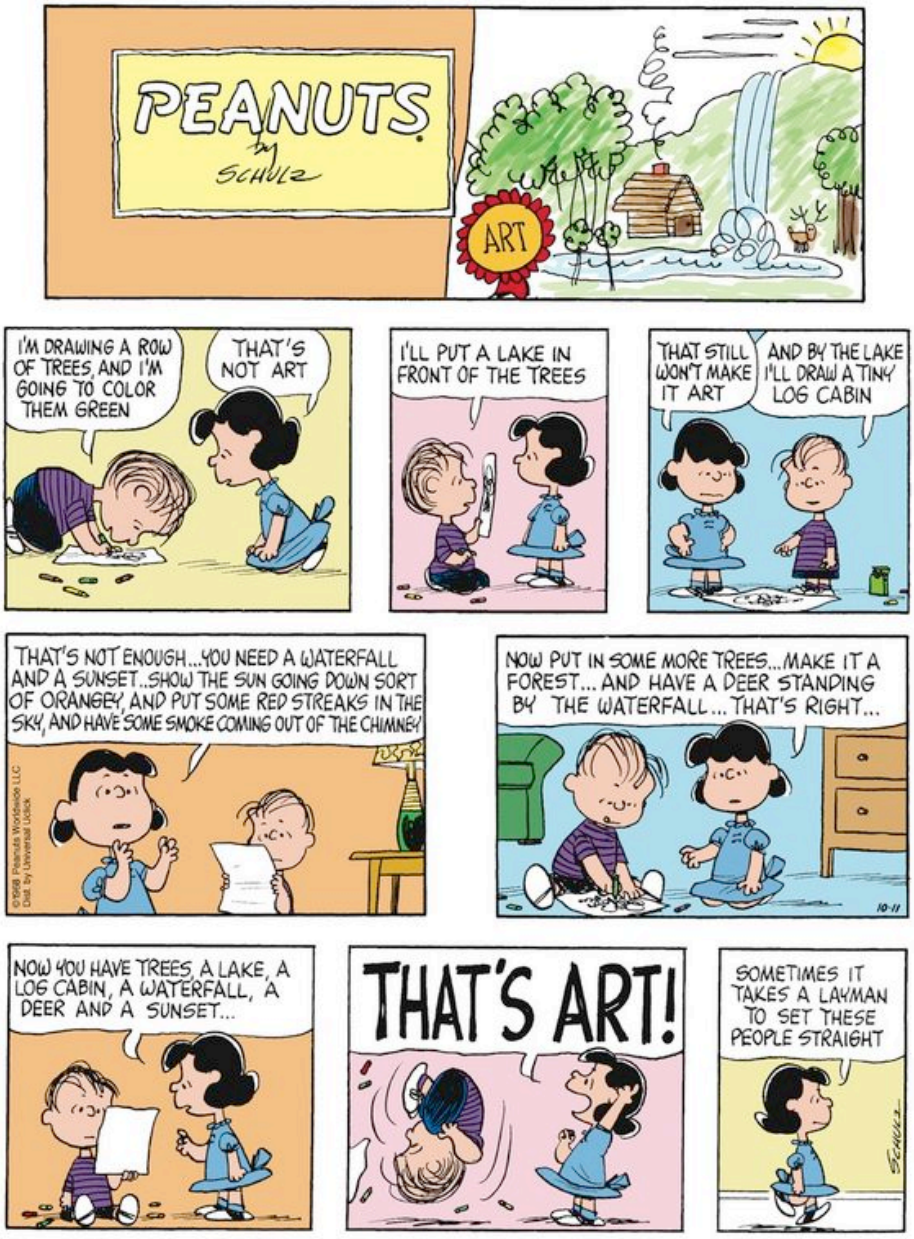
Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages



Murray C McClellan

Frontispiece: Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 13 Oct., 1968.

Table of Contents

Preface

Let me begin by saying what this work is *not*.

It is not an academic study.

A few years ago, I began to organize a collection of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips that my wife and I had cut out from our local newspapers (the New Hampshire *Keene Sentinel* and the *Boston Globe*) between 2011 and 2017. But as I started to delve a little more deeply into this topic, my abysmal ignorance of the scholarly literature on humor and on comics soon became apparent, and I spent many months in an autodidactic crash course on humor studies, comics studies, and the social semiotics of visual images. As an academic myself—I am a retired Classical archaeologist and art history instructor—I naturally began to write up my research with copious citations, fulsome footnotes, bulky bibliographies, and extended addenda. The result, as my dear wife and friends pointed out, was a work unreadable for the non-expert and, presumably, boringly banal for real scholars of humor and comics.

So I went back to the drawing board.

I decided that the audience of my study should in fact be me—that is, the me of three years ago when I set out on this project. I therefore adopted a pedantic textbook tone for this version to teach the former me what I should have known before I started on this crazy task. I abandoned the scholarly apparatus I had used earlier, and I tried to explain concepts from humor and comics theory in as straight-forward terms as I could. The reader of this collection of essays will still find the occasional quotation of this or that scholar and the occasional in-text citation, and I have put at the end of each essay a limited bibliography of those works on which I most relied in writing that section and of those works one should start with for further reading. There is still some unavoidable scholarly jargon, but I have tried to keep that to a minimum and to set off particularly jargony terms with quotation marks.

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In a paper he delivered at the 2007 meeting of the International Comic Arts Forum, "American Comics Criticism and the Problem of Dual Address," the comics scholar Joseph Witek decried the relative lack of academic rigor in American comics studies in comparison to its European, and especially Francophone, equivalents. Witek attributed the watering down of American academic writing about comics to the

tendency of English-language scholars to engage in a "dual address," aiming their work at both other scholars as well as at comics artists and fans. Craig Fischer, in his 2010 article "Worlds within Worlds: Audiences, Jargon, and North American Comics Discourse," took exception to Witek's duality. Fischer (and I) agrees with Witek that what may appear to the non-expert as "difficulty-for-difficulty's sake" jargon is in fact, in Witek's words, "specialist vocabulary [ ] essential to the creation of new disciplinary knowledge." But Fischer suggests that there is a third modality in writing about comics —jargon-free essayist criticism in the tradition of the great "public intellectual" essayists of the early and mid-20th century. Still, Fischer warns of the danger of oversimplification in trying to avoid jargon: "If forced to choose between jargon-with-good-ideas vs. clear-writing-with-watered-down-ideas, I'd always opt for the former . . ."

Although I could scarcely claim to be a good, much less a great, essayist, I hope that if I have failed to achieve clear-writing-with-good-ideas in this collection of essays, I have at least avoided jargony-writing-with-watered-down-ideas!

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Another way that *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* differs from a scholarly study of comics is that it does not directly address any of the currently "hot" academic topics of identity politics, such as gender, sexuality, or race. A perusal of such journals as the *The Comics Journal*, the *International Journal of Comic Art*, the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, or *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, reveals that almost every article title is a variation of the formula: "[Clever phrase]: an exploration of [a given identity-politics issue] in [a given comic or the work of a given comics artist]."

This collection of essays about art- and archaeology-themed humorous cartoons and comic strips does, on the other hand, have a political component in so far as it is an exploration of what this corpus of cartoons and comic strips can tell us about American attitudes towards art and towards ancient cultures. As we will see, these American societal attitudes are characterized by a certain bourgeois insularity—a cultural position in line with the long history of nativism and nationalism in the United States.

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Another thing this study is *not*:

It is not a mere compilation of humorous cartoons and comic strips with art or archaeology themes. Although I assume that, like me, readers will smile at most of the hundreds of comics included in this study, they were not selected just for the sake of the reader's enjoyment. The representations of art or ancient cultures in these cartoons and comic strips are, rather, the *subject* of this analytical study, examined to see what they can tell us about humor in American comics, about American attitudes towards art and antiquity, and, more broadly, about American culture in general.

To be sure, the substantial number of cartoons and comic strips included in this study is not what one normally finds in an article or book about comics, few of which have more than a handful of examples used to illustrate the points their authors are making. To a certain degree, the reticence of writers to include many relevant comics in their work is a function of the great effort and expense involved in obtaining the rights to reproduce copyrighted comics.

In line with the arguments Ronan Deazley makes about fair use of copyrighted comics in his 2014 commentary in *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* and in concordance with the College Art Association's *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use in the Visual Arts,* I have taken a rather liberal view of the degree to which I need to obtain (i.e. pay for!) permission to quote copyrighted material for my non-commercial, analytical study. As a result, I have amassed a substantial corpus of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips, allowing me to address issues—such as the development and transmission of comic clichés and stereotypes, and the thorny question of plagiarism—with a historical perspective that one simply could not employ with a more limited sample.

The core of this corpus of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips are the examples my wife and I had cut out from our local newspapers between 2011 and 2017. I have augmented this core collection with many more cartoons and comics from a variety of online sources, ranging from the collections of cartoons and comic strips in the Library of Congress, in the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University, and in the Andrews McMeels syndication's online site *GoComics.com*, to private blog posts or pins on the Pinterest platform.

Because the examples of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips I include in this study were selected for more or less subjective reasons—namely, how relevant I thought they were to the cultural, historical, or analytical points I was trying to make—this corpus is certainly not a statistically significant sample. Nonetheless, this corpus can provide a general sense of the range and popularity of art and archaeological subjects American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have chosen to lampoon.

If one were to attempt to create a complete catalogue of humorous art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips—an impossibility, given the fact that new cartoons and comic strips about art and archaeology are created every day—one might have recourse to the significant online repositories of cartoons and comic strips such as the British-based CartoonStock, which has purchased the rights to over half a million comics, or the Cartoonist Group, which represents the archived work of some thirty-five cartoonists and comic-strip artists. A subject search for "Archaeology" and "Art History" on CartoonStock, for instance, lists 439 and 23,519 examples, respectively, while the same search on GoComics provides 87 and 1,061 results. Unfortunately, for a study such as this, which analyzes trends of comic strips within the larger categories of "Art" and "Archaeology," one cannot search for subject subcategories on either CartoonStock or GoComics.

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One more thing the reader should *not* expect to find in these essays: consistency.

Up until quite recently, nearly every scholarly article or book about comics would begin with an apparently obligatory, and usually quite long, discussion trying to define what comics are, or, to use the current fashion of treating the term "comics" as a singular noun, what comics is. While it is of course admirable in any discipline to clarify exactly what is the subject of its study, the question of the "definition" of comics has become a polemic in comic scholarship, intertwined with debates about whether comics can be considered as an art form (and, if so, what kind of art form that might be) and the related question of what types of theoretical approaches are best suited for the analysis of the comics *medium*.

Most scholars now generally accept some variation of the definition of comics that the comics artist Scott McCloud gave in his highly influential 1993 study, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Building on the position the comics artist and

teacher Will Eisner took in his 1985 book *Comics and Sequential* Art—that comics tell stories through sequences of panels—McCloud gives us the following definition, which he presented in a tongue-in-cheek dictionary format:

> **com-ics** (kom'iks) **n.** plural in form, used with a singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. . .

In other words, for McCloud, comics is a *medium*, a multimodal form of narrative—sequential—art.

The philosopher of aesthetics, Aaron Meskin, concluded his 2007 article "Defining Comics":

> Moreover, there is no pressing need to come up with a definition. The art of comics, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century and developed largely out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century caricature and mid-nineteenth-century British humor magazines such as *Punch*, can and should be understood on its own terms and by reference to its own history. [ ] Establishing the existence of artistic pictorial narrative prior to the nineteenth century might seem to offer a way to establish the art status of comics, but comics have earned the right to be considered art on their own merits. Works such as George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* strips, Spiegelman's *Maus*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (New York, Pantheon: 2000), and the Crumb oeuvre provide incontrovertible evidence of the artistic possibility of the form. Anachronistic rhetoric is unnecessary. We should get on with the business of thinking seriously about comics as art. Let's get beyond the definitional project.

Again, by citing the work of Spiegelman and Ware—who we now label "graphic novelists"—Meskin would seem to suggest that the "business of thinking seriously about comics as art" would involve analyzing comics as narratives.

This, of course, poses a problem for my study of how art and ancient cultures are represented in humorous comic strips and in what are usually called "gag" cartoons. Both Eisner and McCloud make a distinction between the single-panel cartoon and the multi-paneled comics: just as a single frame from a movie does not tell a story, McCloud maintains, so too a cartoon is not a narrative. But, as we will see in the following essays, the "narratives" in this corpus of cartoons and comic strips about art and archaeology are jokes, and as such can be analyzed using the tools developed by humor theorists in their study of verbal humor.

While it certainly is hubristic of me to cite the famous comment Ralph Waldo Emerson made in his *Self Reliance* essay that "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines," I make no apology for the inconsistent way I often treat the "cartoon" and "comics" as equivalents. Context is all. Just like the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's infamous "I know it when I see it" description of obscenity, when we open a newspaper (actual or virtual) to the funny pages, we have no difficulties in recognizing what constitutes a humorous cartoon or comic strip. We also usually expect that a cartoon or a comic strip (what the British also call a strip cartoon) we find in the funny pages will tell a joke. Those comic strips which are in fact serialized adventure stories or soap operas not meant to be humorous can be clearly differentiated, both by their content as well as by their generally more realistic style of drawing, from those whose goal is to make us laugh. Similarly, while some comic books (what Brits usually call a comic magazine or simply a comic) are humorous, most modern comic books are either adventure stories (such as DC's *Superman* or Marvel's *Avengers* series), easy-to-read "how-to" manuals, or serious works of graphic narratives; again, by context and style, the funny comic book is easily, and automatically, distinguishable from these other genres.

Thus, given that the focus of my study is on what humorous portrayals of art and archaeology can tell us about American culture, when readers encounter the oft-used phrases "cartoons and comic strips" or "cartoonists and comic-strip artists," I assume that common sense will dictate that I am referring to what we instinctively recognize as visual/textual creations "intended to produce a humorous response in the viewer." Similarly, for stylistic reasons, I will often use the adjectives "cartoonish" or "comic" in their normal connotations as synonyms for "like a caricature" or "humorous," without evoking the theoretical baggage that "cartoon" or "comics" carry in comics scholarship and in humor studies.

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It might be helpful at this point to insert an etymological excursus on the terms "comic" and "cartoon":

The term "comic" comes from the ancient Greek word κῶμος—a raucous village festival of Dionysus involving singing and dancing to songs (ᾠδή), a tradition that evolved in 5th century BCE Athens into the comedic plays performed at the annual festivals of Dionysus. This Athenian Old Comedy—preserved to us only in the eleven

surviving plays of Aristophanes—presents an anti-heroic, anti-elitist, alternative to tragedy, addressing the human condition from a detached, common-man perspective. Over time, the biting political satire and slapstick ribald humor of Athenian Old Comedy gave way to the stock situations and stereotyped characters of New Comedy popular in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Later, in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, a comedy came to simply denote a play that has a happy, or at least not a tragic, ending. This latter connotation of the comedic is used today only we when speak of Shakespearean or Restoration comedies, while the Roman sense of a comedy has its modern equivalent in television "sit-coms." On the other hand, the original Classical Greek meaning of the comedic as using humor and satire to make us laugh (or at least wince) is maintained in many of the modern English uses of the term "comic," although not in all. The scatological humor and social or political satire of a modern stand-up comic, for instance, is comedic in very much the same way that Aristophanes' plays were.

Deriving from the Italian word (*cartone*) for the rough paper upon which Renaissance artists made preliminary drawings for paintings or tapestries, a "cartoon" has come to have two distinct meanings in contemporary America: a semi-realistic, often exaggerated, drawing used for satire, caricature, or humor; or a film made from animated cels that is usually intended for an audience of children and that can be humorous or non-humorous. Given sufficient context, there is no ambiguity in the use of these two different meanings of cartoon; no one would mistake, for instance, what Roz Crast is intending to accomplish in one of her *New Yorker* cartoons for what Walt Disney was aiming at in his *Fantasia*. Of course, there are also those egghead art historian academics who continue to use the term "cartoon" in its original sense of a preliminary drawing.

The distinction between a "comedy" as a serious literary art form and a "cartoon" as a disposable drawing not meant to be preserved has been continued in modern scholarship. The emerging academic discipline of comics studies is founded on the assertion that comics are (is) a legitimate art form, one that should be subject to its own set of theoretical analyses and one that is worthy of a place in academia. Naturally, given the view that comics are a form of narrative art, comics scholars have tended to focus on larger works of graphic narratives. On the other hand, cartoons—both the newspaper and animated versions—are generally dismissed as light-weight fare not worthy of

serious scholarly consideration. A professor proposing to establish a department of "cartoon studies," for instance, would be laughed out of the dean's office!

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Other inconsistencies: I fully understand that not all of the cartoonists and webcomics and comic-strip artists whose work is included in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* are "Americans"—the Canadians Jim Unger, John Atkinson, Kaamran Hafeez, Lynn Johnston, and Dave Whamond, the Danish team of Mikael Wulff and Anders Morgenthaler, the German Teddy Tietz, the Argentine Quinto, the Australian Peter Duggan, and the New Zealander Nick D Kim are notable exceptions. Given, however, that almost all of the cartoons, webcomics, and comic strips created by these artists are either syndicated in U.S. newspapers or widely viewed online by Americans, I feel justified to include this material in my essays on what this corpus of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips can tell us about American culture.

A related inconsistency: while *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* naturally focuses on the world of comics within the United States, I have on occasion looked outside of the borders of the country, such as in touching upon the relationship between comics and museums in France or Spain. Similarly, while the focus of these essays are on traditional, syndicated, American cartoons and comic strips, I have also on occasion strayed into an examination of American animated cartoons, action comic books, movies, and even postage stamps.

A further inconsistence in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* is how I treat the term "archaeology." While Part III begins with an essay about cartoons and comic strips directed towards archaeology as the science of uncovering and interpreting the material culture of the past, for the most part, the essays in Part III are concerned with comic stereotypes of ancient cultures, not all of which involve archaeology directly. Given the general societal use of "archaeological" as the equivalent of "ancient," I do not think that this particular inconsistency will cause too much consternation.

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Now, a few words about what this study actually *is*:

Christian F. Hempelmann and Andrea C. Samson noted, in their chapter "Cartoons: Drawn Jokes" in Victor Raskin's *The Primer of Humor Research*:

> Social studies is the application of humor research that tells us something about the users of humor, while theoretical research is development of humor theory, telling us about humor itself. Both avenues are necessary and benefit from each other . . .

Similarly, the French comics scholar Thierry Groensteen began his influential 1999 study, *Système de la bande dessinée (The System of Comics*), with the observation that thematic criticism and genre studies coexist with theoretical approaches ". . . like divergent, or parallel roads offered to the investigator, not exclusive to others." In the same vein, the psycholinguist Neil Cohn, in his essay "Building a Better 'Comic Theory'," pointed out that "theory' within comics studies has often straddled the line between how comics are 'understood' in a cognitive sense and how they are 'understood' in an artistic/literary, aesthetic sense."

Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages is an applied work of "thematic criticism," a "social study" of one category of the *genre* of humorous cartoons and comic strips, one that employs an analysis of how they are to be "understood" both "in an artistic/literary, aesthetic sense" as well as representatives of popular American culture. As such, this work is *not* intended to be a contribution to the theory of humor or to comics theory *per se*, although it does raise several issues relevant to both.

Most notably, for the theory of humor, this work explores the incongruity of the "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly, which is commonly found in art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips but is as yet little discussed in humor theory as a category of incongruity humor. As recognized by Luis Gasca and Asier Mensuro in their 2014 *La Pintura en el Cómic*, intensionally re-contextualizing a work of art, an artist, or an ancient culture within a modern setting is a common technique cartoonists and comic strip artists use to satirize our contemporary world: "En ocasiones, y en especial en adaptaciones caricaturescas, nos encontramos con una ucronía distinta. Los autores descontextualizan conscientemente el pasado introduciendo elementos contemporáneos para reflexionar o ironizar sobre nuestro presente sociopolítico y cultural" ("Sometimes, especially in cartoon adaptations, we find a distinct ucronía. The authors consciously decontextualize the past by introducing contemporary elements to reflect on or to parody our contemporary sociopolitical and cultural world"). As we will see in the Part III essays of this study, this "humorous

uchronía" incongruous temporal anomaly is the dominant form of humor used in American cartoons and comic strips about ancient cultures. Because the term "uchronía", which was coined by the French philosopher Charles Renouvier in his 1857 work *Uchronie: L'utopie dans l´Histoire*, has come to denote the literary genre of "alternate history," we will use the phrase "humorous uchronía" to refer to the creation of a humorous incongruity through the introduction of contemporary cultural elements into the past.

Another type of humor I touch upon in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* that is not generally recognized by humor theorists is what I call "anticipatory humor." As I discuss at the end of the Part II "Comic Art in Museums and Museums in Comic Art" essay, this type of humor asks readers to anticipate what will occur in the *future*, after the instant being portrayed within a cartoon frame has passed.

To the extent that this work contributes to comics studies, its explorations of "representations" and "re-presentations" (cf. **Figs. 463–464**), its analysis of the "associative inversion" effect when works of art are quoted in cartoons and comic strips (cf. **Figs**. **469–471**), and the distinction it makes between "composite cartoons" and "quasi-narrative composite cartoons" (cf. **Figs. 371-381**) might be of some interest to comics scholars.

Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages consists of a series of more-or-less independent essays arranged in three parts. While readers are of course free to delve into these essays in whatever order they wish to, it should be noted that, to a certain degree, the essays are cumulative—that is, it is assumed that readers of later essays will be familiar with concepts from humor theory, comics studies, and the social semiotics of visual images introduced in earlier essays. Because there is a great deal of overlap in the issues raised by many of the cartoons and comic strips in this collection, I have made frequent use of parenthetical *exempli gratia* and *conferatur* references—such as in the previous paragraph—that will require a substantial amount of page-turning on the part of readers.

Part I of this collection of essays sets the stage for our subsequent examination of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips. The first essay, "A Test Case: A Comic Strip from Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*," establishes the fundamental approaches to analyzing humor and formal visual design elements that will be applied to the rest of this corpus of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips. This test-case

essay is followed by "Webcomics and Internet Memes"—an essay which examines how the digital revolution has, and has not, affected the production and consumption of humorous cartoons and comic strips.

The second and third parts of this study comprise the bulk of the corpus of cartoons and comic strips in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*. Part II consists of essays that examine the relationship between, on the one hand, humorous cartoons and comic strips and, on the other, the world of fine arts and museums. One of the main themes in this section is the tension between the evaluation of comics as "low-brow," disposable popular culture designed for children and the evaluation of comics as a "fine art" form in its own right. Part II begins with a rather detailed historical examination of cartoons drawn in response to the highly influential 1913 Armory Show of modernist *avant-garde* art—cartoons that to a large degree laid the foundation for subsequent American comic lampooning of modern art. This section is following by an essay, "Comic Art in Museums and Museums in Comic Art," that explores the often tense relationships between comics and fine art museums. The next essay, "Making Fun of Making Art," examines, among other issues, the question of metafictional "intertextuality," when one comic artist alludes to the work of other artists, including other comic artists. The final, and longest, essay in Part II, "Amusing Art," presents a chronological overview of the cartoon stereotypes that have been used by cartoonists and comic-strip artists to parody famous artworks and artists.

Part III consists of essays that explore how American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have portrayed the ancient world. After a long introduction on cartoons of cavemen and dinosaurs, Part III goes on to an examination of how the discipline of archaeology has been the subject of cartoon and comic-strip jokes. This is followed by an exploration of cartoon stereotypes—almost all of which employ a version of a "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly—used to poke fun at antiquity, from Paleolithic "cavemen" and Neolithic Stonehenge to Biblical, Egyptian, Classical, and pre-Columbian cultures.

Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages concludes with a summary examination of what this corpus of art- and archaeology-related cartoons and comic strips can tell us about American culture and its attitudes about art and our ancient past. Perhaps the most salient conclusion is how these traditional, syndicated, comics—

in contrast to their more radical, underground comics cousins—are extremely conservative and reflect a generally self-complacent bourgeois world view.

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Aside from whatever insights this collection of essays makes about American culture, perhaps the most important contribution of *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* is how it attempts to integrate humor studies with comics studies—two emerging disciplines that seem to have lost sight of each other while traveling down Hempelmann and Samson's mutually beneficial avenues or Groensteen's non-exclusive parallel roads. In part, the lack of any significant overlap between how humor theorists and how comics scholars approach humorous cartoons and comic strips is due to the fact that the two camps speak fundamentally different languages.

The discipline of humor theory is dominated by linguists and psychologists who approach their investigation of the nature of humor from a scientific perspective; in humor theory, propositions about cognitive processes involved in humor that cannot be empirically tested are deemed useless. For instance, in the conclusion to their section on "Aesthetic aspects," Hempelmann and Samson write:

> In summary, aesthetic aspects of visual humor remain largely unexplored, not least because of difficulties of quantifiability and operationalizability and the difficulty to separate them from formal elements and cognitive mechanisms. Furthermore, we claim that aesthetic elements are non-essential to humor, which is a cognitive experience that definitely can be enhanced by aesthetic factors, but is in principle independent of it. Aesthetics of humorous stimuli may have a high impact on affect: the drawing itself may not alter the core elements of humor (i.e., incongruity, incongruity-resolution), but may increase or decrease the humor response in dependence on whether the drawing style is appreciated or not.

Even if we were to grant Hempelmann's and Samson's assertion that, solely from the perspective of an investigation of visual humor *qua* humor, aesthetic qualities are "non-essential," to dismiss them as merely a contributing factor affecting the humor response based on an appreciation of drawing styles would seem to be a rather limited view. Further, the fact that the "quantifiability and operationalizability" of such aesthetic qualities may be problematic does not mean that they should not be considered as part of an overall evaluation of humorous cartoons and comics.

But underlying Hempelmann's and Samson's "Cartoons: Drawn Jokes" article is a more fundamental problem with the way that humor theorists analyze visual humor.

The dominant, though not the only, theory employed by humor theorists to define the nature of of what they call incongruity-resolution humor is the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), first developed by Victor Raskin and Salvadore Attardo in 1991. As its name would suggest, GTVH focuses on the verbal elements of humor, organizing the underlying structure of a joke in terms of "scripts." For humor theorists, there is no difference between a visual image and a verbal description of that image.

Scholars of humor also differentiate between cartoons and comics, albeit not in the way that McCloud does. Hempelmann and Samson, again:

> Comics – in contrast to cartoons – are orientated towards stories, their artwork is more detailed, more often anatomically correct, and the drawing more often closely resembles reality. Whereas a cartoon consists of one or only a few panels, comics, or graphic novels contain more panels, sometimes over several pages. In cases where a cartoon consists of several panels, the purpose of the earlier panels is to set up the punch line in the very last one.

For Hempelmann and Samson, "comics" are synonymous with "graphic novels." For these scholars, the types of single-panel humorous cartoons and the multi-paneled humorous comic strips we are examining in these essays are all "cartoons," the formal visual design of which—the "aesthetic aspects"—are irrelevant to their evaluation as examples of humor.

On the other side of the coin, comics studies are dominated by scholars who focus on the visual components of comics as a *medium* of narrative art. In comics studies, how a story is told through a sequence of panels is of paramount interest. The ways jokes are structured in "gag" cartoons and simple humorous comic strips are, by and large, ignored by comic scholars.

To be sure, humor theorists have undertaken numerous studies of how visual stimuli effect the humor response, such as tracking the eye movements or conducting MRI brain scans of subjects viewing humorous cartoons. Conversely, comics scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the "multimodal" interactions of text and image in the comics medium, especially focusing on political cartoons. But the question of how a given image can, in and of itself, be humorous, seems to be a topic avoided by both humor theorists and comics scholars. As the philosopher Patrick Maynard put it, from the perspective of aesthetics, the problem is ". . . how a depiction, not just what it depicts, can be . . . light or even funny—a problem concerning, as it were, the 'shape' of the mental 'bubble' enclosing the depiction, which expresses its conception and attitude

regarding its content." How, in other words, are humorous comic strips and cartoons funny other than in their depiction of funny things? Clearly, the creation of the mental content of funniness does not depend on the art historical concept of "expression." Maynard goes on: ". . . it seems highly implausible . . . that funny pictures are made of funny lines, shapes, colors, that satiric or ironic presentation of subjects can be explained in terms of satiric or ironic associations of pictorial elements used to depict them. It may seem funny that no standard account of depiction can account for funny pictures."

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Although I will come back to the issue of visual humor at the end of the "Amusing Art" essay as we examine abstract comics (**Figs**. **733-738**), it might be instructive here to give a case in point of how *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* attempts to integrate humor theory and comics scholarship.

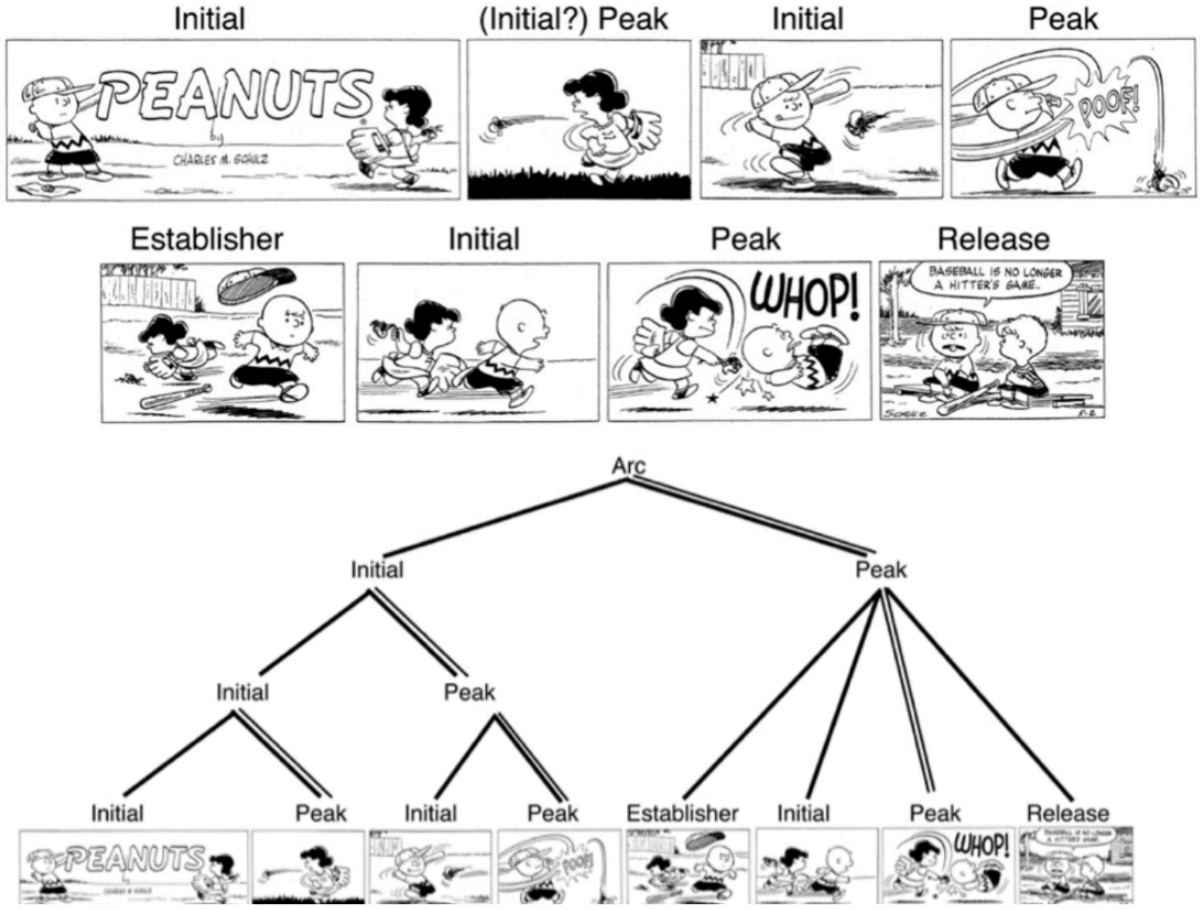

Fig. i. From Neil Cohn, 2015, p. 6 (top) and p. 15 (bottom).

In a helpful online tutorial explaining his concept of Visual Narrative Grammar (VNG)—a key element of his larger Visual Language Theory (VLT)—Neil Cohn uses a

Charles Schulz *Peanuts* comic strip to demonstrate how a VNG analysis of comics functions (**Fig. i**). In this tutorial, Cohn gives us an order of operations to follow in uncovering the VNG of a given strip. We begin with identifying the category role of each panel, starting with what Cohn calls the Peaks before moving on to identify the Initials, Releases, and Establishers. We test our initial intuitive guesses about a given panel's role using the diagnostic tools of substitution, deletion, and modification derived from Chomskyan generative grammar; if the modified strip can be read without ambiguity—i.e. if it makes "grammatical" sense—we can be confident that our identification is correct. Once the panel roles are identified, we can group them together into larger semantically coherent constituents that should follow a logical grammatical pattern. Our initial intuitive groupings can be tested by eliminating or reordering constituents or by creating alternative constituents, again using the degree of ambiguity caused by the modification to ascertain the correctness of our assessment.

Cohn selected this Schulz *Peanuts* strip (**Fig. i**, top) for the simplicity of its narrative: "Lucy throws a beat-up baseball to Charlie Brown, who hits it, and while running the bases gets whopped by Lucy and the beat-up ball." The VNG analysis, however, shows that the visual narrative arc is a little more complicated, consisting of a primary Initial constituent, itself composed of an Initial-Peak pair formed from two lower-level Initial-Peak pairs, and a primary Peak constituent comprising an Establisher-Initial-Peak-Release sequence (**Fig. i**, bottom). Cohn concludes his tutorial:

> There we have it! The whole sequence is now analyzed, derived from the diagnostic tests in combination with our intuitive judgments. It's worth making a final note: The Release panel at the very end is technically ambiguous here, since it is preceded by a Peak locally (within the constituent) and also at a higher level (the Peak constituent). It could hypothetically attach to either the Peak constituent or the Arc, to follow either one of these Peaks. This ambiguity is supported by the fact that it could also be included in a paraphrase with only the Peak panels (motivating each of the top-most constituents), and in the grouping of only the final constituent . . . Such ambiguity is intrinsic to the grammatical system. This ambiguity could be resolved though. If we inserted another panel before the final one (say, Charlie walking to the bench), this would create a new constituent, with this grouping playing the Release role that connects to the Arc, not within the Peak constituent.

Several observations can be made about Cohn's tutorial. First of all, as a demonstration only of how VNG functions, it does not include many aspects of what Cohn would provide in a full VLT analysis of the strip, such as a discussion of the bound

morphemes (the action lines, the onomatopoeic "Poof!" and "Whop!", and the reduplication of Charlie Brown's head in the final panel). Furthermore, by focusing only on the grammatical structure of the panels and treating a linear presentation of them as being the informational equivalent of the actual page layout, the tutorial omits a discussion of, to use Cohn's VLT terminology, the strip's External Composition Structure, such as noting the elongation of the first title-page panel.

But one might also note the absence of any recognition that, like all of the *Peanuts* corpus, this is a *humorous* strip; inserting, to resolve the grammatical ambiguity of the final Release panel, an Initial panel of Charlie Brown walking back to the bench would almost certainly make the strip less funny as a whole. An analysis of this strip from the point of view of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) would point to the anomalous "script opposition" incongruities that set up the strip's punch line—incongruities that closely parallel the narrative structure revealed in Cohn's VNG analysis. The foreground incongruity at play here is a form of what of a GTVH analysis would label NORMAL/ABNORMAL ("Baseball is/isn't a hitter's game"), and the punch line is set up by a series of background incongruities: a) Lucy pitching to Charlie Brown (a gender-switching reversal of the role Charlie Brown normally takes); b) a well-hit ball does not travel far; and c) Lucy whacks Charlie Brown instead of tagging him. Each of these background incongruities maps onto one of the three Peaks identified by Cohn, and the foreground punch line ("for the perpetual baseball loser Charlie Brown, it is not a hitter's game when he is up to bat") is Cohn's Release panel.

But even if we restructure the comics-scholar Cohn's Visual Narrative Grammar analysis of this *Peanuts* strip in terms of the General Theory of Verbal Humor, we have not really accounted for how the *visual* components contribute to the humor in Schultz' joke. Cohn's verbal recapitulation of Schultz' "drawn joke" ("Lucy throws a beat-up baseball to Charlie Brown, who hits it, and while running the bases gets whopped by Lucy and the beat-up ball") is not, after all, funny in itself. Nor does a traditional comics scholarship analysis of the "multimodal" interactions of verbal and visual elements provide much help in a strip that, aside from the final punch line and the onomatopoeic "Poof!" and "Whop!", is wordless. And, while both Cohn's VNG analysis and our restructured GTVH analysis of Schultz' strip emphasize the punch line of the final, "Release" panel, that punch line is also not really funny.

The humor in this strip, I would suggest, comes from how the narrative is depicted, building up what Maynard has called the "'shape' of the mental 'bubble'"—a "bubble" that viewers reading a comic strip in the funny pages already would expect to be humorous. Starting with Charlie Brown sticking out his tongue in the third ("Initial") panel of the top row, to Charlie's hat flying off his head as he rounds the bases in the first ("Establisher") panel of the second row, the visual humor of the strip culminates in the next to last ("Peak") panel, where the swooping action lines and onomatopoeic "Whop!" of Lucy bopping Charlie over the head parallel the action lines and the onomatopoeic "Poof!" of Charlie swinging the bat in the last ("Peak") panel of the first row; Charlie's flying up in the air, feet-first and tongue-out, in this panel will remind viewers familiar with *Peanuts* of the last panel of Schultz long-standing gag about Lucy pulling the football away at the last minute as Charlie tries to kick it. After this cumulative penultimate panel, the visual humor continues in a coda with the pictorial runes of queasiness surrounding Charlie's head in the final punch-line panel.

While these observations about the visual humor in this *Peanuts* test-case strip may not rise to the level of Maynard's call for a "standard account of depiction [that] can account for funny pictures," they do suggest a methodology that may be useful in developing such an account. By employing the Chomsky-inspired heuristic tools of substitution, deletion, and modification, we could ask whether eliminating Charlie's stuck-out tongue, keeping his baseball cap on his head, removing the onomatopoeia and the action and queasiness runes, or keeping Charlie's feet on the ground when Lucy bops him would make this comic strip more, or less, funny. Although there is obviously a level of subjectivity in what any given individual finds humorous, I suspect that if such a test were given to a large enough number of subjects, the results would be sufficiently statistically significant to satisfy even the scientifically snootiest of humor theorists.

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One point about the methodology I employ in analyzing the corpus of cartoons and comic strips in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*: In addition to exploring how formal elements of the cartoons and comic strips in this corpus contribute to their humor, we will attempt to unpack the humor itself to decode the underlying social and cultural information viewers would need to have in order to get the joke. This sort of reverse engineering to find the "contextually and culturally bound background knowledge" viewers are assumed to bring to a humorous cartoon or comic

strip is a technique well establish in the analysis of political cartoons. Elisabeth El Refaie, for instance, in her 2003 article "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons," has expanded on how visual metaphors function in political cartoons from the perspective of social semiotics and cognitive metaphor theory, which holds that "visual metaphors [are] the pictorial expression of a metaphorical way of thinking." El Refaie maintains that

> . . . such a definition of visual metaphors in cognitive terms is not as straightforward as it seems, because the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical are fuzzy and highly context-dependent. This means that metaphors must always be studied within their socio-political context. . . . the specific form in which a metaphor is expressed may have an important influence on its meaning and impact. Therefore, an emphasis on the conceptual must not distract from the potential significance of the 'grammar' of visual metaphor.

Substituting "joke" or "gag" for "metaphor" in the above El Refaie quotation would provide a description of the methodology I use in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*. One of the main goals of my study is to uncover the "socio-political context" (or what I will call the "contextually and culturally bound background knowledge") of the humorous art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips we are examining.

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On the surface, *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* bears a close resemblance to Luis Gasca and Asier Mensuro's 2014 *La Pintura en el Cómic*, a book I came across only after I had essentially finished my study of humorous art- and archaeology-themed American cartoons and comic strips. By presenting an iconographic study of appropriations of famous paintings in comics—"el noveno arte"—Luis Gasca, an art historian, and Asier Mensuro, a pioneer of Spanish comics scholarship, attempt to go beyond what they see as the usual approach to exploring the relationship between comics and painting—that is, either viewing comics solely as archetypes for Pop Art or looking to earlier sequential narrative paintings to find predecessors of comics art.

Like *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*, Gasca and Mensuro's *La Pintura en el Cómic*, with its 543 illustrations, is a fulsome collection of comics that contain visual quotations of famous paintings. And like Parts II and III of my study,

Gasca and Mensuro's *La Pintura en el Cómic* is organized along traditional art-historical lines. Gasca and Mensuro present their collection of comic quotations of paintings in a series of chapters ranging from Prehistory, The Ancient World, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Realism, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, Modernism, and Avant-Garde to Oriental, Exotic, and Primitive Art.

On the other hand, *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* differs from *La Pintura en el Cómic* in several significant ways. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that Gasca and Mensuro focus almost exclusively on larger works of graphic narratives —especially those written in French, Italian, or Spanish—and they pay relatively little attention to the appropriation of famous paintings in shorter humorous cartoons and comic strips. There are, in fact, only a handful of examples of art-themed cartoons and comic strips in *La Pintura en el Cómic* overlap with those I include in *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*.

