

Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages

Part III

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

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Comic Art in Museums and Museums in Comic Art

[Apologies to Michael Picone for expropriating the title of his 2013 article.]

High Art Lowdown

[Apologies to Art Spiegelman for expropriating the title of his 1990 *Artforum* cartoon.]

“That belongs in a museum.”

—the young Indiana Jones in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989)



Fig. 136. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 20 July, 1993.



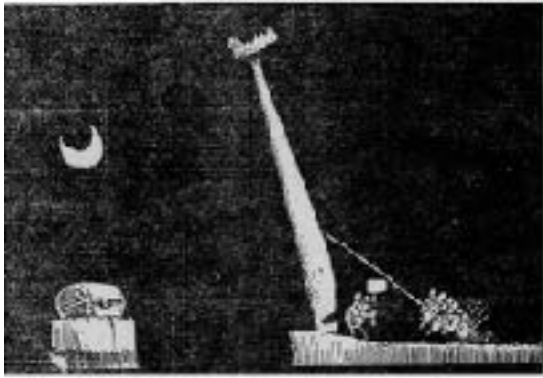
Fig. 137. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 6 Jan., 2000.

The supposed dichotomy between “highbrow” fine arts and “lowbrow” comics art has garnered much attention from comic-strip artists, comics scholars, museum curators, and art historians over the past half century. The issue is hilariously summarized in a Bill Watterson’s 1993 *Calvin and Hobbes* strip (Fig. 136), where Calvin tells his animated stuffed tiger Hobbes that it is “sophomoric, intellectually sterile ‘low’ art” to make a cartoon of a “sophisticated, philosophically challenging ‘high’ art” Pop Art painting of a panel from a “vapid, juvenile, commercial hack work ‘low’ art” comic strip.

Hilary Price has added to Watterson’s deliciously humorous metafiction with a *Rhymes with Orange* strip (**Fig. 137**), this time tackling the issue of comics as high/low art from the perspective of a museum. Price’s strip falls within the class of the “imaginary museum” cartoon, where, as we will see below, the incongruous humor derives from the ridiculousness of the museum’s subject matter (cf. **Figs. 139** and **193–199**). In her typical single elongated panel format, Price presents a *mise a abyme* comic strip of a museum display of comic strips, here attached to refrigerators by magnets; the silliness of using refrigerators for displays in a museum gallery is emphasized by the crossed-armed museum guard protecting the “art” as if it were of great value. (For the comic motif of refrigerator art, cf. **Figs. 402–409** below; for cartoons of museum guards, cf. **Figs. 179–186**.) Price also humorously populates the gallery with sober visitors and a beret-wearing artist making a copy of one of the “masterpieces.” (For the motif of cartoon artists making copies of museum art, cf. **Figs. 371–374** below.) By creating a gag using her audience’s assumption that comic strips do not belong in a museum, the Californian cartoonist Price was ignoring the fact that, at the time she was drawing her strip, a sea-change had already taken place in the scholarly evaluation of comics art, and that several museums of cartoon art had already been established in the United States, including in her home town of San Francisco.



We should note that the low estimation of the artistic merits of comics is of relatively recent vintage. As historians of comics have pointed out, artists such as William Hogarth in the 18th century or Honoré Daumier in the 19th century easily spanned the gap between fine-art painter and caricaturist. And as we have seen in the previous essay on cartoons about the Armory Show, the line between painter and cartoonist continued to be a fluid one in early 20th-century America. Indeed, for many artists of this period, such as Lyonel Feininger (cf. **Fig. 91**), creating newspaper and magazine cartoons was a *travail alimentaire*—something to put food on the table while they worked on their paintings.



George Herriman, Detail from a *Krazy Kat* comic strip, 20 Jan., 1918.



George Herriman, *For Carl Harbaugh*, ca. 1925. Watercolor. Private Collection.



Joan Miró, *Dog Barking at Moon*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 138. Comparison of art work of George Herriman and Joan Miró.

American newspaper comic strips were greatly admired in European modernist circles in the first decades of the 20th century; the ex-pat Gertrude Stein even supplied Pablo Picasso with American comics. Especially influential for its radical layout and visual imagery were the *Krazy Kat* comics by George Herriman, who has been called an American Dadaist. The humor of Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, which began as an add-on to his *Dingbat Family* strip and then ran as an independent comic in William Randolph Hearst's papers from 1913 to 1944, centers on the love triangle between a gender-ambiguous cat, a brick-throwing mouse, and a police-officer dog. Rather than setting his gags within a naturalistic, if cartoonish, world as most other comic-strip artists of the

time were doing, Herriman located *Krazy Kat* within a surrealistically rendered desert landscape inspired by Arizona's Coconino County, where he had a vacation home.

A comparison of Herriman's art to that of the Catalan Surrealist Joan Miró (**Fig. 138**) shows obvious stylistic similarities. While clearly not accidental, these similarities should not be taken as indicating a simple, one-way influence of Herriman's comic art on Miró's surrealist painting. Rather, the work of both the cartoonist and the painter should be understood as responding to a common aesthetic emerging in post-World War I art; as Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik remarked in their exhibition catalog to the 1990 Museum of Modern Art show, *High & Low*, "both Miró and Herriman were in revolt against the idea of the sublime landscape as an icon of solemnity; both sought to make instead a landscape that was musical and free. Both Herriman and Miró wanted to draw sublime landscapes that would be an uncanny delight to look at, and this unpretentious ambition was more revolutionary than it may sound." Still, the striking parallels between the tree piercing a black sky with a crescent moon in Herriman's 1918 comic strip and the ladder piercing a black sky with a crescent moon in Miró's 1925 painting, *Dog Barking at the Moon*, makes one think that, rather than being solely based on memories of his native Catalan landscape as he claimed, Miró's painting might also have been influenced by a subliminal memory of having seen a Herriman cartoon.

To be sure, since their first appearance in the late 19th-century century, American newspaper cartoons and comic strips have been subjected to the general prejudice against considering mass-produced and expendable popular culture as having artistic merit; but it was not until the 1930s, however, that comics were really deemed a "low" art form. To a large degree, this negative evaluation was a function of a change in the audience for whom American comic strips were created. Whereas the first generation of American comic strips was almost exclusively directed to an adult newspaper readership, by the 1930s, comic strips, comic books, and the new animated cartoons were increasingly being made for children and adolescents. *Krazy Kat's* sadistic, brick-throwing Ignatz Mouse had been overtaken by Walt Disney's sappy, large-headed Mickey. The watering-down of American comics was accelerated in 1954 when, in response to claims that comic books were corrupting the morals of America's youth and leading to juvenile delinquency, the comic book industry adopted a self-censoring Comics Code which banned excessively violent or sexual content and required that "in

every instance good shall triumph over evil." [By 2001, comic book publishers began to leave the Comics Code Authority and by 2011 the Code was no longer in effect.]

So it stood with American comics when Andy Warhol's *Dick Tracy* and Roy Lichtenstein's *Look Mickey* (**Fig. 142**) popped onto the art scene in the early 1960's.

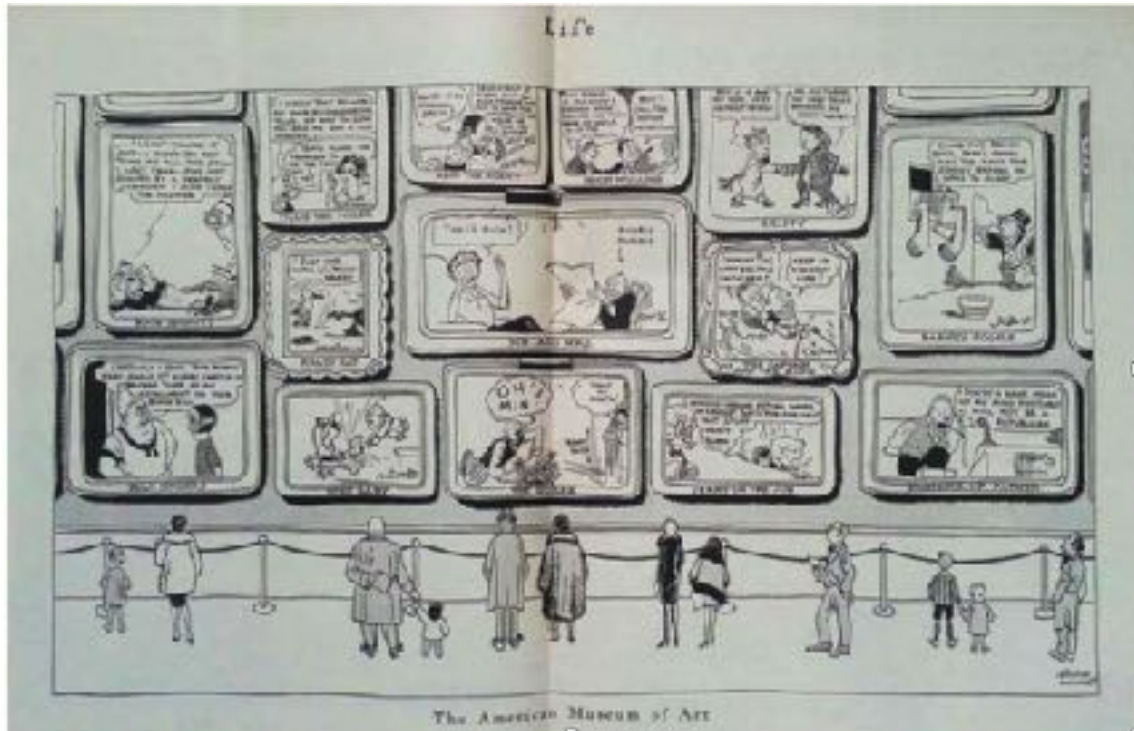


Fig. 139. Ellison Hoover, "The American Museum of Art," *Life (The Comic Strip Number)*, 13 Feb. 1927.

When Ellison Hoover's "The American Museum of Art" was published in 1927 (**Fig. 139**), the very idea that comic strips could be hung in an art museum really was thought to be ridiculous. The incongruity of placing "low" art comics in a bastion of "high" art carries the humor of Hoover's cartoon, which depicts framed panels from actual American newspaper comic strips being displayed in a "salon-style hang"—reminiscent of 19th-century European museums. In front of this display Hoover has placed museum visitors of various ages, all except for one with their backs to us; we the viewers of this cartoon are also on this side of the rope barrier, being asked to giggle at both the idea of comics in a museum as well at the pompousness of the man shown in profile admiring this "art."

[One wonders if Roy Lichtenstein ever saw this cartoon!]

Cartoons and comic strips did begin to make sporadic appearances in American museums and galleries after the mid-20th century. In the early 1940's, the American

Institute of Graphic Arts sponsored an exhibition about the history of comics that opened at New York's National Arts Club. In 1951, the Metropolitan Museum of Art put on a show, *American Cartooning*, again providing a historical overview of the genre. In 1964, the Newspaper Comic Council's *The Cavalcade of American Comics* was displayed at the Pavilion of Humor at the New York World Fair.

But it was not until after Andy Warhol's and Roy Lichtenstein's paintings of enlarged comic-strip panels were being hung on the walls of major modern art museums and galleries that museum curators began to look seriously at the genre of comics. However, Warhol's and Lichtenstein's use of comics imagery was part of the larger postmodern Pop Art movement of making ironic parodies through the expropriation of popular culture, not statements that comics themselves could be works of art—much like the modernist Marcel Duchamp had used R. Mutt's urinal for his *Fountain* readymade sculpture. The first museums to place comic art next to Lichtenstein's giant Ben-Day dot paintings thus did so only to illuminate the “low” popular culture sources for this new “high” Pop Art.



