Adelaide Writer's Festival, panelist, 2014  
 New Zealand Festival Writers Week, panelist, 2014  
 Keynote, Queer Method conference, University of Pennsylvania, 2013  
 City Arts and Lectures Series, San Francisco, 2013  
 Smith College, The Sophia Smith Collection at 70, conversation with Professor Susan Van Dyne, 2013  
 Comics: Philosophy and Practice conference, University of Chicago, 2012  
 Thought Bubble Comic Art Festival, Leeds, UK, 2012  
 Public conversation with the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, King's College, London, 2012  
 Association of Psychoanalytic Medicine at the New York Academy of Medicine, spoke at monthly meeting, 2012  
 Bryn Mawr College, Balch Lecture, 2012  
 New York Institute for the Humanities, spoke at monthly meeting, 2011  
 Brandeis University, Eleanor Roosevelt Lecture, 2011  
 Keynote, NonfictionNOW Conference, University of Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program, 2010  
 UCLA Live! "Titans of the Graphic Novel," with Harvey Pekar, 2010  
 Rochester Institute of Technology, Visionaries in Motion Lecture Series, 2010  
 Commencement Speaker, Center for Cartoon Studies, White River Junction, VT, 2008  
 PEN/Faulkner Reading Series, Washington DC, 2007  
 Hybrid Realities Lecture Series of the Visiting Artists Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
 Comica Series, Institute for Contemporary Art, London, 2006

I've also been a Special Guest Speaker at many comics conventions, including Comic-Con International in San Diego, Toronto Comic Arts Festival, New York Comic-Con, Festival International de la Bande Dessinée, in Angoulême, France, the Ohio State Festival of Cartoon Art, the Alternative Press Expo in San Francisco, and the Museum of Comics and Cartoon Art Festival in NYC.

I've been a guest on numerous podcasts and radio programs, including *Sway* with Kara Swisher, *Fresh Air*, the Slate *Political Gabfest*, *StoryCorps*, and NPR's *Throughlines*.

I speak regularly at colleges and universities.

### professional services and activities

Served on selection committee for the Vermont Arts Council's annual Arts Awards, 2019  
 Led a panel to select a cartoonist to receive the MacDowell Medal, MacDowell Colony, 2018  
 Judge for Publishing Triangle Book Awards, Nonfiction, 2010  
 Judge for Lambda Book Awards, Nonfiction, 2008  
 Served on the Usage Panel of *The American Heritage Dictionary* from 2006 until the print dictionary was discontinued in 2018.  
 Collective member of *Womanews*, a feminist monthly newspaper in NYC, 1983-1985. I contributed book and film reviews, illustrations, and comics.

Countless illustrations and comics for community projects and activist causes over the years, including t-shirts, buttons, flyers, brochures, and posters.

## adaptations of works

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### Fun Home

A musical based on *Fun Home*, written by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori, opened at The Public Theater in New York City in October, 2013 and moved to Broadway in April, 2015. It won five Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical (Lisa Kron) and Best Original Score (Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron—the first time an all-female team won a Tony for a musical's score.)

### Dykes to Watch Out For

Early episodes of my comic strip were adapted into an award-winning radio-play style audiobook by the playwright Madeleine George, for Audible Originals, 2023.

## exhibitions (partial listing)

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Cartoonmuseum Basel, Switzerland, a retrospective exhibition (upcoming 2025)

Freud Museum, Vienna. *Narrating Violence: A Comic Exhibition*. (Fall 2023)

*Self-Confessed! The Inappropriately Intimate Comics of Alison Bechdel*, a retrospective at the Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, 2018. This show also traveled to the Rutgers Museum of Art.

*CartoonInk!: Emerging Comics in Context*, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2011)

*Out of Sequence: Underrepresented Voices in American Comics*, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, The Laboratory of Art and Ideas at Belmar, Lakewood CO, and Thorne-Sagendorph Art Gallery at Keene State College, Keene NH (2009-10)

*Dykes, Dads, and Moms to Watch Out For*, Stamps School of Art and Design, University of Michigan (2015)

*Krazy! The Delirious World of Animé, Comics, Video Games, and Art*, Vancouver Artgallery, Vancouver BC (2007)

*Paper Play*, a joint exhibition with the musician and artist Phranc, Pine Street Art Works, Burlington VT (2006)

I also have pieces in the Smithsonian Institution's permanent collection of comics, the Cartoon Art Trust Cartoon Museum in London, the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University, and the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art.

## other

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*Fun Home; A Family Tragicomic* has been translated into over 25 languages. *Are You My Mother?* has been translated into over 15 languages.

*Fun Home* has been a Common Read selection for many colleges, universities, and municipalities.

I made a cameo (along with cartoonists Roz Chast and Marjane Satrapi) in a 2017 episode of *The Simpsons*, “Springfield Splendor,” in which Lisa attends a comics convention with her graphic novel *Sad Girl*. The brief scene features an animated version of me dressed as a referee and declaring “Bechdel Test Fail!” This is a reference to “The Bechdel Test,” an internet phenomenon that evolved from a comic strip I drew in 1985 which proposes a simple test to gauge whether a movie grants subjectivity to its female characters.

My papers are in the Sophia Smith Collection of Women’s History at Smith College.