A more significant difference between Gasca and Mensuro's study and mine, however, is in the methodological approach we each take to the subject. *La Pintura en el Cómic* is an iconographical work—that is, it focuses on how comics artists have visually expropriated iconic paintings in their graphic narratives. My essays, in contrast, are part of a cultural study that focuses on what these appropriations can tell us about the ""contextually and culturally bound background knowledge" with which those appropriations were made and by which they were received by those who viewed them. Although Gasca and Mensuro, for instance, recognize that "En otras ocasiones la obra pictórica aparece citada en cómics a modo de gag creado por el guionista y el ilustrador, que utiliza algún aspecto o lectura evidente universalmente aceptado de dicha obra" ("On other occasions a pictorial work is cited in comics as a gag created by the writer and illustrator, which uses some universally accepted aspect or obvious reading of the work"), they largely ignore how the symbolism of those "universally accepted" and "obvious readings" of the expropriated works of art functions in the comics in which they appear. For *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages*, uncovering how that symbolism functions in creating a humorous cartoon or comic-strip gag is a key step in revealing its underlying "contextually and culturally bound background knowledge." To the extent that Gasca and Mensuro address the reasons comics artists expropriate famous paintings, they only cite the need to establish a historical background for a story

or the desire to pay homage to a particular artist whose work influenced the graphic artist.

Another significant difference between *La Pintura en el Cómic* and *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* lies in how each work approaches comics expropriations of art from the ancient world. Whereas Gasca and Mensuro treat ancient paintings—from Paleolithic cave painting to Pompeian frescos—in a traditional art-historical fashion as being the categorical equivalents of oil paintings created by professional artists from the Renaissance to the present, the essays in Part III of my work attempt to ground the ancient "art" quoted in this corpus of humorous cartoons and comic strips within the ancient cultural traditions that produced it; the contrast between the historical reality of how ancient "art" actually functioned and the, mostly inaccurate, cartoon and comic-strip stereotypes of that "art" provides important information about American cultural attitudes towards the past.

One more comparison: just as *Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages* is unabashedly focused on American culture, so too is Gasca and Mensuro's *La Pintura en el Cómic* firmly rooted in a European tradition of comics scholarship. The European bias of *La Pintura en el Cómic* can be seen not only in the emphasis it places on European graphic narratives that expropriate famous paintings (although they also include many examples from *DC* and *Marvel* comic books), but also in how it treats American art in general. Gasca and Mensuro chose to present their examples of comics that expropriate paintings made by Americans (Norman Rockwell, Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth, Grant Wood, James McNeill Whistler, and John Singer Sargent) in a separate chapter set apart from their otherwise art-historical chronological account because these works, they claim, are infrequently satirized by comics artists working outside of the English-speaking market and because "La sociedad estadounidense, capaz como pocas de reconocerse en la iconografía que ella misma crea y exporta como esencia de lo auténticamente norteamericano, intenta reinventarse a sí misma, enfrentando la realidad social y cultural del país con los valores tradicionales del *american way of life*." (American society, capable like few others of recognizing itself in the iconography that it creates and exports as the essence of the authentically American, tries to reinvent itself, confronting the social and cultural reality of the country with the values of the *American way of life*."). Tellingly, although we may agree with their evocation of

"American exceptionalism," Gasca and Mensuro make no equivalent claims for any of the many European or Japanese artists surveyed in their book.

Ultimately, how Luis Gasca and Asier Mensuro treat comic expropriation of famous paintings is quite different from how I treat the same issue in this study. Nonetheless, *La Pintura en el Cómic* is an important contribution to comics scholarship, and I wish I had read it before I began writing my book.

☺ ☺

And now, finally, some acknowledgements.

First and foremost, I wish to thank my dear partner Pamela. She started this project when, after coming back from an appointment to the doctor where she saw in the waiting room a loose-leaf notebook filled with comics about doctors, she suggested that we begin to cut out cartoons and comic strips about our own academic fields of archaeology and art history. I am especially indebted to her for her Jobian patience while, after taking over this initially joint project, I absconded myself in my retirement study for hours on end. Her belief that I might have something interesting to say about our collection of art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips helped to keep me at my desk day after day, pounding out sentences.

I also wish to thank my dear friends Cory Woods and Margery Laroue. After rolling their eyes when I showed them the first pages of the initial incomprehensible academic version of this work, Cory bucked me up by saying that I should write whatever I damn well liked. Margery, dear soul, took it upon herself to edit this current version, helping to clean up numerous typos as well as many an awkward passage.

I also wish to thank my many other friends in Oviedo, who put up with my going on and on about my retirement writing project while we enjoyed together that wonderful Spanish tradition of long lunches lasting from two to five pm!

As is customary, I close with the usual acceptance of responsibility for any and all remaining errors, both factual and stylistic.

18 Dec., 2020.
Oviedo, Asturias

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Bibliography for "Preface"

[Note to myself of three years ago: For your crash course on comics studies, begin with Karin Kukkonen's introductory textbook, and then plow your way through the survey articles in the Cook, Bramlett, and Meskin-edited *Routledge Companion to Comics*. Similarly, for an introduction to humor theory, the survey articles in Victor Raskin's *Primer of Humor Research* and in Salvatore Attardo's *Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor* would make a good start.]

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Part I. Setting the Stage.

That the analysis of humor is itself not humorous was humorously noted by E. B. and Katherine S. White in the preface to their 1941 anthology *A Subtreasury of American Humor*: "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind." The Poet Laureate Billy Collins made an analogous point about the study of poetry in his 1988 poem "Introduction to Poetry." After asking his students to "take a poem/ and hold it up to the light," to "walk inside the poem's room/ and feel the walls for a light switch" and to "waterski/ across the surface of a poem/ waving at the author's name on the shore," Collins then complains:

> But all they want to do
> is tie the poem to a chair with rope
> and torture a confession out of it.
>
> They begin beating it with a hose
> to find out what it really means.

But, as I learned from nearly two decades of teaching literature to high school and community college students, tying down a work of art to a pedantic dissecting table and beating a confession out of it is a necessary evil in order to give students the analytical skills they need to waterski across the oceans of art that await them in the future.

So, we begin our investigations of art- and archaeology-themed American cartoons and comic strips by pinning one example onto the dissecting table to poke through its innards. As painful as this exercise will be—both to the comic-strip subject as well as to the reader—I hope that whatever insights we can make it confess will help us to smile a little more widely when we next crack open the funny pages.

A Test Case: A Comic Strip from Garry Trudeau's Doonesbury

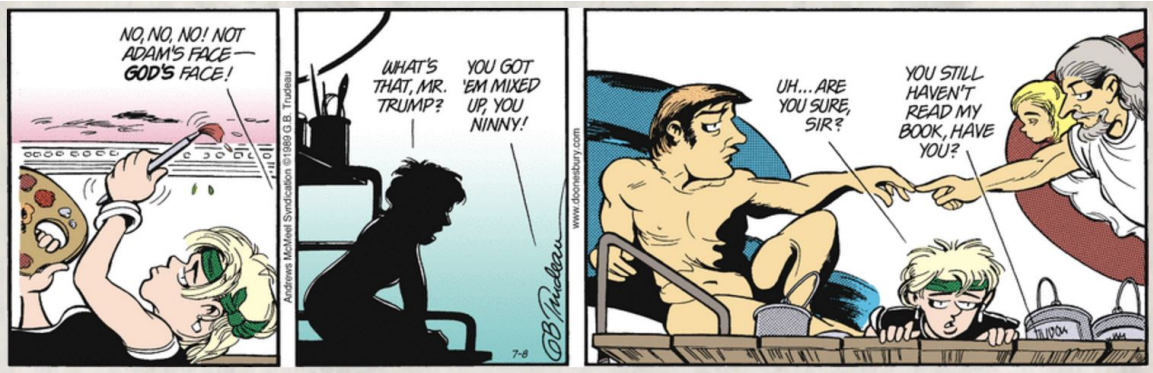

Fig. 1. Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 20 March, 1989.

A Comic Strip or a Political Cartoon?

The dividing line between a humorous cartoon or comic strip and a political cartoon is not always self-evident. Although there are obvious formal similarities between the humorous cartoon/comic strip and the political cartoon—not to mention the fact that many comic-strip artists started out as cartoonists on newspaper op-ed pages—there is a clear distinction between the intended outcomes of the two genres. Whereas the humorous cartoon/comic strip aims to make us laugh, the political cartoon aims to score a political point, most often by ridiculing a particular politician or political view—what one recent scholar has called the "zing." Of course, humor can play an important part in that political ridicule, although it is not strictly a necessary component of a political cartoon. To be sure, there is a certain degree of overlap between political cartoons and those editorial comic strips or cartoons meant to satirize the rich and powerful; social satire, however, is not quite the same thing as expressing a political opinion.

This distinction between a humorous cartoon/comic strip and a political cartoon can be seen in **Fig. 1**. When Garry Trudeau created this *Doonesbury* comic strip in 1989 it was part of a series in which his starving artist character J.J. Caucus was reduced to producing garish art on the bathroom walls of the yacht of a fatuous cartoon Donald Trump; in this series Trudeau was using our understanding of the real Donald Trump's outsized ego to make a joke about the cartoon Donald Trump's request that, in the replica of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel she was painting in his yacht, J.J. replace God's face with Trump's own. However, when Trudeau choose to reprint this same set of panels in 2016 as part of his *Doonesbury Classics* series, what was once a comic strip

designed to make us smile through a biting satire of a well known social figure had crossed over the line into a political opinion piece, now suggesting that Donald Trump's personality was unsuitable for a candidate running for the office of US president. Same set of cartoon panels, different goals. As Trudeau himself expressed it when discussing his earlier Trump satires in an August 2016 interview for the *Washington Post*: "What I once regarded as harmless buffoonery is in fact dangerously symptomatic . . . Whatever else this election is about, it's primarily a referendum on mental health."

Laughing at the Strip

Humor theorists have categorized humor into three main groups: superiority, incongruity, and release. Superiority humor—also referred to as derision or disparagement humor—was recognized as early as Plato, who condemned the aggressive malice in laughing at others as detrimental to our own souls. Incongruity humor, which involves the contrast between an established set of expectations and its resolution through an unexpected punch line, was first recognized by Aristotle, who viewed humor as not necessarily a bad thing as long as it was practiced in moderation. For Freud, humor was a form of release or liberation of nervous energy built up from repressed aggressive or lustful impulses.

Modern humor theory has generally focused on the incongruity-resolution interpretation of humor, although superiority humor and aggression-release humor are also active subjects of investigation. In our test case **Fig. 1**, the humorous incongruity involves three levels of abnormalities—what humor theorists call "script oppositions": 1) a businessman (Trump) hiring an artist to paint a replica of the Sistine Chapel in the bathroom of his yacht; 2) Trump asking for his own face to be put on the replica; 3) Trump asking for his face to replace God's, not Adam's, face. The punch line of the joke —"You still haven't read my book, have you?"—provides a parallelism that helps to resolve the incongruities: just as Trump requesting these three abnormalities shows an outsized ego, so too does his book (*The Art of the Deal*, 1987).

Humorous cartoons and comic strips, of course, consist of visual components that are normally—although not necessarily—combined with verbal components. As the scholarly jargon puts it, they are "multimodal." In our test case, the set-up to the joke in the first two panels is verbal ("Not Adam's face, **God's** face"; "You got 'em mixed up") while the third panel begins with a visual resolution (when we the viewer sees that

the mix-up involves Trump's face) and concludes with the verbal punch line (the reference to *Art of the Deal*).

Looking at the Strip

Analyzing the structure of its humor is only one methodological approach that can be applied to our test comic strip. Another would be to undertake a formal stylistic analysis of its visual structure.

The basic unit of any comics is the panel—the visual equivalent of a "word" or "sentence" in the "language" of comics. While comics scholars are mostly concerned with the layout and relationship among comic panels in longer comic narratives such as graphic novels, the analytical techniques they use were in fact first developed by looking at simple comic strips such as our test example, **Fig 1*bis*** (repeated here in black and white, as most of us who first saw it in a daily newspaper would have encountered it).

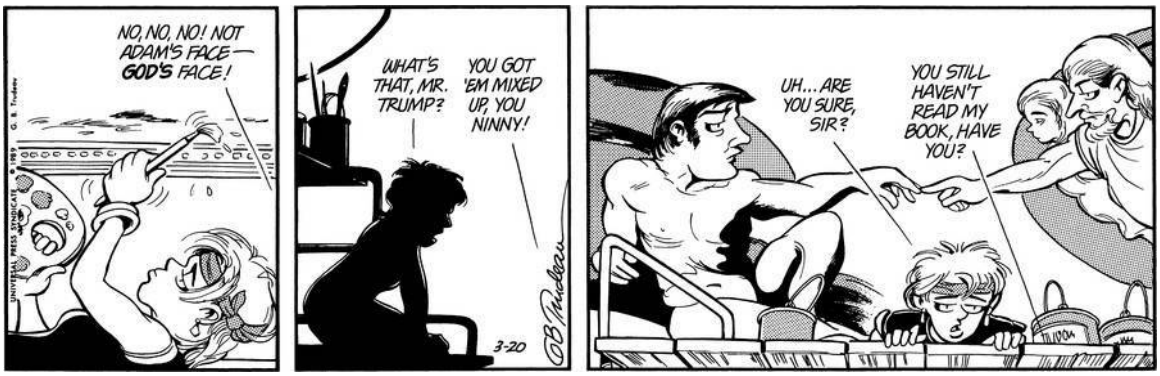

Fig. 1*bis*. Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 20 March, 1989.

Unlike the more normal four-panel format that Trudeau and many other comics artists use for their daily strips, our example is tripartite, with the first two panels occupying half the length of the strip and the final panel the second half. This tripartite structure establishes a certain rhythm to the strip—the visual equivalent of an anapest (short, short, long) metrical foot in poetry or a *bah-bah-boom* snare-drum rimshot accompaniment to a stand-up comic's joke—and serves to time our appreciation of the joke's set-ups and punch line, which we have noted involves three levels of incongruous anomalies.

This tripartite rhythm can also be observed when we apply a standard formal analysis of the composition of our *Doonesbury* strip. Isolating the predominant visual elements of the strip (**Fig. 1*bis* a**) shows that they form a series of directional lines (**Fig.**

1bis b) which lead the viewer's eye from left to right in the first two panels and then, in the third panel, curve from both left and right to meet at the junction of Adam's and God's fingers where they point down to J.J.'s head. Similarly, isolating just the speaker-indicator lines—which Trudeau always uses in place of more cartoonish speech bubbles—reveals the same pattern (**Fig. 1*bis* c**). The downward angled lines of Trump's off-camera voice in both the first and second panels focus the directional lines of their panels, and each leads us to the following panel; the two speaker lines in the third panel amputate Adam's and God's hands at their crucial meeting point, conspicuously framing J.J.'s head.

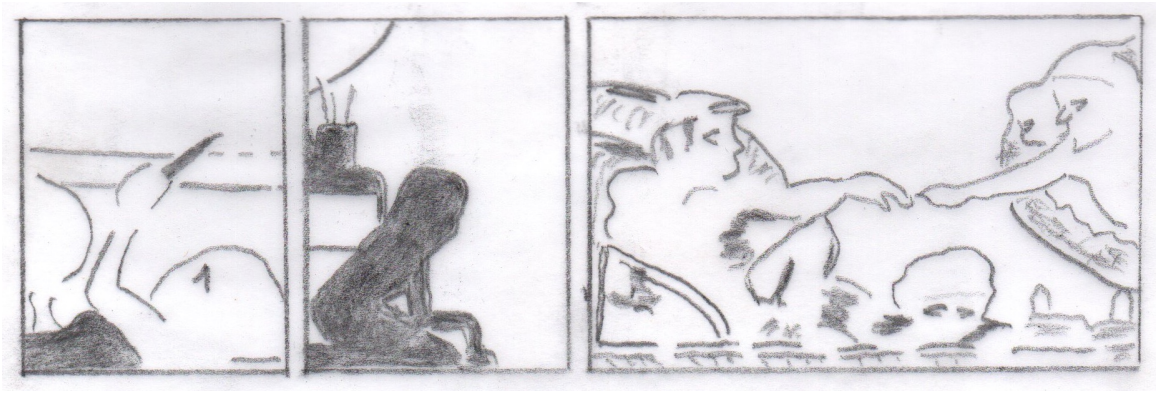

Fig. 1*bis* a.

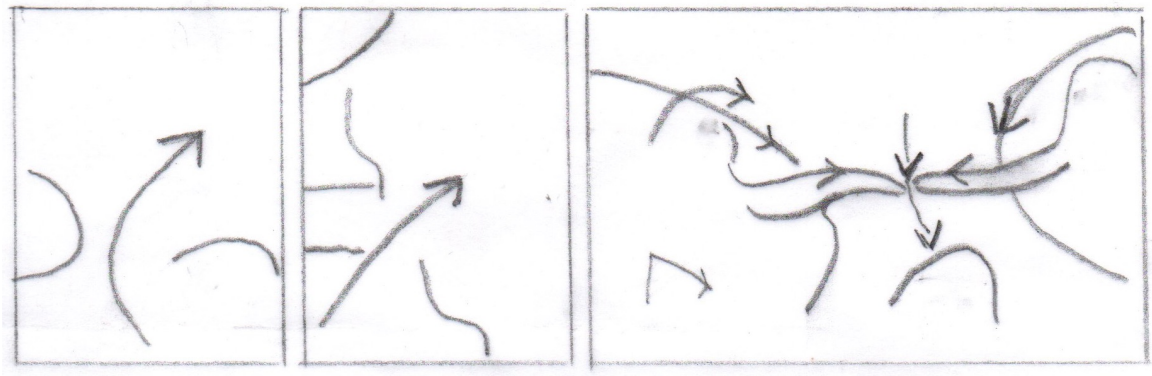

Fig. 1*bis* b.

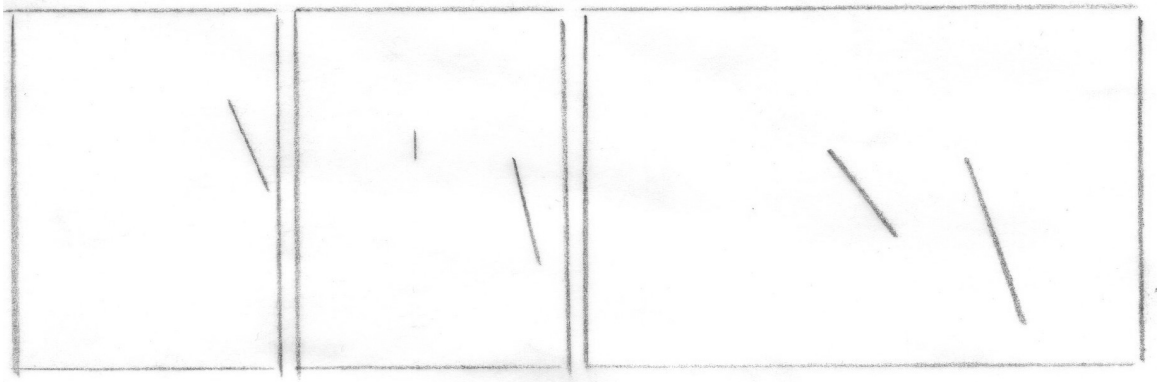

Fig. 1*bis* c.

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The comic artist Scott McCloud, in his seminal 1993 text *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, identified the "special magic" of comics as being how readers participate in supplying "closure", that is, in creating meaning by mentally filling in the narrative gaps in the spaces—the gutters—between sequences of comics panels. McCloud's powerful insight has become axiomatic in comics scholarship, and it is a standard practice to include an examination of the role of gutters in structuring a graphic narrative. Although our *Doonesbury* strip has a simple, humorous, narrative, its two gutters do play a significant role in the timing of Trudeau's joke. In the spaces between each panel, we the viewers are asked to imagine J.J's mental state as she is processing the import of Trump's words. What J.J. says after each gutter matches what we imagined she was thinking: "What's that, Mr. Trump?" and "Uh . . . Are you sure, sir?" The process of imagined closure might not even end with the joke's punch line in the final panel; the strip almost begs a further panel—J.J. looking straight at us with a thought balloon expressing both her and our reaction: "What the #*$@*?"

[This sort of bowdlerized swearing is called a "grawlix"—a neologism that the comics artist Mort Walker invented in his hilariously funny and idiosyncratic 1980 *Lexicon of Comicana*.]

The rhythm of our *Doonesbury* strip is also supported by other compositional elements of the images presented in its three panels. One of the more obvious of these design features is how Trudeau switches from positive to negative lighting between the first and the second panels. The strip starts off with our viewing J.J. in normal light. We see her in action, as indicated with pictorial runes of movement lines around her wrist and with movement lines and splash droplets around her paintbrush. Then, the second panel presents us with a silhouette view where no motion is shown at all. This normal-view/silhouette alternation adds a short rest stop—a blink—between the first and second halves of the strip's metrical rhythm. Like J.J., we the viewers are thus forced to pause, to take in the set-up to the joke before we open our eyes again and move on to the punch line presented in the final panel.

Another salient design feature operating in our *Doonesbury* strip are the changes in framing and in perspective across the panels. As has been recognized by comics analysts, film scholars, and social semioticians, both how a scene is framed and the angle from which we view it influence the emotional responses elicited in viewers. Thus, the

cropped, close-up, and eye-level view of J.J. lying on her back in the first panel puts her into an equal relationship with the viewer, making us identify with her as she reacts to Trump's comments. In the second panel, the "camera" pans out, and we are now viewing J.J.—shown in silhouette without internal detail—from a more dispassionate perspective. This emotional remove is continued in the final panel, where we the viewer are now on ground level with Trump as the punch line to the joke is told both verbally and visually. We are now looking up at J.J., who—in spite of precariously leaning over the scaffolding—is thus put into a position of power. We have become Trump and have to deal with the incredulity of the raised eyebrows on J.J.'s face, so prominently framed in the panel. The switch from our emotional identification with J.J. to our problematic identification with Trump underlines the absurdity of the incongruity resolution of the joke, which is, after all, not really laugh-out-loud funny. As we have noted, this strip was intended to be biting social satire when first published in 1989 and to be biting political commentary when republished in 2016.

A related insight into how the composition of our test-case *Doonesbury* strip affects our interpretation of the joke comes from the social semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Kress and Van Leeuwen maintain that, in visual communications in the Western world, the "given" is placed on the left and the "new" is on the right. Michelangelo's *Creation of Man* fresco, for Kress and Leeuwen, represents the new, humanistic, spirit of the Renaissance overturning traditional religious values. Man, on the left, is now the given and God, on the right, becomes the new; for humanists, we must create a new God to accommodate Man, the measure of all things. In our Trudeau strip, the cartoon Trump is upset because J.J. has placed him in the position of the "given" rather than the "new." In this light, the incongruity is not that the egotistical Trump wanted to be seen as the traditional Judeo-Christian God, but rather that he wanted to be viewed as a new force in the world. Given the conduct of President Trump since Trudeau's 2016 re-publication of his strip, with Trump's relentless attacks on Enlightenment science and the search for objective truth, Trudeau's strip seems particularly prescient.

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The issue of the emotional response of viewers of comic strips and cartoons raises the topic of the "masking effect"—the term Scott McCloud uses to describe his contention that comics readers identify with the abstracted iconic presentation of cartoonish characters: "We don't just *observe* the cartoon, we *become* it." Similarly, Thierry Groensteen maintains that when a comics reader is ". . . projected into the fiction (the diegetic universe), he forgets, up to a certain point, the fragmented character and discontinuity of the enunciation." For McCloud, our identification with comic characters is an extension of the abstracted mental image we have of ourselves that we project on our interactions with the real world. The more realistic the portrayal of the comic character, the weaker our identification. Our identification, however, does not diminish when the comic universe that the character occupies is rendered realistically, as long as the level of abstraction in the rendering of the character itself remains high.

The contrast between the abstract iconic comic character and its comic universe is particularly relevant when that universe includes visual allusions to real works of art. In his 2013 article, "Comic Art in Museums and Museums in Comic Art," Michael Picone observes a curious inversion:

> The theme of 'art within art' is common as well, and is explored using various devices. When a painting is appropriated integrally, very often it has higher resolution and looks more substantial than the graphics in which it is embedded. . . . This creates an odd effect for the reader. A visitor to an art museum sees the paintings embedded in a surrounding where everything else has higher resolution than the objects contained in the paintings. Besides the static nature of the paintings and the lack of real depth, lower resolution is one of the things that the eye and brain rely on to differentiate paintings from reality. When a painting is embedded in comic art, everything is reversed. It is the mimetic 'reality' that has low resolution and it is the embedded painting that, in comparison, has high resolution. Since the reader typically identifies with the 'animate' characters in the unfolding story, not the static paintings, by virtue of association the reader becomes part of a low-resolution world where art has more substance than life.

Our *Doonesbury* strip demonstrates this "associative inversion." The simple rendering of J.J., her painting equipment, and the scaffolding contrasts with the relatively more realistic portrayal of J.J.'s copy of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, with its shading and less abstracted anatomical features. The strip's joke would simply not work as well if the Creation of Man was rendered in a cartoonish fashion; Trudeau needs to

make us believe that J.J. is a talented, albeit put-upon, artist. One suspects that Trudeau also enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of his graphic skills—as Thierry Groensteen puts it, to boast: "See, I can do as well as such-and-such a great artist admired by everyone; it is not so difficult, after all." [For a further discussion of "associative inversion," see the "Miming the Masters" section of the "Amusing Art" essay in Part II.]

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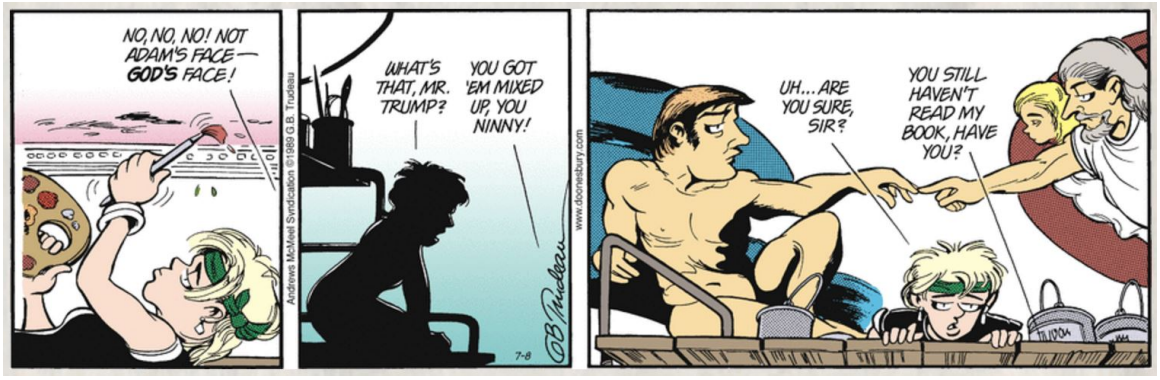

Fig. 1 (*iter*). Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 20 March, 1989.

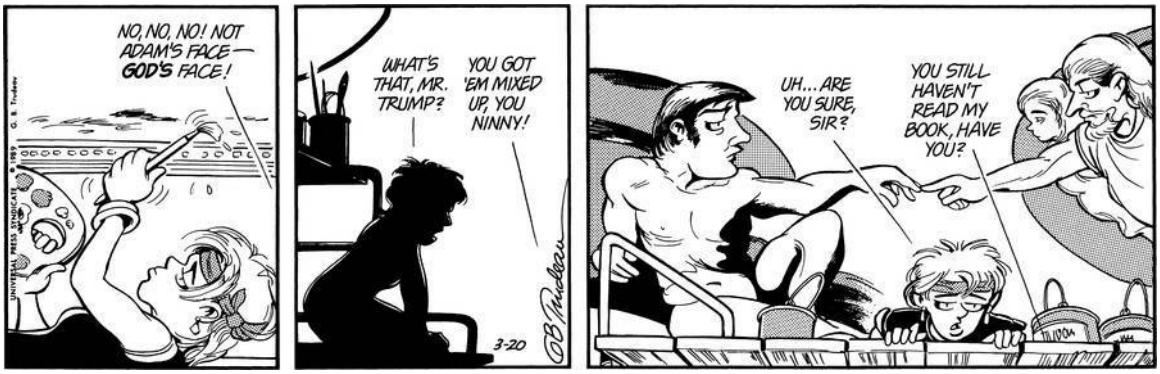

Fig. 1*bis* (*iter*). Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 20 March, 1989.

One further observation about how the design of a comics affects the reading experience can be made by comparing the color version of our *Doonesbury* strip (**Fig. 1**) with the black-and-white version (**Fig. 1*bis***), both presented again above. For those of us who first encountered the comic strip in a black-and-white form, we missed the emotive contexts provided by the subtle association of J.J. with the warm pink of the ceiling she was painting and of the (off-screen) Trump with a threatening blue-green emanating from below. That this warm/cool color contrast is intended to evoke a positive/negative reaction is suggested in the final panel by the blue cloud behind Trump/Adam and the brown-red cloud behind God.

But, even when presented with a black-and-white cartoon, can we really say that color has no place in the visual signification of the image? Just as we the comic-strip viewers are expected to fill in the missing narrative structure between panel gutters, might we not also be expected to mentally color in between the lines? Especially when a comics artist like Trudeau is quoting such a well known work of art, the mental image we have of our black-and-white strip might be something like **Fig. 1*bis* d.**

Fig. 1*bis* d.

Contextualizing the Strip

Anyone—like me—who tried to learn a foreign language by starting off with comics and cartoons, soon discovered that this is not a good idea. While we might think that comics is a childish genre and therefore should be easy to read, in fact cartoons and comic strips are often extremely difficult for non-native speakers to comprehend. Not only do they employ highly idiomatic language (how would a non-native English speaker go about looking up the "'em" in our test case?), but they also embed a host of cultural references that are usually lost on those not conversant with that culture.

Influenced by the field of cognitive linguistics—which views communication as a two-way street involving both the producers and the receivers of information—humor theorists and comics scholars over the past two decades have focused on the cultural traditions shared in common by comics artists and their audiences. These academics talk about "socio-political contexts," "cultural models," "social constructs," "background knowledge," and "cooperative presuppositions." In her 2009 study of humor in modern Greek political cartoons, for instance, Villy Tsakona notes:

> . . . the widely held view that cartoons are a direct and easy way of conveying a message is admittedly put into question. Cartoons can be rather complex and not so easy to decode . . . the mechanisms used for the humorous representation of beliefs and widely held views in cartoons are all part of the visual literacy, namely the ability to understand the 'socially

> acceptable' rules of the visual semiotic mode used in public communication. . . . the decoding of a cartoon requires and presupposes detailed knowledge of the social and cultural information exploited for the production of humor. Cartoons do not invent viewpoints or stereotypes, but, on the contrary, they do provide information on social and political reality and, at the same time, they rely on it for their humorous effect. The humorous scripts opposed are based on explicit knowledge of this type and commonly held beliefs known to the readers in advance. If the scripts opposed are not easily recognized and widely known, humor cannot be understood . . . Cartoon humor, as most humor and humorous genres, is evidently contextually and culturally bound.

To uncover Tsakona's "contextually and culturally bound" humor in our test *Doonesbury* strip would entail, among other things, establishing what American readers could be expected to know about the subject, such as an understanding of who Donald Trump was (both in 1989 and in 2016) and biographical details about the character J.J. Caucus. In addition, one would want to establish whether the American reader had at least a general awareness of Trudeau's satirical *oeuvre* of prominent social and political figures; some readers might be aware of Trudeau's leftish politics if they encountered his strips in one of the newspapers that had banished *Doonesbury* strips from the funny pages and instead printed them in the paper's op-ed pages.

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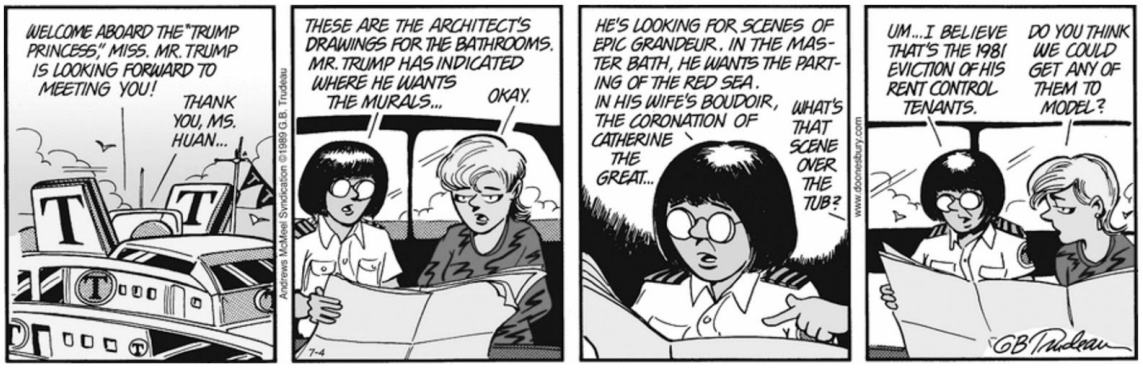
Of course, it would take a great deal of effort to establish exactly what readers brought to the breakfast table as they viewed our test strip. So too would it be difficult to ascertain the degree to which the reader was aware of the other strips Trudeau had created in his week-long series about J.J. Caucus painting the bathroom ceilings of Trump's yacht (**Fig. 2**). Although many people—myself included—often turn to the funny pages before reading anything else, on any given day, we may or may not have time to even pick up (or log in to) the paper. My wife and I, for instance, only clipped out two of these *Doonesbury* strips from our local newspaper (the third and fifth strips below), even though we were trying to systematically collect cartoons and comic strips with art themes.


GUESS WHAT? THE GALLERY CALLED. I GOT ANOTHER BATHROOM GIG!
WHAT?
IT'S A COMMISSION FOR A THREE-ROOM SERIES OF WALL AND CEILING MURALS!
THAT'S GREAT! WHO'S THE CLIENT?
I DUNNO, SOME RICH GUY. BUT GET THIS—THE BATHROOMS ARE ON HIS BOAT!
HIS BOAT?
...AND UP THERE OVER THE JOHN, I WANT A BIG BUNCH OF NYMPHS!
I'LL TELL HER, MR. TRUMP.
Andrews McMeel Syndication ©1989 G.B. Trudeau
www.doonesbury.com
GBTrudeau


WELCOME ABOARD THE "TRUMP PRINCESS," MISS. MR. TRUMP IS LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING YOU!
THANK YOU, MS. HUAN...
THESE ARE THE ARCHITECT'S DRAWINGS FOR THE BATHROOMS. MR. TRUMP HAS INDICATED WHERE HE WANTS THE MURALS...
OKAY.
HE'S LOOKING FOR SCENES OF EPIC GRANDEUR. IN THE MASTER BATH, HE WANTS THE PARTING OF THE RED SEA. IN HIS WIFE'S BOUDOIR, THE CORONATION OF CATHERINE THE GREAT...
WHAT'S THAT SCENE OVER THE TUB?
UM...I BELIEVE THAT'S THE 1981 EVICTION OF HIS RENT CONTROL TENANTS.
DO YOU THINK WE COULD GET ANY OF THEM TO MODEL?
Andrews McMeel Syndication ©1989 G.B. Trudeau
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DOONESBURY / By Garry Trudeau
I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME, KID, SO GET THIS DOWN RIGHT, OKAY?
YES, SIR.
HERE IN THE BATHROOM FOYER, I WANT A MURAL OF THE LABORS OF HERCULES. DO IT IN THE STYLE OF MICHELANGELO. OR PICASSO.
ONE OF THOSE FAMOUS GUYS...
AND UP ON THIS WALL, I WANT YOU TO PAINT ME A BUNCH OF BOOKS. I REALLY RESPECT BOOKS, SO MAKE 'EM LOOK REAL—TO FOOL PEOPLE—WHAT DO YOU CALL THAT?
TROMPE L'OEIL.
RIGHT. AND MAKE 'EM ALL BEST SELLERS.
Andrews McMeel Syndication ©1989 G.B. Trudeau
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GBTrudeau

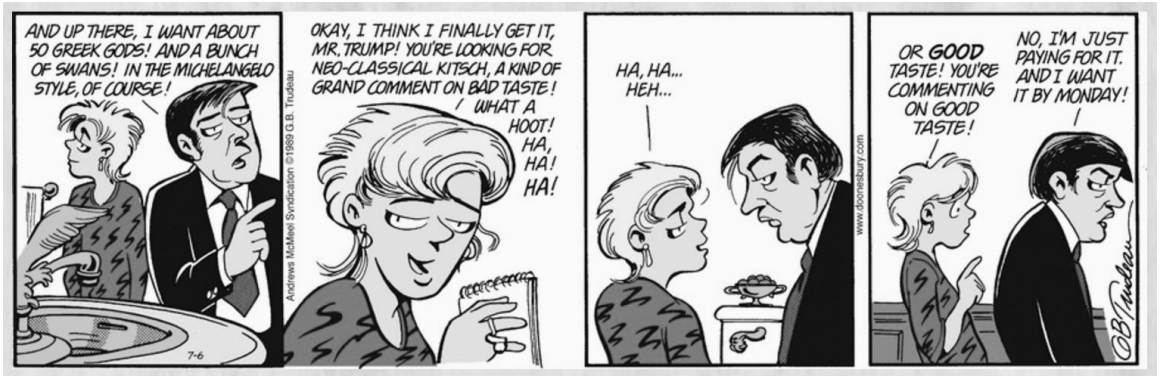
AND UP THERE, I WANT ABOUT 50 GREEK GODS! AND A BUNCH OF SWANS! IN THE MICHELANGELO STYLE, OF COURSE!
OKAY, I THINK I FINALLY GET IT, MR. TRUMP! YOU'RE LOOKING FOR NEO-CLASSICAL KITSCH, A KIND OF GRAND COMMENT ON BAD TASTE!
WHAT A HOOT! HA, HA! HA!
HA, HA... HEH...
OR GOOD TASTE! YOU'RE COMMENTING ON GOOD TASTE!
NO, I'M JUST PAYING FOR IT. AND I WANT IT BY MONDAY!
Andrews McMeel Syndication ©1989 G.B. Trudeau
www.doonesbury.com
GBTrudeau

Fig. 2. Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, March 15–20, 1989.

Although the average newspaper reader may not have seen all six of these strips, it is clear that Garry Trudeau carefully planned the set as a unit. The six strips form an overall narrative arc, from J.J. first informing her (then) husband Michael Doonesbury about getting the Trump commission to the final Sistine Chapel climax. Structurally, the strips share a number of features. There are dramatic shifts of focus and framing between the panels. The first and fifth strips have the same alternation of normal and silhouette views as seen in the final one in the series.

There are also some minor differences among the six strips. The first, fourth, and fifth strips each contain a non-bounded panel, which imbues those strips with a slightly elongated internal rhythm. All of the first five strips are four-paneled, setting up an overall rhythm to the six-strip set that emphasizes the final, double-wide, climax panel of the final strip.

As coherent as this six-strip group is visually, the humor Trudeau employs in each of the strips is in fact quite disparate. While the overall theme is Trump's abnormal behavior, each strip presents a different incongruity to be resolved. The humor of the third panel, for instance, relies on our recognizing the atrocious pun 'Trump l'oeil." The incongruity of having evicted rent-control tenants pose for a portrait to be painted over

Trump's wife's bathtub in the second strip and the incongruity of kitsch/good art in the fourth strip make the satire of those strips particularly biting.

Overall, the set emphasizes Trump's sexism and his denigration of J.J. Caucus not only as an artist but also as a woman. In fact, Trudeau chose to use the offensive phrase "Give those nymphs some hooters" as the title of his 1989 collection of Trump satirical comic strips.

A word of caution, however, should be made about analyzing these six strips out of context. Putting them side by side as we do here fundamentally transforms them, changing the technical unit of analysis from a horizontal segment to a whole page. Further, looking at even one week's output of an artist who produces daily comic strips —much less looking at the entire corpus of a comics artist—denies the timing that the comic artist originally intended for us to appreciate those strips. This is especially relevant when the comic strip, like *Doonesbury*, has characters who age in real time. For instance, knowing—as those of us who follow *Doonesbury* now do—that the Doonesbury-Caucus marriage eventually fails changes the way we emotionally react to J.J.'s struggles to complete the distasteful Trump commission. We might also, after knowing how Trudeau portrayed Trump in 2016 with outrageously dyed blond hair, be slightly confused by the dark brown/black hair Trump sports in Trudeau's 1989 comic.

We scarcely need to add that taking cartoons and comic strips out of context and pinning them down to the agonizingly unfunny pages of an essay such as this transforms them into those dissected frogs the Whites noted are pleasing only to nerdy experts.

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In addition to decoding the political and social contexts of our test *Doonesbury* strip, we must also address its parody of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. As we have already noted, the Trudeau strip exemplifies the "associative inversion" that Michel Picone observed occurs when works of art are quoted in a comic strip. We can go further, however, in decoding what this parody of the *Creation of Man* means for an American audience. As Nancy Pedri points out:

> When images are borrowed or quoted in the visual track of comics, their original context (real or imagined), as well as their re-presentation in the new context of the comics cartoon universe, also factor into the visual interpretative process. The appropriated images are made to exist in a different version, taking on new meanings with their new configuration

> and within the new comics context. The mixing of visual images in comics thus orchestrates a unique reading experience, one that draws on the preconceived notions of readers, accentuates the mechanics of visual storytelling, instates complex multimodal reading practices, and distinguishes comics as a highly malleable and experimental multimodal form. It asks readers to adopt an interpretative practice that respects, but also crosses boundaries, separating visual semiotic modes.

[In the first section of the "Making Fun of Making Art" essay in Part II we will return to the issue of the "metafictional intertextuality" of cartoons and comic strips that appropriate visual images.]

For Americans, Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel is the incarnation of the tortured artist, a cultural archetype established by the 1965 Hollywood film *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (based on Irving Stone's 1961 biographical novel of the same name), staring Charlton Heston as the artist and Rex Harrison as Pope Julius II. An early scene in the film has the camera slowly and repeatedly pan up and down from the unpainted ceiling to Heston's face, each time showing the actor with increasingly furrowed brows while ponderous organ music fills the space; a culmination of the conflict between artist and patron comes as Harrison objects to the *Creation of Man* panel and Heston replies "I will paint Man as God has made him, in the glory of his nakedness."