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).

Given the fact that Europe, and France especially, held comics—the 9th Art—in higher esteem than the U.S. did, it is hardly surprising that the first major museum exhibition on comics art was mounted in Paris. The 1967 *Bande Dessinée et Figuration Narrative* (Comics and Narrative Figuration) at the Louvre’s Musée des Arts Décoratifs was designed to demonstrate that comics art possessed unique aesthetic value on its own. The curators of the exhibition creatively displayed photographic blow-ups of comic panels as the equivalents of Pop Art and its European cousin, Narrative Figuration—examples of which they were forced to include in the show (**Fig. 140**). Although the 1967 *Bande Dessinée et Figuration Narrative* marked a major turning point in the high/low debate about the artistic merits of comics, it was not without its critics. By displaying only isolated panels and segments of comics, some claimed, the exhibition neglected the sequential narration that is so central to the genre; others noted that, by being held in a museum dedicated to functional, mass-produced decorative objects and not in the Louvre itself, the show was bringing comics into the art world through a backdoor.

The 1967 Paris comics exhibition was scheduled to travel to the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, but the curators there decided to mount their own exhibition on comics. Opening in 1971, their show, *AAARGH!: a Celebration of Comic Art*, displayed original comic art and back issues of real comics instead of photographic blow-ups, thus allowing visitors the opportunity to experience comics on their own terms.

Meanwhile, a number of exhibitions on comic art were mounted in the U.S., although none were held at a major museum venues. In 1970, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, exhibited its *The Comics as an Art Form* show. In 1971, the University of Maryland exhibited its *The Art of the Comic Strip* show. In the same year, Maurice Horn—who had helped organize the 1967 Paris exhibition—created a show, *75 Years of the Comics*, that was exhibited at the New York Cultural Center.

It was not until 1983, however, that an exhibition on the art of comics was mounted at a major museum in the U.S.—the Whitney Museum of American Art. And even then, the Whitney’s *The Comic Art Show* was only held at its Federal Hall/Downtown branch, the venue where it used to mount an annual show created by graduate students aspiring to become museum curators (**Fig. 141**).



Fig. 141. Photographs of the exhibition *The Comic Art Show*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1983. From Munson (2012).

As Kim Munson, the chronicler of museum exhibitions on comic art, has noted, the young curators of the Whitney's 1983 *The Comic Art Show* sought to demonstrate that not only could comics and contemporary art coexist, but they were now actually communicating with each other as independent art forms. Rather than merely expropriating "low" art comic imagery as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein had done in the 1960's (cf. **Fig. 142**), graffiti-inspired artists of the 1980's, such as the New-Expressionist Jean-Michel Basquiat (e.g. **Fig. 143**), were quoting comic art as one artist borrowing from another, i.e. they were making art about art.



Fig. 142. Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 122 x 175 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Fig. 143. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *A Panel of Experts*, 1982. Acrylic and oil pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 152.5 x 152 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In 1990, the new director of New York's Museum of Modern Art again took up the topic of paintings and comics with his exhibition, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (Fig. 144). Unlike the Whitney show, which had sought to demonstrate a kind of

artistic parity between painting and comics, MoMA's *High & Low* exhibition on comics presented them only as “low” source material for “high” modern art. The little comics displayed in the prestigious galleries of MoMA's *High & Low* show were dwarfed by the big paintings hung next to them.



Fig. 144. Mali Olatunji, Installation photographs for the exhibition *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, Museum of Modern Art, 7 Oct., 1990–15 Jan., 1991.



Fig. 145. Art Spiegelman, "High Art Lowdown." From *Artforum*, December 1990.



Fig. 146. Detail of above.

Not surprisingly, the 1990 MOMA *High & Low* exhibition was received with hostility by the comics community, most notably by Art Spiegelman, who had been a key consultant for the curators of the 1983 Whitney show and who was to earn a Pulitzer Prize for his graphic novel *Maus* in 1992. Spiegelman's "High Art Lowdown" critiqued the show through a page of cartoons and comic strips that comprise a metafictional parody of modern and Pop Art (Fig. 145). In addition to attacking MOMA's *High & Low*

exhibition for missing “the **real** political, sexual and formal energy” of contemporary comic artists, Spiegelman also criticized the show on economic grounds. In his pastiche of a Herriman *Krazy Kat* strip, Spiegelman has the “L’il irono-class” Ignatz Mouse declare that “‘High ’n Low’ is a question of class/economics—not aesthetics” before then throwing a brick through Miró’s *A Dog Barking at the Moon* (**Fig. 146**).

[Ironically, in the past quarter century, as comics have achieved the sort of artistic recognition that Spiegelman and other advocates were calling for, the prices realized in auctions of comics art have skyrocketed, reaching levels almost on par with those of traditional fine art. Not only do original artworks by well known comic artists regularly fetch high prices, but the ephemeral nature of comic strips and comic books—designed to be consumed and then disposed of—has turned into an economic advantage when a stray example escapes the ravages of time; pristine copies of early American comic books, which originally cost 10¢, have actually been sold for millions of dollars. Rather than being confined to the “low” commercial world of mass-produced commodities, comics have also now entered the realm of artsy high finances.]

In a rebuttal to the 1990 MoMA comics exhibition, John Carlin (one of the two curators of the 1983 Whitney comics show) and the cartoonist Brian Walker (the son of the comic-strip artist Mort Walker and former director of the Museum of Cartoon Art) co-curated a new exhibition, *Masters of American Comics*, which was jointly presented in 2005 by the Hammer Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (**Fig. 147**). In an attempt to define a canon of comics art, Carlin and Walker selected fifteen comics artists as “masters,” based on the level of their craftsmanship and on the formal innovations they contributed to the medium. Rather than displaying the works of these comics artists side-by-side with fine-art paintings, Carlin and Walker presented them by themselves, mounting sketches, final drawings, printers proofs, and tear sheets that revealed the entirety of the artistic processes involved in making comics. As an effort to establish a traditional art historical lineage for American comics art, the *Masters* show was a success, although it has been criticized for its lack of diversity in selecting only white male comics artists as “masters.”



Fig. 147. *Masters of American Comics*, Hammer Museum, 20 Nov., 2005- 12 March, 2006.

One of the “masters” selected for the 2005 Hammer Museum exhibition was the comics artist and writer Chris Ware, who in 2002 had been the first comics artist invited to exhibit works at the Whitney Biennial. In 2007, Ware organized his own show of “serious” comics artists, *Uninked: Paintings, Sculpture, and Graphic Work by Five Contemporary Cartoonists*, at the Phoenix Museum of Art. On the back page of the show’s catalog, which he edited, Ware attached a comic strip about a disaffected comic-strip artist who decided to try to become a “real” artist. After buying lots of art supplies, Ware’s bald, round-bodied cartoonist stops in at an art museum to get inspiration for his new endeavor; in the galleries, he is astounded to see a Pop Art rendition of the title

panel of his own, low-brow gag comic strip “Wingnutz,” which is accompanied by a pretentious label discussing how in “recontextualizing” the strip the pop artist “. . . frees the pictorial space from the tyranny of the viewed . . .” (Fig. 148).

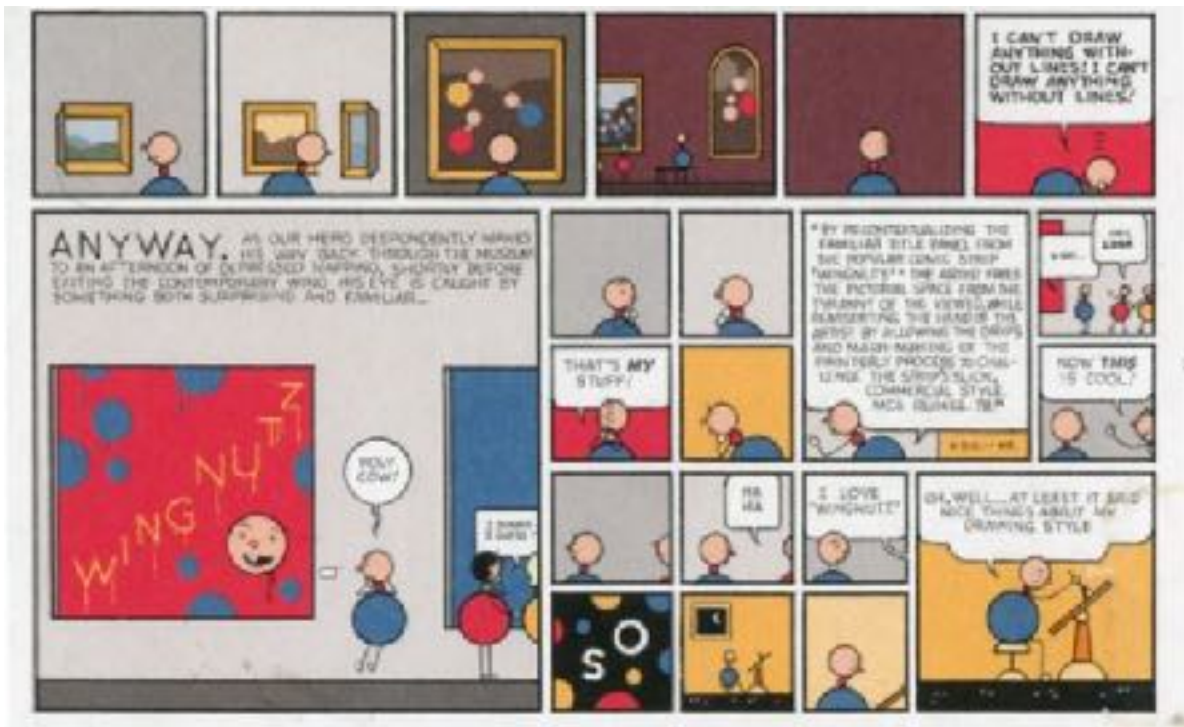


Fig. 148. Chris Ware, Detail of back cover to *Uninked: Paintings, Sculpture and Graphic Works By Five Cartoonists*, Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 2007.

Although we will explore the issue of metafictional self-reflexive comics in the first section of the “Making Fun of Making Art” essay below, we should just note here that, by creating a comic strip about an artist creating a comic strip, Ware is using irony to comment on the place of comics in the high/low art debate. But, as Bart Beaty suggests,

Ware reaffirms the supremacy of the art world relative to comics by maintaining and reinforcing existing prejudices about the inadequacies of the form presumed to be inexorably tainted by mass cultures and its audiences, and turning the loathing of the form into a highly aestheticized performance of the self-hating artist that makes him all the more acceptable by the art world he claims to disdain.



Fig. 149. Installation views of *Comic Abstraction: Image-Making, Image-Breaking*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 4 March – 11 June, 2007.