Cartoonists and comic-strip artists are particularly fond of creating humor by opposing the cultural context of Michelangelo as tortured artist to an incongruous script. Trudeau linked the *Creation of Man* to Trump's narcissism, originally as social satire and later as political commentary. Mike Peters (**Fig. 3**) makes a similar political statement with the incongruous replacement of Adam with a profane Trump.

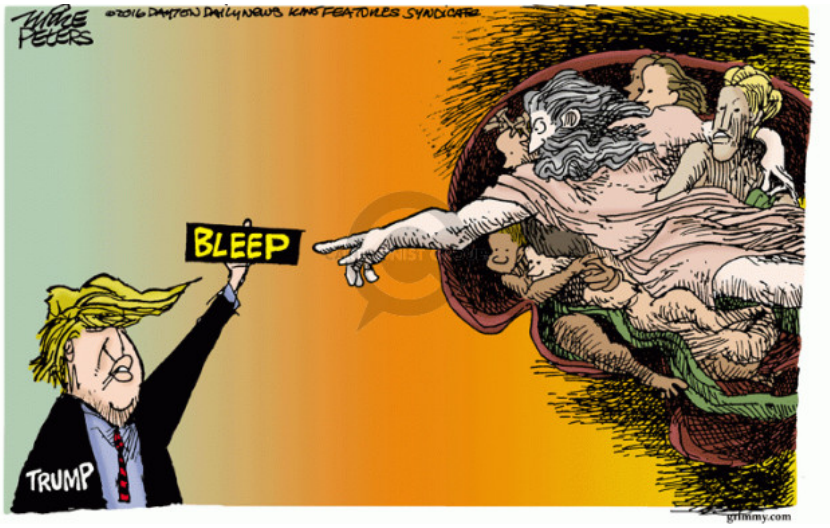


Fig. 3. Mike Peters, 19 Feb, 2016.

Other American cartoonists, such as Wiley Miller (**Figs. 4** and **5**) create incongruities by scripting an incompetent artist onto our icon of the Renaissance master.

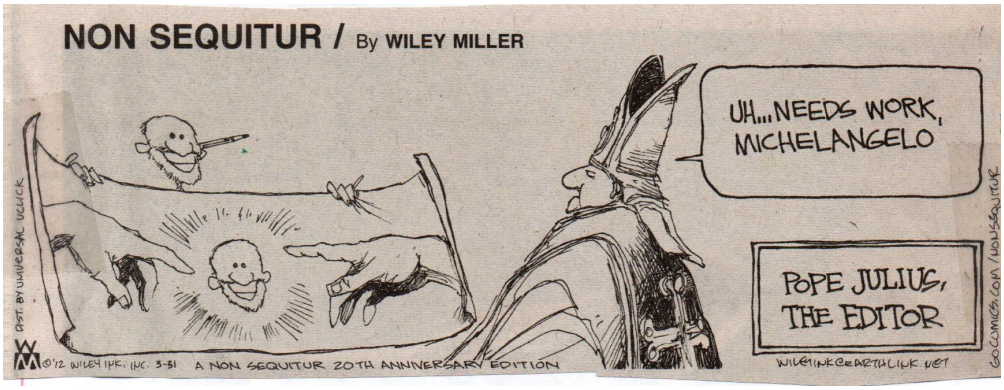


Fig. 4. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 31 March, 2012.

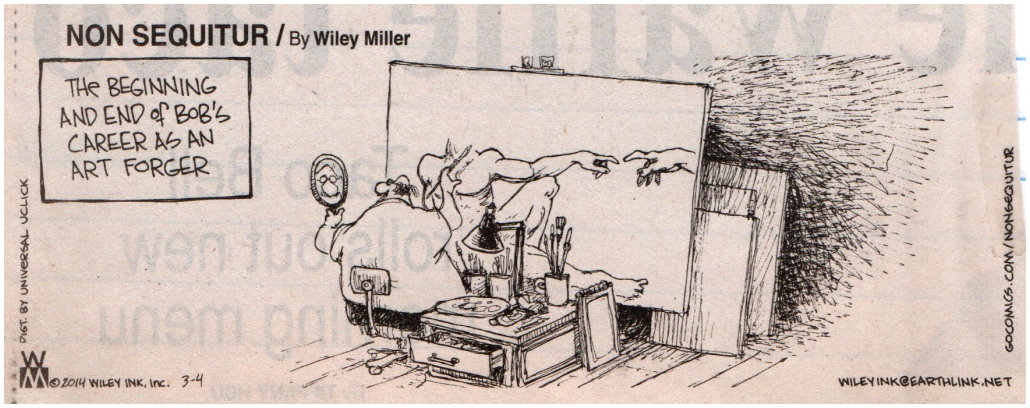


Fig. 5. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 3 April, 2014.

Another strategy comic-strip artists use for creating a humorous incongruity is to insert a speech bubble—usually emanating from God—to represent a comic dialogue between the deity and Adam (**Fig. 6**).

Fig. 6. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 9 Oct., 2011.

Several cartoonists have used the incongruity strategy of suggesting that the *Creation of Man* was a paint-by-numbers (**Fig. 7** and **Fig. 8**).

Fig. 7. Toons, Sistine Chapel, 25 March, 2010.

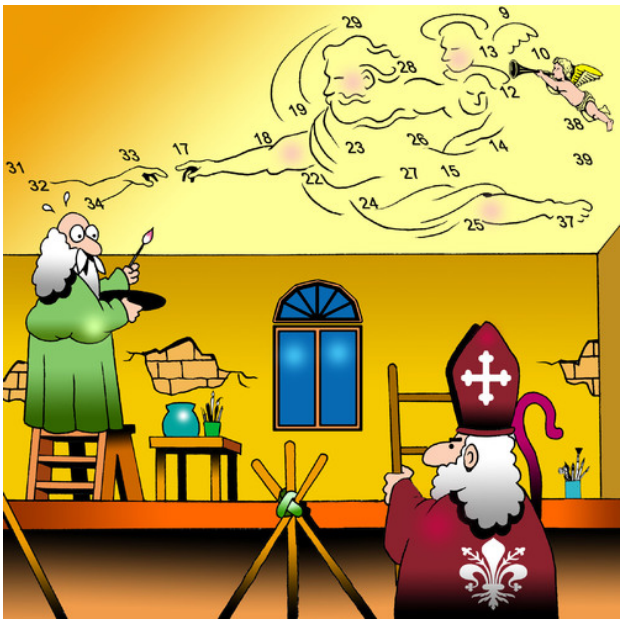


Fig. 8. Scott Hilbrun, *The Argyle Sweater*, 1 July, 2010.

A particularly popular way to create humorous incongruities in cartoons and comic strips that appropriate visual images from the past is to create a "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly. Here, inserting a cell phone or laptop computer into the *Creation of Man* is enough to make us smile (**Fig. 9**, **Fig. 10**, and **Fig. 11**).

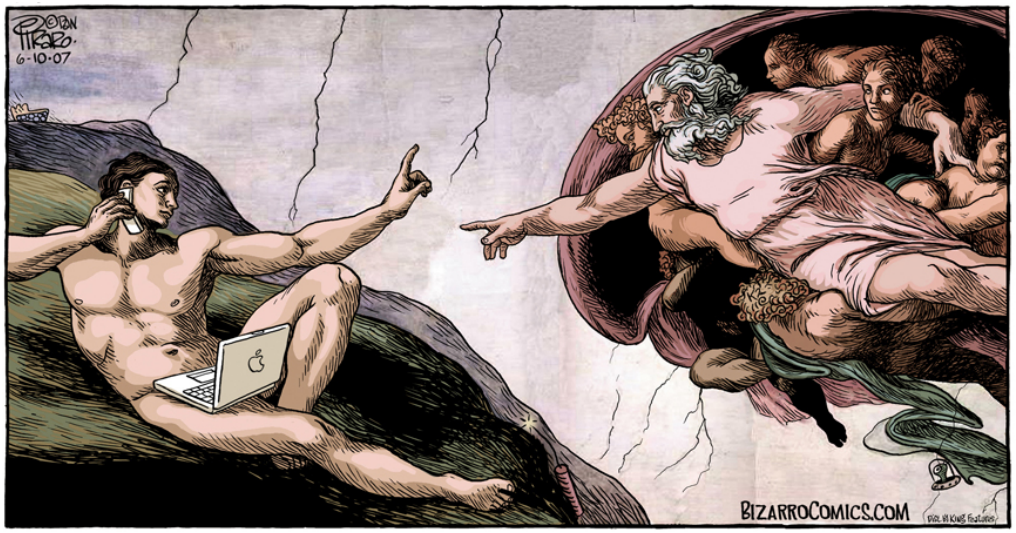


Fig. 9. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 6 Oct., 2007.

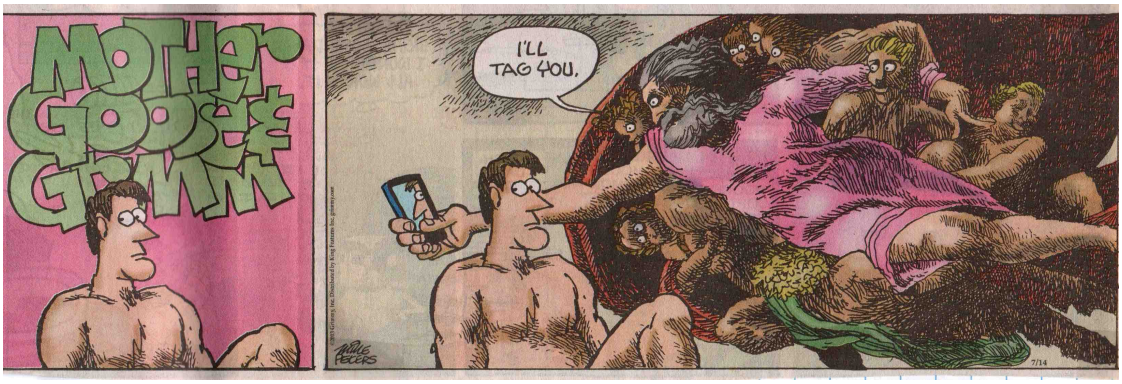
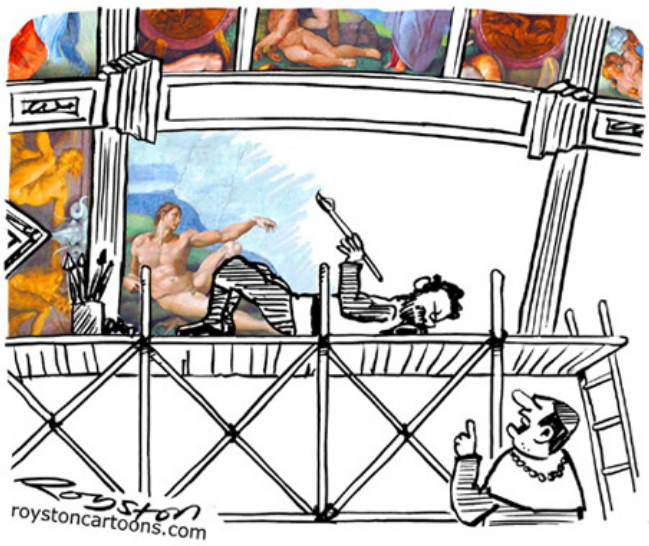


Fig. 10. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 14 July, 2013.



"There's an app for that."

Fig. 11. Royston Robertson, 23 Nov., 2012.

The incongruous "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly can also work in reverse. Rather than retrofitting a modern visual element into the past, the past can be transported into the present. In the final release panel of John Hart *B.C.* strip (**Fig. 12**), for instance, the viewer shares Clumsy Carp's realization that Stone Age men couldn't really think that cloud formations resembled a Sistine Chapel which wouldn't be painted for millennia to come. Similarly, the Neanderthal Alley Oop (**Fig. 13**) creating a *Creation of Man* cave painting draws a smile—at least from the King and Queen of Moo if not from us; Oop's paint brush and tube of yellow ochre paint are superfluous anachronisms that actually detract from the humorous temporal inversion in the Benders' strip.

Fig. 12. John Hart, *B.C.*, 25 Aug., 1992.

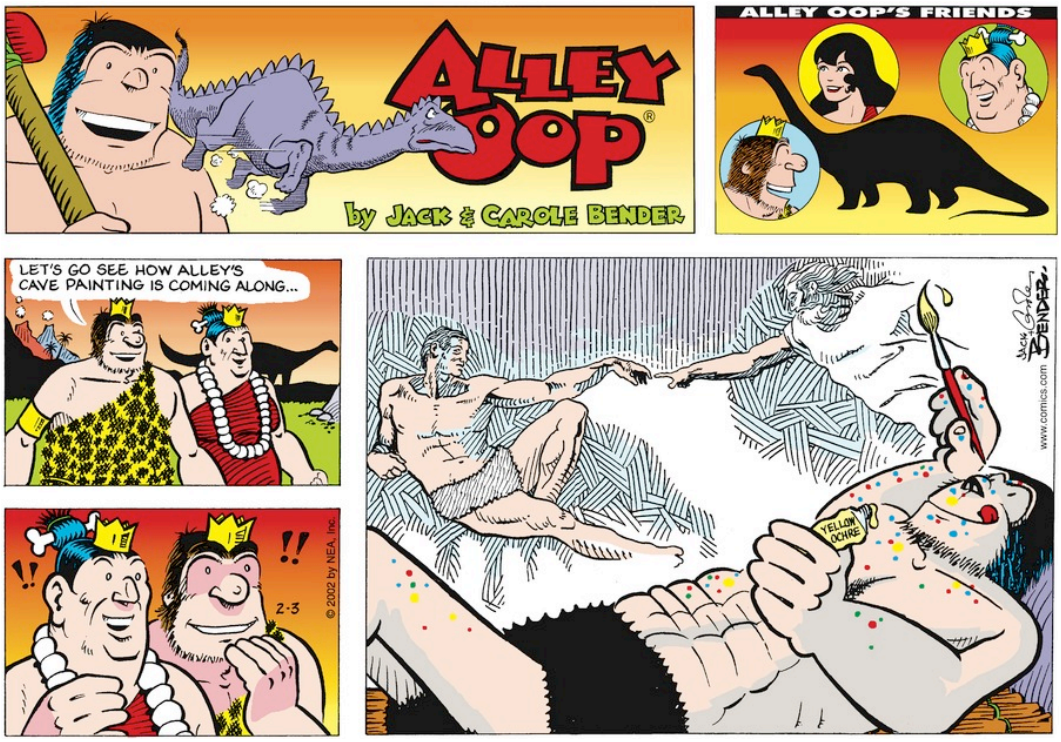


Fig. 13. Jack and Carole Bender, *Alley Oop*, 2 March, 2002.

This survey of how some cartoonists and comic-strip artists have appropriated Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel to script humorous incongruities is not meant to be

comprehensive, and it leaves many topics unaddressed. The narrative structure and stylistic design of each of the cartoons and comic strips illustrated above could be investigated. The formal elements of their incongruity-resolution humor could be further explicated. The constraints under which modern cartoonists and comic-strip artists operate could be explored, and topics such as the distinction between artists who labor under the pressure of creating a daily strip vs. those who sell their work piecemeal, or the issue of plagiarism vs. independent invention could be raised. [We may just add that the constraint on comic-strip artists to produce genteel themes appropriate for a family newspaper is in operation in the *Creation of Man* cartoons illustrated here; whether through cropping or the strategic placement of a paint can, computer, or loin cloth, Adam's genitalia is never shown—so much for Charlton Heston painting Man in "the glory of his nakedness"!]

I hope, however, that this sample of comic appropriations of the archetype of Michelangelo as tortured artist is sufficient to make the point that when cartoonists and comic-strip artist incorporate works of art into their humor, these serve as culturally bound visual codes that the reader is expected to understand and to find as incongruous in their altered settings.

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It should go without saying that it would be impractical to examine the humorous incongruities, the formal visual structures, and the cultural encodings of every example of American art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips we will study in these essays at the same level of detail that we have explored in our test case. We will, on occasion, touch upon these elements when relevant for our study of particular cartoons and comic strips, but the focus of this collection of essays is on uncovering what the cultural codes embedded in this corpus of comic art can tell us about the United States and its social values.

☺ ☺

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Webcomics and Internet Memes

Fig. 14. John Gannam, *Gone Gal*, Advertisement for Balanced Pacific Sheets, 1948.

Back in the day, we all used to read newspapers. We'd trudge out in our slippers in the morning to pick up the paper that the newspaper boy had tossed somewhere near the driveway—usually in a rain puddle if there was one—or we'd hand a coin or two to the old man at the newsstand and take a folded newspaper with us as we boarded the

subway on our way to work. We'd glance at the headlines as we sipped our morning coffee or as we awkwardly tried to refold the newsprint while holding onto a strap in a crowded subway car. And then we'd turn to the funny pages at the back of the paper and read our favorite strips, chuckling at the corny jokes that the syndicated comic-strip artists daily dished out.

Of course some of us still read real physical newspapers, but we are a dying breed. Most people now get their news online or from divisive 24-hour TV news networks. And, while some online newspapers continue to run syndicated comic strips, one often has to click on a link to see each individual strip; few people today get to experience a full page or two of comic strips were laid out before them, affording the opportunity to be pleasantly surprised when a boring strip one normally only glances at turned out to have an actually funny joke.

The changes that the internet is bringing to the production and consumption of cartoons and comic strips are, however, not as profound as they might at first appear to be. Yes, the tactile experience of holding a comic in your hands is quite different from reading it on a screen. And yes, comic strips no longer come to us involuntarily in our newspapers, and, if we want to follow particular comics artists, we have to actively seek out their strips and cartoons or sign up for RSS feeds. On the other hand, our social media platforms are replete with jokes and cartoons that just pop-up on our smartphones. And while clipping out favorite comic strips from the newspaper is rapidly becoming a thing of the past—not to mention irritatingly mailing them to out-of-the-nest children—digitized comics are regularly reposted in social media and copied on blogs. On a daily basis, most of us probably see as many cartoon jokes as we did when they were only to be found in the back pages of newspapers.

To be sure, emerging digital technologies and the internet are fundamentally altering the modes of comic-strip production. Scott McCloud, in his 2000 book *Reinventing Comics*, optimistically looked to the advantages of digital technology for the creation, delivery, and consumption of comics; most notable among these advantages, according to McCloud, is what he calls the "infinite canvas"—the potential of using the internet window as a platform for comics artists to create alternative ways of presenting narratives that are not dependent on the tyranny of the printed page format, thus allowing comics artists to vary panel shapes, sizes, and spacing and to add new

multimedia components of sound and animation to control the presentation and flow of their narratives.

McCloud's concept of the "infinite canvas" has been criticized on many grounds, but most comics scholars generally accept his claim that if webcomics are to have a place on the internet, they will have to develop a unique identity by employing the multimodal potentials of the digital media. As McCloud put it in a 2009 blog post:

> By putting comics "back together" on a single plane, the expanded canvas approach can deliver a reading experience *more like comics* and *less like any other medium* than anything we've seen to date. And for all the bells and whistles it's associated with now, its emphasis on a single unbroken reading line and uninterrupted single mode of presentation can also provide what readers want most from any storytelling medium: a seamless, transparent window into the world of the story.

We should note that McCloud envisioned his "infinite canvas" as applying to "long-form" graphic narratives and not to gag cartoons and humorous comic strips: "Comics strips work fine online and have been one of our biggest success stories of the last decade. They don't need any help from mad scientists."

As Leah Misemer argued in her 2019 article, "A Historical Approach to Webcomics: Digital Authorship in the Early 2000s," any analysis of webcomics needs to take into account the digital environment in which they appear:

> Given the close association with the development of the mode (digital technology) and the medium (webcomics) . . ., webcomics ought to be studied alongside other digital media, approached not just as comics, but as a series of websites and webpages where comics appear amidst such elements as ads, banners, links, and comments, all of which shift over time.

How the collapse of traditional print newspapers is affecting the economic environment within which cartoonists and comic-strip artists function was the subject of the 2014 documentary *Stripped* (**Fig. 15**), a film particularly notable for its interviews with such comic-strip artists as Bill Watterson (*Calvin & Hobbes*), Jim Davis (*Garfield*), Cathy Guisewite (*Cathy*), Mort Walker (*Beetle Bailey*), Jeff Keane (*The Family Circus*), Richard Thompson (*Cul de Sac*), and Stephan Pastis (*Pearls Before Swine*). While traditional syndications such as King Features continue to distribute comic strips to print newspapers, comics artists—even those who continue to sell their work to syndicates—are increasingly publishing their work directly on the internet; some are making substantial amounts of money by soliciting crowdfunding through such

platforms as Patreon, by selling merchandise (ranging from prints of art work to coffee cups, tee-shirts, and refrigerator magnets), and by allowing advertising space on their websites. And the boundary between traditional syndication and web-publishing is now disappearing as syndicates are creating online sites, such as Andrews McNeel's *GoComics.com,* that sell licenses to both syndicated newspaper comic strips as well as webcomics.

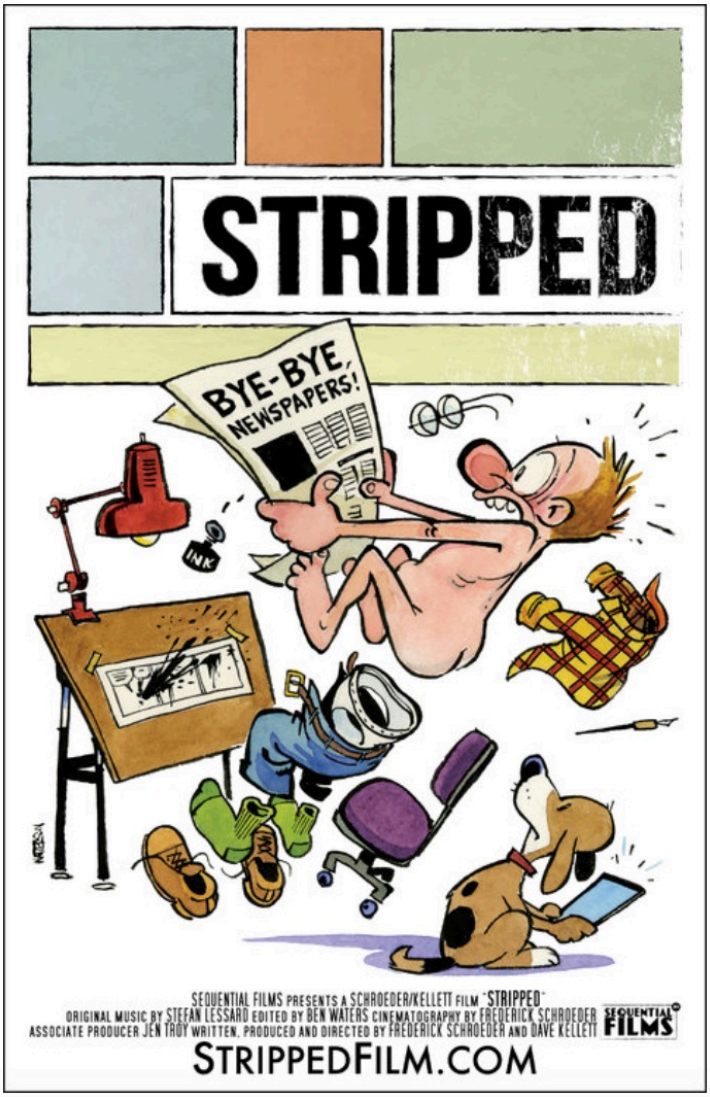

Fig. 15. Bill Watterson, Poster for the movie *Stripped*, 2014.

Yet, however much the economics of comic-strip production and consumption is changing in the digital age, the humor of cartoons and comic strips remains constant. A joke is a joke after all, whether published in print or online.

Fig. 16. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 21 Jan., 2011.

Fig. 17. Blue, *Funny Times*, 6 Oct., 2004.

Fig. 18. Scott Hilbrun, *Argyle Sweater*, 4 April, 2016.

A good example of this can be seen in a cartoon the webcomic Mike Gruhn's uploaded to his popular *WebDonuts* website (**Fig. 16**). Here, Gruhn presents a variation of the Michelangelo as tortured artist motif we examined above. There are two humorous incongruities operating in this Gruhn's cartoon: 1) having an (unseen) Michelangelo already painting ceiling frescoes in his early childhood; and 2) the father's bafflement about how the child Michelangelo managed to paint on the ceiling. The joke is presented with a combination of visual and verbal elements, the most important

being the cartoon's title, without which the first incongruity is lost and the second falls flat. Given the context of the joke, the fact that the ceiling fresco is a childish drawing, rather than a more realistic painting which evokes an "associative inversion," is not problematic.

Mike Gruhn's 2011 webcomic is remarkably similar to others that have appeared both before and after it. For instance, in **Fig. 17**, a "cartoon of the week" published in the *Funny Times* in 2004, we see an angry mother scolding an unseen miscreant Michelangelo who has scribbled a picture on the ceiling that is even more childish than the one drawn by Gruhn's child artist; the mother's sandals and the crenelated borders of her dress vaguely suggest the 15th century. Similarly, the syndicated cartoonist Scot Hilbrun published in 2016 a cartoon on the same topic, depicting Michelangelo and his parents in full 15th-century garb, with the father speaking Shakespearean English (**Fig. 18**). Here too Michelangelo's scribbling is child-like, and Hilbrun supplies us with a helpful title as had Gruhn.

One might suspect that Gruhn had plagiarized the earlier *Funny Times* cartoon and that Hilbrun had in turn plagiarized either one of those; on the other hand, if one were feeling generous one might think that all three cartoons are independent inventions based on a common contemporary stereotype of Michelangelo. In fact, rather than plagiarism or independent invention, these three cartoons are indicative of a more fundamental mechanism at work when cartoonists or comic-strip artists create art- and archaeology-themed visual jokes. Once established, a comic situation—in this case, the child Michelangelo painting on the ceiling—becomes a cliché that other cartoonists and comic-strip artists can exploit to create novel jokes, becoming part of the visual language that artists expect their audience will immediately recognize. As Nick Newman observed in a 2020 *Spectator* article:

> Cartoonists are very keen on regurgitating the same image, or 'celebrating the cliché', as we like to call it. People stranded on desert islands, squashed hedgehogs, men on window ledges, lemmings jumping over cliffs — the list of clichéd cartoon situations is long. There's a common denominator that's always funny: peril. When you fall down a manhole it's a tragedy; when someone else falls down a manhole it's hilarious. When cartoonists draw yet another person on a psychiatrist's couch, it's not simply laziness but a desire to amuse one's colleague. It is a badge of honour among cartoonists to get a cliché published.

When viewers see a comic cliché of a given artist, a work of art, or an archaeological artifact, they are not required each time to decode afresh what Nancy Pedri has called the "re-presentation" of the quoted image or situation. Just as we don't need to parse the language when someone starts a "knock-knock" joke, so too we don't have to guess what to expect when we see a stock cartoon about an art- or archaeology-themed subject; instead, we say to ourselves, "oh, here is a Michelangelo-as-child cartoon—I wonder what comic twist is coming?" [Or, substitute a "Picasso-as-cubist comic," a "Dalí-melted-clocks comic," a "caveman comic," or any of the stock cartoon art and archaeology clichés we will explore in these essays.] And just as we don't know or care about who first came up with the idea of a "knock-knock" joke, so too our appreciation of the humor of a given stock comic art or archaeology situation is not dependent on knowing who might have originated the stereotype.

These stock cartoon clichés, like stock verbal jokes, are capable of being reconfigured into an almost infinite range of humorous variations. While the humor in each of our Michelangelo-as-child cartoons is grounded in the same temporal incongruity—the lad's precocious calling to produce ceiling art—each cartoonist has given it a secondary twist: Gruhn's father wonders how the child got up there; Blue gives us a hands-on-hips nagging mother; Hilbrun's father speaks in silly archaisms.

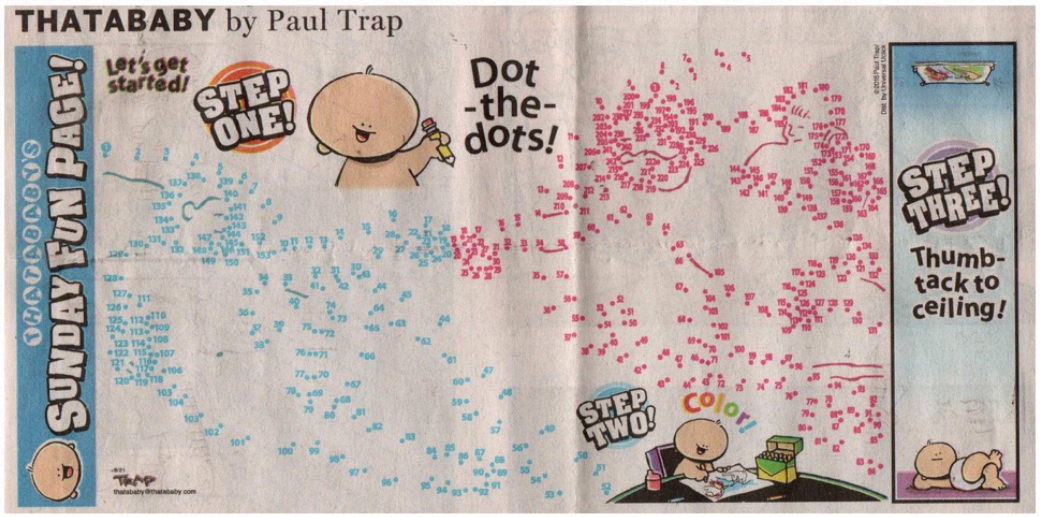

Fig. 19. Paul Trap, *Thatababy* 21 Aug., 2016.

Paul Trap's 2016 *Thatababy* comic (**Fig. 19**) is a creative variation on the child-drawing-on-the-ceiling motif, combining it with the humorous trope of the *Creation of Man* having been created by paint-by-numbers (cf. **Figs. 7** and **8** in the previous essay). As we will examine more fully in the "Kidding Art" section of the "Making Fun of Making

Art" essay below, one of the syndicated cartoonist Trap's favorite subjects is having the strip's eponymous, unnamed, baby create precocious works of art. Here, in this parody of a child's connect-the-dots coloring book, Trap's baby has created for his funny-page audience an incongruously complicated exercise that children are supposed to complete and somehow tack to the ceiling.

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Creating humor by the incongruous retro-projection of artists' works onto their childhoods is a trope that has been employed by several other cartoonists. A 1987 Gary Larson cartoon (**Fig. 20**), for instance, suggests that the young Pablo Picasso was already painting in a cubist style, albeit, given the misplaced eyes on his family's faces, a cubism that is humorously implied to be realistic. In this cartoon, Larson makes the viewer work to get his joke. No title (such as "A Young Picasso Brings Home His Report Card") is provided to help the viewer realize that the young boy is in fact Picasso; the viewer must use the visual cues to conclude that this "Pablo" is the Spanish artist, although the mother's wanting to meet the art teacher "face to face" does guide the viewer where to look.

Fig. 20. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, 26 March, 1987.

Fig. 21. Craig Malamut.

In contrast, the cartoon (**Fig. 21**) by the webcomic artist Craig Malamut does contain a title, "The young Salvador Dalí," to aid the viewer in understanding the incongruity of a boy putting a clock into a microwave oven. Unlike the titles in Mike Gruhn's and Scott Hilbrun's Migelangelo cartoons, however, Malamut's title is not strictly necessary for an appreciation of the cartoon's humor. Given the melted clocks on the counter, the coat rack, and the pet, viewers might be expected to figure out on their own that the Salvador here is the surrealist Dalí as a child, as Blue and Larson assume that viewers can get their Michelangelo and Picasso jokes without an explanatory title.

We might note that none of the humorous incongruities in these cartoons is fully resolved. In the end, we do not know how the young Michelangelo did manage to paint on the ceiling, how the *Thatababy* baby was able to create a connect-the-dots replica of the *Creation of Man*, why Picasso's parents have abstracted visages, or how the young Dali manages to melt clocks in a microwave.

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In addition to the temporal retro-projecting of these artist-as-child cartoons, there is a further "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly in that each is forward-projected onto a contemporary American setting. The cultural codes that the comics artists are assuming is shared by their viewers thus not only encompasses a basic understanding of cartoon conventions on the artistic styles of Michelangelo, Picasso, or Dalí, but also includes an appreciation of such American social phenomena as a child

scribbling on walls, a student bringing home a report card, or an angry, hands-on-hips, parent scolding an innocently mischievous youngster.

The helpful supplementary titles and clearly delineated word balloons of the more recent examples in our small sample of artist-as-child cartoons might suggest that cartoons and comic strips posted on the internet may be more easily deciphered than traditional print versions. Indeed, recent studies of internet humor indicate that online cartoons and comic strips tend to focus on global, youth-oriented, topics generally shared among contemporary Western capitalistic societies.

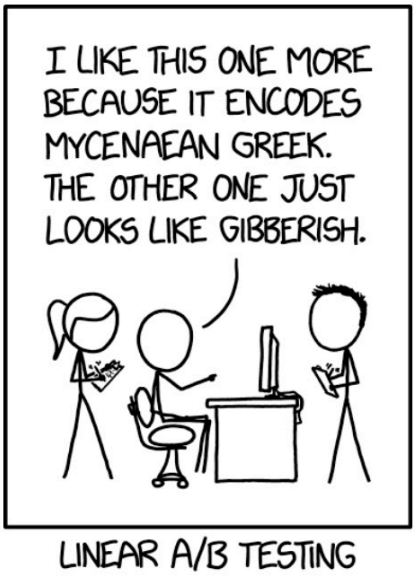

Fig. 22. Randall Munroe, "A/B", *xkcd*.com/2151, 19 May, 2019.

On the other hand, the internet also breeds insularity, and there are webcomics whose esoteric appeal is clearly limited. A good example of this is a cartoon (**Fig. 22**) posted by Randall Munroe on his website xkcd. Munroe, a computer scientist by training, uses minimalist stick-figure drawings to accompany his jokes, all of which are heavily text-dependent. While immensely popular among online communities, xkcd, which Munroe describes as "a webcomic of romance, sarcasm, math, and language," is geared to the well educated and would likely not be successful in a traditional print newspaper. To get this xkcd joke about the common market practice of using statistical A/B testing, for instance, a viewer would at least need to know that Linear A and Linear B were writing ancient systems used at the time of the Mycenaeans (ca. 1600–1200 B.C.E.); one might suspect that Munroe also assumed that his viewers were aware that the person (Michael Ventris) who deciphered Linear B as an early form of Greek had been a code-breaker during WWII. The cartoon is also supplied with a mouseover

alternative text: "We wrote our site in Linear A rather than Aksara Kawi because browser testing showed that Crete script rendered faster than Java script". To get the alt text pun on the web browser scripting language Javascript, the reader must know that Linear A and Aksara Kawi were writing systems that had been used, respectively, on the islands of Crete and Java; it is not clear if Munroe was aware that Linear A remains an undeciphered script, a fact which somewhat detracts from his joke.

[Munroe's use of a mouseover alt text to add an "authorial presence" to his cartoon is an example of what Frank Bramlett has identified as a "metacomic" breaking of the fourth wall—a topic we address at greater length in the "Amusing Metafictional Mashups" section of the "Making Fun of Making Art" essay below.]

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When the biologist Richard Dawkins introduced the concept of the "meme" in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, he couldn't have had any idea how this term would be transmogrified in the digital age. For Dawkins, a meme is the cultural equivalent of a gene, a small unit of cultural information—such as a musical melody, a clothing fashion, or an advertising catchphrase—that is transmitted from person to person by copying or imitation. Dawkins maintained that, like genes, there is fierce competition among memes for hosts, the successful meme being well suited to its sociocultural environment while the unsuccessful meme becomes extinct. In the past decade, however, the term "meme" has almost exclusively been used to refer to an internet meme—any online posting that has "gone viral," especially those that take the form of a funny photograph or of an image and a text combined in a humorous way. Unlike Dawkins' units of cultural information, which could take months or years to be widely replicated, a successful internet meme can go viral in a matter of days. And unlike Dawkins' memes, which, once established, tend to remain in the cultural body for significant periods of time, an internet meme, such as a LOLcat posting, can receive thousands or millions of likes or heart emojis one day and disappear into cyberspace the next.

Art- and archaeology-themed online memes tend to use images that are denoted rather than connoted—i.e. the humor of the internet meme depends only on the relationship of the text to the formal elements of the image, as opposed to being dependent on the decoding of embedded cultural connotations inherent in the image

itself, such as we have seen in the artist-as-child cartoon parodies of the art of Michelangelo, Picasso, or Dalí.

Fig. 23. Meme of Jacques-Louis David, *Madame François Buron*, 1769. Art Institute, Chicago.

A good example of the former, denoted, type is **Fig. 23**, a meme in which the depicted woman's demeanor, with hand to the forehead, downcast face, and eyes looking straight at the viewer, is humorously suggested by the text to represent regret. The viewer of this meme is not expected to know that the photo is of an early oil painting by David of his aunt or or that her coy demeanor is related to an 18th-century concern with problematic female sexuality enflamed by reading the new genre of romantic novels (for more on which, cf. Bollmann 2008, and Inmann 2009); one suspects that the creator of the meme was also ignorant of the context of the image. The incongruity of decade-old Facebook posts taking the form of an 18th century book is left unanswered.

Online memes with denoted art- and archaeology-themed images exist by the myriads on the internet and are shared on blogs and Pinterest sites where the lack of censoring can allow for jokes too risqué for a family newspaper. A few examples:

Fig. 24. Meme of Orazio Gentileschi, *Danaë and the Shower of Gold*, 1621–1623. J. Paul Getty Museum.

Apparently, the creator of the **Fig. 24** meme was not only unconcerned with the art historical issues surrounding this late work by Orazio Gentileschi—painted in Genoa at a time when his daughter Artemisia had already gained recognition as an accomplished artist in her own right—but the meme creator also fundamentally misunderstood what the painting represents. In the Greek myth, when Danaë's father, King Acricius, learned from an oracle that his daughter would bear a son who would kill him, he locked her away in a bronze chamber; unfortunately for Acricius, Zeus espied the beautiful Danaë from afar and rained down upon her an impregnating golden shower, leading to the birth of the hero Perseus. As anyone with even a vague awareness of classical mythology knows, the gold coins in the Gentileschi painting are coming *down*, not being tossed *up* as the meme text suggests. It would seem that the meme creator and the implied viewer are not members of this set of *cognoscenti.*

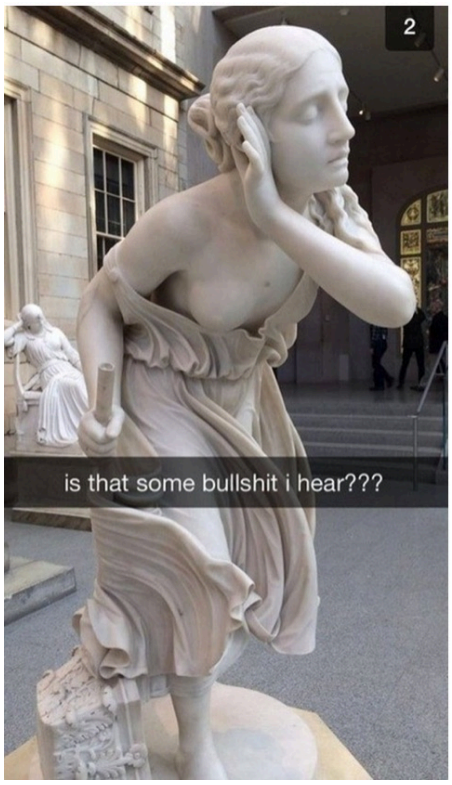

Fig. 25. Meme of Randolph Rogers, *Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii*, 1855–1856. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 26. Meme of Edgar Degas, *L'Absinthe*, 1875–1876. Musée d'Orsay.

A similar lack of concern about the cultural context of the usurped image can be seen in the **Fig. 25** meme. Based on Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, the Randolph Rogers statue in the Metropolitan Museum—one of over a hundred examples Rogers replicated—represents the poignant, fictional, story of a blind slave girl who heroically leads her companions out of Pompeii during the 79 A.D. eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Knowing that the statue's cocked ear is emblematic of a disability turned into a virtue—Nydia's superior hearing helps her find her way out of the city when others are blinded by the falling ash—takes the edge off of the meme's crude joke.

One would hope that the creator and viewer recognized Degas' famous 1875 painting *L'Absinthe* used in the **Fig. 26** meme. Nonetheless, the meme text refers only to the contemporary world of New Year Eve parties, ignoring Degas' commentary on the *demi monde* of late 19th century Parisian absinthe drinkers.

Other examples of memes that use denoted works of art whose recognition by the viewer is assumed but whose cultural coding is not relevant to the joke include **Figs. 27**, **28**, and **29**.

Fig. 27. Meme of Michelangelo, *The Sistine Chapel*, 1508–1512.

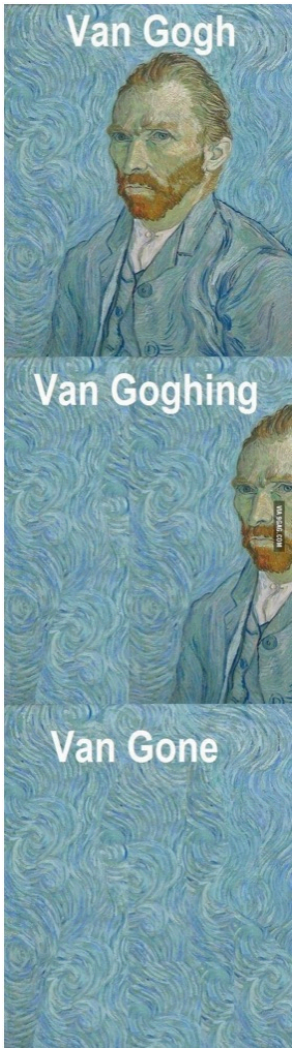

Fig. 28. Meme of Vincent van Gogh, *Self Portrait*, 1889. Musée d'Orsay.

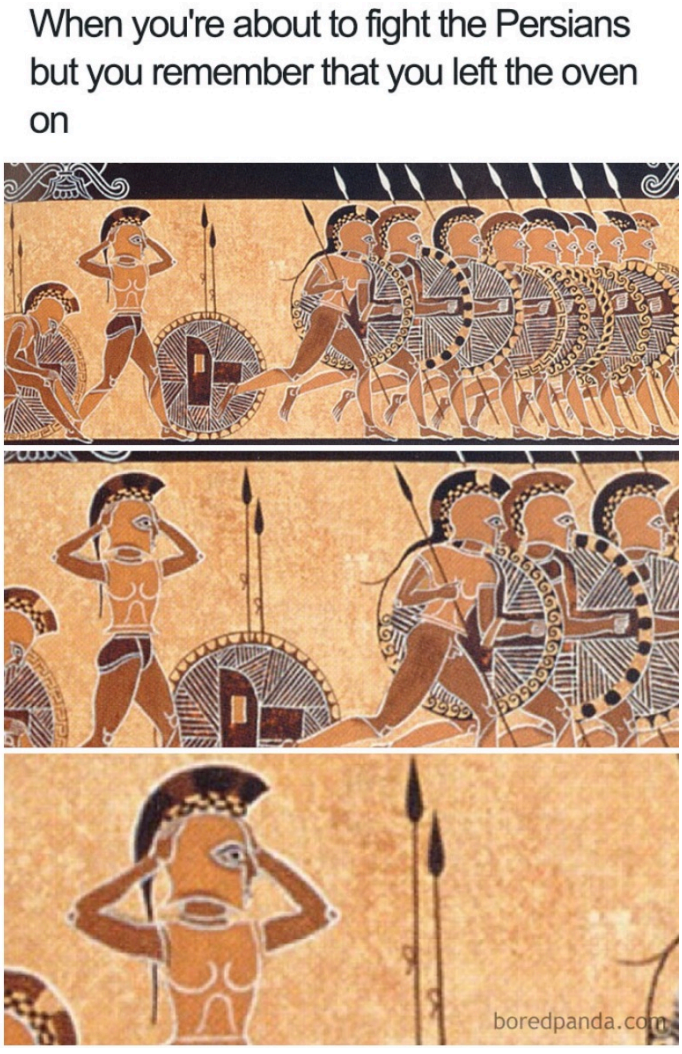

Fig. 29. Meme of the *Chigi Vase*, ca. 650 BCE. Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, Rome.

As we observed in our discussion of cartoons and comic strips about Michelangelo's *Creation of Man* fresco, one sub-category involves an implied conversation between God and Adam. The **Fig. 27** meme fits this sub-category, although it breaks the newspaper-cartoon taboo against showing Adam's genitalia; moreover, its sexually explicit text —"just the tip" is urban slang for inserting a penis only partially into a vagina—would seem to be inappropriately blasphemous for a famous work of art in the Vatican.

The meme of Van Gogh's painting, **Fig. 28**, does depend on the viewer knowing that this famous work is a self portrait, although what this painting has to say, for instance, about Van Gogh as a tortured artist plays no part in the atrocious pun of the meme text. One hardly need add that the pun only works with the typical American mispronunciation of the artist's last name, which the Pronunciation Unit of the BBC recommends should be rendered with "the established Anglicisation van GOKH (-v as in vet, -g as in get, -kh as in Scottish loch)."

The **Fig. 29** meme requires a recognition that the image comes from an ancient Greek pot, although the viewer is apparently not supposed to be concerned by the fact that the Chigi Vase—a Middle Protocorinthian olpe found in an Etruscan tomb near Veii —dates to circa 650 BCE, more than a century and a half *before* the Persian Wars. The viewers of this meme are also apparently not to worry their pretty little heads over the fact that the replicated illustration is a modern rendition of the vase painting and that, in fact, the soldier supposedly putting his hands to his head in dismay is actually a hypothetical reconstruction of a warrior putting on his helmet that is based on a single a preserved painted line taken to be part of an elbow (**Fig. 30**).

Fig. 30. Detail of the upper frieze of the *Chigi Vase*, ca. 650 BCE. Villa Giulia, Rome.

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Photo: Antonio Guillem/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Fig. 31. Antonio Guillem, "Disloyal man with his girlfriend looking at another girl," 2015.

One of the most popular internet memes in recent years is Antonio Guillem's "Disloyal man with his girlfriend looking at another girl", more commonly known as "the distracted boyfriend" (**Fig. 31**). Although it appears to be a casual snapshot of a hip young man checking out a (slightly out of focus) passing woman while his girlfriend looks on disapprovingly, in fact this photograph taken in Girona, Spain, was carefully planned, using paid models. Guillem uploaded the photo under copyright to Shutterstock in 2015, but when it went viral in 2017 he chose not to take any legal action against people who were copying or modifying it "in good faith."

Fig. 32. Meme based on Guillem (2015), 2017.

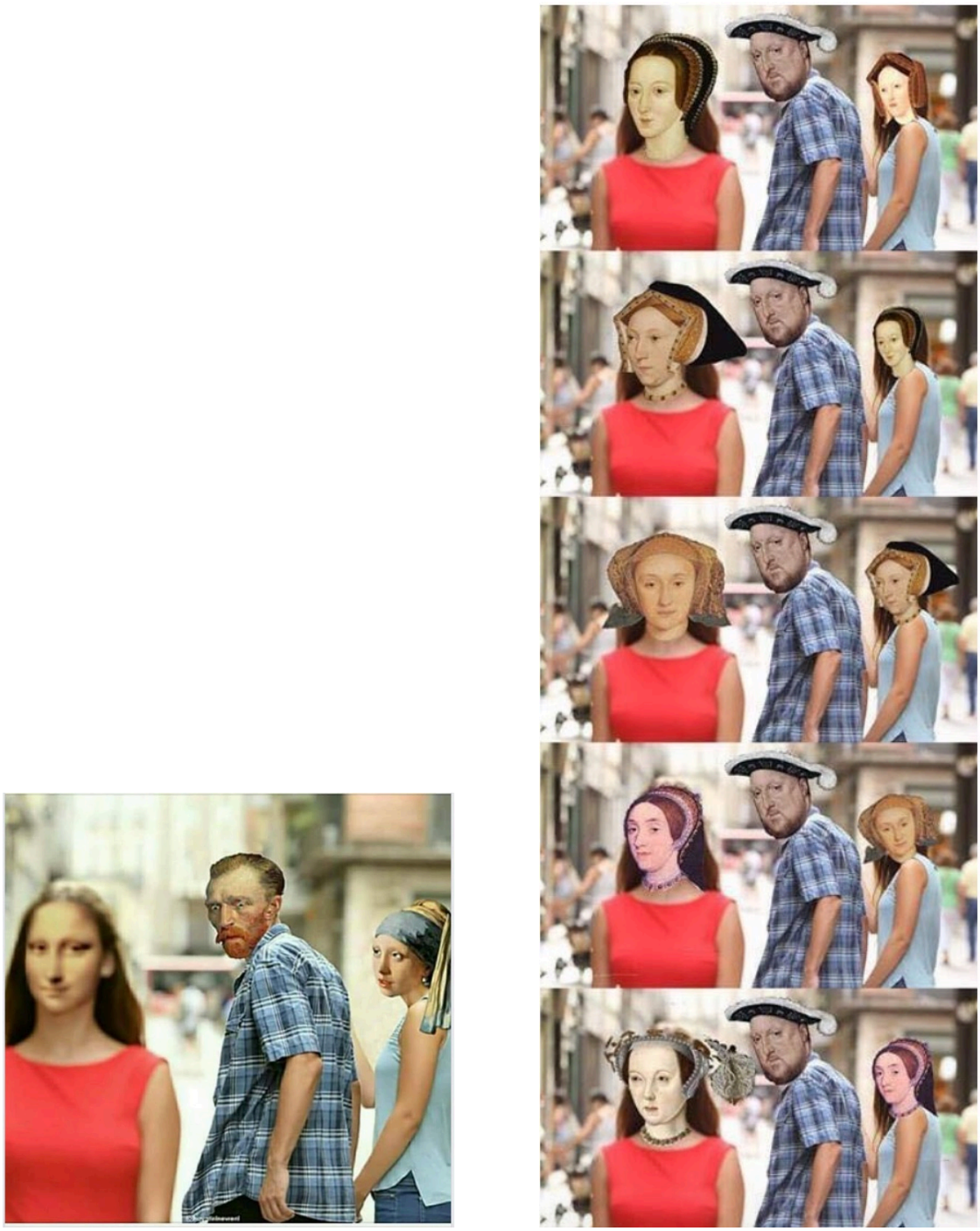

Fig. 33. Two memes based on Guillem (2015), 2018.

Guillem's Distracted Boyfriend photograph has been frequently modified to create art-themed memes. **Fig. 32**, for instance, uses three rather awkwardly superimposed texts—inexplicably rendered in three separate fonts—to humorously suggest that the man's supposed interest in art is not all that deep. The meme on the left of **Fig. 33** features photoshopped heads of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, a version of a Van Gogh self portrait, and Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*; while these modifications bring a chuckle to those familiar with the Guillem photograph, it is unclear whether the

photoshopper is really suggesting that Van Gogh had been interested in earlier Dutch masters but is now tempted by the art of the Italian renaissance. A more humorous example of a photoshopped version of the Guillem image is **Fig. 33**, right, where the man is depicted with a version of the (lost) Holbein portrait of Henry VIII, and the women's faces form a successive series of portraits of Henry's six wives; one needs only to be generally aware of Henry VIII's troubled marital history to get the joke.

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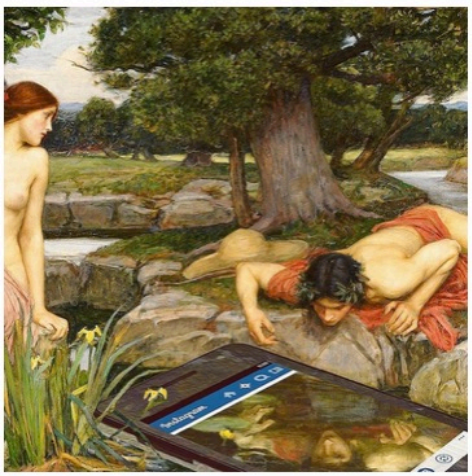


Fig. 34. Dan Cretu, Composites (from Richman-Abdou, 2017).

Using a well known work of art as an "image macro" for an internet meme is not the only way one can make a visual art joke. The Romanian artist and photographer Dan Cretu, who had earlier gained notoriety for his Arcimboldo-esque photographs of food arranged into the shape of everyday objects, has recently created humorous photographic composites using elements of familiar works of art (**Fig. 34**). The humor in some of Cretu's composites come from his photoshopping faces from iconic paintings onto everyday scenes that would be quite familiar to contemporary audiences; the first three examples in **Fig. 34**, for instance, give us: a Van Gogh interviewing a Mona Lisa on NBC's *The Tonight Show;* Van Gogh and Mona Lisa—joined by Caravaggio's *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, Botticelli's *Venus*, and Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*—as the cast of NBC's television show *Friends*; and the same faces photoshopped onto the cast of NBC's show *Baywatch*. Another humorous tactic that Cretu uses is to incongruously contemporize a famous work of art: inserting a McDonald's into the background of Veronese's 1583 *The Wedding Feast at Cana*; sinking a smartphone into the reflecting

pool of John William Waterhouse's 1903 *Echo and Narcissus*; replacing the leaves of a 1907 Monet *Water Lillies* with US dollar bills; putting the Louvre's Hellenistic *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* into a tanning bed; having Michelangelo's 1504 *David* blow a bubble-gum bubble; or wrapping Klimt's 1908 *The Kiss* in a taco. Cretu assumes that viewers will at least realize that his photoshopped faces or modified paintings come from famous works of art, although one need not recognize all of his art references to appreciate the humor of Cretu's composites.

Fig. 35. Shusaku Takaoka, Collages (from Barnes, 2017).

The Japanese graphic designer Shusaku Takaoka has also created a series of photoshopped collages very similar to those of Dan Cretu (**Fig. 35**). Takaoka's modified photographs make us smile as we imagine what characters from famous paintings would look like if they were reincarnated as modern urban youths. To get the humor in Takaoka's collages, we the viewers do need to recognize his art references, and thus Takaoka has tended to photoshop faces from the most iconic paintings, such as Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* or the Van Gogh self-portrait.

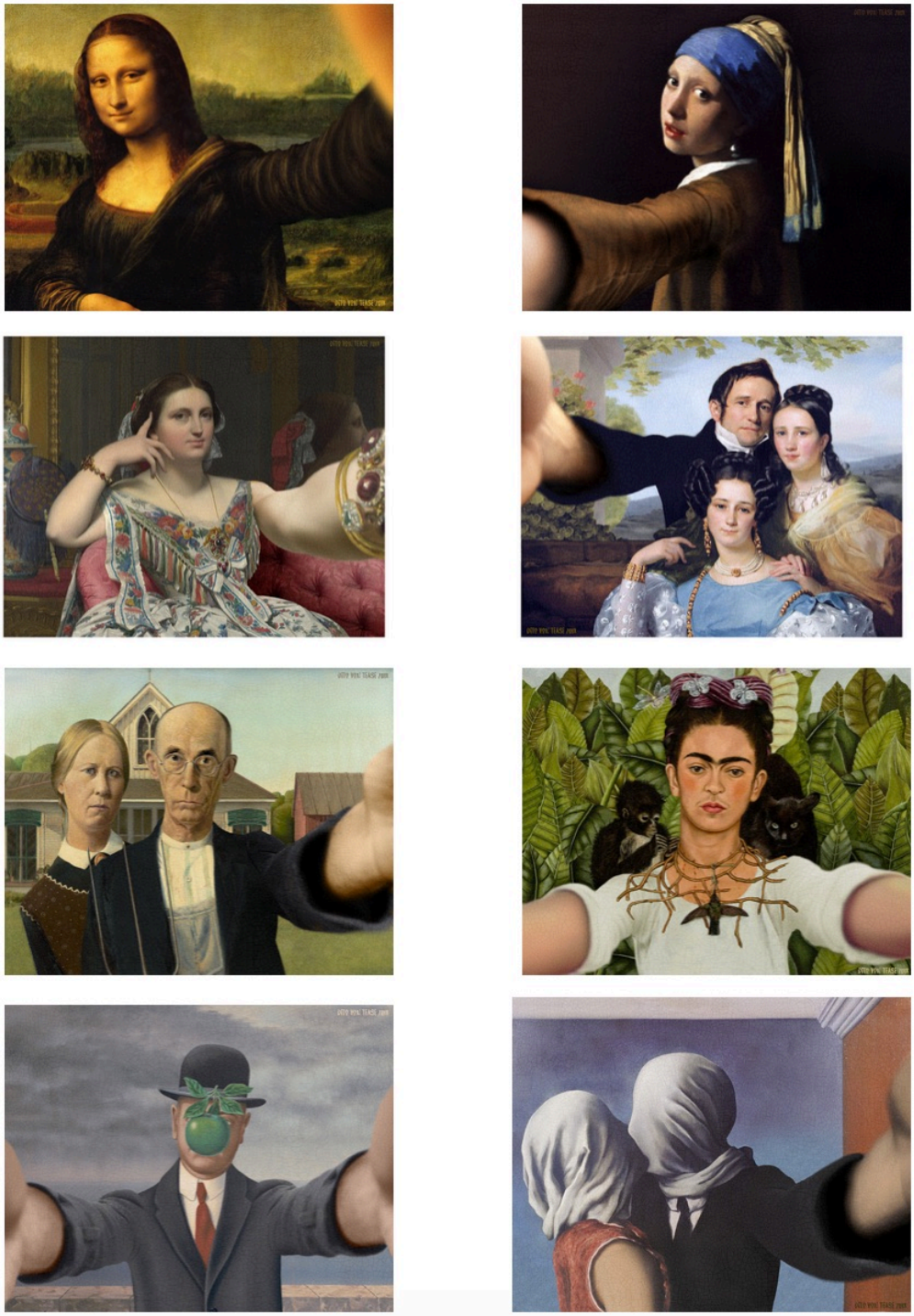


Fig. 36. Ditto Von Tease, *Classicool*, 2018 (from Taggart, 2019).

An artist from Bologna, Italy, who goes by the pseudonym "Dito Von Tease" (a reference to the *nom de l'artiste* of the "Queen of the Burlesque" dancer and fetish model Dita Von Teese) has recently created a series of what he calls *Classicool* paintings—famous portrait paintings modified to look like they were selfies (**Fig. 36**). As Von Tease describes them on his Facebook page:

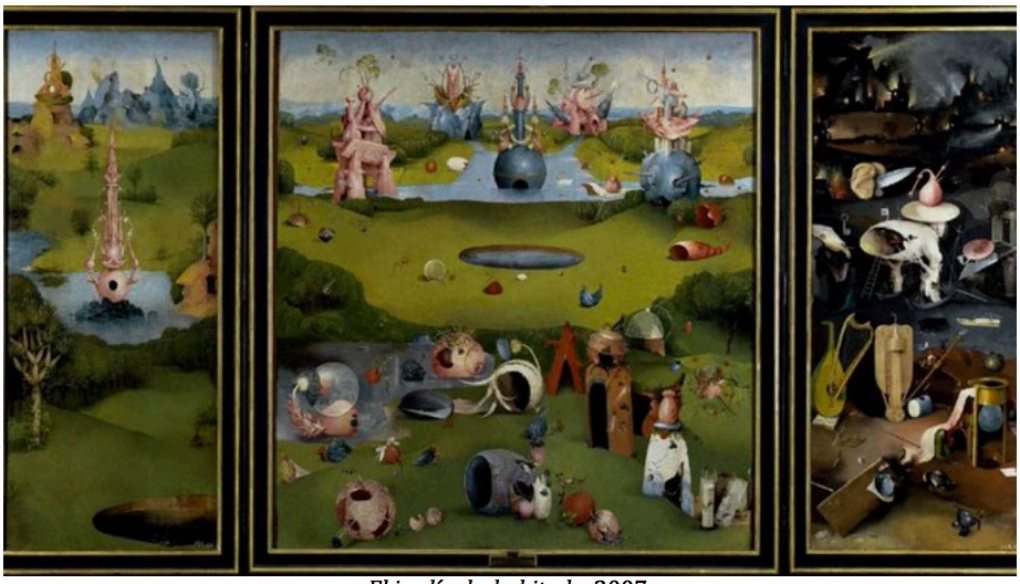
> In Classicool the subjects of the paintings abandon their classical pose by literally taking the canvas to "paint themselves". The classic works, some of the most famous self-portraits and portraits in the world, come back to life within a digital ecosystem as social networks. Not just meme shared on social networks, but finished and detailed artworks, like real paintings of the past, showing subjects in authentic and modern selfie poses. An iconoclastic project that blends together two apparently heterogeneous aesthetics, creating an ironic and surprising result.

For Von Tease, the irony of his reconfigured *Classicool* paintings is in the projection of the contemporary phenomenon of taking smart-phone selfies back onto the age of portrait painting:

> Taking selfies is a social and aesthetic practice facilitated by the democratization of photography and increasingly accessible technological tools. The possibility to easily share self-portraits on social networks has decreed their rapid diffusion and success. The selfie phenomenon is not only linked to narcissism of post-modern society, but also to technological availability.
>
> Before the birth of photography, self-portraits were practiced only by painters to leave a trace to posterity and portraits were commissioned by powerful people to celebrate their essence, their wealth and their physiognomy. Century after century, portraits and self-portraits have gradually passed from private to public exhibition and have cut off all kinds of mediation. Painters, photographers, artists and image professionals are no longer needed.

Like many internet memes, the original portrait paintings Von Tease has chosen to modify are denoted rather than connoted—that is, the ironic comment the Italian artist is making about the "narcissism of post-modern society" is not dependent on our decoding cultural connotations we ascribe to these paintings. The mysteriousness of La Gioconda, the exoticism of the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the bourgeoise complacency of 19th-century Neo-Classical aristocratic portraits, the stoicism of the American Gothic couple, the masochism of Kahlo's self-portraits, or the surrealism of Magritte's faceless people are not particularly relevant to the "humorous ucronía" irony of portraying them as taking a selfie. To get the point of these *Classicool* paintings, we are only required to recognize them as modifications of "classic works," and we need not be able to identify each of the original paintings in order to appreciate Von Tease's "iconoclastic project." Of course one would hope that, in the selection of Von Tease's *Classicool*s presented in **Fig. 36**, everyone would recognize da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, and Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, and at least be able identify the artists in

Von Tease's parodies of Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* and of Magritte's *The Son of Man* and *The Lovers*. One suspects that fewer people could identify Ingres' 1856 *Portrait of Madame Moitessier* or Francois-Joseph Navez's 1832 *Théodore Joseph Jonet and his Two Daughters*, although their 19th-century bourgeoise context is probably readily apparent.



El jardín deshabitado. 2007.

Última cena. 2010.

Lugar para un nacimiento. 2012.

El bosque italiano. 2008.

La ciudad. 2012.

Lugar para el homenaje. 2012.

Lugar de caza. 2008.

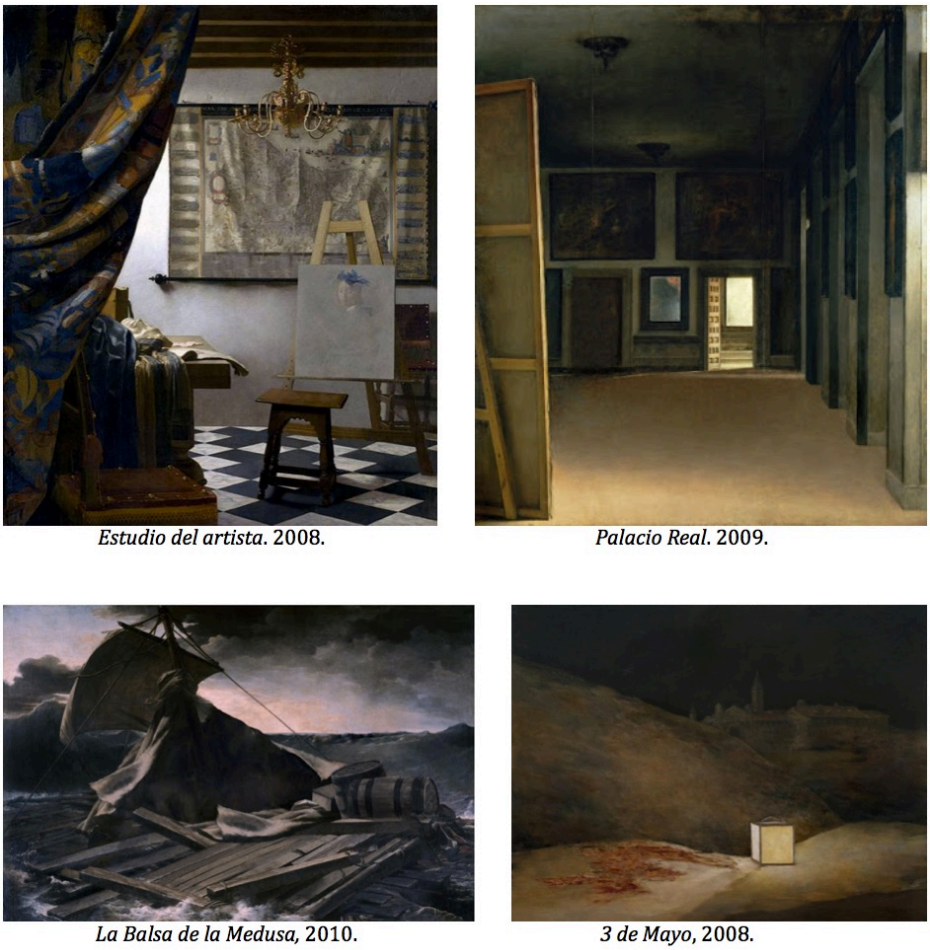


Fig. 37. José Manuel Ballester. Photographs on canvas, 2007–2012.

The Spanish artist José Manuel Ballester has pursued a different approach to manipulating famous paintings. In a series of photographs printed on canvases (**Fig. 37**), Ballester has removed all the human figures from the paintings, leaving behind a ghostly image that forces us to contemplate a world without human actors. (Ballester's photographs have become particularly popular on social media during the social distancing of the COVID-19 pandemic.) Unlike the Von Tease paintings, these Ballester pastiches do require the viewer to at least be vaguely familiar with the famous paintings on which they are based—Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1510); da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1495–1498); Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1485) and *The Story of Nastagio deli Onesti* (1483); Giotto's *The Expulsion of the Devils from Arezzo* (1297–1299) and *Homage of a Simple Man* (1300); Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* (1565); Vermeer's *The Allegory of Painting* (1666–1668); Velázquez' *Las Meninas* (1656); Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819); and Goya's *The Third of May* (1814). However, like the Von Tease pastiches, the art works quoted by Ballester are denoted

rather than connoted—that is, we are not being asked to evaluate Ballester's depopulated images in light of the symbolism we attribute to the originals. Nevertheless, having such a "culturally bound background knowledge" of the original paintings does add to our appreciation of the sense of human alienation Ballester is striving to achieve, especially when the quoted art work involves acts of human violence, such as with the the Bosch, the Botticelli's *The Story of Nastagio deli Onesti*, the Géricault, and the spilled blood in Goya's painting of the 1808 massacre.

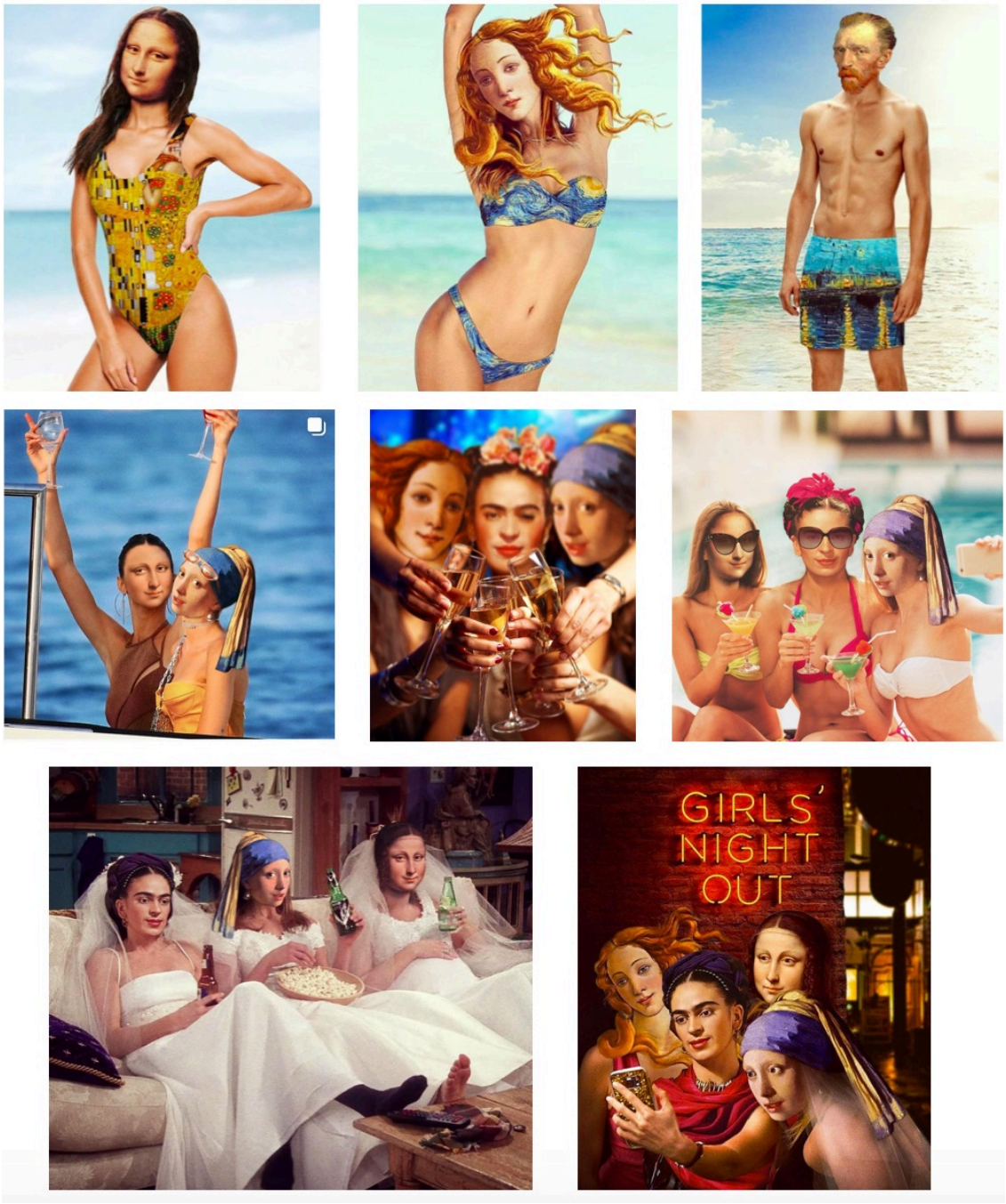


Fig. 38. Ertan Atay, 28 June, 2018, 4 Sept., 2019, 16 Feb., 2018, 20 Aug., 2018, 4 Feb., 2020, 6 Sept., 2019, 23 Feb., 2020, 23 Feb., 2020, 9 Aug., 2018, 29 Oct., 2018, and 15 April, 2018.

One of the most prolific manipulator of image macros of famous paintings in the past few years is the Turkish graphic designer and photographer Etan Atay, who publishes his work on his "Failunfailunmefailun" Instagram and Facebook accounts. On his Instagram page Atay explains, in somewhat broken English, his motivation:

> My starting point is the though of "Everything that attracts attention and make one want to take a second look is special." I like to make difference in perception. I am interested in painting, Renaissance paintings in particular and i like to put them together with modern times. But apart from this, i have satirical photo manipulation works and different tryings.

Like Dan Cretu and Shusaku Takaoka, Etan Atay has had fun photoshopping images from famous portraits into incongruous "urchronía" settings, being especially fond of the *Mona Lisa*, Botticelli's *Venus*, and Van Gogh's and Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, as well as the artists Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and Andy Warhol (**Fig. 38**). And, like

Dito Von Tease and José Manuel Ballester, Atay has played with manipulating real works of art, such as using Van Eyck's 1420 *The Ghent Altarpiece* to parody the phenomenon of "sexting" posts being shared on the internet, adding an obscene gesture to Magritte's 1964 *The Son of Man*, and transforming Maurizio Cattelan's 2019 *The Comedian* (the controversial work consisting of a banana duct-taped to a wall, one version of which sold for $120,00 at Miami's Art Basel in December 2019) into a parody of the *Mona Lisa* (**Fig. 39**). In a series of manipulated art images from 8 March, 2019, Atay transformed the *Mona Lisa* and the *Girl with Pearl Earring* into versions of J. Howard Miller's iconic 1943 *We Can Do It* poster, and—just in case his viewers didn't get the message—added a "Girl Power" text to a fist-pumping Frida Kahlo (**Fig 40**).

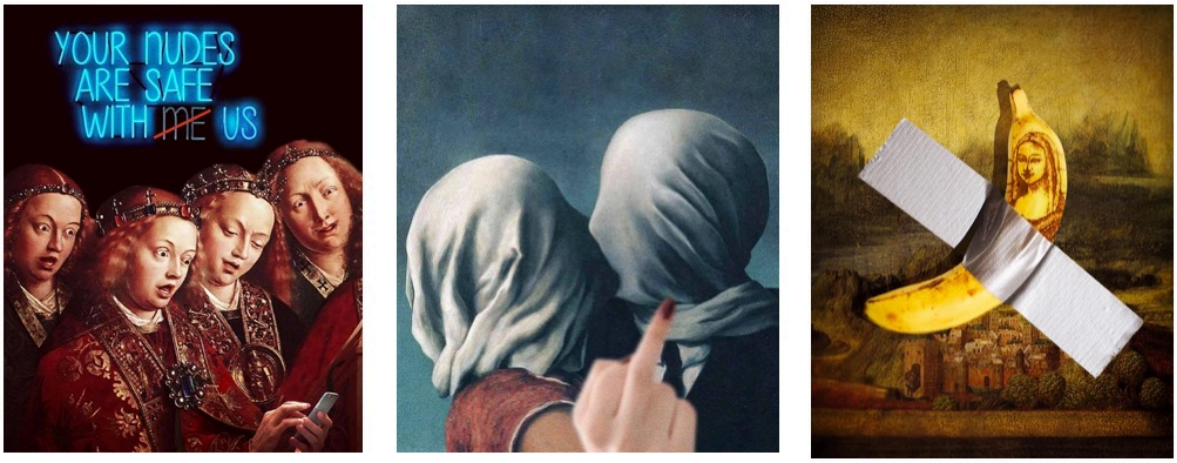


Fig. 39. Ertan Atay, 27 Aug., 2019, 20 July, 2018, and 23 Feb., 2020.

Fig. 40. Ertan Atay, 8 March, 2019.

In 2018, Atay imagined what the *Mona Lisa*, Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* or the Van Gogh self-portrait would look like if they were transformed into photographs (**Fig. 41**). The next year, in a similar vein, Atay postulated what the *Mona Lisa*, the *Girl*

with a Pearl Earring or Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* would have looked like if they had been painted when the subjects were children (**Fig 42**).

Fig. 41. Ertan Atay, 20 Feb., 2018 and 29 Nov., 2018.

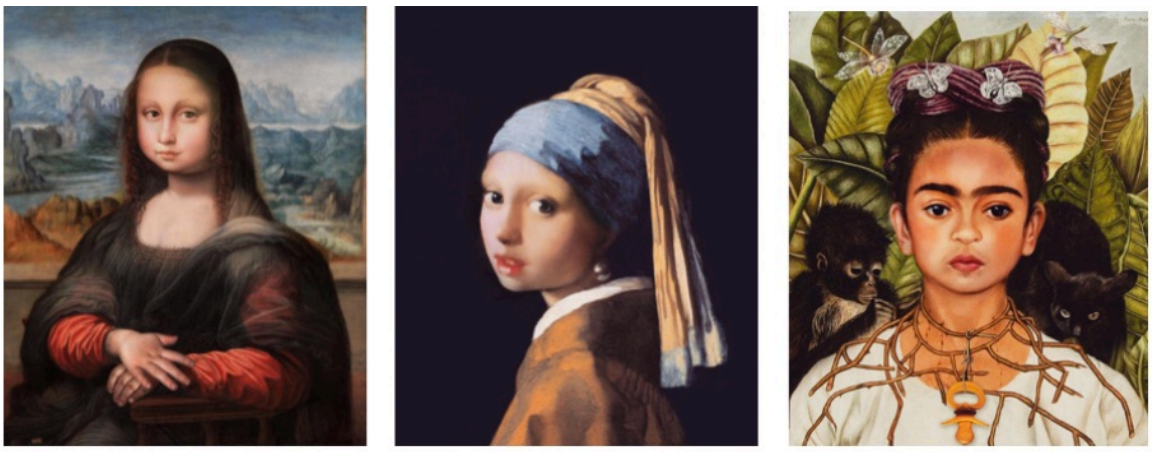


Fig. 42. Ertan Atay, 20 May, 2019.

Fig. 43. Ertan Atay, 12 April, 2018.

In another arresting series from 2018, Atay manipulated photographs of nature to allude to famous works of art (**Fig. 43**), giving us branches transformed into *The Creation of Adam*, a tree trunk coming alive as the *Scream*, a (scallop, not an oyster?) shell reflecting the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, and a butterfly metamorphosed into *Starry Night*.

Fig. 44. Ertan Atay, 27 Aug., 2019, and 5 Dec., 2018.

Fig. 45. Ertan Atay, 7 May, 2018, 5 Dec., 2018, ,and 27 Sept., 2018.

Etan Atay has also created photographic art mash-ups by attaching fragments of real paintings to random photographs, such as putting the *Mona Lisa* on the body of a fashion model or attaching Grant Wood's *American Gothic* to the body of a modern couple (**Fig. 44**). Atay has, in addition, created photographic art collages of iconic photographs where the viewer is expected to recognize both the photograph as well as

the attached art (**Fig**. **45**), adding the *Mona Lisa* to Dorthea Lange's 1936 *Migrant Mother*, Klimt's *The Kiss* to Alfred Eisenstaedt's 1945 *V-J Day in Times Square*, a Bouguereau-esque woman and Cupid to Marilyn Monroe subway-vent shot from the 1955 movie *The Seven Year Itch*, Botticelli's *Venus* to a John Lennon and Yoko Ono 1969 *Bed-In for Peace* photo, the *Last Supper* to the 1932 *Lunch atop a Skyscraper*, the *Scream* to the 1968 photo of the assassination of Nguyễn Văn Lém in Vietnam, and John Williams Waterhouse's 1908 *The Soul of the Rose* to Marc Riboud's *The Ultimate Confrontation: The Flower and the Bayonet* photograph of Jan Rose Kasmir protesting in 1967 at the Pentagon.

Fig. 46. Ertan Atay, 9 Sept., 2018, 29 Aug., 2018, 11 Dec., 2018, and 10 Jan, 2020.

As exemplars of popular culture, Etan Atay's "satirical photo manipulation works" are particularly attuned to famous personalities, such as with his collages pairing Michael Jackson with the *Scream*, Benedict Cumberbatch with Van Gogh's 1889 *Self-Portrait*, Natalie Portman (from the 1995 movie *Leon the Professional*) with Sir Frederic Leighton's 1895 *Flaming June*, and Adam Driver with a Modigliani (**Fig**. **46**).

☺ ☺

We should note that the metafictional art mashups created by Dan Cretu, Shusaku Takaoka, Dito Von Tease, José Manuel Ballester, and Etan Atay differ from art-themed internet memes in that these parodies are the creations of serious artists making ironic, post-modern, comments about our contemporary society and that, while these graphic artists may use humor in making those comments, their goal is not simply to elicit a smile.

☺ ☺

Fig. 47. Meme of Caveman Spongebob.

Internet memes with art and archaeology themes are not only made from co-opted image macros fine art but can also be created by using icons from popular culture. **Fig. 47**, for instance, is a meme based on the Caveman SpongeBob cartoon—a Neanderthal-like ancestor of the title character of the TV cartoon series, depicted with a projecting fanged jaw and loincloth. The general cultural code embedded in Caveman SpongeBob memes derives from early interpretations of Neanderthals as brutish savages—a view based in part on Marcellin Boule's 1911 reconstruction of the Neanderthal skeleton of an old man discovered at the site of La Chapelle-aux-Saints in France, the most complete Neanderthal remains known at that time; as we now realize, however, Boule failed to recognize the severe osteoarthritis of the bones and thus suggested that all Neanderthals had brutish forward-thrusting skulls, curved backs, and short bowed legs. Rather than being a serious commentary about the nature of our

ancestors, of course, the Caveman SpongeBob meme shown here, like other internet memes about the past, is only used as a prop to make a commentary about the contemporary world.

The insurance company Geico's "It's so simple, even a caveman can do it" ad campaign, first aired in 2004, presents a clever variation of the Neanderthal-as-brute code. These Geico commercials feature a sophisticated, urbane, Neanderthal man dressed in modern clothing being offended by the aspersions cast on the intelligence of his species. The Geico Caveman is a modern embodiment of 20th century revisionism of the Neanderthal-as-brute interpretation: in 1939, the anthropologist Carlton Coon published a drawing of the La Chapelle-aux-Saints Neanderthal who, depicted with a shaven face and a hat, is indistinguishable from a modern human; and in 1957 the American anatomists William Strauss and A.J.E. Cave wrote in the *Quarterly Review of Biology*: "If [the Neanderthal] could be reincarnated and placed in a New York subway—provided that he were bathed, shaved, and dressed in modern clothing—it is doubtful whether he would attract any more attention than some of its other denizens."

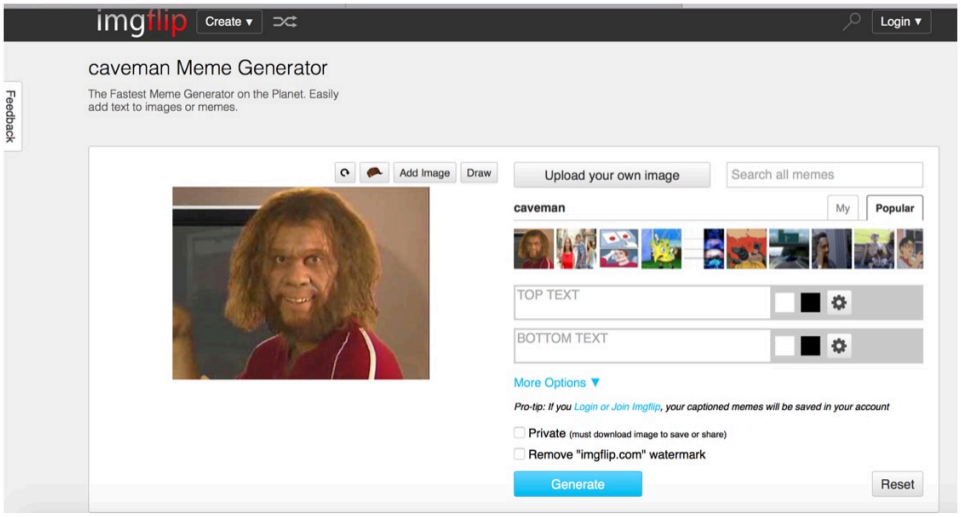


Fig. 48. The imgflip.com "caveman Meme Generator".

The "pass-the-subway-test" Geico Caveman has inspired a raft of internet memes—the imgflip website even has a "caveman Meme Generator" that allows users to create their own memes (**Fig. 48**). One of these caveman memes (**Fig. 49**) appears to be a tongue-in-cheek commentary about the faddish Paleo diet made popular in a series of books published by the American nutritionist Loren Cordain between 2002 and 2012. Cordain mistakenly asserted we would be more healthy if we ate only foods available to our hunting-and-gathering, pre-Neolithic, ancestors; the Paleo diet—also know as the

caveman or stone-age diet—in fact can lead to nutritional problems such as inadequate calcium intake and severe diarrhea. The humor of the **Fig. 49** meme is unclear, however, as the whole point of Cordain's Paleo diet is that we should to go back to a more "natural" way of eating.