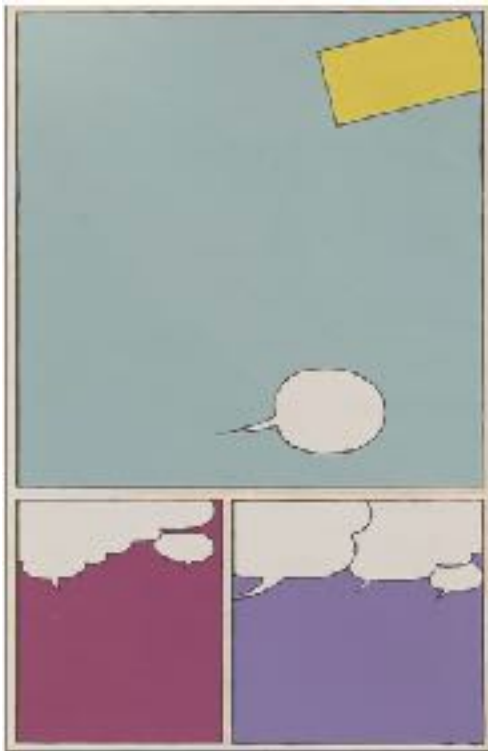


Fig. 150. Rivanne Neuenschwander, First two pages from *Zé Carioca no. 4, A Volta de Zé Carioca*, 2004. Synthetic polymer paint on comic book pages, each 15.9 x 10.2 cm.

At the same time that Chris Ware's *Uninked* was at the Phoenix Museum of Art, a comics-related exhibition, *Comic Abstraction: Image-Making, Image-Breaking*, opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (**Fig. 149**). This 2007 MoMA show displayed the work of thirteen contemporary artists who, in the words of the show's organizers, were "inspired by comics, cartoons, animation, slapstick, and caricature" to use "the vernacular language of these art forms as a springboard for abstraction." In spite of this claim, most of the contemporary art in *Comic Abstraction* seems to have, at best, only a tangential relationship to comics or cartoons. Among the works in the show that did

allude to comics was the French artist Philippe Parreno's 1997 *Speech Bubbles*, an installation of unmarked, white helium-filled mylar balloons shaped like comic-strip speech bubbles (**Fig. 149**, left); Parreno's installation was inspired by the similarly unmarked balloons he had made for a French union strike as a clever platform for protesters to write their demands.

The only work of contemporary art in the 2007 MoMA *Comic Abstraction* exhibition that directly speaks to comics art were the paintings the Brazilian artist Rivanne Neuenschwander made based on the popular Brazilian *Zé Carioca* comic books (**Fig 150**). *Zé Carioca* ("Joe from Rio de Janeiro") is a dapper, soccer-loving, green parrot character created by Walt Disney when he was sent to South America as a cultural ambassador to the region during World War II; in Neuenschwander's opinion, *Zé Carioca* reinforces a stereotypical cliché of Brazilians as street-smart, lazy, flirtatious scoundrels. In protesting against this stereotype, Neuenschwander took *Zé Carioca* comic books, blew each panel up to two meters, and overpainted the scenes in monochrome colors and removed the texts from the word balloons and insets. The resulting abstract comics "offers viewers a clean slate to imagine their own stories and dialogues." (For more on abstract comics, cf. **Figs. 733–738** below.)



Fig. 151. Installation views of *VRAOUM! An Exhibition of Comic Strips and Contemporary Art*, Maison Rouge, Paris, 28 May–27 Sept., 2009.

In 2009, another approach to displaying contemporary art and comics together was mounted at the Maison Rouge, an exhibition space in central Paris dedicated to contemporary art (**Fig. 151**). The show's curators, David Rosenberg and Pierre Sterckx, declared that "VRAOUM! is a celebration of paintings, sculptures and drawings shown side-by-side. There is no hierarchy and certainly no divisions. Comic strips are presented as art and contemporary art as being fueled by strips." By evaluating comics art as a form of drawing as opposed to a genre of mass-produced popular literature, the

onomatopoetically named *VRAOUM!* exhibition attempted to break down the high/low division between fine art and comics art. But, as Thierry Groensteen points out in his 2011 *Bande dessinée et narration (Comics and Narration, 2013)*, this attempt to abolish hierarchies between the two forms of art failed on several accounts. Groensteen sees the exhibition's juxtaposition of contemporary art with a century-worth of comics art (from Richard Outcault and Winsor McCay to Robert Crumb and Moebius) as implicitly reinforcing a division between "fine" contemporary art and "low" comics art—the former belonging to an art-historical tradition we are presumed to know, the latter belonging to an ahistorical and undifferentiated popular culture. Groensteen's more serious critique of *VRAOUM!* is that the exhibition implies "that comics requires the mediation of the fine artists whose eyes need to alight upon it in order to magnify it, reveal it to itself, and allow it to claim its rightful place as art." In other words, *VRAOUM!* is more akin to the 1990 MoMA *High & Low* exhibition, which presented comics as "low" source material for "high" art, than it is to the 1983 Whitney *The Comic Art Show*, which presented contemporary art and comics as independent art forms.



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.

Groensteen's point that the contemporary art in the *VRAOUM* exhibition expropriates, rather than communicates on an equal footing with, comics art can be seen in many of the works selected for the show. In addition to including examples of Rivanne Neuenschwander's *Zé Carioca* paintings, the *VRAOUM!* show included two pieces by the French artist Sammy Engramer (**Figs. 152–153**) that, like Philippe Parreno's 1997 *Speech Bubbles*, are abstract rifts on comic word balloons (*bulles*). In a similar manner, the show's installation of the French artist Gilles Barbier's *L'hospice* (**Fig. 154**) takes superhero comic-book characters out of context and transforms them into life-like statues, humorously suggesting what well-known *DC* and *Marvel* heroes would look like if they aged and were put in an old-folks home.

In its use of comics as “low” popular culture source material for “high” art, the contemporary comics-inspired art displayed in the 2007 MoMA *Comic Abstraction* and the 2009 Maison Rouge *VRAOUM!* exhibitions differs little from the Pop Art expropriations of comics art by Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol.



Now that the issue of cartoon-inspired modern art has come up, we pause here to briefly look at the other side of the coin—cartoons and comic strips directed to making fun of Pop Art.

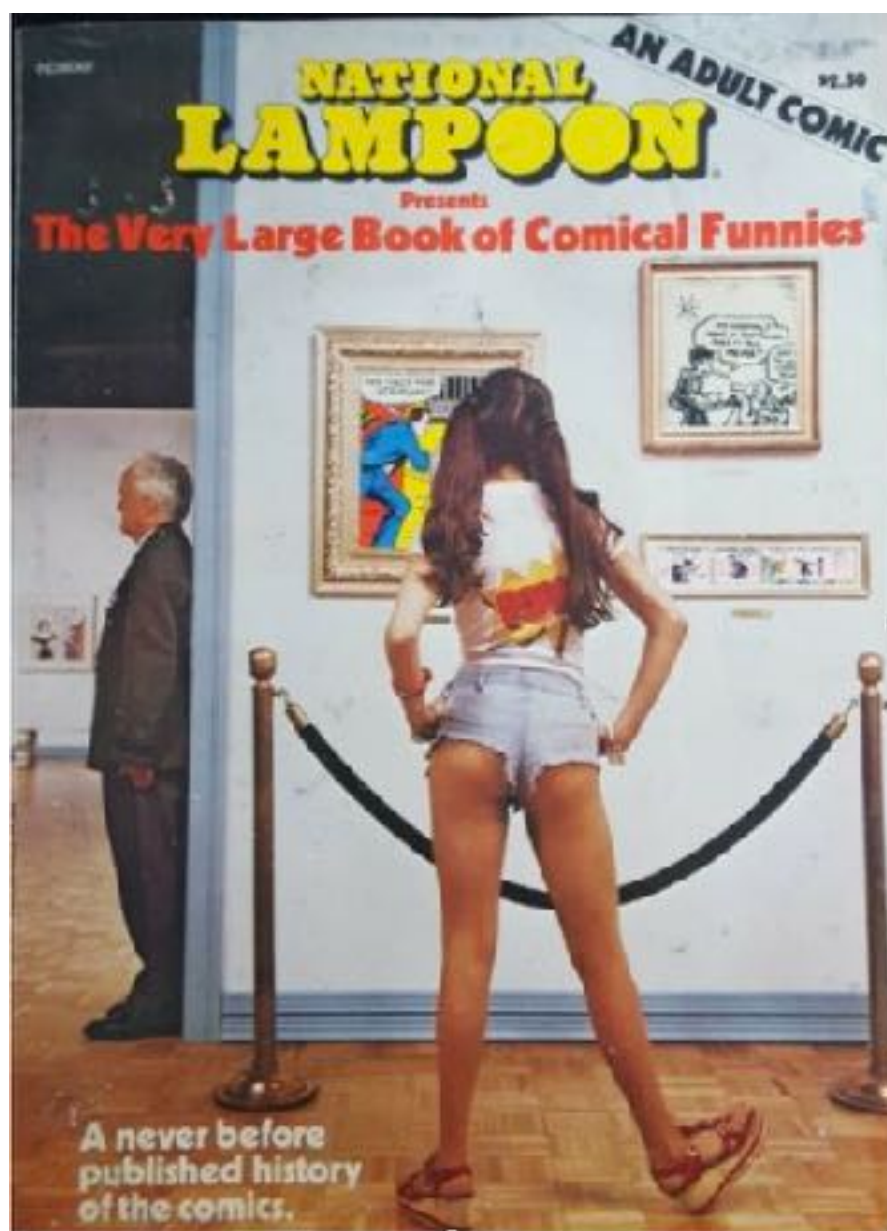


Fig. 155. David Arky and John Barrett, Cover photograph, Sean Kelly, ed., *National Lampoon Presents The Very Large Book of Comical Funnies*, 1975.

When David Arky's and John Barrett's photograph appeared on the cover of a 1975 issue of the *National Lampoon* dedicated to comics (**Fig. 155**), the idea of comic strips being hung on the walls of a museum was—in America, at least—as unusual as it had been when Ellison Hoover published his 1927 cartoon in *Life* magazine (**Fig. 139** above). The real humor in Arky's and Barrett's photo, however, is in the visual attire of the young woman standing behind the rope barrier. In addition to the obvious juvenile prurience of the woman's pose, a closer examination of the photo—eyes up here, buddy!—reveals that she is wearing a Lichtenstein-esque Pop Art tee-shirt. The roles have

been reversed: the comics are in the museum and the fine art is a mass-produced commodity.



Fig. 156. Eldon Redmi, *The New Yorker*, 17 Sept., 1990.

Eldon Redmi's *The New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 156**) was wonderfully prescient, appearing only a few weeks before the *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art on 7 October, 1990. Here, Redmi also uses a role reversal to create metafictional humor. The joke only works by the absurd temporal anomaly of having Ignatz Mouse and Krazy Kat standing before a Warhol Coca-Cola painting, thus giving us a posthumous George Herriman critique of the pomposity of Pop Art.

Ken Fisher, who publishes under the name Ruben Bolling, repeats the same high/low art joke that Bill Watterson had made in his 1993 *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip (**Fig. 136** above). Whereas Watterson leaves it up to the viewer to imagine exactly which works of Pop Art and which comic strips Calvin and Hobbes are looking at, Bolling spells it out for us (**Fig. 157**). The target of Bolling's joke—the pompous museum visitor—has a long heritage in American comics art, going back to cartoons about the Armory Show (cf. **Fig. 740** below). Bolling emphasizes this humorous motif by having his pompous intellectuals sipping wine and stroking their chins while admiring Lichtenstein-esque paintings presented out of sequential order.



Fig. 157. Ruben Bolling(Ken Fisher), from *Tom the Dancing Bug*, 23 Jan., 2010.



Fig. 158. Harry Bliss, 19 July, 2012.