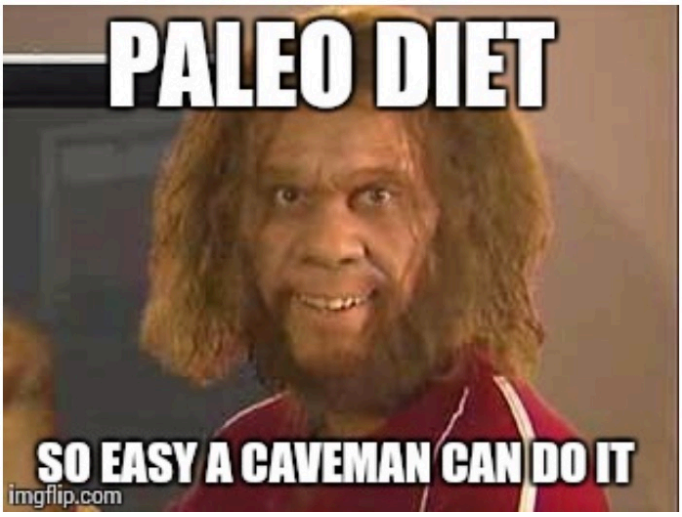


Fig. 49. A Geico Caveman meme.

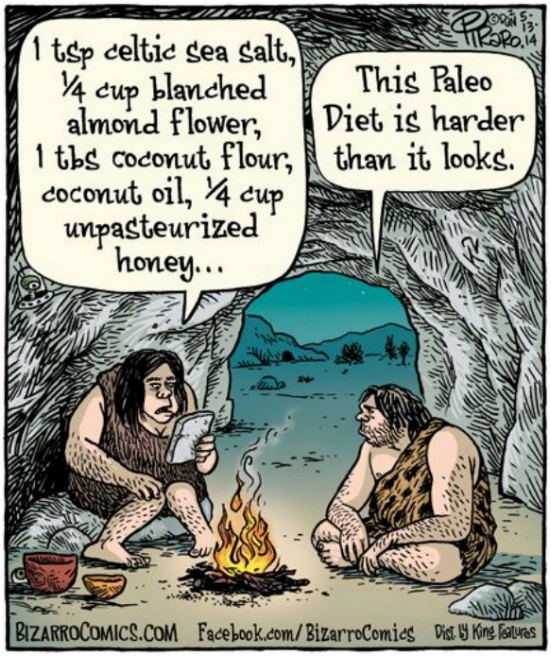


Fig. 50. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 15 May, 2014.

The Paleo diet/caveman diet fad has also inspired a number of cartoonists, both from traditional print media as well as from webcomics. The syndicated cartoonist Dan Piraro, for instance (**Fig. 50**), gives us a prehistoric couple (depicted with the stereotype of Neanderthals as having hairy bodies, curved backs, and projecting skulls) who are engaged in the decidedly modern activity of cooking from a recipe—here humorously

shown as being written on a stone tablet. The projection of contemporary cuisine onto the past, however, is not the only "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly represented in this cartoon. As is typical of almost all cartoons and comic strips of "cavemen," the cave is represented as the equivalent of a modern home. Usually depicted from just inside the cave opening, the cartoon caveman cave is a place of permanent residence, where families cook, converse, and put decorative paintings on the wall. Although our Paleolithic ancestors did indeed utilize caves and rock shelters, these bands of hunter-gatherers certainly did not occupy them year-round, much less turn them into typical American dwellings.

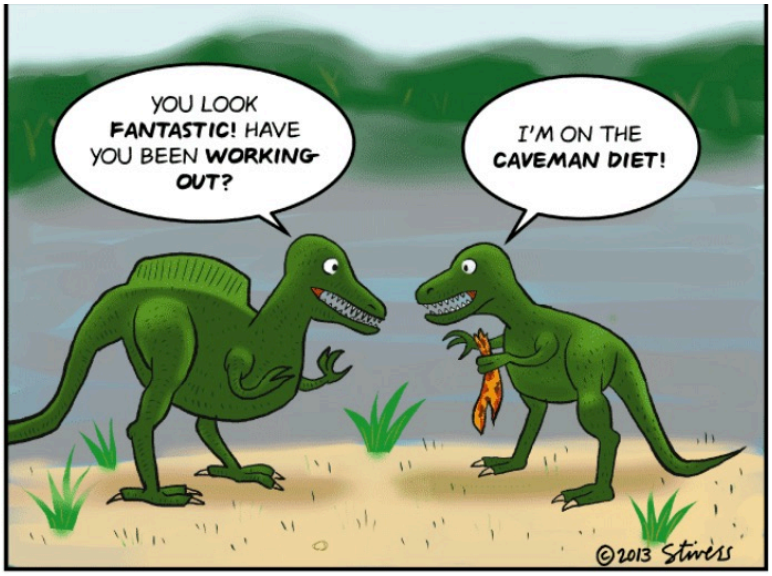


Fig. 51. Mark Stevers, 2013.

The webcomic artist Mark Stevers published a caveman diet cartoon (**Fig. 51**) that relies on another common comic stereotype of the Paleolithic age, namely the contemporaneity of early humans and dinosaurs. The art historian John Glaves-Smith explains why this temporal anomaly remains a perennial source of humor:

> With the exception of precocious schoolboys and other specialists in the field, most of us find it hard to differentiate between the vast wastes of prehistory. While we do not really believe that early man hunted the brontosaurus, we tend to see them as part of the same world, distance having marred our powers of making distinctions. What the cartoonist does is to make a clarified image of our own confusions.

[We return to cartoon representations of cavemen living with dinosaurs in "Introduction" to Part III below.]

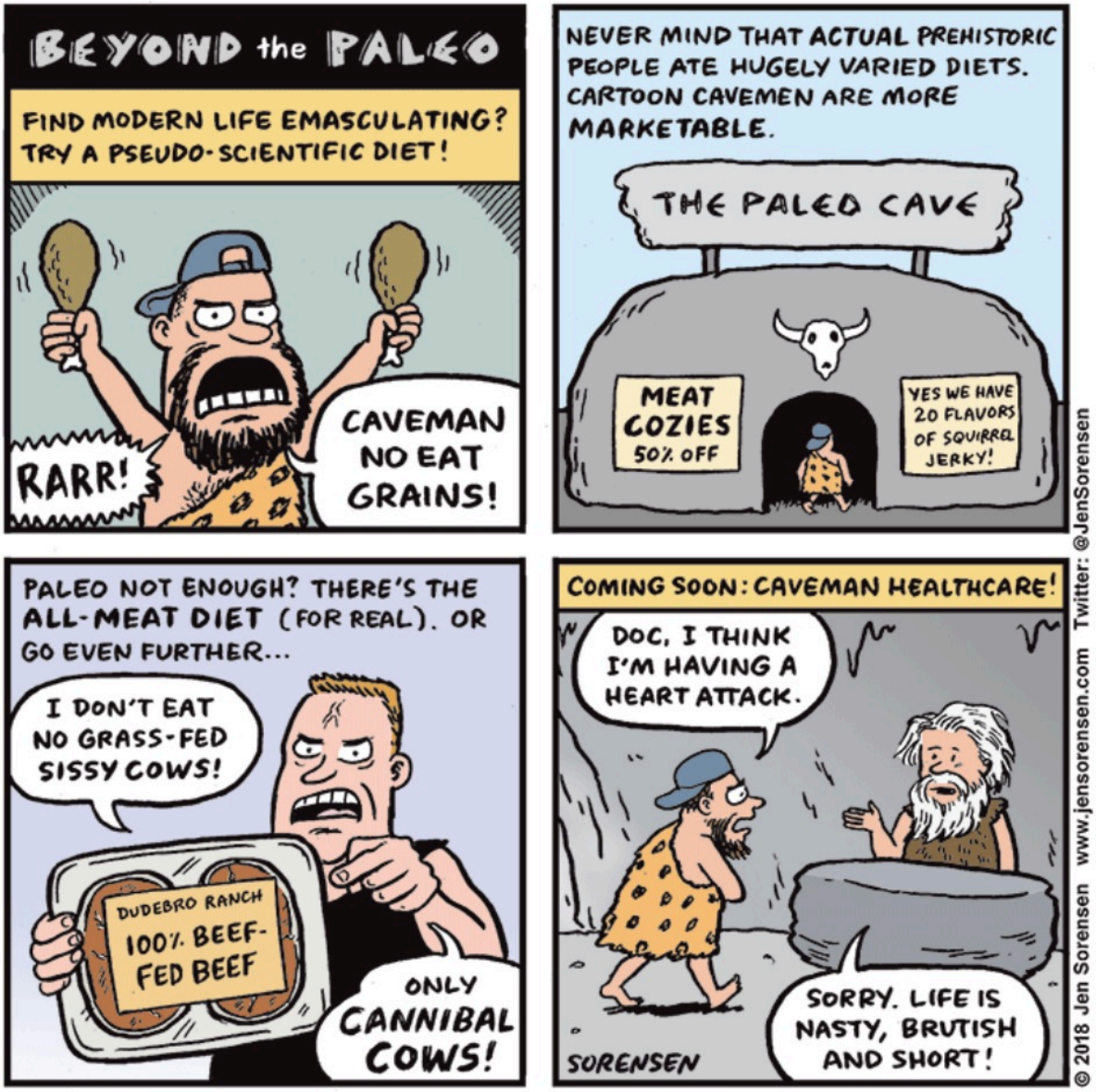


Fig. 52. Jen Sorensen, 8 March, 2018.

Another webcomic caveman cartoon about the Paleo diet, Jen Sorensen's "Beyond the Paleo" (**Fig. 52**), is presented in a novel format. Rather than being part of a single comic-strip narrative, each of the four panels in this cartoon presents an independent vignette which contributes to Sorensen's overall critique of the Paleo diet; it is not entirely clear, in fact, if Sorensen wants the viewer to read the cartoon from left to right or from top to bottom. Here too, Sorensen makes no bones about blurring the lines between the present and the Paleolithic past. A hairy caveman wearing an animal skin and a backward baseball cap appears in three of the panels while a completely modern macho man is shown in another. The caveman cave appears as a modern diner

as well as a doctor's office where the physician delivers a devastating Hobbesian punch line.

Fig. 53. Alex Gregory, *The New Yorker*, 22 May, 2006.

The general relevance of the Paleolithic lifestyle to modern health is the subject of Alex Gregory's 2006 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 53**). Again, in the conversation between these two prognathous-jawed cavemen, it is the incongruous "humorous ucronía" projection of the present back into the past that forms the basis of the cartoon's humor.

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One feature of internet memes is their anonymity. Like most verbal jokes in popular culture, the initial creators of internet memes are often unnamed. Whether reposted on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, or on a personal blog, a Pinterest site, a reddit community, or a webpage like *boredpanda*, an internet meme is rarely accompanied with an attribution. And even when one digs more deeply on the web and can find where a particular internet meme originated, one is frequently rewarded with only a non-helpful tagline line that does not reveal the identity of the actual person who created the meme.

Increasingly, the line between creator and viewer is becoming blurred with the rise of interactive websites involving humorous internet memes and comic strips. As we have seen with webpages such as the imgflip "Meme Generator," an original meme like Guillem's Distracted Boyfriend or the Geico Caveman can become an image macro

for users to create their own new memes. Other online generators allow users to manipulate comic strips in ways the original artist never intended. The Garfield Comic Randomizer, for instance, gives users the ability to put together random panels from Jim Davis' comic strip, often forming bizarre juxtapositions whose humor depends on nonsensical incongruities. Non-cartoonist amateurs can also manipulate comic strips on their own and post the result on fan-produced parody sites, such as the *Pearls Without Swine*/*Garfield* comic-strip cross-over we will examine in the "Making Fun of Making Art" essay below (**Fig. 289**).

An analogous, though more analog, form of interactivity between creator and viewer is the recent trend of "caption that cartoon" contests in which a cartoon is posted without a text and viewers are invited to submit a humorous caption. The most famous of these "caption that cartoon" contests is the one *The New Yorker* has been running since 2005; with over five thousand people participating each week, several million hopeful captions have been submitted in the years since *The New Yorker* contest began.

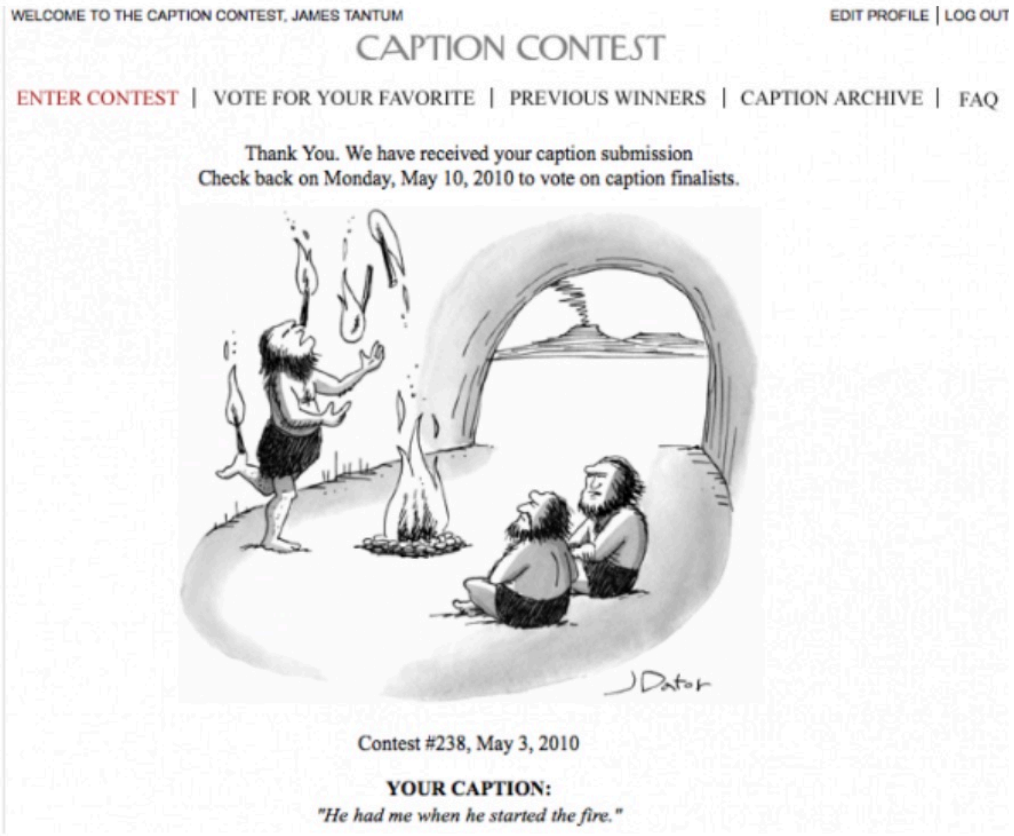


Fig. 54. A screen-shot of James Tantum's submission to *The New Yorker*, May, 2010.

On several occasions, the un-captioned cartoons used in *The New Yorker* contest have involved cavemen, such as the 2010 Joe Dator cartoon (**Fig. 54**) for which James Tantum submitted a winning caption. The Tantum/Dator joke of heavy brow-ridged Neanderthals sitting in a typical cartoon cave while they watch a fire juggler depends on the incongruity that they would have been impressed if the performer had been able only to light the fire. It is unclear whether either Tantum or Dator was aware that, while there is ample evidence that Neanderthals made use of fire, their ability to start their own fires is a matter of debate.

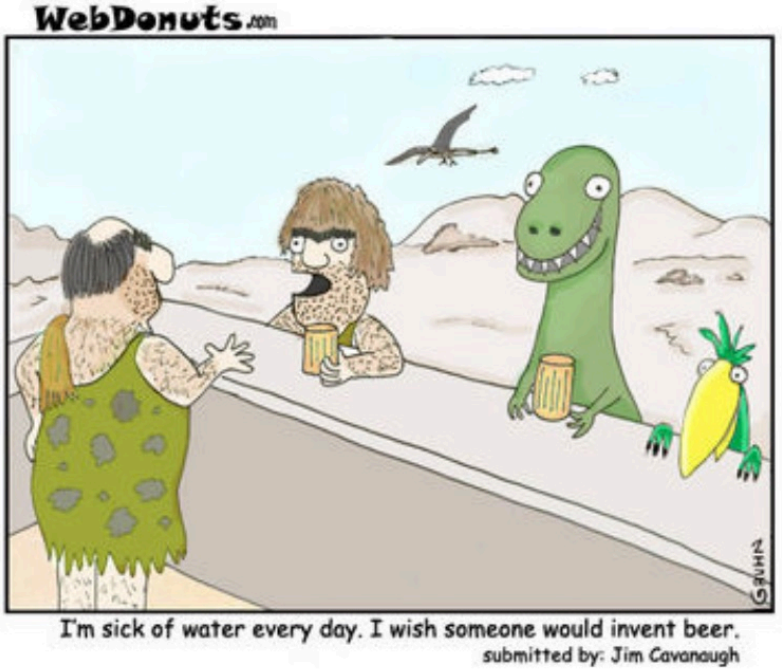


Fig. 55. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 14 Jan., 2010.

The webcomic artist Mike Gruhn has also hosted "caption that cartoon" contests on his web site. One, (**Fig. 55**), features a temporally anomalous assortment of a caveman, a dinosaur, and a tropical bird sitting around a bar while a pterodactyl flies in the background. The caption winner, Jim Cavanough, furthers the "ucronía" projection of the future into the past by having the caveman being incongruously aware that he is missing beer, a commodity which did not exist until advent of cereal agriculture in the Neolithic period.

Another Gruhn caption contest (**Fig. 56**) was based on an art-themed cartoon. Gruhn presented his viewers with a museum scene in which, for some reason, Van Gogh's *Starry Night* and Grant Wood's *American Gothic* contain images of bowling balls

and bowling pins. The contest winner, identified only as Diana, has chosen to caption this wacky cartoon with a clever pun.

Fig. 56. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 26 March., 2013.

☺ ☺

Technology is of course affecting the modes of comics production and consumption, and the trend towards interactivity between creator and viewer will no doubt increase. Yet, again, a joke in the types of humorous cartoons and comic strips we are examining in these essays is, in the end, just a joke, and there are only so many forms a joke can take.

Pandemic Pastiches

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and the subsequent stay-at-home lockdown of much of the world has led to the emergence of new classes of humorous art-themed memes. Several museums have challenged people to recreate favorite works of art at home as an entertaining and educational way to pass the time while under quarantine. These #artathome memes are intended to be amusing, and because their humorous incongruities come from comparing the original artworks to how they have been recreated in household settings, it has become standard practice to post the original next to the reconstruction.

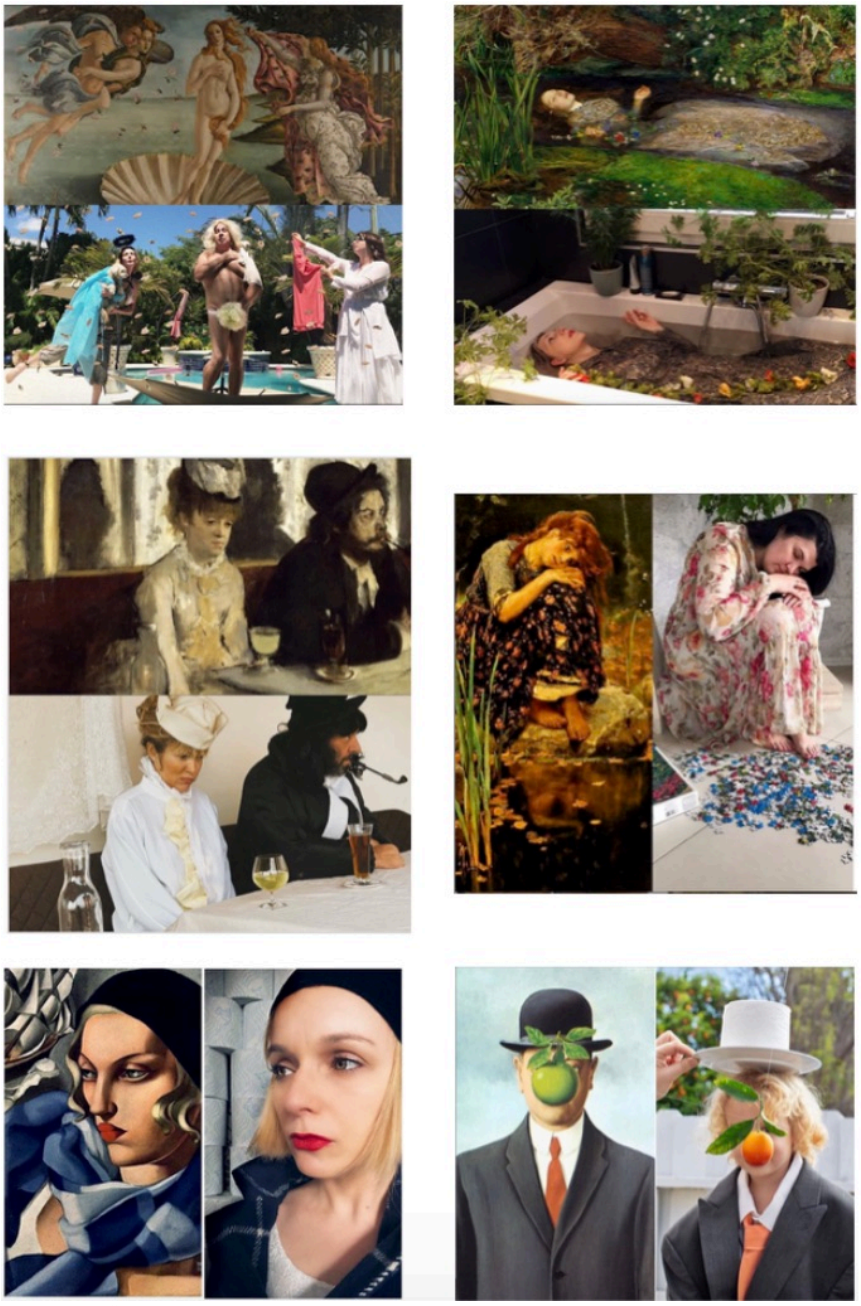


Fig. 57. Responses to "#artathome" challenge from Tussen Kunst en Quarantaine, March, 2020.

The #artathome phenomenon appears to have originated on a March, 2020, Instagram account from Amsterdam called Tussen Kunst en Quarantaine ("Between Art and Quarantine"). Among the postings linked to this account (**Fig. 57**) are amusing recreations of: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus* (1484–1486); John Everett Millais, *Ophelia* (1850–1851); Edgar Degas, *L'Absinthe* (1875–1876); Viktor Vasnetsov, *Alenushka*, (1881); Tamara de Lempicka, *L'écharpe bleue* (1930); and René Magritte, *Son of Man* (1964). In addition to the humorously creative way #artathomers have reconstructed these works, there are also additional humorous incongruities, such as the gender-bending in the Botticelli and Magritte recreations, the use of toilet paper (a reference to the hoarding of this product at the outset of the pandemic) as a prop in the de Lempicka and Magritte reconstructions, or a jigsaw puzzle (a pastime that has become particularly popular during the quarantine) replacing the autumnal pool of water in the Vasnetsov painting; the Degas reconstruction may be an oblique reference to drinking—another favorite activity among those sequestered in quarantine!

Fig. 58. Responses to "#artathome" challenge from Pinchuk Art Center (Kiev), March, 2020.

The Tussen Kunst en Quarantaine initiative was quickly taken up by the Ukrainian Pinchuk Art Center, on whose website #artathomers have posted, among other recreations, versions of Vermeer's 1665 *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the Catalan Ramon Casas' 1899 *Jove decadent*, and David Hockney's 1968 *Portrait of Christopher*

Isherwood and Don Bachardy (**Fig. 58**)—the latter two with references to reading, another major pastime of people in coronavirus lockdown.

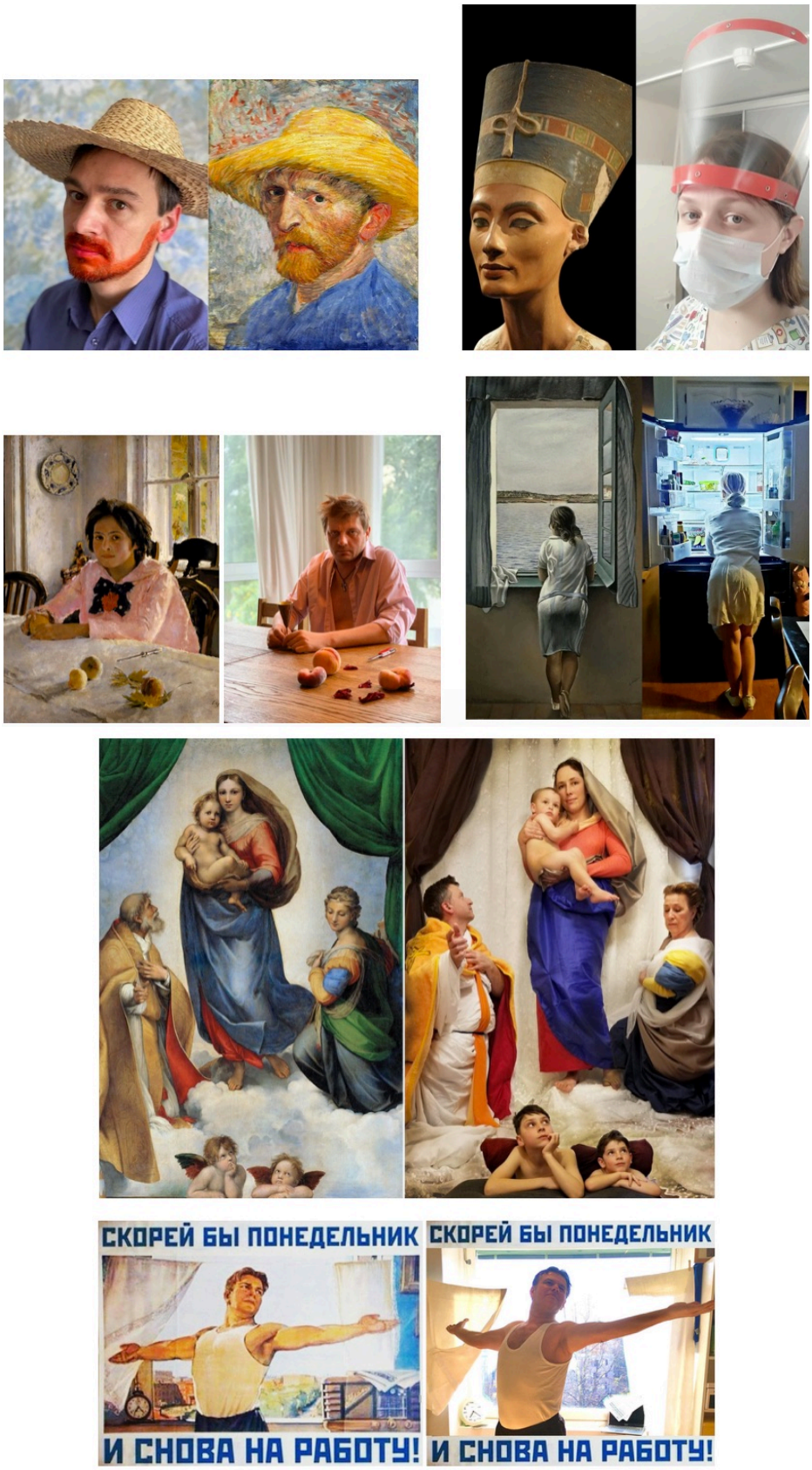


Fig. 59. #artathome parodies on the Russian Facebook group *Izoizolyacia* ("Art Isolation"). (After Maynes, 2020).

The #artathome movement also popped up in Russia, where the Facebook group *Izoizolyacia* ("Art Isolation") has posted a number of at-home art parodies (**Fig. 59**), including Dmitry Dolgorukov 's re-creation of a Van Gogh self-portrait, Olga Blytova's version of the mid- 14th-century B.C.E. bust of Queen Nefertiti., Sasha Nikolov,'s surly take on Valentin Serov's 1887 *Girl With Peaches*, Kira Yastrebova's remake of Salvador Dalí's 1925 *Figure at a Window*, Elena Nikolaenko re-creation of Raphael's 1512 *Sistine Madonna*, and Vasily Simonenko's replication of a Soviet proletarian work poster which reads, "Let Monday come fast and then it's back to work!" As Charles Maynes has noted, the art posts on *Izoizolyacia* are characterized by "a familiar Russian-inflected sense of irony":

> But at their core, the creators tap into a Russian-influenced talent for laughing and creating through hard times — at the deprivations of the Soviet Union, the chaos that followed its demise and now the evolving restrictions of our coronavirus age.
>
> "It's hard to put a finger on it, but it's a certain Russian know-how — funny, ironic and depressing all at once," says Kira Yastrebova, 36, a group member whose family moved from Moscow when she was 11 to a tightknit Russian immigrant community in a suburb outside Minneapolis.


SOCIAL DISTANCING
Staying home and keeping social distance is the most effective way to stop the spread of the virus.
Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine
#ArtOfQuarantine
#FlattenTheCurve
USE HAND SANITIZER
Use sanitizers to keep your hands and personal accessories clean.
Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine
#ArtOfQuarantine
#FlattenTheCurve
WEAR A FACE MASK
Cover mouth and nose, avoid touching mask once it's on.
Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine
#ArtOfQuarantine
#FlattenTheCurve
USE DELIVERY
Using delivery services reduces the number of contacts and minimizes the risks of infection.
Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine
#ArtOfQuarantine
#FlattenTheCurve

Fig. 60. Looma, "Art of the Quarantine" Campaign, Ukranian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, March, 2020. (After Siente, 10 April, 2020).

Ukrainians seem particularly fond of pandemic quarantine art pastiches. In March, 2020, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy employed the Kiev graphic design company Looma to produce a series of posters (**Fig. 60**) to encourage citizens to follow safe practices during the pandemic. In addition to isolating Jesus in Da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1495–1498), having God use hand sanitizer when reaching out to Adam in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco (1508–1512), or putting a mask on Magritte's *The Son of Man* (1964) and on David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801–1805), the Looma company parodied Leonardo da Vinci's, *Lady with an Ermine* (1489–1490); Benjamin West's, *Mrs. Worrell as Hebe* (1776–1778)*;* Rafael's, *Portrait of a Young Man in Red* (ca. 1505); Frederic Leighton's, *Orpheos and Eurydice* (1864), and Sassoferrato's, *Virgin in Prayer* (ca. 1650).

La Nueva España

Los niños podrán salir dentro de ocho días, el resto seguirá encerrado

La reapertura será progresiva a partir de mayo y diferente por regiones y concejos ■ España supera los 20.000 fallecidos por coronavirus

Barbón pide que este verano al menos los asturianos puedan hacer turismo por la región

Indignación de los autónomos al quedar para mayo la devolución de la cuota de marzo

"Los enfermos tienen miedo a no regresar a casa", dicen los técnicos de las ambulancias

Y ADEMÁS

PROMOCIONES

Los artistas asturianos recrean la "cuarentena" de Hopper

EDITORIAL

Un desconfinamiento asimétrico y progresivo

Metrohm DropSens busca talento

Fig. 61. *La Nueva España*, 19 April, 2020.

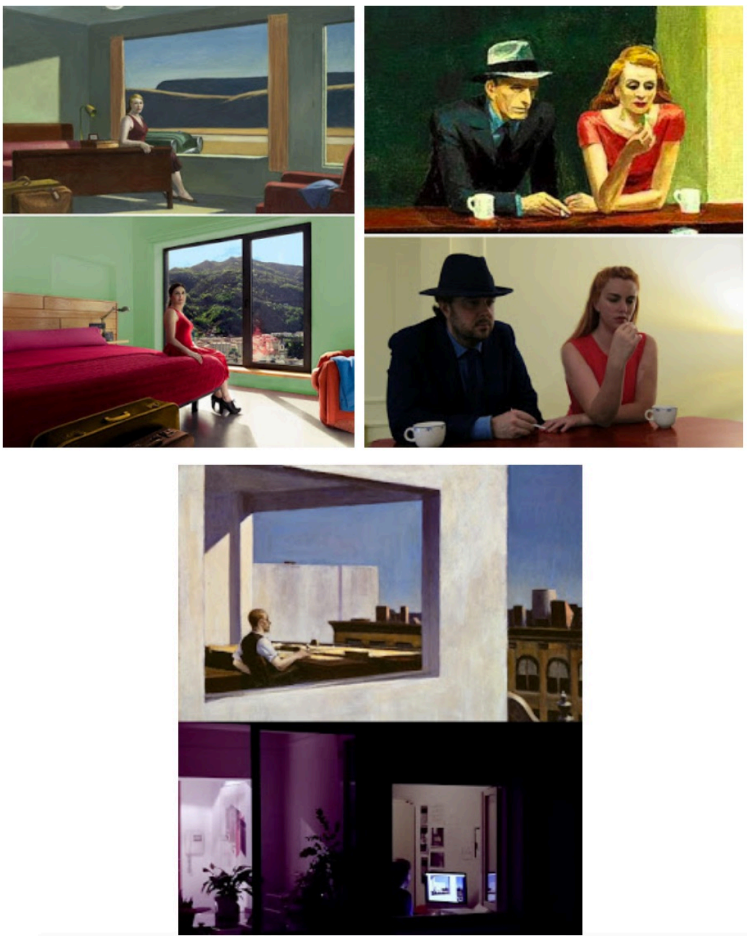


Fig. 62. #artathome pastiches of Edward Hopper paintings. (After Siente, 21 April, 2020.)

As the Asturian (Spain) newspaper *La Nueva España* has noted (**Fig. 61**), the melancholy art of Edward Hopper seems to particularly resonate with Spanish #artathomers. The Asturian blogger Sofi Siente has detailed (**Fig. 62**) Natali Pastor's version of *Western Motel* (1957), Hugo Fontela's and Carmen Figaredo's version of *Nighthawks* (1942), Pablo de Lillo's version of *Office in a Small City* (1953), Federico Granell's version of *Excursion into Philosophy* (1959), Maite Centol's version of *Night Windows* (1928), and Sandra Lusquiños' version of *Girl at a Sewing Machine* (1921).

Fig. 63. Pelac, Pastiche of Magritte's *Golconda* (1953). (After Stewart, 2020.)

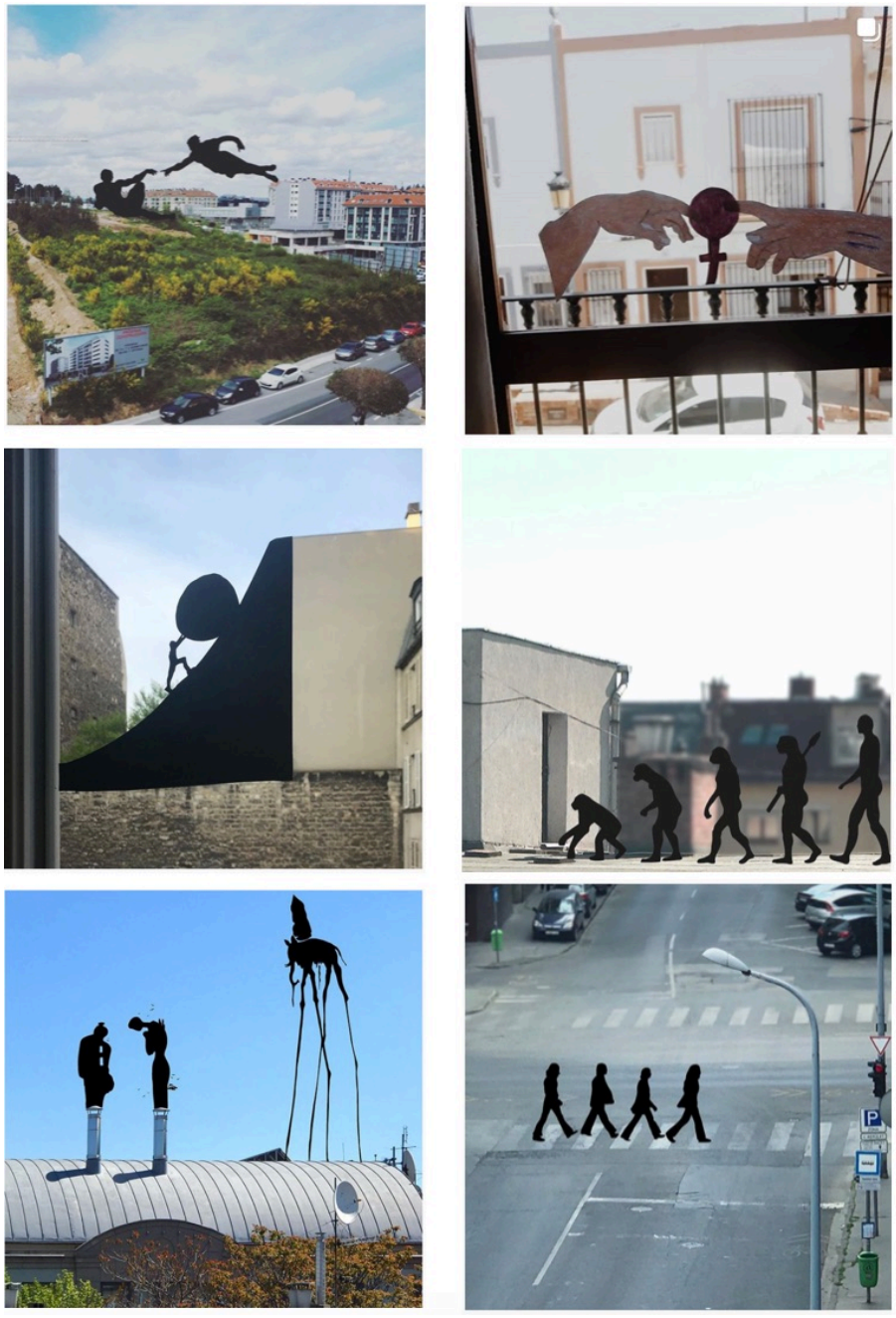


Fig. 64. Responses to #StayArtHomePelac.

The Spanish street artist Pelac has created an innovative alternative to the #artathome movement. Using a window as a canvas, Pelac painted silhouettes on his windowpane to create a pastiche of Magritte's *Golconda* (**Fig. 63**) and invited his Instagram followers to come up with their own artistic creations that interact with the environment they see from their windows. Among the responses to his #StayArtHomePelac challenge (**Fig. 64**) are parodies of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, Sisyphus pushing the rock up the hill, the Ascent of Man, Dali's 1948 *Elephants*, the Beatles' iconic 1969 *Abby Road* album cover, van Gogh's 1889 *Starry Night*, and Bansky's 2002 *Balloon Girl* mural.

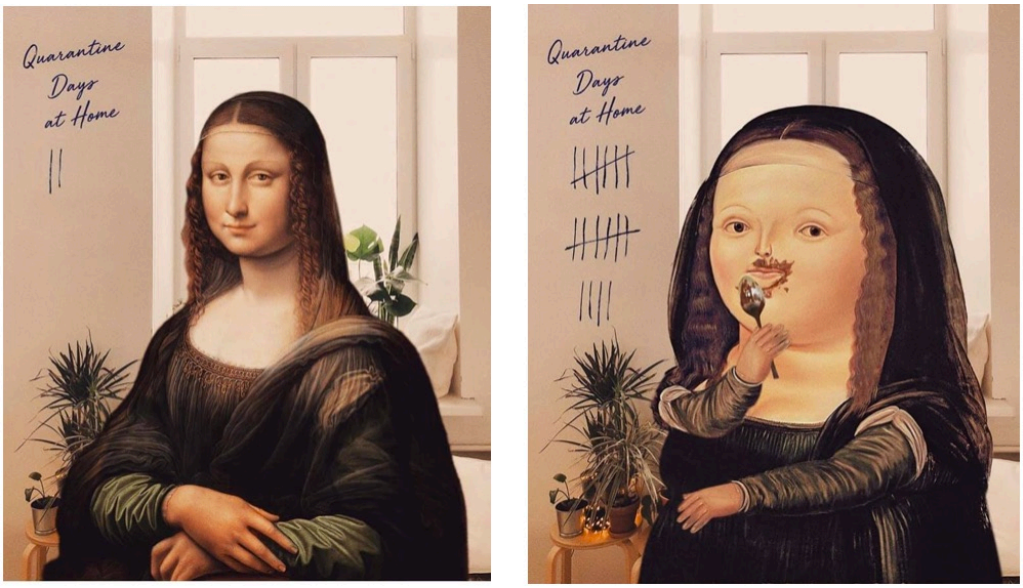


Fig. **65**. Ertan Atay, 8 April, 2020.

Fig. 66. Ertan Atay, 14 April, 2020.

Ertan Atay, the Turkish graphic designer and art mashup photoshopper (cf. **Figs. 38–45**), has also jumped into the pandemic art ring, creating a humorous collage (**Fig. 65**) of the *Mona Lisa* that pokes fun of the tendency of to put on weight during the lockdown. Another Atay photoshopped effort (**Fig. 66**) imagines what famous artists, from Van Gogh, Kahlo, Munch, Dalí, Klimt, and Picasso, would wear for their pandemic masks.

In the United States, the Getty Museum has been the main promotor of the #artathome phenomenon, suggesting that participants recreate "your favorite artwork" using "three things lying around your house." Among the at-home recreations of famous works of art linked to the Getty Instagram account (**Fig. 67**) are: a mid-third millennium BCE Early Cycladic Harp Player figurine creatively recreated using a vacuum cleaner hose; the second century BCE Winged Victory of Samothrace recreated from a Boost bottle and a torn subway receipt; van Eyck's 1434 *Arnolfini Portrait* reimagined with a puffy winter coat, a black kettle for a hat, and a colander taped to the wall in place

of the Dutch painting's iconic round mirror; an elaborated reconstruction of Vermeer's 1658 *The Milkmaid* that uses many more than the recommended three items; a dog in the pose of Ingres' 1814 *La Grand Odalisque*; a Lego version of Mondrian's 1921 *Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue, and Black*; Warhol's 1965 *Soup Cans* silkscreens reproduced with Zantac labels (perhaps another reference to pandemic escape?); and a painting dog *à la* Rockwell's 1960 *Triple Self-Portrait* (for cartoon parodies of this Rockwell painting, cf. **Figs. 348–349** below).

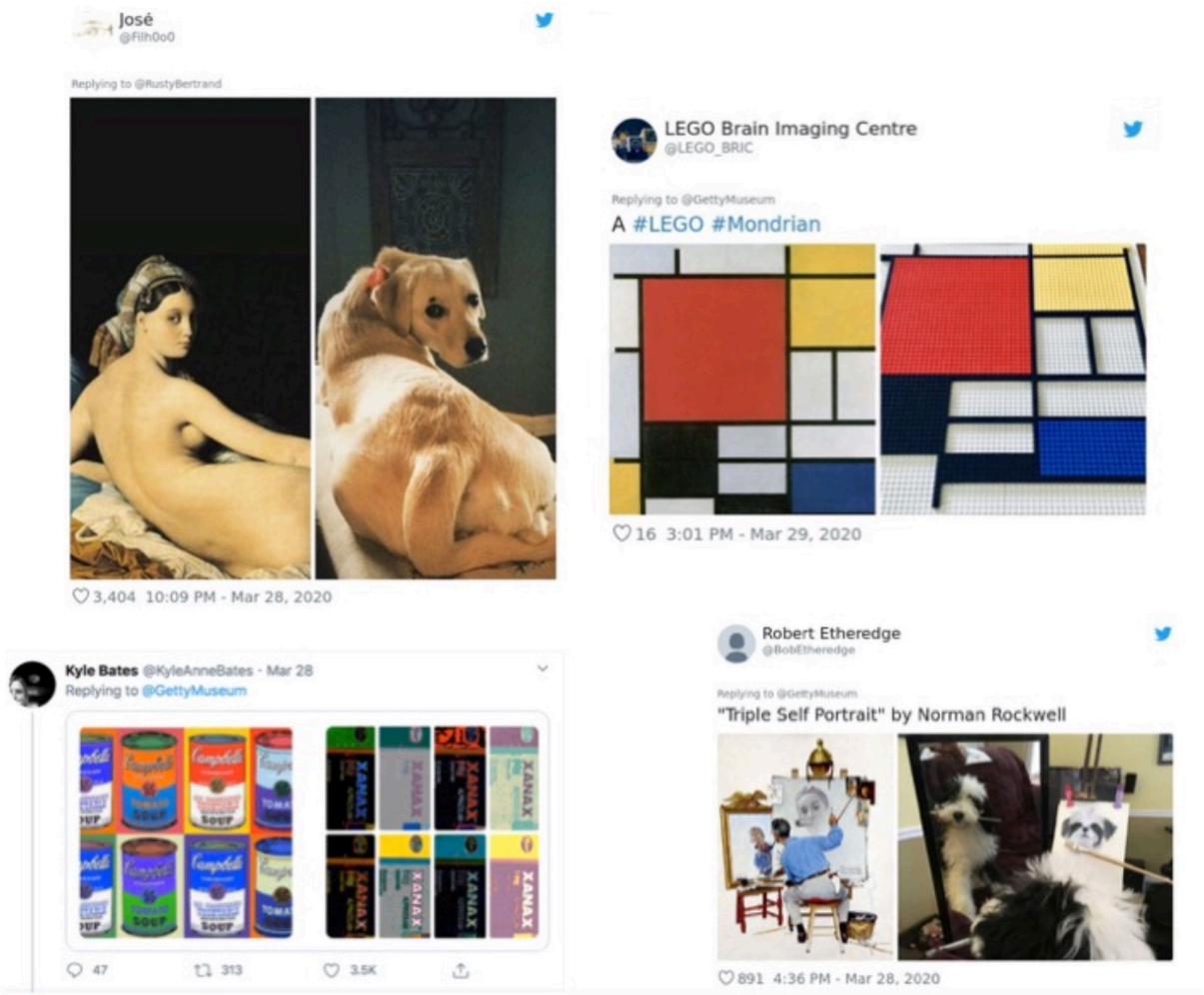


Fig. 67. Responses to "#artathome" challenge from the Getty Museum, 28 March–3 April, 2020.

☺ ☺

Naturally, cartoonists have turned to visual humor to relieve our pandemic anxieties. One common way they have done this is to re-situate a famous work within the context of the measures taken to fight the COVID-19 virus—a trend especially popular in Europe and well documented in the Spanish blogs of Sofi Siete (and hence my including here pandemic cartoons outside of the American canon).

#1 LE CONFINEMENT DANS L'HISTOIRE DE L'ART.
«La naissance de Vénus» par Andrea Botticelli, 1484–1485.

#2 – LE CONFINEMENT DANS L'HISTOIRE DE L'ART.
«La laitière» par Johannes Vermeer, 1660.

#3 – LE CONFINEMENT DANS L'HISTOIRE DE L'ART.
«La chambre de Van Gogh à Arles» par Vincent Van Gogh, 1889. Musée d'Orsay.

#5 – LE CONFINEMENT DANS L'HISTOIRE DE L'ART.
« La Vénus de Milo » par Alexandros d'Antioche, vers 150–130 av. J.-C

LE DÉCONFINEMENT DANS L'HISTOIRE DE L'ART.

www.ledessindelasemaine.fr

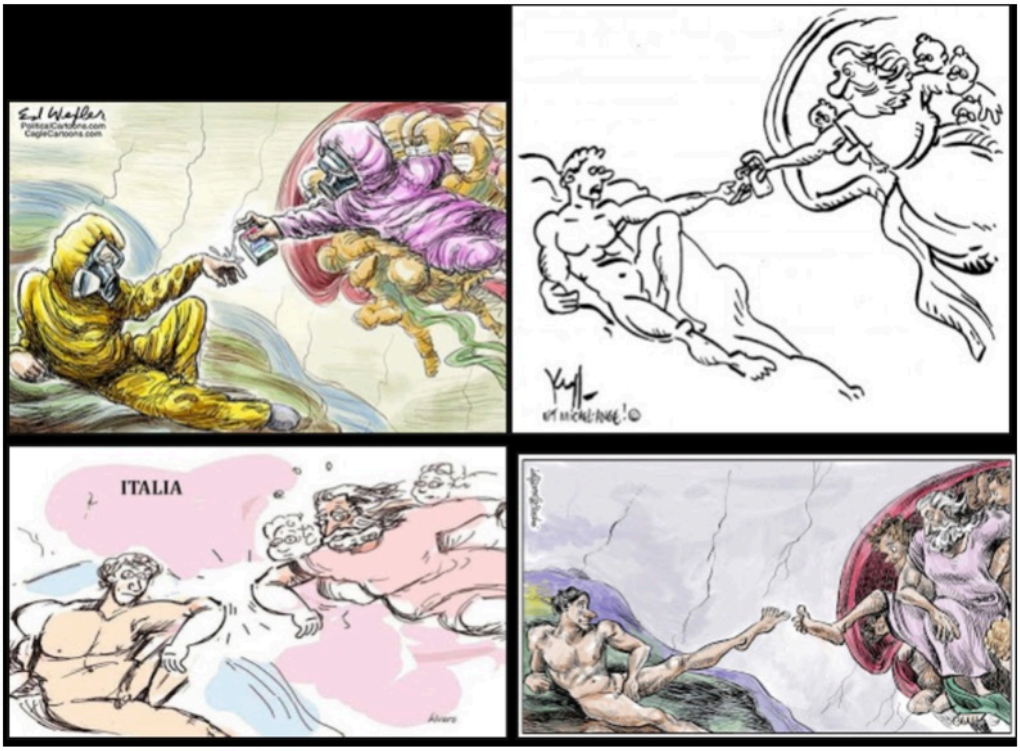
Fig. 68. Olivier Ménégol, Le Confinement dans l'Histoire de l' Art, 4, 6, 8, 14 April, 11 May, 2020.

For instance, Olivier Ménégol, a cartoonist for the French daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, has published a series of "Le Confinement dans l'Histoire de l' Art" cartoons (**Fig. 68**) that spoof: Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, with the goddess saying that she is *not* coming

out ("Sotirai pas!!"); Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*, with the servant hoarding food; van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles*, with confinement days being crossed off on the footboard; the *Venus de Milo* transformed into a wine-opener; and da Vinci's *Last Supper*, with Jesus and the Apostles outside playing soccer on the first day of de-confinement.

Peter Brooks, *The Times*, 26 Feb., 2020.

John Deering, *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 26 Feb., 2020.



From Siente (16 March, 2020)

Fig. 69. Michelangelo *Creation of Adam* pandemic cartoons.

Given that the first major outbreak of the pandemic in Europe was in Italy, it is not surprising that cartoonists would use iconic Italian artworks in their pandemic parodies. On the same day in February, both the British cartoonist Peter Brooks and the American John Deering published pandemic parodies of Michelangelo's *Creation of*

Adam fresco (**Fig. 69**); using this iconic painting as a cartoon cliché for incongruously putting a mask on God and Adam, for their using hand-sanitizers, or for them elbow- or foot-pumping is something that occurred to many other cartoonists as well.

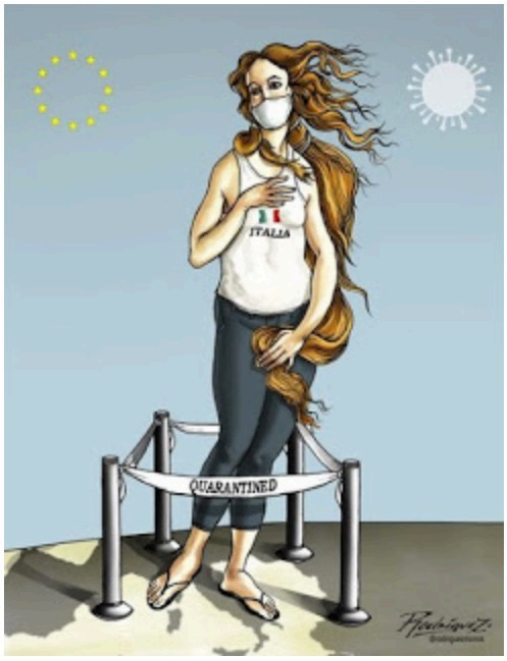


Fig. 70. Antonio Rodríguez Garcia, 1 March, 2020.

Fig. 71. Alex Balamain, 1 March, 2020.

In a similar vein, the Mexican cartoonist Antonio Rodríguez Garcia has humorously put into quarantine Botticelli's *Venus* (**Fig. 70**)—here depicted as a realistic statue discretely clad in sandals, sweatpants and an Italian tee shirt; it is unclear what Rodríguez Garcia is suggesting by pairing the twelve stars of the European flag with an image of the COVID-19 virus. On the same day that Rodríguez Garcia's cartoon came out, the Swiss cartoonist Alex Balamain published a parody of Michelangelo's *David* (**Fig. 71**), with the Florentine statue being re-carved by a beret-wearing sculptor to have a mask.

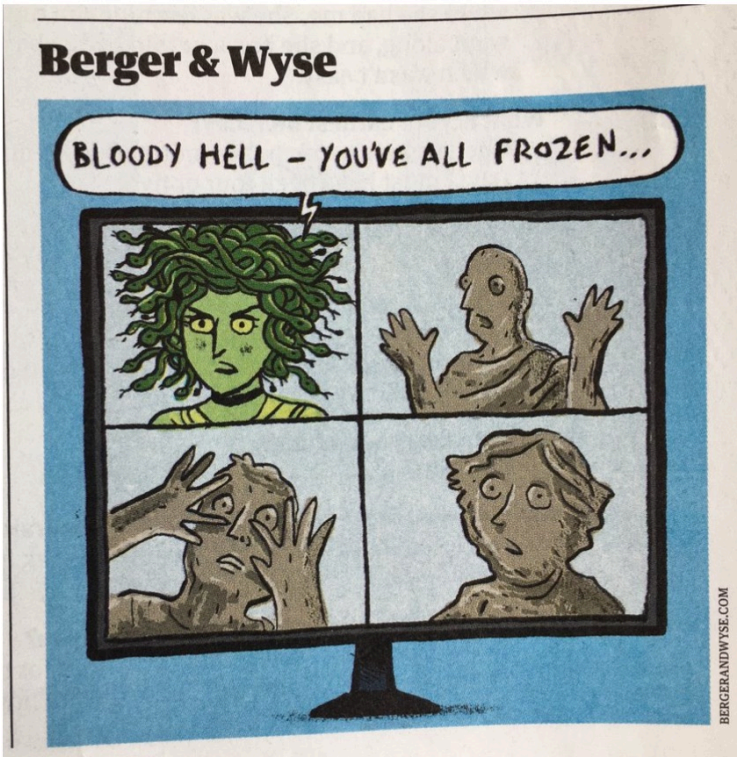


Fig. 72. Joe Berger and Pascal Wyse, *The Guardian*, 16 May, 2020.

The British cartoonists Joe Berger and Pascal Wyse (**Fig. 72**) have turned to Classical mythology to poke fun at another common pandemic lockdown experience—humorously suggestions that the Gorgon Medusa is responsible for Zoom meetings where participants' panels become frozen. [For more Medusa cartoons, see **Figs**. **1466**–**1482** below.]

Fig. 73. David Pope, *Canberra Times*, 28 April, 2020.

The Australian cartoonist Davie Pope has parodied Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in cautionary cartoon (**Fig. 73**) warning about the dangers of relaxing quarantine measures, with the woman in the background labeled "Cabin Fever", the two men labeled "Complacency" and "Economic Necessity", and with the nude model Victorine Meurent transformed into a COVID-19 virus.

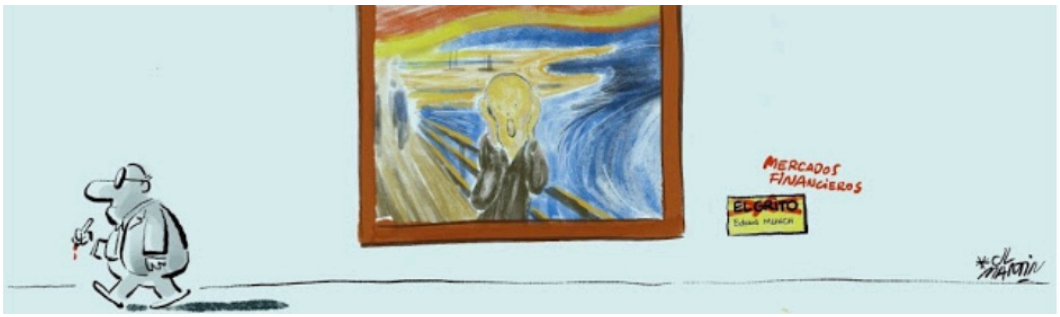


Fig. 74. José Luis Martin, *Vanguardia*, 1 March, 2020.

Fig. 75. Dave Whamond and Bas van der Schot (*De Volkskran*t), 1 March, 2020.

Like Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, Edward Munch's *The Scream* is an obvious choice for cartoonist to parody in response to the anxiety brought on by the pandemic. The Spanish cartoonist José Luis Martín Zabala and the Canadian Dave Whamond have given us pastiches of Munch's painting where they suggest that the character is screaming at the world-wide economic collapse caused by the pandemic (**Figs 74** and **75** left), while the Dutch cartoonist Bas van der Schot has transformed the screamer with COVID-19 eyes (**Fig. 75** right).

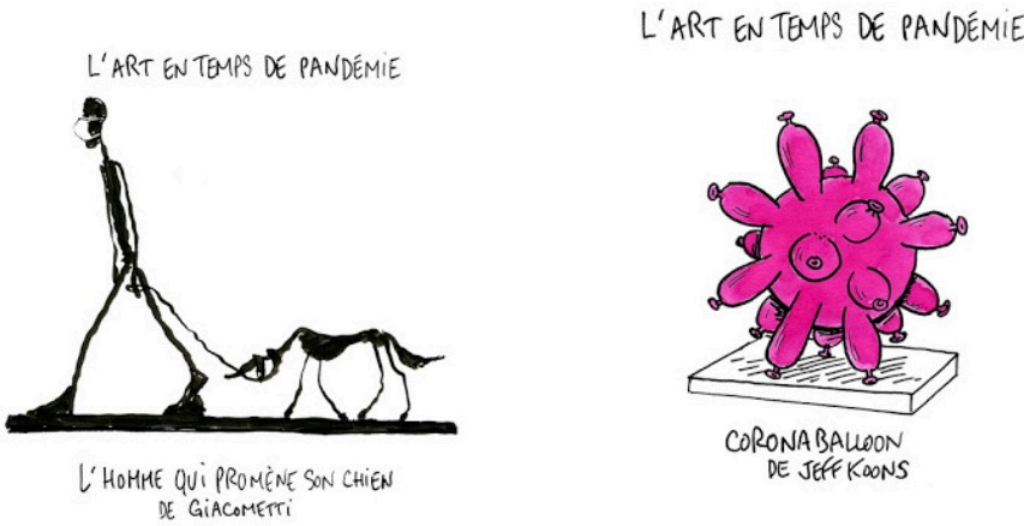


Fig. 76. Michael Cambon, "L'art en temps de pandémie" cartoons.

Fig. 77. O-Sekoer (Luc Descheemaeker), 1 March, 2020.

The French cartoonist Michael Cambon, like his compatriot Olivier Ménégol, has reworked famous works of art to fit the "new normal" of the pandemic, parodying Giacometti's sculpture as a man walking a dog (one of the few exceptions Europeans were afforded to avoid the #stayathome lockdown) and transforming a Jeff Koons' *Balloon Dog* into a COVID-19 virus (**Fig. 76**). The Dutch cartoonist O-Sekoer (Luc Descheemaeker) has similarly transformed Bansky's *Balloon Girl* mural, putting a mask on the girl and changing the red heart-shaped balloon into a green COVID virus (**Fig. 77**).

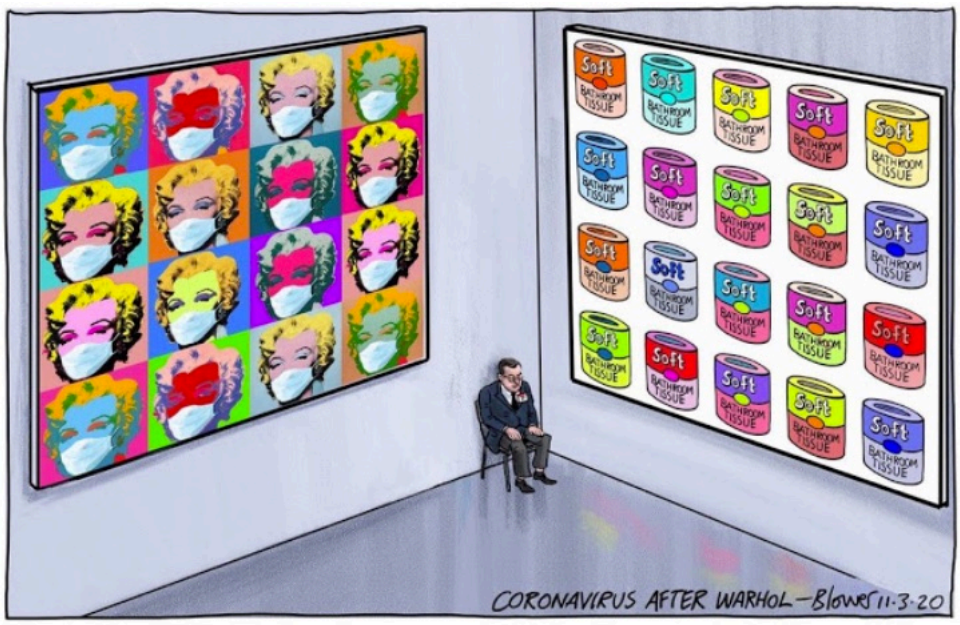


Fig. 78. Patrick Blower, *The Telegraph*, 3 March, 2020.

Fig. 79. Patrick Blower, *The Telegraph*, 18 March, 2020.

The British cartoonist Patrick Blower has also given us a pandemic mashup of modern art with a pastiche of Warhol's *Marilyn* and *Soup Can* silk screens (**Fig. 78**), putting a mask on each image in the former and replacing the cans of the latter with—of course—rolls of toilet paper. A later Blower cartoon (**Fig. 79**) takes a much darker tone, with a pastiche of Hopper's *Nighthawks* where the Grim Reaper sits alone behind the coffee shop window with a glowing red "Happy Hour" neon sign.

Fig. 80. Peter Kuper, March, 2020.

Fig. 81. Ángel Idígoras, *Sur*, 11 March, 2020.

Fig. 82. David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, 9 April, 2020.

Fig. 83. Manel Trenchs i Mola, 29 March, 2020.

The Blower cartoon pastiche of Hopper is representative of another trend in art-themed pandemic memes, namely enforcing "social distancing" on the original artwork —much like José Manuel Ballester's de-populated art pastiches (cf. **Fig. 37** above). The American alternative comics artist Peter Kuper has left only one woman—wearing a

mask—and a dog on the banks of the Seine in Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (**Fig. 80**); the Spanish cartoonist Ángel Idígoras has detangled the lovers in Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* (**Fig. 81**); the *New Yorker* cartoonist David Sipress has separated the dancers in Henri Matisse's *Dance* (**Fig. 82**); and the Catalan educator and "QuedAR'T a casa" participant Manel Trenchs i Mola has put Grant Wood's *American Gothic* couple inside their home (**Fig. 83**).

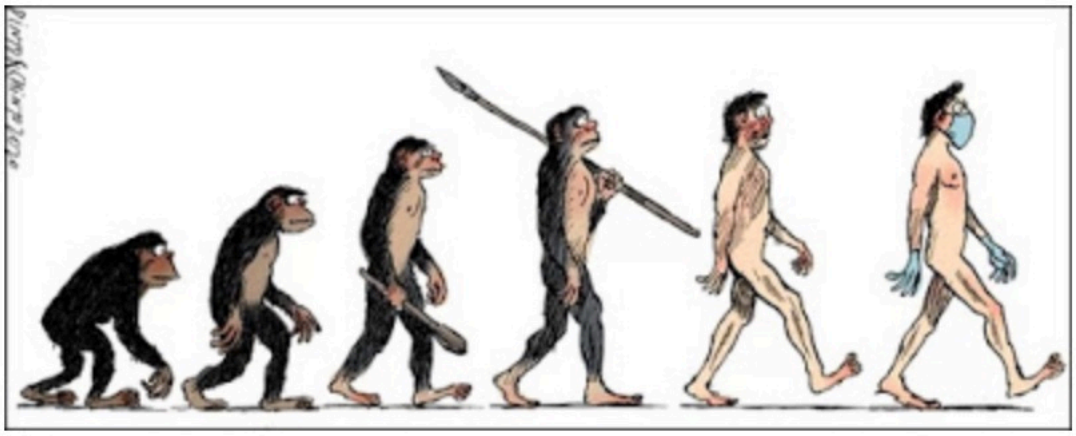


Fig. 84. Pinto (David Pintor Noguerol) and Chinto (Carlos López Gómez).

And not all cartoon pandemic pastiches involve well known paintings. The Spanish cartoonist team of Pinto and Chinto, for instance, have parodied Rudolph Zallinger's famous 1965 "The Road to Homo Sapiens" illustration in the Time-Life publication *Early Man* by putting a mask and gloves on the final upright figure (**Fig. 84**). [For more cartoon parodies of Zallinger's "The Road to Homo Sapiens" illustration, see the "Ascent of '*Homo Hilarius*'" section of the "Nutty Stone Age" essay in Part III below.]

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In closing this "Webcomics and Internet Memes" essay, we should note that, while the "Pandemic Pastiches," #artathome parodies, and cartoons we have just surveyed bear many formal similarities with "normal" internet memes, they are fundamentally different from them. Internet memes are intrinsically individualistic, giving one person's often esoteric humorous take on a well known image macro. Pandemic pastiches are by nature fundamentally collective, providing a humorous relief from a shared social anxiety about the COVID-19 virus and the global effects it is bringing to our world. It will be interesting to see if some variation of this comic collectiveness continues in the "new normal" of our post-pandemic world.

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Indices

List of Figures

Fig. 101. Comparison of Johnstone's caricatures to originals exhibited in 1913 Armory Show.
Fig. 102. Oscar Cesare, "What Cesare Saw at the Armory Art Show," *The Sun*, 23 Feb., 1913.
Fig. 103. Comparison of Cesare's drawings to originals exhibited in 1913 Armory Show.
Fig. 104. Frederick Opper, "The 'New Art' Fest," *New York American*, 27 Feb., 1913.
Fig. 105. Comparison of F. Opper's drawing to original exhibited in 1913 Armory Show.
Fig. 106. Bartimaeus Winson (?), "A Near Post-Impression of a Post-Impressionist Room at the International Exhibition," *New-York Tribune*, Sunday, 2 March, 1913.
Fig. 107. Comparison of B. Winson (?) drawing to original exhibited in Armory Show.
Fig. 108. Winsor McCay, "The Modern Art Show," *New York Herald*, 1913.
Fig. 109. Frank King, "A Few Futurist Fancies," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 16 March, 1913.
Fig. 110. *Chicago Examiner*, 2 April, 1913.
Fig. 111. J.F. Griswold, "The Rude Descending a Staircase (Rush Hour at the Subway)," *New York Evening Sun*, 20 March, 1913.
Fig. 112. John T. McCutcheon, "A Near-Futurist Painting," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 April, 1913.
Fig. 113. Clare Briggs, "The Original Cubist," *New York Evening Sun*, 1 April, 1913.
Fig. 114. F. Fox, "Cubisto Picture Composed by Dad, Under the Inspiration of the Incoming Bills for the Ladies' Spring Purchases," *New York Evening Sun*, 8 April, 1913.
Fig. 115. Maurice Ketten, "The New Art," *New York Evening World*, 21 February, 1913.
Fig. 116. John T. McCutcheon, "How to Become a Post-Impressionist Paint Slinger," *New York Evening Sun*, 6 March, 1913.
Fig. 117. Charles Voight, "Who Said Anything Against Futurists?," *Mrs. Worry*, *New York Evening Mail*, 24 March, 1913.
Fig. 118. Frank King, "After the Cubist Food Exhibit," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 April, 1913.
Fig. 119. George Herriman, "If Cubists Don't Come From There, Where Do They Come From," *The Dingbat Family*, *New York Evening Journal*, 23 Dec., 1914.
Fig. 120. L. M. Glakings, "With the Cubists and Futurists," *Puck*, 19 March, 1913, p. 6.
Fig. 121. Harry Grant Dart, "Beautiful New York Made Possible by the New Art," *Life*, 20 March, 1913.
Fig. 122. Comparison of Harry Dart's drawing to original exhibited in 1913 Armory Show.
Fig. 123. Rea Irvin, "Cubist Artist: Ah, If You Could Only See Things as I Do, My Dear!," *Life*, 20 March, 1913.
Fig. 124. Power O'Malley, "'The Light that Lies in Woman's Eyes' As the Futurist sees it," *Life* 27 March 1913.
Fig. 125. Art Young, "How to Judge a Picture According to Modern Criticism," *Life*, 3 April 1913.
Fig. 126. M.A. Stocking, "Art: Past, Present, Future," *Life*, 24 April, 1913.
Fig. 127. George Carlson, "Suggestion to Futurists: Why Not Paint Four Pictures on One Canvas?" *Life*, 8 May 1913.
Fig. 128. Will Allen, "A Futurist Home Run," *Life*, 10 July, 1913, p. 64.
Fig. 129. John Sloan, "A Slight Attack of Third Dementia Brought on by Excessive Study of the Much- talked of Cubist Pictures in the International Exhibition at New York," *The Masses*, Vol. 4:7, April 1913.
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Fig. 134. *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Feb., 1913.
Fig. 135. Derry Noyes, "Armory Show 1913," *Celebrate The Century 1910s*, Stamp, United States Postal Service, 1998.
Fig. 136. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 20 July, 1993.
Fig. 137. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 6 Jan., 2000.
Fig. 138. Comparison of art work of George Herriman and Joan Miró.
Fig. 139. Ellison Hoover, "The American Museum of Art," *Life* (*The Comic Strip Number*), 13 Feb. 1927.

Fig. 140. Photographs of the exhibition *Bande Dessinée et Figuration Narrative* (Comic Strips and Narrative Figuration), Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1967. Top image reported in *The Cartoonist*, from Munson (2016).
Fig. 141. Photographs of the exhibition *The Comic Art Show*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1983. From Munson (2012).
Fig. 142. Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 122 x 175 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
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Fig. 146. Detail of above.
Fig. 147. *Masters of American Comics*, Hammer Museum, 20 Nov., 2005- 12 March, 2006.
Fig. 148. Chris Ware, Detail of back cover to *Uninked: Paintings, Sculpture and Graphic Works By Five Cartoonists*, Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 2007.
Fig. 149. Installation views of *Comic Abstraction: Image-Making, Image-Breaking*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 4 March – 11 June, 2007.
Fig. 150. Rivanne Neuenschwander, First two pages from *Zé Carioca no. 4*, *A Volta de Zé Carioca*, 2004. Synthetic polymer paint on comic book pages, each 15.9 x 10.2 cm.
Fig. 151. Installation views of *VRAOUM! An Exhibition of Comic Strips and Contemporary Art*, Maison Rouge, Paris, 28 May, 27 Sept., 2009.
Fig. 152. Sammy Engramer, *Untitled*, 2005. Néon, plexiglas, acrylic, 120 x 140 cm.
Fig. 153. Sammy Engramer, *Speech Bubbles*, 2005. Digital prints on paper, each 19 x 25 cm.
Fig. 154. Gilles Barbier, *L'hospice*, 2002, private collection.
Fig. 155. David Arky and John Barrett, Cover photograph, Sean Kelly, ed., *National Lampoon Presents The Very Large Book of Comical Funnies*, 1975.
Fig. 156. Eldon Redmi, *The New Yorker*, 17 Sept., 1990.
Fig. 157. Ruben Bolling (Ken Fisher), from *Tom the Dancing Bug*, 23 Jan., 2010.
Fig. 158. Harry Bliss, 19 July, 2012.
Fig. 159. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 23 Aug., 2013.
Fig. 160. Exhibition catalog for the La Luz de Jesus Gallery show *Pop Sequentialism: Great Comic Book Art of the Modern Age* (May, 2011), and exhibition poster for the Gallery 30 South show *Pop Sequentialism: The Art of Comics* (July, 2018).
Fig. 161. Wizardskull, *72*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 30.48 x 30.48 cm.
Fig. 162. Teresa Watson, *Yummy Cowgirl*, 2019. Gouache with acrylic spray varnish, 20.32 X 20.32 cm.
Fig. 163. Brian and Greg Walker and Chance Browne, *Hi and Lois*, 27 Aug., 1989.
Fig. 164. Will Eisner, Original work of art created for the opening of the International Museum of Cartoon Art at Boca Raton, March 1996. Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.
Fig. 165. Excerpts from David Prudhomme, *La Travsée du Louvre*, 2012.
Fig. 166. Comics published by the Museo del Prado. Top left: Max (Francesc Capdevila Gisbert), *El Tríptico de los Encantados (Una pantomima bosquiana)*, 2016; Top right: Antonio Altarriba and Keko (José Antonio Godoy Cazorla), *El Perdón y la Furia*, 2017; Bottom left: Montesol (Francisco Javier Ballester Guillén), *Idilio. Apuntes de Fortuny,* 2017; Bottom right: Vincent,"Sento" Llobell Bisba, *Historietas del Museo del Prado*, 2019.
Fig. 167. Installation photograph of *Botticelli: Heroines + Heroes*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 14 Feb. - 19 May, 2019.
Fig. 168. Karl Stevens, *Lucretia*, 2018, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.
Fig. 169. Installation photograph and detail of Karl Stevens, *Botticelli*, 2018, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.
Fig. 170. Nina Paley, *Nina's Adventures*, 15 July, 2008.
Fig. 171. Anatol Kovarsky, "Modern Art Museum," *The New Yorker*, 19 Oct., 1957.
Fig. 172. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark,* 9 Jan., 2003.
Fig. 173. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 5 Oct., 2014.
Fig. 174. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*.
Fig. 175. Isabella Bannerman, *Six Chix*, 18 Aug., 2018.

Fig. 176. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*. 25 Jan., 2015.
Fig. 177. James Stevenson, *The New Yorker.*
Fig. 178. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker,* 16 Jan., 2012.
Fig. 179. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 28 April, 2013.
Fig. 180. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, 21 March, 1950.
Fig. 181. Brian and Ron Boychuk, *Chuckle Bros*, 11 Nov., 2009.
Fig. 182. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 5 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 183. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 27 March, 2013.
Fig. 184. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 11 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 185. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 18 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 186. Alex Gregory*, The New Yorker*, 20 April, 2015.
Fig. 187. Jim Unger, *Herman*, 28 April, 2012.
Fig. 188. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 3 July, 2012.
Fig. 189. Liana Finck, *The New Yorker*, 19 Nov., 2018.
Fig. 190. Daniel Beyer, *Long Story Short*, 24 Jan., 2019.
Fig. 191. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 13 April, 2004.
Fig. 192. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 19 July, 2015.
Fig. 193. Harry Bliss, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 15 March, 1999.
Fig. 194. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 30 July, 2013.
Fig. 195. Mark Tatulli, *Lio*, 1 April, 2016.
Fig. 196. Gary Larson and John McPherson Etch-A-Sketch cartoons.
Fig. 197. Samson (Samuli Lintula), *Dark Side of the Horse*, 6 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 198. Weingartens & Clark, *Barney and Clyde*, 9 June, 2013.
Fig. 199. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, 2008.
Fig. 200. Art Young, "Fagged Out. A Sketch of the French Section of Fine Arts at the World's Fair,"*The Inter Ocean*, 31 May, 1893.
Fig. 201. Isabella Bannerman, *Six Chix*, 20 May, 2013.
Fig. 202. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker*, 30 Nov., 1968.
Fig. 203. Todd Clark, *Lola*, 15 Oct., 2007.
Fig. 204. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 9 Sept., 2010.
Fig. 205. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 15 Nov., 1952.
Fig. 206. Harry Bliss, 26 April, 2012.
Fig. 207. Willey Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 208. Kaamran Hafeez, *Barron's*, 17 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 209. Harry Bliss, 31 March, 2015.
Fig. 210. Stephen Pastis, *Pearls Before Swine*, 8 Feb., 2007.
Fig. 211. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 19 Oct., 2009.
Fig. 212. Harry Bliss, 2 July, 2018.
Fig. 213. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 11 Nov., 2011.
Fig. 214. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 12 April, 2015.
Fig. 215. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*, 29 Feb., 2016.
Fig. 216. Bruce McCall, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 13 Jan., 2020.
Fig. 217. George Herriman*, Krazy Kat and Ignatz*, *New York American*, 17 Nov., 1911.
Fig. 218. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, T*he Duplex*, 14 July, 2000.
Fig. 219. Nina Paley and Stephen Hersh, *The Hots*, 2003.
Fig. 220. Jef Mallett, *Frazz*, 12 June, 2004.
Fig. 221. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, 13 May, 1950.
Fig. 222. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, 23 June, 1971.
Fig. 223. Mike Twohy, *The New Yorker*, 9 July, 2001.
Fig. 224. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 10 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 225. David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, 23 Sept., 2019.
Fig. 226. Lynda Barry, *The Near-Sighted Monkey*, May, 2016. Web.
Fig. 227. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*.
Fig. 228. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 23 Nov., 2016.
Fig. 229. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 7 May, 1971.
Fig. 230. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 22 July, 1975.
Fig. 231. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 25 - 27 Jan., 1999.
Fig. 232. Lincoln Peirce, B*ig Nate*, 11 April, 2015.

Fig. 284. Thomas E. Powers, "Krazy Kat Herriman Loves his Kittens," 1922.
Fig. 285. Mark Tatulli, *Lio,* 4 Dec., 2016.
Fig. 286. Selection of Mort Walker and Jerry Dumas, *Sam's Strip*.
Fig. 287. Stephan Pastis, *Pearls Before Swine*, 2–7 June, 2014.
Fig. 288. Stephan Pastis, "The Sad, Lonely Journey of a 'Pearls' Comic Strip," *Pearls Before Swine*, 11 July, 2004.
Fig. 289. Midnight Strike, "No. 1209. The Sad, Lonely Journey of a Garfield Comic Strip," *Square Root of Minus Garfield*, 9 Sept., 2012.
Fig. 290. Mort Walker and Jerry Dumas, *Sam's Strip*, 20 Dec., 1961.
Fig. 291. Scott Adams, *Dilbert*, 18–19 May, 1998.
Fig. 292. Selection of Stephan Pastis, *Pearls Before Swine*, 7–12 July, 2002.
Fig. 293. John Bell, *The Bell Curve Cartoons*.
Fig. 294. John Deering, 16 June, 2011.
Fig. 295. Nicholas Gurewitch, "Rubbed," *The Perry Bible Fellowship*, 2020. Web.
Fig. 296. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 8 Dec., 2011.
Fig. 297. Jim Benton, 26 March, 2012.
Fig. 298. LOL Zombie, 19 May, 2010.
Fig. 299. Hillary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 9 Feb., 2014.
Fig. 300. Dana Fradon, *The New Yorker*, 1 May, 1948.
Fig. 301. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 2 April, 2017.
Fig. 302. Lou Brooks, *The Museum of Forgotten Art Supplies*. 2019. Web.
Fig. 303. Garrett Price, "All right then, what is <u>your</u> conception of the Awakening of Intelligence through Literature and Music?" *The New Yorker*, 1934.
Fig. 304. Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934. Mural, 160 x 43 cm. Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City.
Fig. 305. Maurice Ketten, "Why Not?", *The New York Evening World*, 27 April, 1916.
Fig. 306. Detail of **Fig. 243**, George Herriman, *Krazy Kat*, 26 Nov., 1916.
Fig. 307. Two cartoons by Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker.*
Fig. 308. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 3 May, 1952.
Fig. 309. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 8 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 310. Charles Saxon, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 5 Aug., 1961.
Fig. 311. John McPherson, *Close to Home,* 25 Oct., 1999.
Fig. 312. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 2 May, 2014.
Fig. 313. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 10 July, 2013.
Fig. 314. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 5 April, 2017.
Fig. 315. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker*, 26 Jan., 1987.
Fig. 316. Todd Clark, *Lola*, 25 July, 2010.
Fig. 317. Garrett Price, *The New Yorker*, 2 July, 1951.
Fig. 318. Robert J. Day, *The New Yorker*, 5 Jan., 1952.
Fig. 319. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 5 April, 2014.
Fig. 320. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 27 Sept., 2015.
Fig. 321. Harry Bliss, 18 Aug., 2018.
Fig. 322. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 7 June, 2015.
Fig. 323. Donald "Duck" Edwing, *Tribune Toon*, 22 Oct., 1995.
Fig. 324. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*.
Fig. 325. Chip Dunham, *Overboard*, 30 Oct., 2002.
Fig. 326. Isabella Bannerman, *Six Chix*, 27 May, 2018.
Fig. 327. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 7 July, 2003.
Fig. 328. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 11 March, 2012.
Fig. 329. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 1 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 330. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 13 Oct., 2011.
Fig. 331. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 5 March, 2016.
Fig. 332. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 333. Jeff Berry, 8 Nov., 2011.
Fig. 334. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 12 May, 2019.
Fig. 335. Russell Myers, *Broom-Hilda*, 6 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 336. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 19 June, 2017.
Fig. 337. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 10 April, 2016.

Fig. 451. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 28 Dec., 2014.
Fig. 452. Benjamin Schwartz, *The New Yorker*, 24 June, 2013.
Fig. 453. Ros Chast, *The New Yorker*, 4 June, 2014.
Fig. 454. Dan Pirraro, *Bizzaro*, 27 Sept. 2017.
Fig. 455. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 17 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 456. Benjamin Schwartz, *The New Yorker*, 6 Nov., 2013.
Fig. 457. Dan Piraro and Andy Cowan, *Bizarro*, 10 Feb., 2011.
Fig. 458. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*, 2017.
Fig. 459. Charles Addams, *The New Yorker*, 20 Aug. 1979.
Fig. 460. Edward Sorel, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 21 May, 2001.
Fig. 461. Harry Bliss, 2014.
Fig. 462. J. B. Handelsman, *The New Yorker*, 3 Oct., 1988.
Fig. 463. A panel from Dan Piraro, *Bizaro*, 9 Sept., 2012.
Fig. 464. Darren Bell, *Candorville*, 21 July, 2004.
Fig. 465. Norman Rockwell, *The Connoisseur*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 96 x 80 cm. Cover illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 13, 1962. Private Collection.
Fig. 466. Photograph of Norman Rockwell painting his model for *The Connoisseur*, 1961. Norman Rockwell Museum.
Fig. 467. Harry Bliss, "Paint by Pixel," *The New Yorker*, 30 April, 2007.
Fig. 468. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, 25 Jan., 2011.
Fig. 469. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 27 Jan., 1999 (cf. **Fig. 231**).
Fig. 470. Detail from Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 23 Aug., 2013 (cf. **Fig. 159**).
Fig. 471. Two panels from Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 21 April, 2013.
Fig. 472. Ros Chast, *The New Yorker*, 4 August, 2014.
Fig. 473. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 2 Nov., 1995.
Fig. 474. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 28 Oct. 1998.
Fig. 475. Dan Reynolds, 2009.
Fig. 476. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 9 June, 2018.
Fig. 477. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 7 Nov., 2012.
Fig. 478. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 26 Aug., 2017.
Fig. 479. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 13 Sept., 2005.
Fig. 480. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 13 Nov., 2007.
Fig. 481. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 31 Jan., 2019.
Fig. 482. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 31 July, 2016.
Fig. 483. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 19 Sept., 2008.
Fig. 484. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, 30 Jan., 1991.
Fig. 485. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 2 Nov., 2009.
Fig. 486. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 25 April, 2012.
Fig. 487. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 20 Dec., 2016.
Fig. 488. Peter Duggan, *The Guardian*, 25 April., 2012.
Fig. 489. Peter Porges, *The New Yorker*, 16 Nov., 1987.
Fig. 490. J. B. Handelsman, *The New Yorker*.
Fig. 491. T. Lewis and Michael Fry, *Over the Hedge*, 16 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 492. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 14 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 493. Lynn Johnston, *For Better or for Worse*, 26 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 494. John Zakour and Scott Roberts, *Working Daze*, 7 March, 2009.
Fig. 495. Kara Walker, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 27 Aug., 2007.
Fig. 496. Harry Bliss, 31 July, 2017.
Fig. 497. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 20 Feb., 1977.
Fig. 497. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 19 Dec., 1999.
Fig. 499. Tim Rickard, *Brewster Rockit: Space Guy!*, 22 Feb., 2012.
Fig. 500. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 18 Aug. 2013.
Fig. 501. U.S. Post Office, 1934.
Fig. 502. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 14 Dec., 1957.
Fig. 503. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 28 Dec., 2007.
Fig. 504. Gary Wise and Lance Aldrich, *Real Life Adventures*, 13 Dec., 2009.
Fig. 505. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 20 June, 2011.
Fig. 506. Edward Sorel, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 13 May, 1996.