For his Pop Art joke (Fig. 158), the cartoonist Harry Bliss uses the innocence of the child art-museum visitor—a topic to which we will return in a subsequent section of this essay. We the viewers of Bliss’s cartoon share the sentiment of the boy’s “out-of-the-mouths-of-babes” comment that Lichtenstein’s use of giant Ben-Day dots does make the woman seem to have a disease.



Fig. 159. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 23 Aug., 2013.

Jim Meddick’s Lichtenstein comic strip (Fig. 159) is part of his series about Monty’s friend Moondog working as a guard in an art museum—a topic we will also explore in greater detail below. Meddick’s strip is also an example of the sub-category of cartoon narrative metafiction wherein the comic-strip characters are conscious of their fictional nature. Not only do we find it humorously incongruous that Moondog’s fellow guard is aware that he is in a comic strip, but, by having him say that a comic of a Lichtenstein painting of a comic looks more like photorealism than Pop Art, Jim Meddick is making a hilarious comment on the issue of the “associative inversion” that, as we noted in the first essay above, occurs when works of art are quoted in a comic strip. Moondog’s reply underlies this punchline: in the fictional world of the comic strip, Moondog—were he to break what we can presume is his museum’s rule against touching the art—could touch the painting of the airplane, but not the comic upon which the painting was based, much less the actual airplane upon which the comic was based; in the real world of the viewers of Meddick’s strip, however, the cartoonish, three-fingered, Moondog cannot touch anything!



Another sign of the narrowing of the high/low gap between “fine” art and comics art can be found in the *Pop Sequentialism* exhibitions (Fig. 160) curated by Matt Kennedy, first in 2011 at Los Angeles’ La Luz de Jesus Gallery—which calls itself “the birthplace of the Pop-Surrealism school of Post-Pop California Art”—and later, in 2018, at Kennedy’s own Gallery 30 South in Pasadena. Matt Kennedy, who also hosts podcasts about comics and art on his popsequentialism.com website, described his motivation for creating the original 2011 show which featured “artwork from several landmark series

that have crossed into the Pop Culture zeitgeist, finding audiences beyond comic book fandom, and changing the perception of the hobby and the format”:

Few art forms have gone as unchanged and unrespected for as long as sequential art, and yet none has had as tremendous an impact as the superhero comic book . . . More than just dynamic artwork on a page, this is a medium that tells stories. Comic books are the American mythology, and by presenting an exhibition that celebrates the collaborations of the greatest storytellers, I’m hoping to open a fine art dialogue on the importance of this art form.

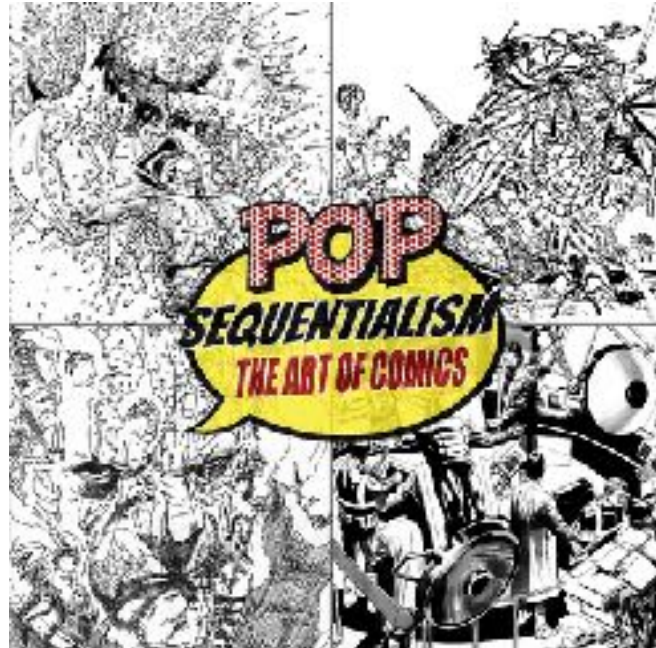
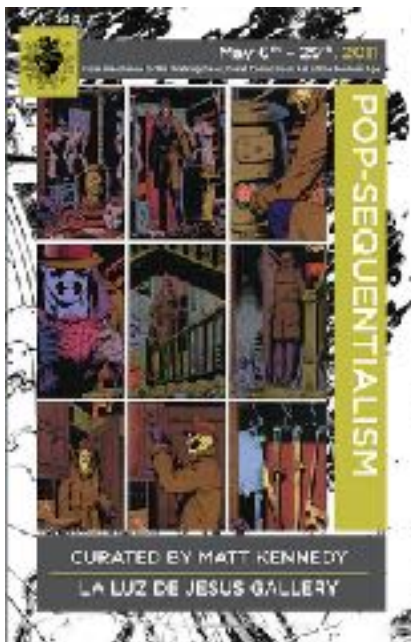


Fig. 160. Exhibition catalog for the La Luz de Jesus Gallery show *Pop Sequentialism: Great Comic Book Art of the Modern Age* (May, 2011), and exhibition poster for the Gallery 30 South show *Pop Sequentialism: The Art of Comics* (July, 2018).



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.

In addition to exhibiting the works of comic-book artists, the La Luz de Jesus Gallery and the Gallery 30 South also represent the work of “Post-Pop” artists, including those of the skateboard graphic designer Wizardskull (**Fig. 161**) and the illustrator and painter Teresa Watson (**Fig. 162**), both of whom engage with the genre of comics art on the equal footing envisioned in the 1983 Whitney *The Comic Art Show*. Rather than expropriating a “low-brow” form of popular culture as Warhol and Lichtenstein did in their 1960’s Pop Art, Wizardskull’s quotation of Jim Davis’ *Garfield* and Watson’s incorporation of a comic-strip speech bubble in her painting treat comics as part of the “culturally bound background knowledge” viewers would bring to their art, much like Jean-Michel Basquiat did for his *A Panel of Experts* (**Fig. 143**). This “Post-Pop” “neo-expropriation” of comics art blurs the line between “fine” art and comics art. And, as we noted in discussing Art Spiegelman’s “High Art Lowdown” (**Fig. 145**) above, this blurring has had an economic impact in the world of art auctions. As the owner of a commercial art gallery, Matt Kennedy is particularly attuned to this change in the “Pop Culture zeitgeist”:

When the first *Pop Sequentialism* exhibition opened in 2011, the record price for a piece of comic book art had barely exceeded six figures, but in subsequent years single pages of important, original comic art routinely fetch more than half a million dollars each. And new records are set almost quarterly, with the current record being \$3.5 million for a set of Tin Tin endpaper illustrations. But pages from the same era as those in this show have realized hammer prices of over \$650,000.



Gallery shows like Matt Kennedy’s *Pop Sequentialism* aside, it would seem that the era of mounting large, canon-defining, exhibitions of cartoons and comic strips in traditional art museums is coming to an end. To be sure, a crack in the doors of these museums has been opened for displaying the works of those comics artists now accepted into the canon. As Art Spiegelman noted in his recent *New York Review of Books* review of a traveling exhibition of Rube Goldberg cartoons:

Over on the comics side of the collapsing high-low divide, Goldberg’s influence can be found in the work of generations of influential cartoonists, including Dr. Seuss, Harvey Kurtzman, and Robert Crumb—all of whom have now been exhibited in museums. In fact, with categories of every kind crumbling around us daily, seeing comic art on walls has become delightfully commonplace . . .

Still, in order to see grand historical overviews of comics art in a gallery, you must go to a specialized comics museum—if you can find one!

The history of comics museums in the United States is fraught with failures.

The first specialized comics museum, the Museum of Cartoon Art, was created by the cartoonist Mort Walker in 1974. It opened in Greenwich, CT, moved to Rye Brook, NY, in 1977, and then closed in 1992, after which it moved to Boca Raton, FL in 1996 and was renamed the International Museum of Cartoon Art; that institution itself closed in 2007, with its collections being transferred to the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum housed at Ohio State University.

The Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art in New York City also had a troubled history; it opened its doors in 2001 and closed them in 2012, although it continues to sponsor an annual comics convention in the city. The ToonSeum of Pittsburgh, PA, similarly had short run, beginning in 2007 and closing in 2018.



Fig. 163. Brian and Greg Walker and Chance Browne, *Hi and Lois*, 27 Aug., 1989.

The *Hi and Lois* comic, **Fig. 163**, written and drawn by the sons of the original creators of the strip, was made at a time when the Museum of Cartoon Art was still in Rye Brook, NY and Brian Walker was its director. In presenting a Flagstons family trip to the Museum of Cartoon Art, the strip operates on a metafictional level: we the viewers of this strip are looking at comic-strip characters who are apparently aware that they are comic-strip characters looking at other comic strips. The children's statement in the final panel is ambiguous. Are they claiming that they are funnier than the comic strips *The Family Circus* or *For Better or Worse*, or are they asserting that, as a class, these comic strips about bourgeois American families are more humorous than generally thought? While we might want to disagree with either option, we should note that this *Hi and Lois* strip was not an effective enough advertisement to keep the Museum of Cartoon Art from closing.

At this point in time there are only two specialized comics art museums in the U.S. The Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco was established in 1987, and although rising rent prices forced it out of its original location in the city's Yerba Buena Gardens district in 2015, it reopened in the Fisherman's Wharf district in 2017. The other museum, the aforementioned Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum housed at Ohio State University, began in 1977 when the university was gifted the artwork and papers of an alumnus, the comic-strip artist Milton Caniff. Through subsequent acquisitions of numerous collections of cartoons and comic strips, including those of Will Eisner, Walt Kelly, Bill Watterson, Bill Blackbeard's San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, and the collection of the defunct International Museum of Cartoon Art, The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum now comprises the world's largest collection of material related to cartoons and comics.



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.

Among the collections of the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum is an original work of art that Will Eisner created in 1996 when the Museum of Cartoon Art moved to its new location in Florida (**Fig. 164**). When Eisner drew this cartoon he was one of the most famous comics artists in the country: his comic-strip series, *The Spirit* (1940–1952) had been hailed for its innovations in content and form; his 1978 narrative, *A Contract with God*, popularized the term “graphic novel”; his 1985 study, *Comics and Sequential Art*, and his 1996 book, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*, have become foundational texts in American comic scholarship; and, through his classes at the New York School of Visual Arts, Eisner himself help to create the academic study of comics art. For his tribute to the reopening of the Museum of Cartoon Art, Eisner chose to give us the metafiction of the Spirit towering over a crowd of museum visitors looking at a framed comic-strip panel from the *Spirit*. Rather than showing the museum visitors from behind, Eisner gives us a three-quarter’s view, with the Spirit’s torso turned towards us—thus focusing our attention on the tall figure who seems bemused by seeing the cartoon of himself. To highlight this metafiction, Eisner has one of the three children turn away from the museum display and, with hand to mouth, give an astonished glance at the “real” Spirit; so too, we the viewers are expected to have our heads turned by this visual double-take.



If, in addition to a few, somewhat shaky, private ventures, the only institutional support given to American cartoon museums—and to American comics scholarship in general—is in academia, such is not the case elsewhere, especially in France. As we have already noted, the Musée de la bande dessinée in Angoulême was established in 1984 as a French national museum on the same institutional level as the Louvre.

Given that the focus of our essays is on American art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips, we are not going to dwell at any length on their cousins in other cultures. We do, however, have to mention the recent collaboration between French museums and the graphic-novel publishing firm Futuropolis, a collaboration that has almost no parallel in the United States. Beginning in 2005, the Louvre Museum and Futuropolis began co-publishing a series of *bande dessinée* albums, each of which used the Louvre’s collections in their narratives; to date, a dozen of these collaborative graphic novels have been published. In 2009 and again in 2016, the Louvre hosted exhibits featuring these *bande dessinée* works. In 2014, the Musée d’Orsay in Paris also initiated a publishing project with Futuropolis, and two graphic novels based on that museum’s collections have been published.

As Margaret C. Flinn observed in her 2013 review of the Louvre/Futuropolis publications, these albums were a good-faith attempt to bridge the high/low art division between museums and the comics community. But if they were designed to create dialogue, the result, Flinn opined, was a dialogue of the deaf. The albums, she said, while generally well received by critics, are “better serving the purpose of introducing an elite, museum-going, ‘high culture’ public to the *bande dessinée* than they are of attracting the *band dessinée* public to the museum.” Flinn further notes that, through their creative use of reflexivity and *mise en abyme* (the infinite regress of frames within frames), the Louvre/Futuropolis albums are making a case to the fine arts community for the artistic merits of the 9th Art. On the other hand, Finn detected an inherent hostility toward the fine arts community in the way that almost every one of the albums involves a violent disruption of the normal experience of visiting a museum—with stories of ghosts coming out of paintings, or with narratives set in the museum’s basement storage or at night when no other visitors are present.

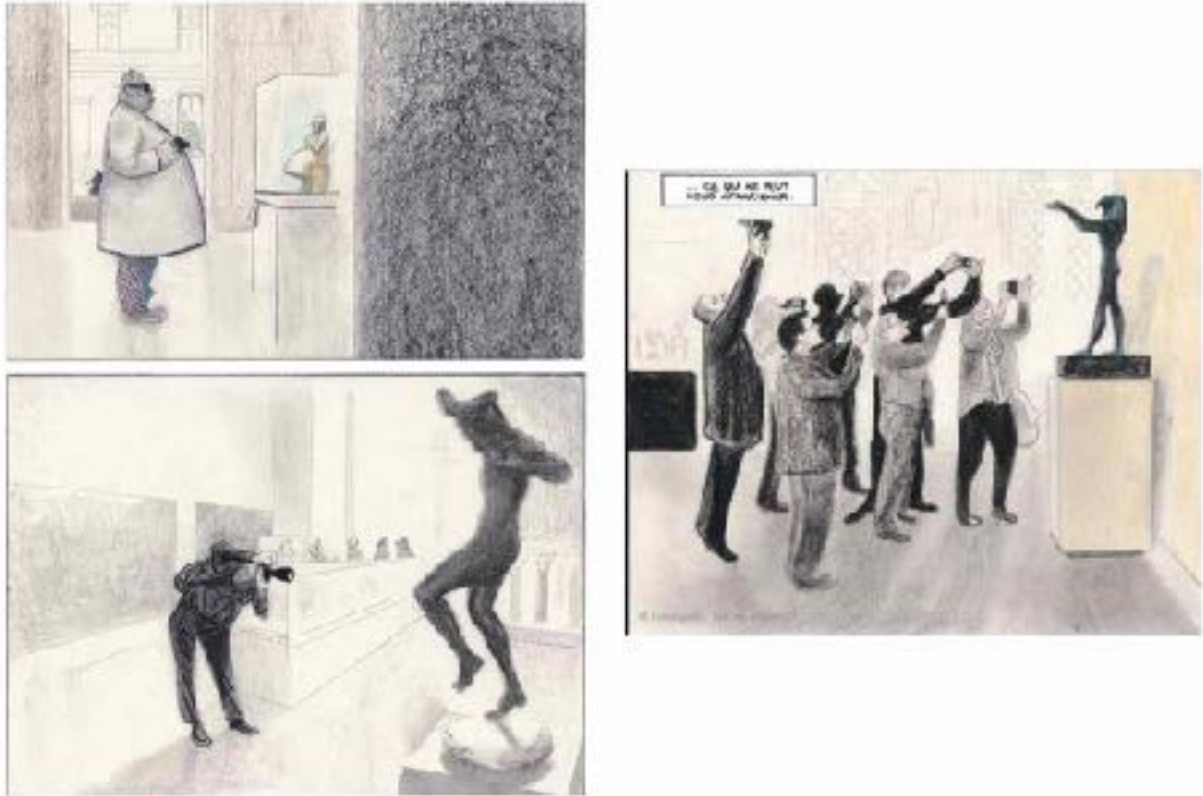


Fig. 165. Excerpts from David Prudhomme, *La Traversée du Louvre*, 2012.

One exception to this last feature of the Louvre/Futuropolis graphic novels is David Prudhomme's *La Traversée du Louvre* (2012; translated by Joe Johnson as *Cruising through the Louvre*, 2016). The storyline is simple: a comic-strip artist (presumably Prudhomme himself) wanders through the Louvre looking for his girlfriend while he ponders what he was going to do for the commission he received to create a *bande dessinée* about the museum. Within this metafictional context, Prudhomme's artist notices that his fellow museum visitors often bear a striking similarity to the art displayed before them (**Fig. 165**): the portly man who looks like an Akkadian statuette; the bronze statue that seems to be reacting to a photographer taking a closeup of its crotch; and the crowd holding cell-phone cameras above their heads, mirroring Horus' offering of blessing. The visual humor in Prudhomme's soft, realistic, wordless drawings does not leap off the page, which makes it that much more fun when one gets the joke. And, if other artists in the Louvre/Futuropolis series make the Parisian institution seem scary, Prudhomme's Louvre seems like a pleasant place to visit.



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.

Other European museums have followed the Louvre and Musée d'Orsay examples and have engaged in collaborative ventures with comics artists. Of particular note in this regard is the Museo del Prado in Madrid, which has recently published a number of comic books ("historietas") in conjunction with exhibitions featuring its collection (**Fig. 166**). In 2016, to celebrate the quincentennial anniversary of the death of Hieronymus Bosch, the Prado commissioned the Catalan comic artist Max (Francesc Capdevila Gisbert) to create a comic book, *El Tríptico de los Encantados (Una pantomima*

bosquiana), based on the Prado's famous Bosch triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1510). In the following year, in conjunction with the 2017 exhibition *Ribera. Maestro del dibujo*, the Prado published *El Perdón y la Furia*, a comic by Antonio Altarriba and Keko (José Antonio Godoy Cazorla) about Ribera's 1632 painting *Tityus*. Also in 2017, in association with its retrospective exhibition on Mariano Fortuny, the Prado published its third comic, *Idilio. Apuntes de Fortuny*, a coming-of-age story by the Spanish underground comics artist Montesol (Francisco Javier Ballester Guillén). In 2019, on the occasion of the bicentennial of its creation, the Museo del Prado commissioned the Valencian comics artist Sento (Vincent Llobell Bisba) to produce *Historietas del Museo del Prado*—a series of comic stories about some notable events in the history of the Madrid museum.

Recently, an American museum has emulated this European model by commissioning a comics artist to create works related to its collections. For its 2019 exhibition, *Botticelli: Heroines + Heroes*, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston employed the graphic novelist and painter Karl Stevens to produce comic strips related to the show. Stevens, a native of greater Boston, created drawings and comic-strip panels that were hung next to the Botticelli paintings, which included the *The Story of Virginia* on loan from the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo, Italy, and the Gardner's own *The Story of Lucretia* (Figs. 167 and 168). The juxtaposition of Stevens' comics with Botticelli's *spalliere* was designed to highlight the connection between contemporary and Renaissance visual narration.



Fig. 167. Installation photograph of *Botticelli: Heroines + Heroes*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 14 Feb. - 19 May, 2019.

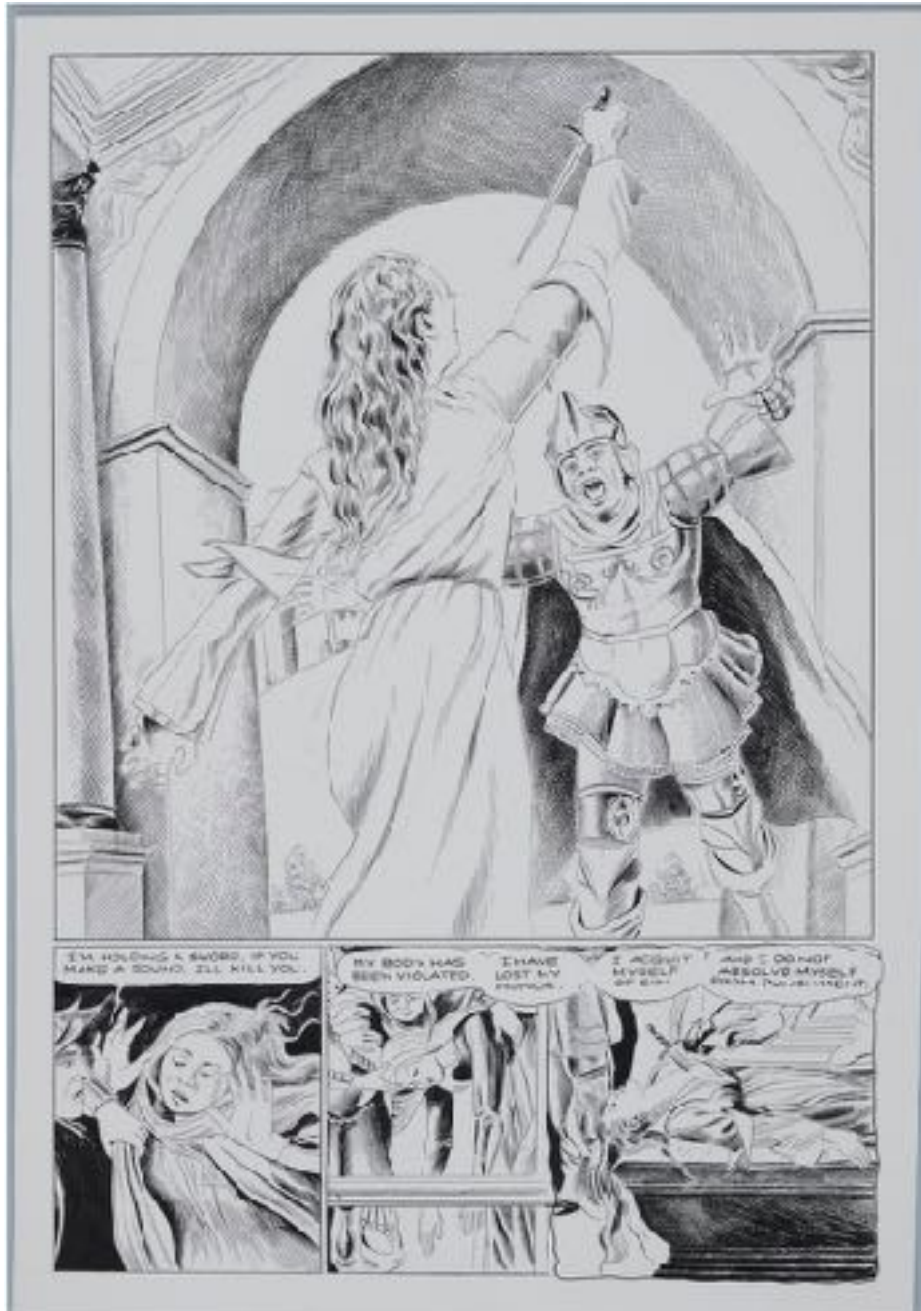


Fig. 168. Karl Stevens, *Lucretia*, 2018, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

For the Gardner's *Botticelli: Heroines + Heroes* exhibition, Karl Stevens also produced a series of comic-strip panels narrating Isabella Stewart Gardner's acquisition of Botticelli's *The Story of Lucretia* in 1894 (**Fig. 169**). Hung like pages in a graphic novel, Stevens' panels portray the pioneering Bostonian philanthropist and art collector as a strong woman who defies conventions, showing the same strength of character—though not the tragic fate—as the Roman heroine Lucretia.