Fig. 507. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 31 July, 2006.
Fig. 508. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 15 Oct., 2007.
Fig. 509. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 1 May, 2013.
Fig. 510. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 12 Sept., 2016.
Fig. 511. Scott Hilburn, *Close to Home*, 28 Dec., 2010.
Fig. 512. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 21 Oct., 2014.
Fig. 513. Ian Falconer, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 5 June, 2000.
Fig. 514. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker,* 24 Sept., 2018.
Fig. 515. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 11 Feb., 2015.
Fig. 516. Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 1986.
Fig. 517. Jeff Stahler, *Moderately Confused*, 5 Nov., 2004.
Fig. 518. Marjorie Sarnat, 21 Sept., 2011.
Fig. 519. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*.
Fig. 520. Bob Knox, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 15 July, 1991.
Fig. 521. L.H. Siggs, *The New Yorker*, 30 Aug., 1952.
Fig. 522. Bunny Hoest and John Reiner, *The Lockhorns*, 2011.
Fig. 523. Greg Walker and Mort Walker, *Beetle Bailey*, 10 June, 2012.
Fig. 524. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 10 June, 2011.
Fig. 525. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker.*
Fig. 526. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 7 Nov., 2006.
Fig. 527. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 28 Feb., 2006.
Fig. 528. Bob Mankoff, "Cartoon Desk: Inking and Thinking," *The New Yorker*, 16 June, 2010.
Fig. 529. Two versions of a Dan Reynolds cartoon, 2012.
Fig. 530. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1993. p. 122.
Fig. 531. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 17 April, 2000.
Fig. 532. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 25 Sept, 2014.
Fig. 533. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 19 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 534. Jack Ziegler, *The New Yorker*, 12 Dec., 1994.
Fig. 535. Harry Bliss, 4 May, 2012.
Fig. 536. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 19 April, 2018.
Fig. 537. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 21 June, 2015.
Fig. 538. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 26 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 539. Dan Reynolds, 2009.
Fig. 540. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 11 Nov., 1997.
Fig. 541. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 14 June, 2016.
Fig. 542. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 5 May, 2014.
Fig. 543. Harry Bliss, 18 Nov., 2017.
Fig. 544. Weingartens & Clark, *Barney and Clyde*. 21 March, 2011.
Fig. 545. Jim Davis, *Garfield*, 8 Jan., 1998.
Fig. 546. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 24 March, 2012.
Fig. 547. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 29 April, 2016.
Fig. 548. Ben Zaehringer, *Berkeley Mews*, 30 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 549. Harry Bliss, 11 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 550. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 27 Oct., 2009.
Fig. 551. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 17 April, 2013.
Fig. 553. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 21 May, 2006.
Fig. 554. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 9 July, 2017.
Fig. 555. Doug Savage, *Savage Chickens*, 17 October, 2013.
Fig. 556. Ruben Bolling (Ken Fisher), *Tom the Dancing Bug*, 2009 (republished 15 Nov., 2012).
Fig. 557. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 13 Oct., 2006.
Fig. 558. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 26 Nov., 2006.
Fig. 559. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 3 Nov., 1993.
Fig. 560. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 23 Sept., 2013.
Fig. 561. Bill Griffith, *Zippy*, 25 Dec., 2003.
Fig. 562. Bill Griffith, "Cartoonist Descending a Staircase," 2003.
Fig. 563. Henri Matisse, *Dance (I)* and *Dance*.
Fig. 564. Roy Lichtenstein, *Artist Studio "The Dance"*, 1974. Oil on canvas, 2.44 X 3.26 m. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Fig. 565. Roy Lichtenstein, *Tintin Reading*, 1994. Lithograph.
Fig. 566. Henri Matisse, *The Dessert: Harmony in Red*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 1.8 X 2.2 m. Hermitage Museum.
Fig. 567. Larry Rivers, *Déjà vu and the RedRoom: Double Portrait of Matisse*, 1996.
Fig. 568. Christina Malman, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 2 May, 1942.
Fig. 569. Andrea Arroyo, Cover art,*The New Yorker*, 26 Oct., 1992.
Fig. 570. Wiley Miller, Non Sequitur, 6 Feb., 1995.
Fig. 571. TubeyToons, 13 March, 2015.
Fig. 572. Brian and Ron Boychuk, *Chuckle Bros*, 8 Nov., 2016.
Fig. 573. Dan Piraro, Bizarro, 4 April, 1997.
Fig. 574. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 30 July, 2016.
Fig. 575. Jim Davis, *Garfield*, 3 March, 1983.
Fig. 576. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 1 March., 2007.
Fig. 577. Mark Tatulli, *Lio*, 26 Aug., 2009.
Fig. 578. Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado Tejón).
Fig. 579. Pablo Picasso, *Sueño y mentira de Franco* (*The Dream and Lie of Picasso*), 1937. Etching and aquatint on paper, 31.2 x 40.0 cm. Sheet 1; Series of 150.
Fig. 580. Marc Chagall, *The Village and I*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 192 X 151 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Fig. 581. Bob Knox, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 8 Feb., 1993.
Fig. 582. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 24 Dec., 2017.
Fig. 583. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 May, 1997.
Fig. 584. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 24 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 585. Robert Leighon, *The New Yorker*, 4 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 586. Mark Tatulli, *Lio*, 26 July., 2006.
Fig. 587. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 21 August, 2016.
Fig. 588. M.C. Escher, *Drawing Hands*, 1948. Lithograph, 28.2 x 32.2 cm.
Fig. 589. Patrick O'Donnell, *Mutts*, 18 Oct., 1998.
Fig. 590. Chis Cater, 24 July, 2013.
Fig. 591. Harry Bliss, 28 May, 2019.
Fig. 592. Carl Rose, *The New Yorker*, 1937.
Fig. 593. Bill Griffith, *Zippy*. 21 July, 2013.
Fig. 594. Grant Snider, "My Neighbor Magritte," *Medium.com*, 3 Sept., 2013. Web.
Fig. 595. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1993. pp. 24–25.
Fig. 596. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 1997.
Fig. 597. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 19 Feb., 2011.
Fig. 598. Harry Bliss, 27 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 599. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 1 Dec., 2010.
Fig. 600. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 17 Nov., 2005.
Fig. 601. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 24 Aug. 2012.
Fig. 602. Wayne Honath, *Bizarro*, 16 May, 2018.
Fig. 603. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 4 April, 2016.
Fig. 604. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 4 April, 2016.
Fig. 605. Richard Taylor, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 9 Jan., 1937.
Fig. 606. Sam Cobean, *The New Yorker*, 1947.
Fig. 607. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 21 Feb., 2014.
Fig. 608. Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman, *Zits*, 18 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 609. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 7 July, 1996.
Fig. 610. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 1 Sept., 2012.
Fig. 611. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 24 July, 2010.
Fig. 612. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 7 Jan., 2003.
Fig. 613. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 9 June, 2010.
Fig. 614. John Deering, *Strange Brew*, 20 July, 2017.
Fig. 615. Maria Scrivan, *Half Full*, 25 April, 2019.
Fig. 616. Dan Piraro and Wayne ("Wayno") Honath, *Bizarro*, 15 Jan., 2012.
Fig. 617. Harry Bliss, 1 Jan., 2011.
Fig. 618. Wayne Honath, *WaynoVision*, 16 Feb., 2015.

Fig. 619. Jesús Ángel González López, "Metafiction in American Comic Strips," Slide 11, *slideshare.net*, 5 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 620. Jef Mallett, Frazz, 23 Sept., 2003.
Fig. 621. James Stevenson, *The New Yorker*, 20 Oct., 1980.
Fig. 622. Bill Griffith, *Zippy*, 3 Nov., 1989.
Fig. 623. Three Anatol Kovarsky cartoons from *The New Yorker*.
Fig. 624. Arthur Getz, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 7 Oct., 1972.
Fig. 625. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled* ca. 1945. Crayon, colored pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper, 51.5 x 63.5 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Fig. 626. Rob Harrell, *Adam@Home*, 8 May, 2001.
Fig. 627. Harry Bliss, 29 Jan., 2013.
Fig. 628. Wayne Honath, *WaynoVision*, 6 Feb., 2015.
Fig. 629. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 15 Dec., 2010.
Fig. 630. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 15 Sept., 2016.
Fig. 631. Harry Bliss, 29 Sept., 2018.
Fig. 632. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 27 April, 2014.
Fig. 633. Steve Breen, *Grand Avenue*, 20 July, 1999.
Fig. 634. Mark Tatulli, *Heart of the City*, 2 Feb., 2003.
Fig. 635. Brian Basset, *Red and Rover*, 12 March, 2008.
Fig. 636. Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman, *Zits*, 2012.
Fig. 637. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 22 Jan., 2011.
Fig. 638. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 21 May, 2019.
Fig. 639. Hector D. Cantú and Carlos Castellanos, *Baldo*, 3 Sept., 2006.
Fig. 640. James Stevenson, *The New Yorker*, 29 Aug., 1964.
Fig. 641. Pat Oliphant, 11 August, 1986.
Fig. 642. Paul Trap *Thatababy*, 15 Sept., 2015.
Fig. 643. Harry Bliss, 19 Aug., 2019.
Fig. 644. Selection of Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 1964—1968.
Fig. 645. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 29 Jan., 1999.
Fig. 646. Bob Thaves, Frank and Ernest, 5 July, 1994.
Fig. 647. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 18 Nov., 2012.
Fig. 648. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 17 May, 2014.
Fig. 649. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 13 June, 2012.
Fig. 650. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 13 Jan., 2014 (originally posted on *medium.com*, 7 Oct., 2013).
Fig. 651. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 26 Sept., 1959.
Fig. 652. Disney commemorative pins, 2004, 2018.
Fig. 653. Tony Fernandez, "Inspired By" Collection.
Fig. 654. Two stills from Matt Groening, "The Crepes of Wrath," *The Simpsons*, Season 1, Episode 11, 15 April, 1990.
Fig. 655. Alina Urusov, Cover art for *Ghost Rider*, #34, June, 2009.
Fig. 656. Laura Martin, Cover art for *Uncanny X-Men,* #508, June, 2009.
Fig. 657. Juan Doe, Cover art for *Moon Knight*, #29, June, 2009.
Fig. 658. Jason Chan, Cover art for *Exiles*, #1, June, 2009.
Fig. 659. Paolo Rivera, Cover art for *The Amazing Spider-Man*, #592, June, 2009.
Fig. 660. Morry Hollowell, Cover art for *Wolverine: Legacy*, #223*,* June, 2009.
Fig. 661. Juan Doe and Russ Heath, Cover art for *Daredevil*, #118, June, 2009.
Fig. 662. Skottie Young, Cover art for *Captain Britain and M113*, #12, June, 2009.
Fig. 663. Chris Eliopoulos, Cover art for *Wolverine: First Class*, #14, June, 2009.
Fig. 664. Christian Nauck, Cover art for *Age of Apocalypse*, No. 2, April, 2012.
Fig. 665. Greg Horn, Cover art for *Invincible Iron Man*, No. 515*,* April, 2012.
Fig. 666. Julian Totino Tedesco, Cover art for *Future Foundation*, No. 17, April, 2012.
Fig. 667. Richard Isanove, Cover art for *Captain America*, No. 10, April, 2012.
Fig. 668. Greg Horn, Cover art for *Uncanny X Men*, No. 11, April, 2012.
Fig. 669. Gabriele Dell'Otto, Cover art for *Avengers*, No. 25, April, 2012.
Fig. 670. Gerald Parel, Cover art for *Uncanny X Force*, No. 24, April, 2012.
Fig. 671. Julian Totino Tedesco, Cover art for *Secret Avengers*, No. 26, April, 2012.
Fig. 672. Alex Maleev, Cover art for *Wolverine & the X-Men*, No. 9, April, 2012.

Fig. 673. Joe Quinones, Cover art for *The Mighty Thor*, No. 13, April, 2012.
Fig. 674. Mike del Mundo, Cover art for *Amazing Spiderman*, No. 683, April, 2012.
Fig. 675. Michael Kaluta, Cover art for *Fantastic Four*, No. 605. April, 2012.
Fig. 676. Steffi Schutzee, Cover art for *Daredevil*, No. 11, April, 2012.
Fig. 677. M. T. "Penny" Ross, "Mamma's Angel Child has a Cubist Nightmare in the Studio of Monsieur Paul Vincent Cezanne Van Gogen Ganguin," *The Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 1916.
Fig. 678. Rube Goldberg, *Cosmopolitan*, 1928.
Fig. 679. Detail of Thomas E. Powers, "Art at the Armory by Powers, Futurist," *New York American*, 22 Feb., 1913 (**Fig. 98**).
Fig. 680. Cliff Sterrett, *Polly and Her Pals*, 26 Sept., 1929.
Fig. 681. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, from Groensteen (2017).
Fig. 682. Cliff Sterrett, *Polly and Her Pals*, 31 March, 1936.
Fig. 683. Richard Taylor, Frontispiece from Taylor (1947).
Fig. 684. Frank King, *Gasoline Alley*, 2 Nov., 1930.
Fig. 685. Constantin Alajalov, *Vanity Fair*, March, 1938.
Fig. 686. Constantin Alajalov, *New Yorker*, 27 Sept., 1941.
Fig. 687. Ad Reinhardt, "How to Look at a Cubist Painting," *PM* 1946.
Fig. 688. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 12 Jan., 1952.
Fig. 689. Chon Day, *The New Yorker*, 8 March, 1952.
Fig. 690. Garrett Price, *The New Yorker,* 22 March, 1952.
Fig. 691. Charles E. Martin, *The New Yorker*, 9 Aug., 1952.
Fig. 692. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 18 Oct., 1952.
Fig. 693. Saul Steinberg, *The New Yorker*, 1 Nov., 1952.
Fig. 694. Robert Krauss, *The New Yorker*, 27 Dec., 1952.
Fig. 695. Ollie Harrington, *Bootsie*, *Pittsburgh Currier*, 17 Oct., 1959.
Fig. 696. Jim Berry, *Berry's World* 1974.
Fig. 697. Harry Bliss, 22 June, 2011.
Fig. 698. John Ruge,"I know what he's trying to say, - he's trying to say that he can't paint worth a damn!" *Playboy*, April, 1963.
Fig. 699. Abel Faivre, "At an Exhibition of 'Cubist' or 'Futurist' Pictures," *The Century*, Vol. 85:6, April, 1913, p. 960.
Fig. 700. Wiley Miller, 1981.
Fig. 701. Ellison Hoover, "At the Museum," 1940. Lithograph, 25 x 36 cm.
Fig. 702. Gary Brookins & Susie MacNelly, Jeff MacNelly's Shoe, 5 April, 2015.
Fig. 703. Jeff Stahler, *Moderately Confused*, 10 March, 2018.
Fig. 704. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 2 Dec., 2010
Fig. 705. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 28 Sept., 2018.
Fig. 706 P. C. Vey, *Narrative Magazine*, 2018.
Fig. 707. P. C. Vey, *Barron's*, 2019.
Fig. 708. Pat Byrnes, *Barron's*, 5 Dec. 2018.
Fig. 709. Selection of Bunny Hoest and John Reiner, *The Lockhorns*, 2011–2017.
Fig. 710. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 19 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 711. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 10 Oct., 2016.
Fig. 712. Barbara Shermund, "Of course it's a woman. They don't do landscapes in marble," *The New Yorker*, 29 Oct., 1939.
Fig. 713. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 1 March, 1947.
Fig. 714. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 1955.
Fig. 715. Charles E. Martin, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 15 Jan. 1955.
Fig. 716. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 18 April, 1989.
Fig. 717. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 30 April, 1990.
Fig. 718. Ron Ferdinand and Scott Ketcham, *Dennis the Menace*, 6 March, 2016.
Fig. 719. Bill Amend, *Foxtrot*, 12 June, 2011.
Fig. 720. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 30 Oct., 2016.
Fig. 721. Berkeley Breathed, *Bloom County*, 8 April, 1985.
Fig. 722. Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 1985.
Fig. 723. Glenn and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 9 Jan., 2011.
Fig. 724. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 16 Sept., 2014.

Fig. 725. Tony Carrillo, *F Minus*, 19 May, 2006.
Fig. 726. Dean Young and John Marshall, *Blondie*, 19 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 727. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, T*he Flying McCoys*, 23 Oct., 2008.
Fig. 728. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 17 April, 2015.
Fig. 729. Jim Toomey, *Sherman's Lagoon*, 11 March, 2011.
Fig. 730. Matthew Diffee, 2018.
Fig. 731. Wayne Honath, *Bizarro*, 2 May, 2011.
Fig. 732. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 23 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 733. Saul Steinberg, Detail from "Comic Strip," 1958.
Fig. 734. Robert Crumb, "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics," *Zap Comix*, No. 1, 1968.
Fig. 735. Mike Getsiv, Tim Gaze, Jonny Gray, Maco, Steven LaRose, Satu Kaikkonen, Steven Bellitt, Rosaire Appel, Alexey Sokolin, Gareth A Hopkins, Chris Kreuter, A Decker, Daryl P. Morris, Charles Newton, Jase Daniels, Robukka, Rob, Ruela, Emmanuel, El Pájaro Mixto, Mauro Cesari, Amy Kuttab, Jenny Robins, Abi Daker, and Dellde Loport, *ABCOLAB #2*, 5–25 June, 2010. From Mike Getsiv, *Abstract Comics*, 5 July, 2010. Web.
Fig. 736. Man Ray, André Breton, Yves Tanguy, and Max Morise, "Exquisite Corpse" drawing, 1928. Art Institute, Chicago.
Fig. 737. Pablo Picasso and Saul Steinberg,"Exquisite Corpse" drawing, 16 May, 1958. Crayon and pencil on paper, 26 x 17 cm. Beinike Library, Yale University.
Fig. 738. Pablo Picasso and Saul Steinberg, "Exquisite Corpse" drawing, 16 May, 1958. Ink on paper, 26 x 17 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 739. Ros Chast, "Ad Infinitum," Cover art, *The New Yorker*,4 March, 2013.
Fig. 740. Silly art critics, from **Figs**. **116–117**, **136**, **157**, **184**, **193**, **402**, **696–697**, and **719**.
Fig. 741. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 22 Feb., 2015.
Fig. 742. Mike Peters, Editorial, *Dayton Daily*, 24 Feb., 2010.
Fig. 743. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose and Grimm*, 18 Nov., 2013.
Fig. 744. Detail of the "Hesione Vase," Late Corinthian column krater, ca. 550 BCE. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Fig. 745. Édouard Riou, Illustration for Jules Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, 1864.
Fig. 746. Gilbert Gaul, Illustration for James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, 1888.
Fig. 747. Robert L. Mason, Illustration for Frank Savile, *Beyond the Great South Wall*, 1901.
Fig. **748**. Harry Roundtree, Illustrations for Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World*, 1912.
Fig. 749. J. Allen St. John, Cover art for Edgar Rice Burrough's *At the Earth's Core*, 1922.
Fig. 750. J. Allen St. John, Cover art, Edgar Rice Burroughs' *The Land that Time Forgot*, 1924.
Fig. **751**. J. Allen St. John, Cover art and illustration for Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan the Terrible*, 1921.
Fig. 752. J. Allen St. John, Cover art and illustration for Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan at the Earth's Core*, 1930.
Fig. 753. John Taine (Eric Temple Bell), *The Greatest Adventure*, 1928. (Ace Book edition, 1960).
Fig. **754**. Don Marquis, *Love Sonnets of a Cave Man*, 1928.
Fig. **755**. Two stills from D. W. Griffith, *Brute Force* (Primitive Man), 1914.
Fig. 756. Still from Willis O'Brien, *RRD 10,000 BC*, Conquest Pictures, 1917.
Fig. 757. Still from Willis O'Brien, *Prehistoric Poultry*, Conquest Pictures, 1917.
Fig. **758**. Movie poster for *The Lost World*, First National Pictures, 1925.
Fig. **759**. Two stills from *The Lost World*, First National Pictures, 1925.
Fig. **760**. Two still from *King Kong*, 1933.
Fig. 761. Two stills from the Buster Keaton 1923 movie, *The Three Ages*.
Fig. 762. Movie Poster and production photograph, *One Million B.C.,* Hal Roach Studios, 1940.
Fig. 763. Tom Chantrell, Movie poster for *One Million Years B.C.*, Hammer Film Productions, 1966.
Fig. 764. Movie poster for *Unknown Island*, Universal Studios, 1948.
Fig. **765**. Movie poster for *Two Lost Worlds*, Sterling Productions, 1951.
Fig. 766. Movie poster and promotional photograph for *The Land Unknown*, Universal Pictures, 1957.

Fig. **767**. Movie poster for *The Lost World*, 20th Century Fox, 1960.
Fig. **768**. Movie poster for *The Land that Time Forgot*, Amicus Production, 1975.
Fig. 769. Movie poster for *At the Earth's Core*, Amicus Production, 1976.
Fig. 770. Movie Poster for *Quest for Fire*, Cinema International Company, 1981.
Fig. 771. Movie poster for *Caveman*. Turman-Foster Company, 1981.
Fig. **772**. Frank R. Paul, Cover art for *Amazing Stories*, Feb., 1927.
Fig. 773. Joe Kubert, Cover art for *One Million Years Ago!*, St. John's, 1953.
Fig. 774. Joe Kubert, Cover art for *Tor*, D.C. Comics, 1974.
Fig. 775. *Turok, Son of Stone*, Dell Comics, 1956, Gold Key Comics, 1966.
Fig. 776. Jack Sparling, Cover art, *Naza, Stone Age Warrior*, Dell Comics, 1964 and 1966.
Fig. **777**. *Tarzan of the Apes*, Gold Key Comics, No. 142 (June, 1964) and No. 146 (Oct., 1964).
Fig. **778**. Russ Manning, Cover art, *Tarzan of the Apes*, Gold Key Comics, Nos. 166–167 (July Sept. 1968).
Fig. **779**. Doug Wildey, Cover art, *Tarzan of the Apes*, Gold Key Comics, Nos. 179–181 (Sept.– Dec., 1968).
Fig. **780**. Ross Andru and Mike Esposito, Cover art, *Star Spangled War Stories*, No. 92 (Sept. 1960), No. 103 (July, 1960), and No. 125 (March, 1966).
Fig. **781**. David Schleinkofer, Cover art for Harry Harrison, *West of Eden*, 1984.
Fig. 782. E.T. Reed, *Mr. Punch's Prehistoric Peeps*, 1894.
Fig. 783. Oskar Andersson, "Urmänniskan och Urhunden," 1900.
Fig. **784**. Thomas Starling Sullivant, "Missed the Boat," *Life Magazine*, 15 June, 1899.
Fig. 785. Dan Regan, Hallmark Cards, 2009.
Fig. **786**. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013**.**
Fig. **787**. Charles R. Knight, Brontosaurus (Apatosaurus) and Diplodocus, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1898.
Fig. **788**. Frederick Opper, Frontispiece to *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903.
Fig. **789**. Frederick Opper, Selection of *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903.
Fig. **790**. Frederick Opper, "Our Antediluvian Ancestors," 3 April, 1904. Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.
Fig. **791**. Willian A. Rodgers, *Harper's Weekly*, 11 Jan., 1902.
Fig. **792**. Winsor McCay, *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend*, 25 May, 1913.
Fig. 793. Winsor McCay, "Flip in the Land of the Antediluvians," *In the Land of Wonderful Dreams*, 21 September, 1913.
Fig. **794**. Winsor McCay, "Flip Educates a Distacuteus Mastadonius," *In the Land of Wonderful Dreams*, 5 Oct., 1913.
Fig. 795. Winsor McCay, "Going Up! Flip and His Party Visit the Mayor of Cliffville ," *In the Land of Wonderful Dreams*, 12 Oct., 1913.
Fig. 796. Winsor McCay. Poster and animation cell from *Gertie the Dinosaur*, 1914..
Fig. 797. Poster for Fox Studio's *Winsor McCay's "Gertie"*, 1914.
Fig. 798. Robert McCay (Winsor McCay), *Dino*, 1934. Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University. From Merkl, 2015, pp. 16–17.
Fig. **799**. "Winsor McCay, Jr." (Robert McCay), *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 27 June, 1937.
Fig. 800. V. T. Hamlin, First *Alley Oop* comic strip, 5 Dec., 1932.
Fig. 801. V. T. Hamlin, *Alley Oop*, 9 Sept., 1934.
Fig. 802. V. T. Hamlin, *Alley Oop*, 21 Oct, 1934.
Fig. 803. Jon St. Ables Cover art, *Lucky Comics,* Aug.–Sept., 1945 and Feb.–March, 1946.
Fig. **804**. Albert Robida, "Une bonne partie de chasse à l'époque tertiaire," ca. 1900.
Fig. **805**. Georges Léonnec, "L'Histoire gallant: Le Chapitre des baignoires," *La Vie parisienne*, 1912.
Fig. **806**. Maurice Cuvillier, Detail from "The Adventures of Ra and Ta, Stone Age schoolchildren," *Guignol Cinema de la jeunesse*, 6 May, 1928.
Fig. **807**. Pouf, "Iroh, l'enfant des cavernes ," *Guignol Cinema de la jeunesse*, 19 May, 1933.
Fig. **808**. Douglas Dundee (Dugald Matheson Cumming-Skinner), "Cave-Boy Erek," *The Triumph, The Boys' Best Story Paper*, 1933.
Fig. **809**. Michael Maslin, *The New Yorker*, 14 April, 2008.
Fig. **810**. Frank Cotham, *The New Yorker*, 13 April, 2020.
Fig. **811**. Max Garcia, *Sunny Street*, 2013.

Fig. 812. Bill Abbott, *Spectickles*, 27 Aug., 2019.
Fig. 813. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*. From "KoProFagO" 2020.
Fig. 814. Photograph of the exhibition, *Prehistòria i Còmic*, Museu de Prehistòria de València, 14 June, 2016–8 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 815. Front cover to Fabrice Douar and Jean-Luc Martinez, *L' Archéologie en bulles,* Musée du Louvre, 2018.
Fig. 816. Poster for exhibition *Archéo-BD, A la croisée de l'archéologie et de la bande dessinée*, Service Archéologique de Melun, 2018–2019.
Fig. 817. Obelix, from *Astérix le Gaulois*, created by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo.
Fig. 818. From André Houot, *Chroniques de la nuit des temps*, 1. *Le Couteau de pierre* ("The Stone Knife"), Fleurus, 1987.
Fig. 819. From André Houot, *Chroniques de la nuit des temps*, 3. *On a marché sur la terre* ("We Walked on Earth"), Le Lombard, 1990.
Fig. 820. From Priscille Mahieu and Éric Le Brun, *Ticayou, Chasseur de la préhistoire (Prehistoric Hunter)*, Totem, 5 Nov., 2009.
Fig. 821. Covers to Éric Le Brun, *L'art préhistorique en bande dessinée*, (Glénat, 2012–2018).
Fig. 822. Cover and page from David Prudhomme, Emmanuel Guibert, Pascal Rabaté, Troub's, Marc-Antoine Mathieu and Etienne Davodeau, *Rupestres*, Futuropolis, 2011.
Fig. 823. Poster and panel from *Préhistoire de la bande dessinée et du dessin animé*, 2008–2009.
Fig. 824. Engraving of an ibex, from the rock shelter of Colombier (Ardèche) and a carved plaque with a horse, from Le Marche, after Azéma (2008).
Fig. 825. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1993. p. 141.
Fig. 826. From Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*, 2008 (1996), p. 1.
Fig. 827. Sephko (Gojko Franulic), 4 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 828. Reza Farazmand, *Poorly Drawn Lines*, 18 Aug., 2014.
Fig. 829. Mick Steven, *The New Yorker*, 22 Dec., 2014.
Fig. 830. A mid-2nd century B.C.E. "Homeric" bowl in the Antikensammlung Staatliche Museum zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz (3161n). Top, from Mertens, 2019, p. 156, fig. 14; bottom, drawing after Roberts 1890, p. 8, fig. A.
Fig. 831. John Swogger, Page from *Llyn Cerrig Bach* (CADW – Welsh Government Historic Environment Service), 2014. From Swogger, Feb., 2014.
Fig. 832. Sylvain Savoia, *Les Esclaves oubliés de Tromelin*, 2015, plates 72 and 82. From Douar and Martinez, 2018, pp. 24–25.
Fig. 833. Johannes H. N. Loubser, *Archaeology. The Comic*, 2003, p. 47.
Fig. 834. Larry Gonick, cover to *The Cartoon History of the Universe I*, and page from *The Cartoon History of the Universe II*.
Fig. 835. Troy Lovata, "How to Use the Tool," 2000. Reprinted in de Boer, 2004, p. 113.
Fig. 836. Faith Haney, "Six Things I've Never Found [A True Story]," *Shovel Bum #13*, 2012, p. 9.
Fig. 837. Anne Glynnis Fawkes, *Cartoons of Cyprus*, 2001, p. 26.
Fig. 838. Anne Glynnis Fawkes, *Cartoons of Cyprus*, 2001, pp. 28 and 33.
Fig. 839. Anne Glynnis Fawkes, *Cartoons of Cyprus*, 2001, p. 27.
Fig. 840. Anne Glynnis Fawkes, *Cartoons of Cyprus*, 2001, pp. 43.
Fig. 841. Anne Glynnis Fawkes, *Cartoons of Cyprus*, 2001, pp. 34–35.
Fig. 842. Fredrick Opper, *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903, Fig. 40.
Fig. 843. Fredrick Opper, *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903, Fig. 48.
Fig. 844. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 7 March, 2007.
Fig. 845. Two stills from *The Flintstones*.
Fig. 846. Fred Flintstone at work, and Fred, Wilma, and Pebbles Flintstone with their pet, Dino.
Fig. 847. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 26 Oct., 1984.
Fig. 848. Troy Lovata, "Talking Dog Archaeology," 2005, p. 25.
Fig. 849. Front Cover to Cornelius Holtorf, *Archaeology is a Brand!*, 2007.
Fig. 850. Walter Paget, Illustration for H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mine*, 1888.
Fig. 851. Arthur Conan Doyle, "Burger's Secret" ("The New Catacomb"), *The Sunlight Year-Book*, 1898.
Fig. 852. Robert Macartney, Dust jacket illustration for Agatha Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia*, 1936.
Fig. 853. Cover to Glyn Daniel, *The Cambridge Murders* (1964 Penguin reprint of 1945 original).
Fig. 854. Poster for *Mister V* (*Pimernel Smith*), 1941.

Fig. 855. Poster for *Indiana Jones* movies, 1981–2008.
Fig. 856. Howard Chakyn, Cover art for Walt Simonson, "Raiders of the Lost Arc," *Marvel Comics Super Special*, Vol. 1, # 18 (September, 1981).
Fig. 857. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 2014.
Fig. 858. Poster for *the Mummy*, 1999.
Fig. 859. Poster for *Lara Croft Tomb Raider*, 2001.
Fig. 860. Michael Turner, Cover illustration for *Tomb Raider* # 1 (1 Jan., 1999).
Fig. 861. Adam Hughes, Cover illustration for *Tomb Raider* # 33 (1 Jan., 2003).
Fig. 862. Poster for *Relic Hunter*, 1999.
Fig. 863. Salvador Larocca, Cover art for Kieron Gillen, *Star Wars Doctor Aphra*, Marvel Comics, 25 March, 2015.
Fig. 864. Rucka and Bilquis Evely, *D.C. Universe Rebirth # 8, Wonder Woman* (Dec., 2016).
Fig. 865. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 6 Feb., 2007.
Fig. 866. Mark Tatulli, *Heart of the City*, 2 March, 2015.
Fig. 867. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 2–7 and 9–12 May, 1988.
Fig. 868. Jan Eliot, *Stone Soup*, 24 Sept., 2000.
Fig. 869. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur,* 16 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 870. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 22 March, 2015.
Fig. 871. Jeff Stahler, *Moderately Confused*,31 Dec., 2014.
Fig. 872. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 29 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 873. Paul Gilligan, *Pooch Café*, 23 June, 2013.
Fig. 874. Paul Gilligan, *Pooch Café*, 22 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 875. Nick D Kim, 5 September, 2017.
Fig. 876. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 30 April, 2019.
Fig. 877. Charles Addams, *The New Yorker*.
Fig. 878. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*. , 13 March, 2015.
Fig. 879. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 27 March, 2019.
Fig. 880. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 881. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 25 March, 2013.
Fig. 882. Jim Meddick, *Monty*,14 July, 2013.
Fig. 883. David Maccaulay, *Motel of the Mysteries*, 1979.
Fig. 884. Sophia Schleimann wearing the "Jewels of Helen," 1874.
Fig. 885. David Maccaulay, *Motel of the Mysteries*, 1979.
Fig. 886. David Maccaulay, *Motel of the Mysteries*, 1979.
Fig. 887. Gary Wise and Lance Aldrich, *Real Life Adventures*. 29 Dec., 1999.
Fig. 888. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 13 July, 2011.
Fig. 889. Walt Handelsman, *Newsday* 19 Nov., 2012.
Fig. 890. Wayne Honath, *WaynoVision*, 7 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 891. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 July, 2016.
Fig. 892. John Baynham 2006.
Fig. 893. Scott Hilburn, *The* A*rgyle Sweater*, 24 July, 2009.
Fig. 894. Wiley Miller, Non Sequitur, 7 Oct., 1992.
Fig. 895. Wiley Miller, Non Sequitur, 7 July., 1998.
Fig. 896. Ruben Bolling (Ken Fisher), *Tom the Dancing Bug*, 4 May, 2002.
Fig. 897. Matt Wurker, 12 July, 2012.
Fig. 898. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 28 March 2011.
Fig. 899. Rudolph Zallinger, *Early Man*, 1965.
Fig. 900. Greg Noll "Da Cats" surfboard ad, 1966.
Fig. 901. Logo of the Leakey Foundation, 1968.
Fig. 902. Joe Garnett, Cover art to Door's *Full Circle* album, 1972.
Fig. 903. Supertramp, *Brother Where You Bound* album cover, 1985.
Fig. 904. *Encino Man* soundtrack album cover, 1992.
Fig. 905. Robert Leighton, *The New Yorker*, 25 Dec., 2006.
Fig. 906. Steve Greenberg, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 1996.
Fig. 907. Patrick Hardin, 3 Feb. 1999.
Fig. 908. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 30 Aug., 2004.

Fig. **909**. Kris Wilson, Rob DenBleyker, Matt Melvin and Dave McElfatrick. *Cyanide and Happiness*, explosum.net, April, 2005.
Fig. **910**. Paul Reiley, *Judge*, 18 July, 1925.
Fig. **911**. Mike Luckovid, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 1 Feb., 2003.
Fig. **912**. Jeff Parker, *Florida Today*, 6 May, 2005.
Fig. **913**. R. J. Matson, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 10 Nov., 2005.
Fig. **914**. Bill Day, *Detroit Free Press*, from Pausas (2009).
Fig. **915**. Matt Davies, *The Journal News*, 15 April, 2005.
Fig. **916**. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 24 Oct., 2006.
Fig. **917**. Tony Auth, from Pausas (2009).
Fig. **918**. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, reprinted 14 July, 2014.
Fig. **919**. Nick D Kim, *Science and Ink*.
Fig. **920**. Carmen Ezgeta, from Gri (2016).
Fig. **921**. Peter Steiner, *The New Yorker*, 30 July, 1990.
Fig. **922**. Mort Gerberg, *The New Yorker*, 24 Dec., 2001.
Fig. **923**. Sam Gross, from Pausas (2009).
Fig. **924**. Bruce McCall, three alternative covers for *The New Yorker,* 14 May, 2007.
Fig. **925**. Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman, *Zits*, 10 April, 2015.
Fig. **926**. Mike Keefe, *The Denver Post*, 27 March, 2009.
Fig. **927**. David Horsey, *The Los Angeles Times*, 2012.
Fig. **928**. George Riemann, from Gri (2016).
Fig. 929. Wilbur Dawbarn, from Giller and Conniff (2014).
Fig. **930**. From Gri (2016).
Fig. **931**. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 16 July, 2017.
Fig. **932**. Matthew Inman, "The evolution of our spine and speech," theoatmeal.com, 2020.
Fig. **933**. Patrick Boivin, June, 2005. From Gri (2016).
Fig. **934**. Darren Humphreys and John Schmelzer, 14 Nov., 2013.
Fig. **935**. Amjad Rasmi, from Gri (2016).
Fig. **936**. Anonymous, street art, London, 2008.
Fig. **937**. From Gri (2016).
Fig. **938**. MAC (Stanley McMurtry), *Daily Mail*, 2008.
Fig. **939**. Jon Kudelka, 4 June, 2009.
Fig. **940**. Teddy Tietz, 2009.
Fig. **941**. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 Dec., 2007.
Fig. **942**. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 1 Feb., 2015.
Fig. **943**. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 9 April, 2017.
Fig. **944**. Chris Madden, 1 Sept., 2008.
Fig. **945**. Glenn Jones, from Gri (2016).
Fig. **946**. Matt Groening, from Gri (2016).
Fig. **947**. Maentis, Selection of "99 Steps of Progress" posters, 2012.
Fig. **948**. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013**.**
Fig. **949**. Jorodo, 1 March, 2010.
Fig. **950**. Clare Mulley, *The Spectator*, 29 Feb., 2020.
Fig. **951**. Mick Stevens, *The New Yorker*, 24 Nov., 2014.
Fig. **952**. Bill Whitehead, *Free* Range, 4 April, 2018.
Fig. **953**. Carlotta Monterey and Louis Wolheim in the 1922 Plymouth Theater production of Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.
Fig. **954**. Caricature of Charles Darwin as a monkey, *La Petite Lune*, 1878.
Fig. **955**. C. H. Bennett, *Punch's Almanack for 1882*, 6 Dec. 1881.
Fig. **956**. Label of "Anis de Mono" liquor, and statue in Vicente Bosch Company, Badalona, Spain.
Fig. **957**. Emmanuel Frémiet, *Gorille enlevant une femme*, 1887. Bronze sculpture, 187 X 167 X 100 cm, Musée d'Arts, Nantes.
Fig. **958**. Cover to Georges Sim (Georges Simenon), *Le Gorille-roi*, 1929.
Fig. 959. Still from the 1933 RKO movie, *King Kong*.
Fig. **960**. Fred J. Arting, Book cover to Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes,* A. C. McClurg, 1914.
Fig. **961**. Lee O'Mealia, Cover art for *Action Comics*, No. 6, Nov., 1938.