Fig. 169. Installation photograph and detail of Karl Stevens, *Botticelli*, 2018, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Like the *bande dessinée* albums created for the Musée du Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, and the Museo del Prado, the Stevens' ink drawings for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum exhibition complete the circle begun by Warhol's and Lichtenstein's expropriation of "low" art comic book panels. Now the fine arts have become source materials for comics art, both of which are hung together as equals in a prestigious "high" art institution.

There are, however, important differences between the European model of collaboration between museums and comics artists and this new American enterprise. The Musée du Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, and the Museo del Prado are public

institutions, and their collaboration with comic artists is supported in part by public funds. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in contrast, is a private institution, and its employment of a comics artist was not subject to any sort of public scrutiny. Also, the collaborations between the European museums and comics publishing firms resulted in graphic novels readily available to the non-museum-going public at reasonable prices (David Prudhomme's *La Traversée du Louvre*, for example, costs 17€ and the English translation can be had for \$20; the Prado comic books are available in Spanish or English for 14,25€). The graphic art that Karl Stevens created for the Gardner show, on the other hand, has not been independently published and does not even appear among the scholarly essays in the exhibition catalog (which sold for \$46).



Michael Picone concluded his 2013 article on comic art in museums: “. . . abetted by the twin challenge that art museums are facing to remain relevant and to increase revenue, a game-changing development is afoot, leading to a co-operative re-positioning.” The collaborations with comics artists and the Musée du Louvre, the Musée d’Orsay, the Museo del Prado, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum do seem like the wave of the future.

Margaret Flinn, on the other hand, thinks it unlikely that comics aficionados will throng into art museums even if those institutions host exhibitions of comics or commission graphic novels about their collections. For Flinn, the benefits of any “co-operative re-positioning” will probably be confined to breaking down the elite museum-goer’s distain for comics as an art form.

While it is certain that some museum exhibitions in the future will incorporate related comics art, there are two major reasons for thinking that the efforts to bring comics into museums have gone about as far as they can.

As Kim Munson has noted, there is an inherent problem in displaying comics art in museum settings, especially when those displays are selected from larger narrative works such as graphic novels: “Just sticking a [comics] page on a wall with no context robs the viewer of an understanding of the storyline and the artist’s intention.” Cartoons, comic strips, comic books, and graphic narratives are supposed to be enjoyed while one is alone and sitting down, not while standing up in the public setting of a

museum. And even if a museum does have benches—usually hard wooden ones!—they are invariably placed too far away from the walls for a visitor to actually be able to read comic strips hung there.

Secondly, as Thierry Groensteen has argued, comics should not be considered as a sub-category of contemporary art, much less one that is somehow lagging behind the innovative trends of its artistic elders. To be sure, the fine arts have influenced comics art (and *vice versa!*), but the two are fundamentally different in essence. Comics is an art form that is both visual and narrative. It is visual story telling, more akin to reading than to standing in front of monumental, and mostly non-narrative, works of art hung in spacious museum galleries.

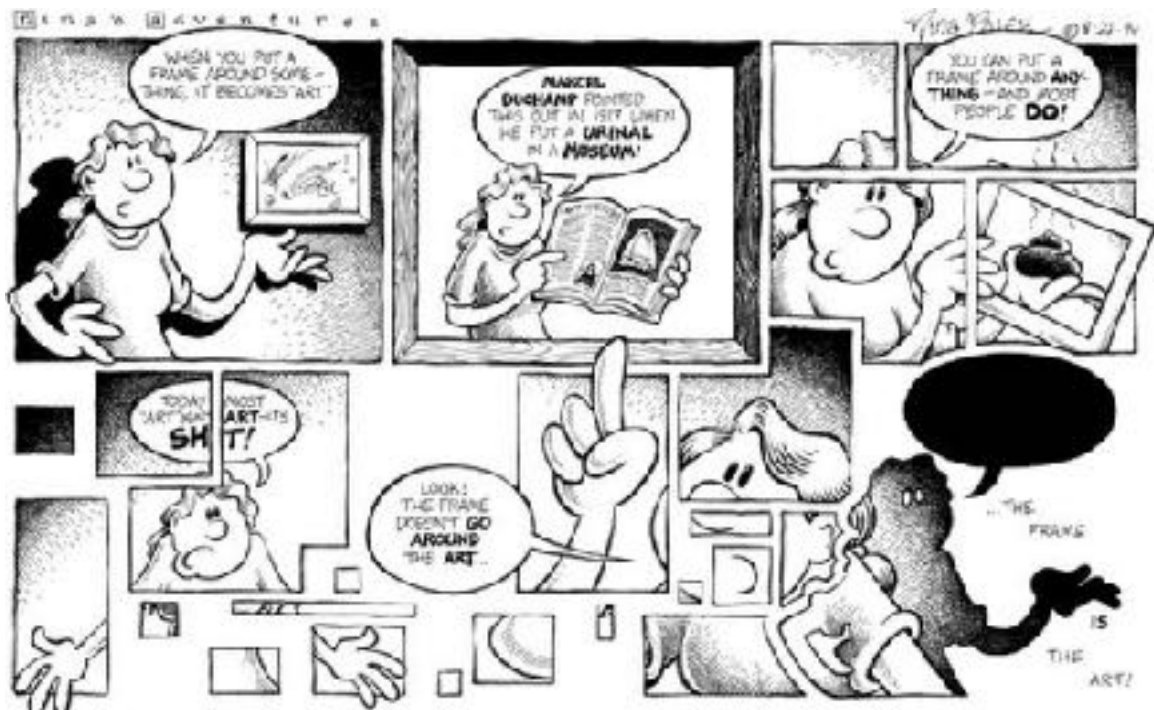


Fig. 170. Nina Paley, *Nina's Adventures*, 15 July, 2008.

Nina Paley cleverly illustrates this point in her 2008 comic strip (Fig. 170), flipping the metafiction that Bill Watterson used in the 1993 *Calvin and Hobbes* strip with which we began this section (Fig. 136). For Paley, modern art is just any old crap—even literal shit—that someone has put a frame around; the real art, she says, is the frame itself, a point she demonstrates with her creative use of the basic unit of the comic strip, the frame (aka the panel). Paley's strip begins with a standard comic-strip panel, with Nina's elbow and speech bubble breaking out of the frame as she is standing in front of a framed work of modern art. In the next panel, the panel has become a wooden frame, this time broken by Nina's finger poking up from the second row. The

final panel in the top row is now broken into four separate frames, dividing up Nina as she puts a frame around a poop emoji she holds in her hand. This pattern of disintegration goes wild in the bottom row of the strip, as rectangular frames of various shapes and sizes explode the expected three-panel format. Nina is still there talking to us in the first two “panels” of the bottom row, but she seems to be struggling to break out of the frames that divide her up; in the final scene, the lights have gone out and we have a borderless panel showing a silhouetted Nina with her words falling out of a silhouetted speech bubble. If “the frame **is** the art,” the comic strip is where one can find art!

Mocking Museums

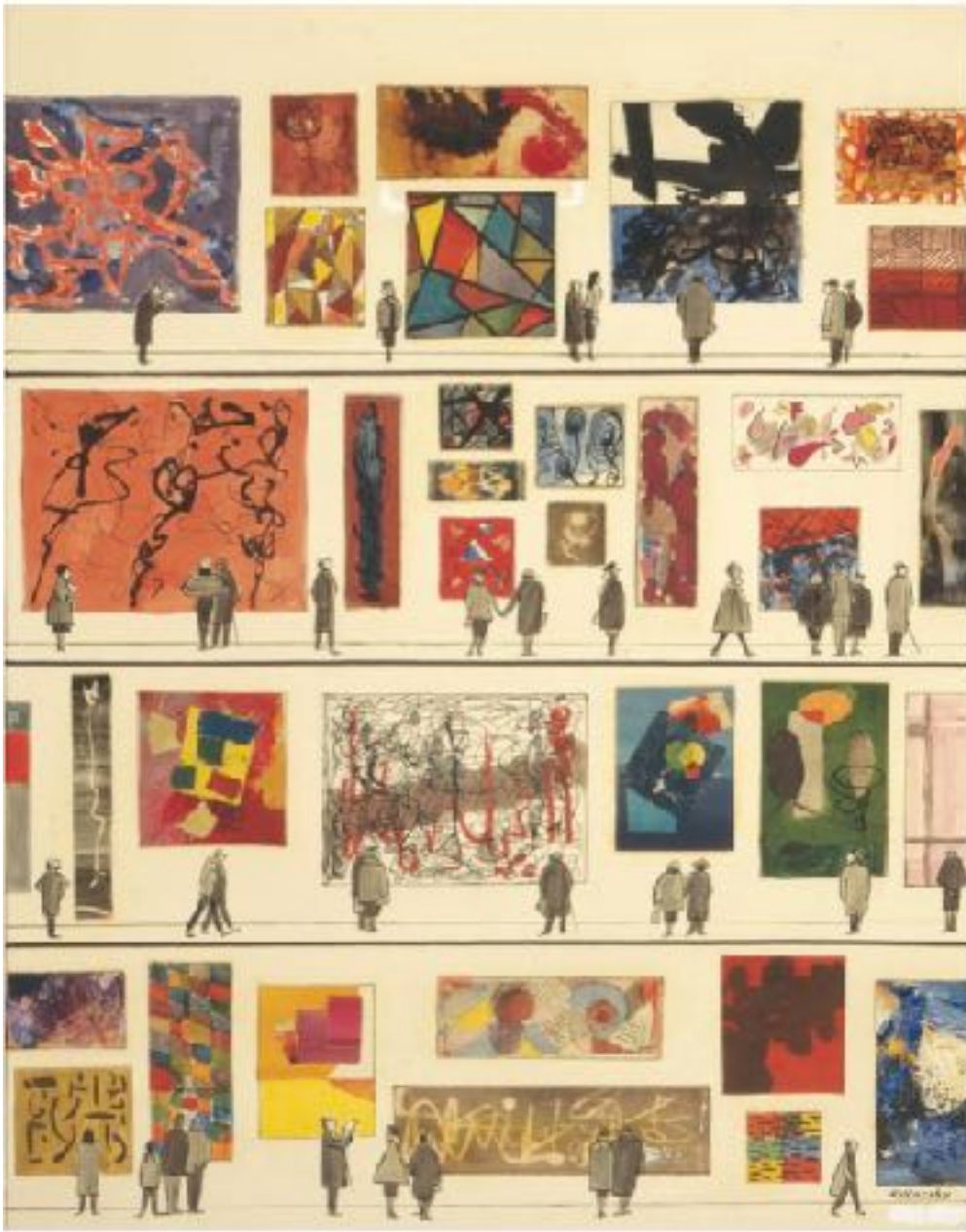


Fig. 171. Anatol Kovarsky, "Modern Art Museum," *The New Yorker*, 19 Oct., 1957.

If putting comics in art museums is problematic, putting art museums in comics is something that comic-strip artists have been doing ever since the earliest days of the genre. That art museum curators and administrators generally ignore comics art is not unexpected, given the continuing high/low art division between the two communities; that comic-strip artists are familiar with art museums is also not unexpected, given that many of these artists were trained in traditional art schools.

Hanging comic-strip panels sequentially on the walls of an art museum is the mirror image of depicting framed works of art sequentially in comic-strip panels, both involving the same visual metafiction—literally telling a story-within-a-story by the visual comparison of the contents of a museum with the spacial arrangement of comic-strip panels. Anton Kovarsky’s 1957 *The New Yorker* cover art (**Fig. 171**) explores this metafictional comparison with its four stacked rows of nondescript small gray museum visitors admiring a series of colorful abstract paintings. The Russian-born Kovarsky had studied art at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and with the Cubist painter André Lhote in the 1930’s before fleeing to America in 1941; after his enlistment in the U.S. Army during World War II, when he served as a cartoonist for the *Stars and Stripes*, Kovarsky continued his art studies at Columbia University and at the Arts Student League in New York before beginning a long career as a cartoonist for *The New Yorker* and other national publications. Given his background, we should not be surprised that, rather than mocking the work of the Abstract Expressionists then all the vogue in the city, Kovarsky chose to pay homage to them with his masterful replications of their styles; part of the joy of looking at the original miniature works of art in Kovarsky’s *New Yorker* cover is in imagining which ones were intended to mimic the paintings of Robert Motherwell, Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollack, Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, etc.



Anatol Kovarsky’s sympathetic treatment of his imaginary “Modern Art Museum” is an exception to the rule. Almost every other cartoonist and comic-strip artist who incorporate art museums into their work do so to mock those bastions of artistic elitism.

One way cartoons bash museums is to take to absurd levels what these institutions might do to satisfy their need to stay relevant—a topic we discussed in the above section. Mark Parisi thinks that art museums might go as far as installing picture-in-picture monitors in paintings (**Fig. 172**). That men would rather watch sports than go to a museum is a gender stereotype other cartoonists exploit (cf. **Fig. 212**), but why the museum chose Picasso’s *Three Musicians* for the monitor is unclear; that kids can watch cartoons in the *Mona Lisa* makes more sense when we see that the screen is showing Matt Groening’s animated cartoon character Lisa Simpson.



Fig. 172. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 9 Jan., 2003.



Fig. 173. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 5 Oct., 2014.

In another example on this theme, Hilary Price suggests that the installation of zip lines might increase attendance at staid art museums (Fig. 173). Whereas Parisi's cartoon gives us real paintings—although from different museums (the MOMA and the Louvre)—Price's comic museum is wholly imaginary. Curiously, in both cartoons, the visitors admiring the art do not seem bothered by these incongruously absurd museological innovations.



Fig. 174. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*.



Fig. 175. Isabella Bannerman, *Six Chix*, 18 Aug., 2018.

A related tactic cartoonists and comic-strip artists use to make fun of museums is to mock their commercialization. The team of Mikael Wulff and Anders Morgenthaler, for instance, give us the humorous vision of future museums where the museum shop is the main feature and the actual museum is an attached shed (Fig. 174). Similarly, Isabella Bannerman—one of the six women artists who took turns in creating the cartoon *Six Chix*—suggests that the actual artworks in our museums of art are lost behind all the amenities these institutions offer (Fig. 175).



Fig. 176. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*. 25 Jan., 2015.

Another way to mock art museums is to give them comically absurd installations. Dan Piraro's cartoon (Fig. 176), for instance, gives us a visual pun of a painting of an

actual landscaper hung like a landscape painting; the man reading the label is necessary for our appreciation of this joke, but its humor resides in its visual presentation.



Fig. 177. James Stevenson, *The New Yorker*.

The same combination of verbal and visual elements can be found in James Stevenson's vignette of a man in a gallery of ancient Egyptian art (**Fig. 177**). After reading the "closed for renovation" sign, we too do a double-take when we see that the workers are actual ancient Egyptians.



No. 62. Stand still, count to ten, slowly walk toward painting, stop, lean forward, count to ten, step backward twelve paces, cross your arms, stroke your chin, count to fifteen. Put your hands behind your back, step forward five paces, nod your head and smile, and move on to No. 63."

Fig. 178. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker*, 16 Jan., 2012.

Cartoonists have also found humor in museum audio guides. Lee Lorentz gives us a man standing in front of a work of art while listening to a recording that, rather than providing information about the piece, describes what a pretentious museum visitor would do in front of this abstract painting (**Fig. 178**). It is not clear if the man is smiling at knowing how to seem to be a knowledgeable museum-goer, or whether he is smiling at the incongruity of the recording itself; the fact that his eyes are closed may suggest the latter.

If Lorentz's joke is mainly conveyed by the written text, the humor in a Dan Piraro's strip is provided by the interplay between the verbal and the visual (**Fig. 179**). The incongruity of a crowd of museum visitors pulling up a guard's trouser leg to look at his argyle sock is resolved by the inset text suggesting a practical joke. Piraro helps us focus on this delayed-reaction gag by making his cartoon world much more realistic than the absurdly comic art he puts on the museum walls, including paintings containing his trademark secret symbols—here the "Flying Saucer of Possibility" and the "Bunny of Exuberance."



Fig. 179. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 28 April, 2013.



Although the targets of Dan Piraro's gag are museum-goers who unquestionably rely on their audio guides, the haplessness of the museum guard also figures into its humor. Indeed, as several other comics artists have explored, museum guards can themselves be a funny subject.



Fig. 180. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, 21 March, 1950.

Like the Piraro cartoon, Ernie Bushmiller’s gag depends on a combination of verbal and visual elements (Fig. 180). The simplicity of Bushmiller’s joke belies the craft employed to tell it. In the first two panels we are down at Nancy’s level, watching her walk into the museum and then turn to read the set-up to the joke. In the third panel we have pulled back to look down at her from the level of the “guard.” The changed perspective of the final panel provides the visual punch line to the gag and show us that Nancy, with only the top of her head poking above the table, doesn’t understand what’s so funny.

[Although Bushmiller’s humor might seem corny to us, his mastery of the simple gag comic strip has been the subject of a book-length essay by Mark Newgarden and Paul Karasik, and has been cited by Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware, Bill Griffith, and other modern comics artists as a major influence on their work. For more on Bushmiller’s appeal and on the cultish Bushmiller Society, see Harvey (2012).]



Fig. 181. Brian and Ron Boychuk, *Chuckle Bros*, 11 Nov., 2009.

The Boychuk brothers have created a more subtle museum guard joke (Fig. 181). Here the text also provides the set-up to the joke, but it is not until we look at the museum guard’s turned head that we realize that he has misunderstood the photographer’s description of his own work.

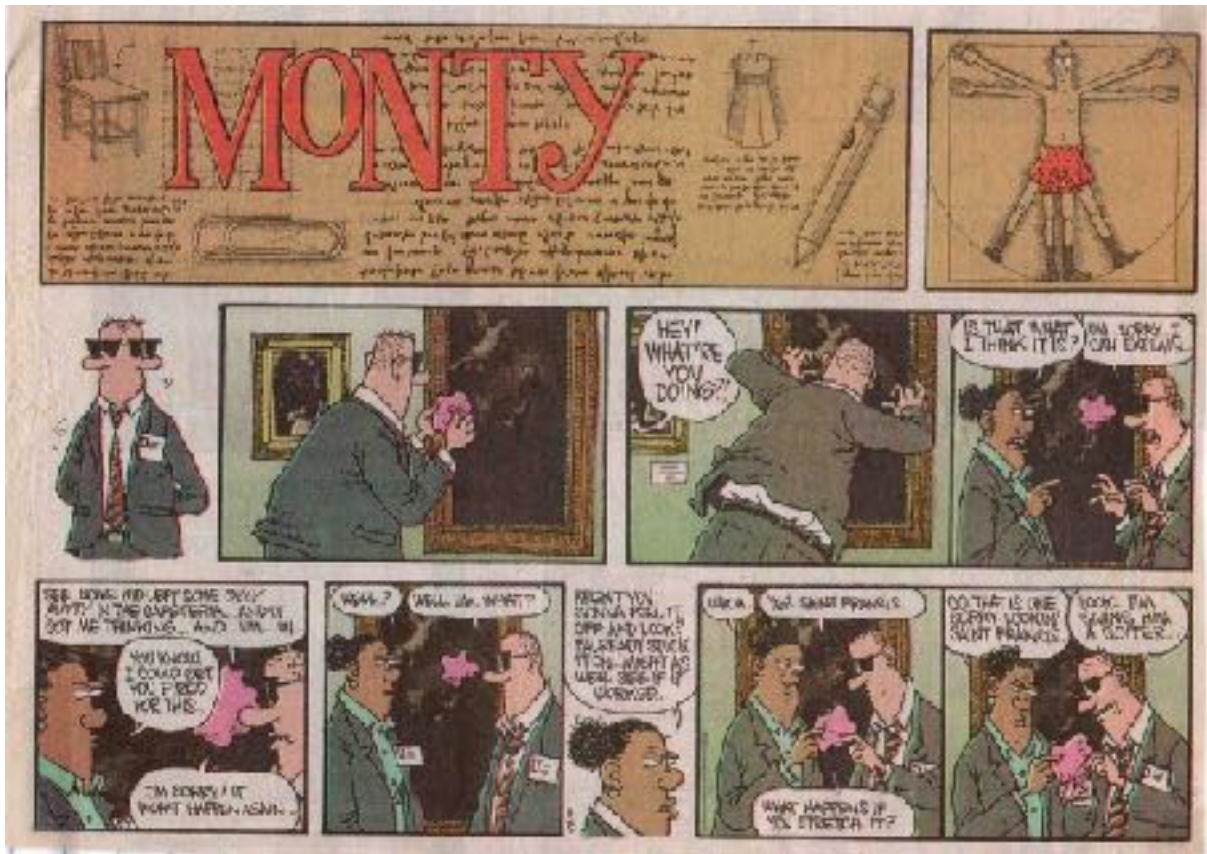


Fig. 182. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 5 Aug., 2012.