Fig. 962. Publicity photo of Dorothy Lamour in *Her Jungle Love*, 1938.
Fig. 963. Pierre Boitard, Frontispiece, *Paris avant les hommes* (*Paris Before Man*), 1861.
Fig. 964. Frontispiece to Charles G.D. Roberts, *In the Morning of Time*, 1919.
Fig. 965. Joe Kubert, Cover art, DC Comics *Tor*, No. 1, June, 1975.
Fig. 966. Movie poster and still from D. W. Griffith, *Brute Force* (Primitive Man), 1914.
Fig. 967. Still from Buster Keaton, *The Three Ages*, 1923.
Fig. 968. Léon-Maxime Faivre, *Envahisseurs*, *épisode d'une migration a l'âge de pierre*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 259 x 189 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Vienna.
Fig. 969. Paul Jamin, *Rapt à l'âge de pierre*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 279 x 200 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims.
Fig. 970. Giambologna, *The Capture of the Sabine Women*, 1581–1583. Marble, 4.1 m. Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence.
Fig. 971. Photograph of the Centenary of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway, Liverpool, Sept., 1930.
Fig. 972. Frederick Opper, *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903.
Fig. 973. Leonard Dove, *The New Yorker*, 1 Dec., 1934.
Fig. 974. Misha Richter, *The New Yorker*, 27 Nov., 1943.
Fig. 975. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*, 12 April, 1999.
Fig. 976. Danny Shanahan, *The New Yorker*, 2002.
Fig. 977. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013**.**
Fig. 978. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 18 Oct., 2019.
Fig. 979. Leigh Rubin, *Rubes*, 27 May, 2018.
Fig. 980. Ballo (Rex May), 2010.
Fig. 981. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 982. Robert Crumb, "Cave Wimp," *Zap Comix*, No. 12, 1988.
Fig. 983. Front cover to E.T. Reed, *Mr. Punch's Prehistoric Peeps*, 1894.
Fig. 984. Dust jacket to Walt Disney, *Mickey Mouse on the Cave-Man Island*, 1944.
Fig. 985. Jean Ache (Jean-Baptiste Huet), "Archibald, l'homme de la préhistoire," *Pilote. Le journal d'Asterix et Obelix*, 1965.
Fig. 986. Gary Larson, *The Far Side.*
Fig. 987. Kaaman Hafeez, *The New Yorker*, 2 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 988. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 12 May, 2013.
Fig. 989. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 31 May, 2015.
Fig. 990. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 23 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 991. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*, 22 June, 2009.
Fig. 992. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*, 11 Oct., 2011.
Fig. 993. Bill Whitehead, Free Range, 14 Dec., 2019.
Fig. 994. Steve Moore, *In the Bleachers*, 27 Dec., 2001.
Fig. 995. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 16 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 996. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, 5 May, 1988.
Fig. 997. Screen shots from *Originalos,* Tiny Film, 2010.
Fig. 998. Baloo (Rex F. May), 2014.
Fig. 999. Chuck Ingwersen, 2009.
Fig. 1000. Paul Mahoney, 2012.
Fig. 1001. Ted Blackman, *Crotchety Comics*, 2012
Fig. 1002. "El origen de algunas cosas," *TBO.* Año XIV, n. 701, Barcelona, 1928.
Fig. 1003. Three Gary Larson *The Far Side* cartoons.
Fig. 1004. Bill Abbott, Sept., 2001.
Fig. 1005. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 5 April, 2010.
Fig. 1006. Robert Leighton, *The New Yorker*, 13 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 1007. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 14 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 1008. Maurice Cuvillier, "Les Aventures de Ra et Ta. Écoliers de L' Âge de Pierre," *Guignol*, no. 96, 6 May, 1928, pp. 1 and 8.
Fig. 1009. Jon St. Ables, *Lucky Comics*, Oct.–Nov., 1945.
Fig. 1010. Gene Hazelton, *The Flintstones*, 27 Nov., 1962.
Fig. 1011. Johnny Hart, *B.C.*, 1958.
Fig. 1012. Arby's B.C. Comics Caveman Unicycle Glass Tumbler, 1981.

Fig. 1013. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 20 March 1981.
Fig. 1014. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 23 Oct., 1984.
Fig. 1015. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 24 July, 1985.
Fig. 1016. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 17 Jan., 1986.
Fig. 1017. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 15 Jan., 1988.
Fig. 1018. Gary Larson, *Far Side*, 22 May, 1990.
Fig. 1019. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 3 Aug., 2014.
Fig. 1020. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 27 Nov., 2016.
Fig. 1021. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 22 Oct., 2017.
Fig. 1022. Patrick Hardin, 4 March, 2003.
Fig. 1023. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 17 April, 2005.
Fig. 1024. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013**.**
Fig. 1025. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 4 Jan. , 2010.
Fig. 1026 Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 14 Feb., 2014.
Fig. 1027. Mike Stanfill, 12 April, 2013.
Fig. 1028. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 2 June, 2016.
Fig. 1029. Harry Bliss, 21 Dec., 2016.
Fig. 1030. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 12 Feb., 2018.
Fig. 1031. David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, 24 Sept., 2018.
Fig. 1032. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 25 April, 2019.
Fig. 1033. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 1034. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 1035. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 22 Dec., 2016.
Fig. 1036. Nick D. Kim, *Science and Ink*.
Fig. 1037. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, 1985.
Fig. 1038. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 28 Sept., 2003.
Fig. 1039. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*.
Fig. 1040. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 8 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 1041. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 11–14, 19, 21–23, and 25–26 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 1042. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 27–28 Feb., and 1–2, 4, 6 March, 2013.
Fig. 1043. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 4 Nov., 1995.
Fig. 1044. Aurelio Santarelli, 1998.
Fig. 1045. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 April, 2019.
Fig. 1046. Eight Gary Larson *The Far Side* cartoons.
Fig. 1047. Baloo (Rex F. May), 2011.
Fig. 1048. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*.
Fig. 1049. Zahary Kanin, *The New Yorker*, 1 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 1050. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 8 April, 2009.
Fig. 1051. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 17 Aug., 2009.
Fig. 1052. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 17 Sept., 2009.
Fig. 1053. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 Dec., 2009.
Fig. 1054. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 May, 2012.
Fig. 1055. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 19 Sept., 2012.
Fig. 1056. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 4 May, 2013.
Fig. 1057. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 28 Sept., 2016.
Fig. 1058. Wayne Honath, *Bizarro*, 31 Aug., 2018.
Fig. 1059. Wayne Honath, *Bizarro*, 15 July, 2020.
Fig. 1060. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 July, 1992.
Fig. 1061. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 31 Dec., 1998.
Fig. 1062. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 5 March, 2012.
Fig. 1063. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 30 April. 2012.
Fig. 1064. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 17 April, 2016.
Fig. 1065. Johnny Hart, Advertisement for Dr. Pepper, 1963.
Fig. 1066. Danny Shanahan, *The New Yorker*, 27 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 1067. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 1068. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 1069. Peter C. Vey, *The New Yorker*, 27 April, 2020.
Fig. 1070. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 23 May, 2004.

Fig. 1071. Dan Piraro and Wayne Honath, *Bizarro*, 28 July, 2018.
Fig. 1072. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 19 Sept., 2008.
Fig. 1073. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 14 June, 2016.
Fig. 1074. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 1075. James Stevenson, *The New Yorker*, 21 Feb., 1970.
Fig. 1076. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 12 Dec., 2018.
Fig. 1077. Matthew Diffee, *The New Yorker*, 20 Dec., 2004.
Fig. 1078. Leigh Rubin, *Rubes*, 17 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 1079. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 1 Feb., 2010.
Fig. 1080. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 22 July, 2013.
Fig. 1081. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 5 March 2013.
Fig. 1082. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 2 June, 2013.
Fig. 1083. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 31 March, 2012.
Fig. 1084. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 30 June, 2014.
Fig. 1085. Tom Sloan, 26 Dec., 2013.
Fig. 1086. Max Garcia, *Sunny Street*, 2013.
Fig. 1087. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 29 Jan., 2013.
Fig. 1088. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 24 Nov., 2011.
Fig. 1089. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 16 Feb., 2019.
Fig. 1090. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 16 July, 2000.
Fig. 1091. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro,* 25 April, 2002.
Fig. 1092. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 20 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1093. Four Gary Larson, *The Far Side* cartoons.
Fig. 1094. Nick D. Kim, *Science and Ink*.
Fig. 1095. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 7 Sept. 2014.
Fig. 1096. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 1 June, 2006.
Fig. 1097. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 20 Oct., 2009.
Fig. 1098. Gary Larson, *The Far Side,* 1 April, 1980.
Fig. 1099. Brian and Ron Boychuk, *Chuckle Bros*, 26 Aug., 2013.
Fig. 1100. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 15 Jan., 2010.
Fig. 1101. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 1 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 1102. Harley Schwadron, 2006.
Fig. 1103. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 8 Feb., 2015.
Fig. 1104. Harry Bliss, 2017.
Fig. 1105. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 25 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 1106. Cedric Hohnstadt, 7 March, 2016.
Fig. 1107. Kaaman Hafeez, *The New Yorker*, 17 Aug., 2020.
Fig. 1108. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 9 May, 2016.
Fig. 1109. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweate*r, 16 Sept., 2011.
Fig. 1110. Dave Granlund, 11 March, 2020.
Fig. 1111. Baloo (Rex F. May), 2013.
Fig. 1112. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, 1986.
Fig. 1113. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweate*r, 11 March, 2011.
Fig. 1114. Mark Parisi*, Off the Mark*, 21 Oct., 2012.
Fig. 1115. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 1 Dec., 2018.
Fig. 1116. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 6 April, 2008.
Fig. 1117. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 8 July, 2008.
Fig. 1118 Mark Tatulli, *Lio*, 22 May, 2014.
Fig. 1119. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*.
Fig. 1120. Nick Kim, 23 Sept., 2008.
Fig. 1121. Harry Bliss, 13 Feb., 2012.
Fig. 1122. Garrett Price, *The New Yorker*, 5 July, 1952.
Fig. 1123. Three Gary Larson, *The Far Side* cartoons.
Fig. 1124. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013.
Fig. 1125. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 14 Feb., 2008.
Fig. 1126. Bob Eckstein, *Barron's*, 2018.
Fig. 1127. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 31 Oct., 1999.

Fig. 1128. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 29 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 1129. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, reprinted 27 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1130. Teddy Tietz, 2010.
Fig. 1131. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 22 Dec., 2013.
Fig. 1132. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 29 Dec., 2015.
Fig. 1133. Baloo (Rex F. May), 2013.
Fig. 1134. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 9 Jan., 1994.
Fig. 1135. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 5 Oct., 2014.
Fig. 1136. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 18 March, 2014.
Fig. 1137. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 26 March, 2020.
Fig. 1138. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 Aug., 2004.
Fig. 1139. Mike Luckovid, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 28 Nov., 2012.
Fig. 1140. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 7 Aug., 2016.
Fig. 1141. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 3 May, 2005.
Fig. 1142. Harley Schwadron, 2005.
Fig. 1143. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 27 July, 2014.
Fig. 1144. Dave Coverly, Speed Bump, 6 March, 2018.
Fig. 1145. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 19 Feb., 2014.
Fig. 1146. Leigh Ruben, *Rubes*, 26 Oct., 2016.
Fig. 1147. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 2 Feb., 2009.
Fig. 1148. Ryan Pagelow, *Buni*, 2012.
Fig. 1149. Frederick Opper, *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903, Fig. 41.
Fig. 1150. Leigh Ruben, *Rubes*, 21 Dec., 2018.
Fig. 1151. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 23 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 1152. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 16 March, 1995.
Fig. 1153. Tony Carrillo, *F Minus*, 16 Sept., 2005.
Fig. 1154. Leo Cullum, *The New Yorker*, 29 June, 2009.
Fig. 1155. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 8 April, 2010.
Fig. 1156. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 27 July, 2015.
Fig. 1157. Adrian Raeside, 3 April, 2020.
Fig. 1158. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 21 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 1159. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 16 Dec., 2014.
Fig. 1160. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 3 March, 2019.
Fig. 1161. Jim Unger, *Herman*, 28 March, 2006.
Fig. 1162. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 6 July, 2017.
Fig. 1163. Tom Toro.
Fig. 1164. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 18 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 1165. Kim Warp, *The New Yorker*, 14 June, 2010.
Fig. 1166. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 24 May, 2015.
Fig. 1167. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 26 Feb., 2012.
Fig. 1168. Rina Piccolo and Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 10 April, 2020.
Fig. 1169. Tony Husband, 2011.
Fig. 1170. Jeff Stahler, *Moderately Confused*, 12 Oct., 2018.
Fig. 1171. Ed McLachlan, 2006.
Fig. 1172. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 9 Jan., 2012.
Fig. 1173. Frederick Opper, *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903, Fig 45.
Fig. 1174. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 30 Oct., 2001.
Fig. 1175. David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, 12 Jan., 2015.
Fig. 1176. Laurie Ransom, 2018.
Fig. 1177. Mason Mastroianni, *B.C.*, 25 Aug., 2011.
Fig. 1178. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 2 Sept., 2017.
Fig. 1179. M. J. Fry, 2012.
Fig. 1180. Claude Smith, *The New Yorker*, 26 July, 1952.
Fig. 1181. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*, 30 Oct., 2017.
Fig. 1182. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 26 Nov., 1997.
Fig. 1183. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 14 May, 1997.
Fig. 1184. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 9 Feb., 2002.
Fig. 1185. Tony Carrillo, *F Minus*, 30 June, 2008.

Fig. **1186**. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 26 Nov., 2008.
Fig. **1187**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 22 Nov., 2007.
Fig. **1188**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 25 Jan., 2010.
Fig. **1189**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 15 Nov., 2012.
Fig. **1190**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 6 Feb., 2015.
Fig. **1191**. Harry Bliss, 1 June, 2009.
Fig. **1192**. Harry Bliss, 3 Feb., 2018.
Fig. **1193**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 10 Aug., 2013.
Fig. **1194**. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 23 June, 2014.
Fig. **1195**. Jim Unger, *Herman*, 10 Dec., 2009.
Fig. **1196**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 7 Sept., 2002.
Fig. **1197**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 8 Oct., 2010.
Fig. **1198**. Christopher Weyant, *Narrative Magazine*, 2019.
Fig. **1199**. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 11 Sept., 1998.
Fig. **1200**. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 6 Feb., 2010.
Fig. **1201**. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 18 Dec., 2013.
Fig. **1202**. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 14 Aug., 2016.
Fig. **1203**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 29 Jan., 2014.
Fig. **1204**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 6 May, 2015.
Fig. **1205**. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 22 Sept., 2016.
Fig. **1206**. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 28 June, 2015.
Fig. 1207. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 3 Sept., 2015.
Fig. **1208**. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 25 Nov., 2015.
Fig. **1209**. Pat Byrnes, *The New Yorker*, 18 April, 2016.
Fig. **1210**. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 8 Sept., 2019.
Fig. **1211**. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 2 April, 2012.
Fig. **1212**. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 6 June, 2016.
Fig. **1213**. Ryan Pagelow, *Buni*, 25 May, 2016.
Fig. 1214. Leigh Rubin, *Rubes*, 14 Jan., 2017.
Fig. **1215**. Tony Zuvela, 2009.
Fig. **1216**. M. Moeller, 2012.
Fig. **1217**. Figure from Moser and Gamble, 1997.
Fig. **1218**. Frederick Opper, Selection of *Our Antediluvian Ancestors*, 1903.
Fig. 1219. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 17 April, 2008.
Fig. 1220. Dan Pirraro, *Bizarro*, 23 May, 2015.
Fig. **1221**. Dan Piraro and Wayne ("Wayno") Honath, *Bizarro*, 3 May, 2018.
Fig. **1222**. Dave Carpenter, 2006.
Fig. **1223**. Chris Wildt, 2008.
Fig. 1224. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 25 Nov., 2013.
Fig. 1225. Tom Thaves*, Frank and Ernest*, 18 Aug., 2012.
Fig. **1226**. Cartoon cave paintings with a sun icon (from Figs. 1080, 1117, 1174, 1199, and 1224).
Fig. 1227. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 15, 16 Feb. 2013.
Fig. 1228. Frank Cotham, *The New Yorker*, 28 May, 2007.
Fig. 1229. Dan Pirraro, *Bizarro*, 29 Jan., 2007.
Fig. 1230. Dan Pirraro, *Bizarro*, 30 March, 2010.
Fig. 1231. Dan Pirraro, *Bizarro*, 31 May, 2016.
Fig. 1232. Dan Pirraro, *Bizarro*, 28 Sept., 2014.
Fig. **1233**. A sample of cartoon cavemen speaking (from Figs. 870, 994, 1001, 1026, 1030, 1050, 1068, 1103, 1106, 1123, 1125, 1068, 1206, 1208, 1219, 1229, and 1231).
Fig. **1234**. Fred and Wilma Flintstone, 1960–1966.
Fig. **1235**. "A selection of ornaments found in Paleolithic and Mesolithic deposits of coastal and inland sites in Greece," from Boric and Christiani, 2019.
Fig. **1236**. Burial 1 from Sunghir, Russia.
Fig. **1237**. Neanderthal body ornaments from he Grotte du Renne (Arcy-sur-Cure, France).
Fig. **1238**. Carved stag horn ornament from Tito Bustillo, Spain.
Fig. **1239**. Detail of Fig. 1195.
Fig. **1240**. Detail of Fig. 1079.

Fig. 1241. Selection of cartoon cavewomen with bone hair ornaments (from Figs. 1067, 1080, 1096, 1097, 1099, 1101, 1105, 1207, and 1224).
Fig. 1242. Jim Unger, *Herman*, 10 Dec., 2009.
Fig. 1243. Volcanoes in cavemen cartoons (from Figs. 54, 829, 870, 975, 976, 978, 982, 993, 1000, 1027, 1028, 1032, 1066, 1081, 1089, 1100, 1108, 1114, 1163, 1172, 1222, and 1228.
Fig. 1244. Adam Zyglis, *The Buffalo News*, 16 Nov., 2008.
Fig. 1245. Two Stonehenge/Easter Island internet memes.
Fig. 1246. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 25 July, 2012.
Fig. 1247. Dan Reynolds, 19 Sept., 2016.
Fig. 1248. Mid-14th-century illustration from a manuscript of the *Roman de Brut* by Wace, showing a giant helping the wizard Merlin build Stonehenge, British Library (Egerton MS 3028).
Fig. 1249. William O'Brian, "Well we've done it, but don't ask me how," *The New Yorker*, 1950's.
Fig. 1250. Zachary Kanin, *The New Yorker*, 24 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1251. E.T. Reed, "Howzat Umpire?", *Mr. Punch's Prehistoric Peeps*, 1894.
Fig. 1252. Mark Parisi*, Off the Mark*, 1998.
Fig. 1253. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 23 May, 2006.
Fig. 1254. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 30 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 1255. Mason Mastroianni, *B.C.*, 10 Jan, 2017.
Fig. 1256. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 25 June, 2017.
Fig. 1257. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories," *History Today*.
Fig. 1258. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 19 Feb., 2017.
Fig. 1259. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*, 12 April, 1999.
Fig. 1260. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 9 Oct., 2006.
Fig. 1261. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 12 March, 2017.
Fig. 1262. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 10 Oct., 2012.
Fig. 1263. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 16 Dec., 2012.
Fig. 1264. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 3 Feb., 2008.
Fig. 1265. Jeremy Kramer and Eric Vaughn, 2008.
Fig. 1266. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 17 April, 2017.
Fig. 1267. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 17 Nov., 2013.
Fig. 1268. Tim White, *Back of the Class*, 2009.
Fig. 1269. Jamie Smith, *Ink & Snow*, 1 April, 2012.
Fig. 1270. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 29 March, 2011.
Fig. 1271. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump,* 3 April, 2013.
Fig. 1272. Pat Byrnes, 2007.
Fig. 1273. Jack Ziegler, *The New Yorker*, 16 March, 2016.
Fig. 1274. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 17 June, 1997.
Fig. 1275. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 19 Sept., 2004.
Fig. 1276. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 28 June, 2012.
Fig. 1277. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 14 Nov., 2017.
Fig. 1278. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 25 Dec., 2017.
Fig. 1279. Arnie Levin, *The New Yorker*, 20 April, 1992.
Fig. 1280. Joe Dator, *The New Yorker*,16 Jan., 2012.
Fig. 1281. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 5 Aug., 2013.
Fig. 1282. Joseph Farris, *The New Yorker*, 23 Sept., 2013.
Fig. 1283. Jon Carter, *Cartertoons*, 2009.
Fig. 1284. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 8 May, 2011.
Fig. 1285. Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman, *Zits***,** 10 Oct., 2012.
Fig. 1286. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 13 Sept., 2015.
Fig. 1287. NAD (Mark Godfrey), *Wildlife Cartoons Australia*, 2013**.**
Fig. 1288. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 1 Dec., 2013.
Fig. 1289. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler*, Wumo*, 30 March, 2014.
Fig. 1290. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 9 Feb., 2014.
Fig. 1291. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 6 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 1292. Daan Jippes, Cover art, *Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge Adventures* #3, Gladstone, Jan. 1988.

Fig. 1293. Geronimo Stilton (Elisabetta Dami), #60, *The Treasure of Easter Island*, Scholastic, June 2015.
Fig. 1294. Gil Kane, Cover art for *Strange Adventures* #16, D.C. Comics, Jan., 1952.
Fig. 1295. Jack Kirby, Cover art for *House of Mystery*, Vol 1, #85, D.C. Comics, April, 1959.
Fig. 1296. Jack Kirby, Cover and page illustrations, *Tales to Astonish* #5, Atlas Comics, May 1959.

Fig. 1297. Frank Miller, Cover art, and Sal Buscema, illustrations for *The Incredible Hulk* #261, Marvel, July 1981.
Fig. 1298. Gil Kane, Cover and page illustration, *Thor* #318, Marvel, April, 1982.
Fig. 1299. Jack Kirby, Cover art and illustrations, *Super Powers* #3, D.C. Comics, Nov., 1985.
Fig. 1300. "The Stone Men!," *Sparky*, D.C. Thompson, 1977.
Fig. 1301. *Jewel Keepers: Easter Island* video game, Nordcurrent, 2011.
Fig. 1302. Brian and Ron Boychuk, *Chuckle Bros*, 22 June, 2009.
Fig. 1303. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 25 Sept., 2013.
Fig. 1304. Hergé, *Les Cigares du Pharaon*, 1934 (1955).
Fig. 1305. Gil Kane, Cover Art, *Mystery in Space* #36, Feb. 1957.
Fig. 1306. Kurt Swan and Stan Kaye, Cover art, *Action Comics*, #240, May, 1958.
Fig. 1307. Jack Kirby, Cover art and illustration, *Strange Tales* #70, Aug., 1959.
Fig. 1308. Ross Andreu and Mike Esposito, Cover art, *Wonder Woman* # 113, April, 1960.
Fig. 1309. Jack Kirby, Cover art, *Fantastic Four* #19, March, 1963.
Fig. 1310. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 10 Oct., 2007.
Fig. 1311. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 22 July 22, 2009.
Fig. 1312. Colby Jones, *SirColby*, 2017.
Fig. 1313. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 26 Dec., 2008.
Fig. 1314. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 19 Oct., 2014.
Fig. 1315. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 17 April, 2016.
Fig. 1316. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 4 Nov., 2018.
Fig. 1317. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 21 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 1318. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 May, 2014.
Fig. 1319. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 3 April, 2016.
Fig. 1320. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 16 July, 2017.
Fig. 1321. Roger L. Phillips, *The Grey Zone*, 2012.
Fig. 1322. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 7 Dec., 2014.
Fig. 1323. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 9 March, 2014.
Fig. 1324. Bill Amend, *Foxtrot*, 9 April, 2017.
Fig. 1325. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 17 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 1326. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 15 Sept., 2013.
Fig. 1327. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro* 29 Jan., 2017.
Fig. 1328. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 1 April, 2017.
Fig. 1329. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 26 Oct., 2008.
Fig. 1330. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 12 April, 2015.
Fig. 1331. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 16 March, 2014.
Fig. 1332. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*., 7 June, 2015.
Fig. 1333. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 15 March, 2008.
Fig. 1334. Mark Tatulli, *Lio*, 16 Oct., 2010.
Fig. 1335. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 25 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 1336. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*.
Fig. 1337. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 19 March, 2011.
Fig. 1338. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 29 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 1339. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 9 Nov., 2016.
Fig. 1340. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 8 Nov., 2018.
Fig. 1341. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 29 Nov., 2016.
Fig. 1342. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 3 Nov., 1995.
Fig. 1343. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 22 July, 2007.
Fig. 1344. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 28 May, 2011.
Fig. 1345. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 24 June, 2005.
Fig. 1346. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 22 Sept., 2000.
Fig. 1347. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 26 Jan., 2008.

Fig. 1348. Mike Baldwin*, Cornered*, 2 March, 2008.
Fig. 1349. Alain (Daniel Brustlein), *The New Yorker*, 1 Oct., 1955.
Fig. 1350. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 10 Feb., 2012.
Fig. 1351. Tim Richard, *Brewster Rockit,* 20 Sept., 2020.
Fig. 1352. Ronald Searle, 1945.
Fig. 1353. Carl Rose, *The New Yorker*, 5 Jan., 1952.
Fig. 1354. Alan Dunn, *The New Yorker*, 19 April, 1952.
Fig. 1355. Ed Fisher, *The New Yorker*, 26 Jan., 1963.
Fig. 1356. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 12 July, 2013.
Fig. 1357. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 9 Oct., 2009.
Fig. 1358. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 22 Oct., 2012.
Fig. 1359. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 9 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 1360. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 16 Feb., 2017.
Fig. 1361. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 6 Oct., 2011.
Fig. 1362. Tony Zuvela, 2008.
Fig. 1363. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories: Twitter in Ancient Egypt," *History Today*, 8 June, 2012.
Fig. 1364. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 26 April, 2014.
Fig. 1365. Cuyler Black, front page of *What's That Funny Look on Your Faith?*, 2006.
Fig. 1366a. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366b. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366c. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366d. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366e. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366f. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366g. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366h. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366i. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1366j. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1367. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 27 Sept., 2020.
Fig. 1368. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*,12 May, 2016.
Fig. 1369. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 20 May, 2016.
Fig. 1370. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 30 May, 2017.
Fig. 1371. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 22 May, 2016.
Fig. 1372. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 17 April, 2016.
Fig. 1373. David Borchart, *The New Yorker*, 14 Oct., 2013.
Fig. 1374. Scott Hilburn*,* 30 April, 2009.
Fig. 1375. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 7 Jan., 2010.
Fig. 1376. Leigh Rubins, *Rubes*, 24 Jan., 2011.
Fig. 1377. Leigh Rubins, *Rubes*, 24 Oct., 2011.
Fig. 1378. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 5 Dec. 2009.
Fig. 1379. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 22 July, 2010.
Fig. 1380. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 1 Feb., 2016.
Fig. 1381. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 20 July, 2010.
Fig. 1382. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 6 Jan., 2012.
Fig. 1383. Leigh Rubins, *Rubes*.
Fig. 1384. Daniel Collins, NobleWorks Cards.
Fig. 1385. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 4 April, 2015.
Fig. 1386. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 1 Jan., 2016.
Fig. 1387. Dan Reynolds, *Divine Comedy*, 2016.
Fig. 1388. Selection of Mike Baldwin, *Cornered* cartoons, 2000 to 2020.
Fig. 1389. J.V., 2002.
Fig. 1390. Harry Bliss, 24 Sept., 2005.
Fig. 1391. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 2007.
Fig. 1392. John Huckeby and Nicholas DeYoung, *Bible Tails*, DaySpring, 2008.
Fig. 1393. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1394. A Gary Larson cartoon.
Fig. 1395. A Leigh Rubins cartoon.

Fig. 1396. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 5 April, 2010.
Fig. 1397. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 4 Sept., 2013.
Fig. 1398. Dan Reynolds, Cover and cartoon from *Divine Comedy*, 2017.
Fig. 1399. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 9 Aug., 2014.
Fig. 1400. Hank Ketcham, *Dennis the Menace*, 28 May, 2017.
Fig. 1401. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 16 Feb., 2019.
Fig. 1402. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater,* 18 Dec., 2013.
Fig. 1403. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater,* 19 Dec., 2016.
Fig. 1404. Scott Metzger, *The Bent Pinky*.
Fig. 1405. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 29 April, 2015.
Fig. 1406. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories: Galilee, A.D. 26," *History Today*, 5 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 1407. Phil Judd, 2008.
Fig. 1408. Three Tim Whyatt greeting card cartoons.
Fig. 1409. Joseph Nowak.
Fig. 1410. Cuyler Black, a selection of "Inherit the Mirth" cartoons.
Fig. 1411. A Gary Larson cartoon.
Fig. 1412. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 26 Jan., 2007.
Fig. 1413. A Chris Madden cartoon.
Fig. 1414. John McPherson, *Close to Home,* 5 July, 2011.
Fig. 1415. A Tim Whyatt greeting card cartoon.
Fig. 1416. Randy Bish, *Pittsburgh Tribune*, 13 Feb. 2000.
Fig. 1417. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 16 June, 2017.
Fig. 1418. Loren Fishman, *HumoresQue Cartoons*, 2011.
Fig. 1419. Barry Blitt *The New Yorker*, 10 July, 2020.
Fig. 1420. George Herriman, *Krazy Kat*, 6 Jan., 1906.
Fig. 1421. Wesley Osam, 16 Oct., 2008.
Fig. 1422. Curt Swan, Cover art, *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane* #92, D. C. Comics, May, 1969. (From Kovacs, 2011, fig. 1.1.)
Fig. 1423. David Mazzucchelli, Cover art, *Daredevil* #226, Marvel Comics, Jan., 1986. (From Kovacs and Marshall, 2011, fig. 0.1.)
Fig. 1424. Frank Miller, *300*, Dark Horse Comics, 1998.
Fig. 1425. Everett E. Hibbard, Cover art for *The Flash* #10**,** D.C. Comics, Oct., 1940.
Fig. 1426. William Moulton Marston and Harry G. Peter, Panel from *All Star Comics #8*, D.C. Comics, Dec. 1941.
Fig. 1427. George Perez, *Wonder Woman Omnibus*, D.C. Comics, 2015.
Fig. 1428. C. C. Beck, Cover art for *Whiz Comics #2,*, Fawcett Comics, Feb., 1940.
Fig. 1429. Al Plastino, Cover art for *Action Comics* #293, D.C. Comics, Oct., 1962.
Fig. 1430. Theatrical release poster for *Hercules*, Walt Disney Pictures, 1997.
Fig. 1431. Andrew Kreisberg, Josh Lieb, and Matt Warburton, "D'oh, Brother Where Art Thou?" *The Simpsons*, March, 2002.
Fig. 1432. Pedro Cifuentes, Title page to *Historia del arte en cómic 1. El mundo clásico*, 2019.
Fig. 1433. Pedro Cifuentes, *Historia del arte en cómic 1. El mundo clásico*, 2019, p. 42.
Fig. 1434. Detail of an Attic Red-Figure Stamnos ("The Siren Vase"). From Vulci, 480–470 B.C.E. The British Museum.
Fig. 1435. Pedro Cifuentes, *Historia del arte en cómic 1. El mundo clásico*, 2019, p. 43.
Fig. 1436. Marble sculpture of Aphrodite, Pan, and Eros. From Delos, ca. 100 B.C.E. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.
Fig. 1437. John Buscema, Cover art, *The Iliad*, Marvel Classics Comics #26, July, 1977.
Fig. 1438. Ernie Chan, Cover art, *The Odyssey*, Marvel Classics Comics #18, Dec., 1976.
Fig. 1439. George Pichard, Cover art to *Ulysses*, Heavy Metal, 1978.
Fig. 1440. José María Martín Saurí, Cover art to *The Odyssey*, Heavy Metal, 1983.
Fig. 1441. José María Martín Saurí, Illustration for *Odiseo*, 1983.
Fig. 1442. José María Martín Sauri, illustrations for *The Odyssey*, Heavy Metal, 1983. (From Jenkins, 2011, figs. 16.1 and 16.2)
Fig. 1443. Cover to Virgin Steele, *The House of Atreus* album, 2009.
Fig. 1444. Cover to Symphony, *The Odyssey* album, Inside Out Music, 2002.
Fig. 1445. Eric Shanower, Title page to *Age of Bronze*, Vol. 1, 2001.

Fig. 1446. Eric Shanower, *Age of Bronze*, "Mycenae Palace Courtyard," (From Shanower, 2005, fig. 1.)
Fig. 1447. Eric Shanower, "Twenty-first Century Troy" (2011), pp. 199, 200, 202, and 206.
Fig. 1448. Eric Shanower, Paris and Helen, detail from *Age of Bronze* 23, 2006. (From Sulprizio, 2011, fig. 15.2)
Fig. 1449. V.T. Hamblin, *Alley Oop*, 23 Aug., 1939.
Fig. 1450. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 8 Oct., 1996.
Fig. 1451. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 1 Feb., 2015.
Fig. 1452. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 11 May, 2015.
Fig. 1453. Scott Hilburn, *The* A*rgyle Sweater*, 20 Feb, 2012.
Fig. 1454. Mark Schultz and Thomas Yeates, *Prince Valiant*, 4 Jan., 2015.
Fig. 1455. Mark Schultz and Thomas Yeates, *Prince Valiant*, 11 Jan., 2015.
Fig. 1456. Dolphin fresco, Palace of Knossos, Minoan, ca. 1500 B.C.E. Herakleion Museum, Crete.
Fig. 1457. "Ladies in Blue" fresco, Palace of Minoan, ca. 1500 B.C.E. Herakleion Museum, Knossos, Crete.
Fig. 1458. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 31 March, 2012.
Fig. 1459. Eric Shanower, panel from Shanower, 2011, p, 196.
Fig. 1460. Cover and illustration from *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*.
Fig. 1461. Bill Waterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 3 Feb., 1988.
Fig. 1462. Arnie Levin, *The New Yorker*, 8 Jan., 1990.
Fig. 1463. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 23 June, 2013.
Fig. 1464. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 12 Feb., 2008.
Fig. 1465. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 15 May, 2016.
Fig. 1466. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 28 Oct., 2012.
Fig. 1467. Roger L. Phillips, *The Grey Zone*, 2014.
Fig. 1468. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 25 June, 2013.
Fig. 1469. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 21 June, 2013.
Fig. 1470. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 7 Sept., 2017.
Fig. 1471. Scott Maynard, *Happle Tea*, 19 July, 2013.
Fig. 1472. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 6 June, 2006.
Fig. 1473. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 26 Dec., 2015.
Fig. 1474. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 10 Sept., 2011.
Fig. 1475. John Zakour and Scott Roberts, *Working Daze*, 11 June, 2012.
Fig. 1476. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 31 May, 2018.
Fig. 1477. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 30 May, 2014.
Fig. 1478. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 16 March, 2012.
Fig. 1479. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 16 Feb., 2018.
Fig. 1480. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 28 May, 2010.
Fig. 1481. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 28 Aug., 2017.
Fig. 1482. Dan Piraro, 2003.
Fig. 1483. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 30 April, 2018.
Fig. 1484. Mort Gerberg, *The New Yorker*, 20 July, 1998.
Fig. 1485. Roz Chast, *The New Yorker*, 22 Sept., 2008.
Fig. 1486. Charles Barsotti, *The New Yorker*, 8 Dec., 2008.
Fig. 1487. Zachery Kanin, *The New Yorker*, 1 June, 2009.
Fig. 1488. Christopher Weyant, *The New Yorker*, 29 Nov., 2010.
Fig. 1489. Paul Booth, *The New Yorker*, 24 Dec., 2012.
Fig. 1490. Drew Dernavich, *The New Yorker*, 20 May, 2013.
Fig. 1491. Mort Gerberg, *The New Yorker*, 21 Oct., 2013.
Fig. 1492. Shannon Wheeler, *The New Yorker*, 11 Nov., 2013.
Fig. 1493. Bob Eckstein, *The New Yorker*, 27 July, 2015.
Fig. 1494. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*,16 Aug., 2015.
Fig. 1495. Kaamran Hafeez, *The New Yorker*, 26 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 1496. Danny Shanahan, *The New Yorker*, 2 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 1497. Seth Fleishman, *The New Yorker*, 22 Aug., 2016.
Fig. 1498. Pat Byrnes, *The New Yorker*, 24 March, 2017.
Fig. 1499. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 18 Feb., 2020.

Fig. 1500. Lars Kenseth, *The New Yorker*, 1 June, 2020.
Fig. 1501. Benjamin Schwartz, *The New Yorker*, 17 Aug., 2020.
Fig. 1502. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*, Work Cartoon #7042.
Fig. 1503. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 4 Nov., 2012.
Fig. 1504. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grim*, 26 May, 2013.
Fig. 1505. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 20 Jan., 2013.
Fig. 1506. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 30 March, 2013.
Fig. 1507. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 14 Aug. 2014.
Fig. 1508. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 3 May, 2015.
Fig. 1509. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 Dec., 2016.
Fig. 1510. Anatol Kovarsky, "Leda and the Swan," unpublished drawings, 1953–1959.
Fig. 1511. Frank Modell, *The New Yorker*, 16 Nov., 1968.
Fig. 1512. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 14 March, 2016.
Fig. 1513. Charles Hankin, *The New Yorker*, 20 Nov., 2017.
Fig. 1514. Robert Leighton, *The New Yorker*, 10 Jan., 2005.
Fig. 1515. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 25 March, 2009.
Fig. 1516. Dylan Spencer, *Earth Explodes*, 2013.
Fig. 1517. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 11 July, 2014.
Fig. 1518. Richard Thompson, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 5 Sept., 2018 (reprint).
Fig. 1519. Ros Chast, *The New Yorker*, 30 Nov., 2015.
Fig. 1520. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 23 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 1521. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 6 April, 2019.
Fig. 1522. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 9 Aug., 2020.
Fig. 1523. Scott Adams, *Dilbert*, 3 Jan., 2016.
Fig. 1524. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 2004 and 2016.
Fig. 1525. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 11 March, 2016.
Fig. 1526. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories: Greece, c. 560 B.C.," *History Today*, 23 April, 2015.
Fig. 1527. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 28 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 1528. Peter Duggan, *The Guardian*, 12 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 1529. Harry Bliss, illustration from *Bailey at the Museum*, 2012.
Fig. 1530. Bill Amend, *FoxTrot*, 5 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 1531. Jim Davis, *Garfield*. 2 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 1532. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 4 May, 2014.
Fig. 1533. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 18 Sept., 2016.
Fig. 1534. George Herriman, *Krazy Kat*, 15 May, 1919.
Fig. 1535. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 20 Oct., 1956.
Fig. 1536. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 4 March, 2016.
Fig. 1537. Ian Baker, "Exhibition Piece," 22 June, 2008.
Fig. 1538. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 6 Jan., 2009.
Fig. 1539. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 8 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1540. Rea Irvin, Cover to *Life*, 20 Feb., 1913.
Fig. 1541. Garrett Price, *Life*, 30 Sept., 1940.
Fig. 1542. Left: Attic Black-Figure olpe, ca. 550–520 B.C.E. Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology; right: vectorized drawing by Alexandre G. Mitchell, from Mitchell 2009, Fig. 1.
Fig. 1543. Attic eye cup from Vulci, ca. 550 B.C.E. Tampa Museum of Art.
Fig. 1544. Fragment of an Attic Red-Figure cup, ca. 440–430 B.C.E. Acropolis Museum. From Mitchell, 2009, Fig. 3.
Fig. 1545. Attic Red-Figure kylix from Vulci, ca. 500–490 B.C.E. British Museum.
Fig. 1546. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 3 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1547. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 14 Sept., 2015.
Fig. 1548. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 14 March, 2010.
Fig. 1549. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 5 May, 2018.
Fig. 1550. Dave Blazek, *Loose Parts*, 19 Jan., 2015.
Fig. 1551. Rob Murray, "Alternative Histories," *History Today*, 2020.
Fig. 1552. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 19 July, 2008.
Fig. 1553. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 7 Nov., 2010.

Fig. 1554. Dean Young and John Marshall, *Blondie*. 12 Aug., 2012.
Fig. 1555. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 9 April, 2017.
Fig. 1556. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 12 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1557. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 1 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1558. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 3 Dec., 2014.
Fig. 1559. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 19 July, 2016.
Fig. 1560. Cast of characters of *Asterix*.
Fig. 1561. Advertisement for McDonalds, from *Le Figero*, 2010.
Fig. 1562. Jack Kirby, *Tales of the Unexpected* #16, 1957.
Fig. 1563. John Buscema, cover art for *Thor* #272, June, 1978.
Fig. 1564. Chris Browne, *Hagar the Horrible*, 25 Dec., 2006.
Fig. 1565. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*.
Fig. 1566. Colby Jones, *SirColby*, 27 Dec., 2007.
Fig. 1567. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 5 June, 2011.
Fig. 1568. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 April, 2009.
Fig. 1569. Leigh Rubin, *Rubes*, 4 March, 2014.
Fig. 1570. Scott Maynard, *Happle Tea*, 6 Aug., 2013.
Fig. 1571. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 27 Nov., 2016.
Fig. 1572. Carl Barks, Cover and page from *Donald Duck "Lost in the Andes"*, Walt Disney, 2011.
Fig. 1573. David Farley, *Doctor Fun*, 3 Dec., 2004.
Fig. 1574. Glenn and Gary McCoy, *The Duplex*, 17 July, 2009.
Fig. 1575. Lalo Alcaraz, *La Cucaracha*, 13 Feb, 2010.
Fig. 1576. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 7 Feb., 2012.
Fig. 1577. Aztec Sun Stone, ca. 1502–1521 A.D. National Anthropology Museum, Mexico City.
Fig. 1578. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 26 Nov., 1960.
Fig. 1579. Leigh Rubin, 24 Jan., 2006.
Fig. 1580. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 2 Dec., 2009.
Fig. 1581. Tom Cheney, *The New Yorker*.
Fig. 1582. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 Sept., 2015.
Fig. 1583. Ballgame scene on a Maya vase K5435; (bottom right) speed depicted by Hergé in 1930 in the Quick & Flupke series - Acroabaties p. 2. (From Wichmann and Nielsen, 2017, fig. 3.)
Fig. 1584. Rolled-out view of "Regal Rabbit Pot," K1398, Maya, 693–728 A.D., Private Coll.
Fig. 1585. Ray Billingsley, *Curtis*, 23 Nov., 2014.
Fig. 1586. Dave Horton, *Hortoon*, 2008.
Fig. 1587. Peter Kuper, "This is Not a Pipe," Screenprint, 2008. University of North Dakota.
Fig. 1588. Peter Kuper, cagle.com, 21 Sept., 2020.
Fig. 1589. Peter Kuper, cagle.com, 17 Sept., 2020.
Fig. 1590. Detail from Fig. 288, Stephan Pastis, "The Sad, Lonely Journey of a 'Pearls' Comic Strip," *Pearls Before Swine*, 11 July, 2004.
Fig. 1591. Mothers taking their children to the art museum. From Figs. 158, and 223–225.
Fig. 1592. The living room sofa. From Figs. 845, 1075, 535, 1494, 1458, 1084, 1546, and 1554.
Fig. 1593. Art above the couch. From Figs. 725, 536, and 709.
Fig. 1594. Mothers chiding their children. From Figs. 21, 297, 298, 331, 636, 1099, and 1331.
Fig. 1595. Disgruntled women. From Figs. 17, 18 1489, 1504, 1519, 1558, 1586.
Fig. 1596. Men watching television. From Figs. 505, 551, 618, 1509, 883, and 894.
Fig. 1597. Men sleeping in chairs. From Figs. 200, 201, 239, 377, and 504.
Fig. 1598. Andrew Toos, 2011.