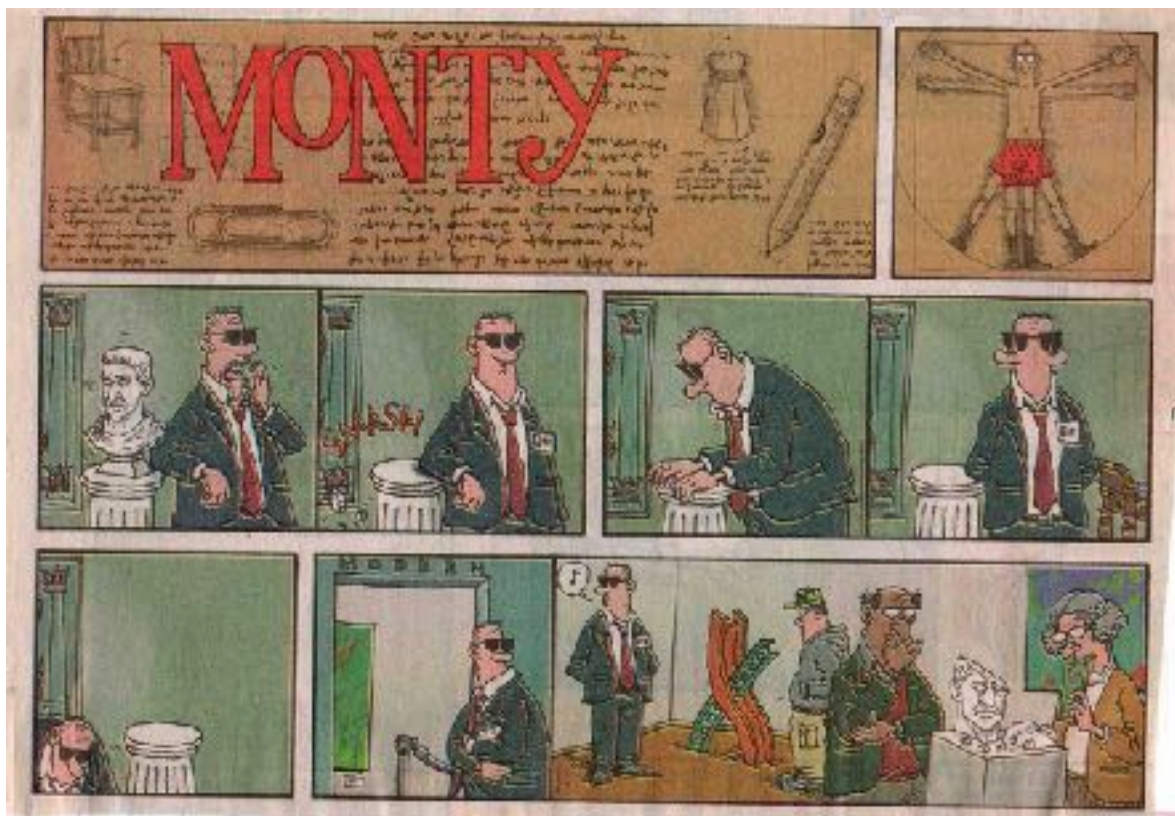


Fig. 183. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 27 March, 2013.

As we noted in the previous section, Moondog, a side-kick of the title character in Jim Meddick's comic strip *Monty*, works as a museum guard. Although not a regular feature of Meddick's strip, Moondog's antics as a guard continue to pop up from time to time. Several of these jokes involve the high jinxes guards can get up to when no one is looking. In **Fig. 182**, for instance, Moondog has been caught by a fellow guard while he was sticking some Silly Putty on a what would appear to be a version of Peter Paul Rubens' *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*; in addition to this humorous incongruity, the real joke comes when we focus in on the other guard's face in the borderless middle panel of the bottom row and realize that she is just as willing as Moondog is to engage in this childish play. A similar what-museum-guards-might-get-up-to-when-we're-not-looking joke is Meddick's 2013 comic strip where Moondog accidentally breaks a classical bust and clandestinely puts the broken pieces in the modern art gallery (**Fig. 183**). Here again, the humor of this strip is not just in Moondog's incongruous museological maleficence; the real target of this joke is the pompous modern art aficionados duped by Moondog's switcheroo.

Although the humor in both of the above Meddick comic strips have similar, dual-incongruity ("script oppositions"), structures, they differ in how that humor is delivered. The humorous information in the **Fig. 182** strip is almost entirely provided by the dialog, without which we couldn't distinguish the Silly Putty from bubble gum or understand what the guards find amusing in playing with it; in the third panel of the top row of this strip, Meddick cleverly puts part of the speech bubble of the off-screen guard behind Moondog's arm, thus indicating that her interruption came before his jittery reaction. In contrast, the **Fig. 183** strip is almost entirely visual, with only the "smash" sound of Moondog's clumsy goof and his nonchalant whistle adding to what we can see; the crux of the joke here is contained in the man's chin-stroking—a stereotype of the pompous modern art lover that appears in numerous cartoons (cf. **Fig. 740**).

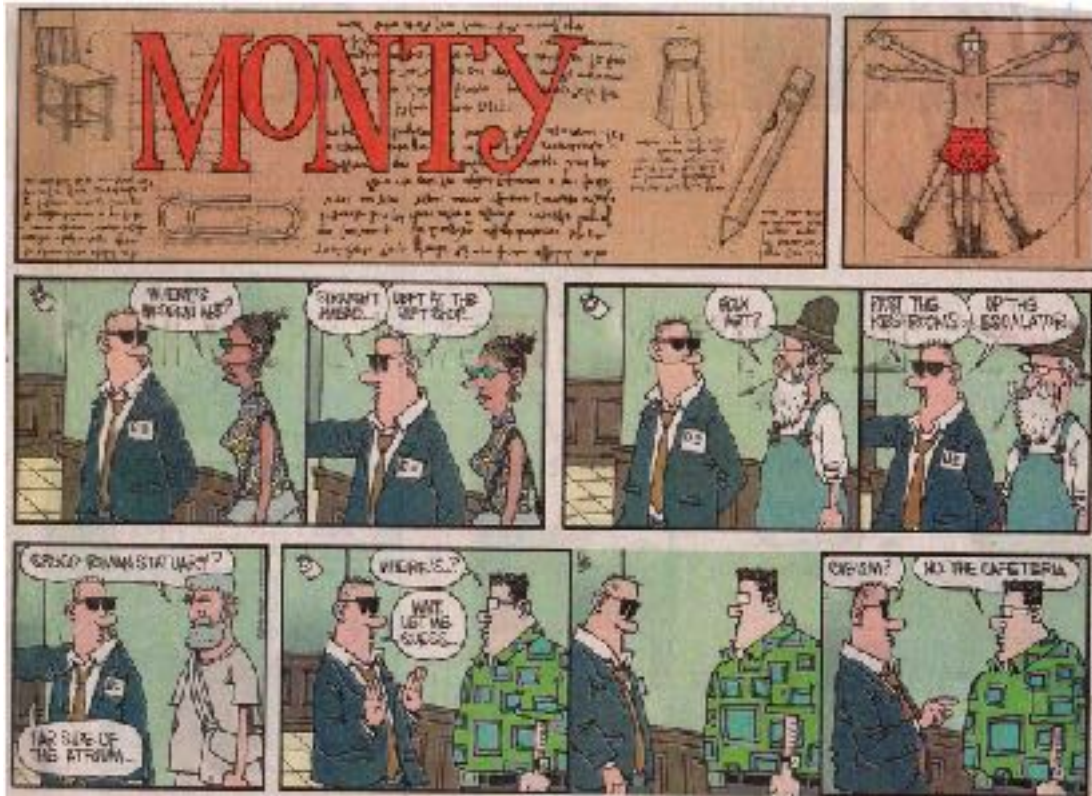


Fig. 184. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 11 Nov., 2014.

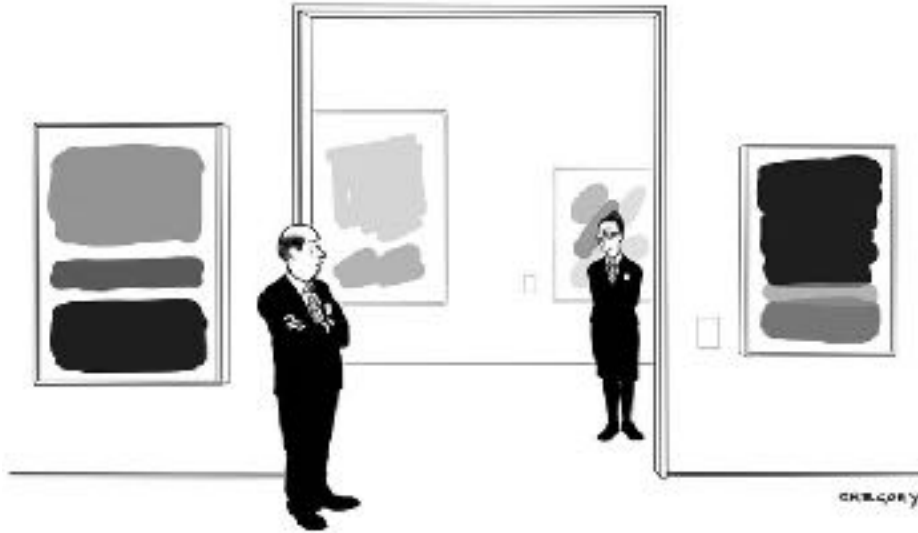
A 2014 Meddick strip (Fig. 184) takes a different tack in presenting a museum-guard joke. Here, Moondog is trying to be a good guard as he gives directions to a series of museum visitors whose clothing oddly matches the type of art that they want to see. Like the two previous strips, this initial humorous incongruity is given a twist, this time when Moondog mistakenly assumes that the man wearing a shirt with odd square designs wants to see the Cubism exhibit.



Fig. 185. Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 18 Oct., 2015.

Jim Meddick's fertile imagination keeps drawing him back to Moondog museum-guard jokes. **Fig. 185**, for instance, reverts to the bad-museum-guard theme, with Moondog "borrowing" priceless works of art and bringing them home to impress a hot date. This humorous incongruity is highlighted when his nacho-chumping friend Monty visits and almost breaks an antique chair. Unlike the vaguely Rubens-esque painting subjected to Silly Putty in Meddick's **Fig. 182** comic strip, which is too indistinctly depicted to be positively identified, the "borrowed" Rembrandt *Self Portrait* that Moondog hangs in his living room here can be recognized, and we can deduce that the miscreant Moondog works for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This realistically rendered painting evokes Michael Picone's "associative inversion" we discussed in the first essay above, where the "mimetic 'reality'" of the comic reverses our normal experience of viewing art as less real than ourselves and instead has us identifying with the more abstracted cartoon universe.

In all four of these comic strips, Meddick employs a variety of panel styles to impart a rhythm appropriate to each joke. In the top and bottom rows of the **Fig. 182** strip, Meddick uses borderless close-ups to set up the joke's two incongruities: a double-headed Moondog looking around before he puts the Silly Putty on the painting, and the other guard asking him to peel it off; the final two panels of the top and bottom rows of this strip are conjoined, the absence of gutters between them speeding up the joke's tempo. Similar conjoined panels appear in the top row of the **Fig. 183** strip, the gutter between them making us pause, as Moondog does, to consider how he is going to get out of his predicament; a different rhythm is created in the bottom row, where the second panel is conjoined to an elongated final panel, pulling us to the joke's punch line. Meddick repeats this same panel rhythm in the **Fig. 184** comic strip, where the two sets of conjoined panels in the top row each provide an "initial-peak" sequence pairing clothing to appropriate gallery; in the bottom row, the third "initial-peak" pair has been confined to a single panel, with the final three conjoined panels speeding up our appreciation of the humorous incongruity of the joke's "release." The two, double-sized, panels in the top row of the **Fig. 185** strip impart a slow pace to the beginning of this joke, giving us time to feel the "associative inversion" of Meddick's realistically rendered Rembrandt; the increasing sizes of the three panels of the bottom row, the last two of which are conjoined, visually match Monty's precarious stretching out in the antique chair.



"I hope no one's noticed, but I am totally phoning it in today."

Fig. 186. Alex Gregory, *The New Yorker*, 20 April, 2015.

An Alex Gregory *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 186**) takes a different tack in poking fun at museum guards with the incongruous idea of a guard “phoning it in” while standing stock-still during his shift in the gallery. Because this cartoon was printed in black-and-white, the Rothko-esque paintings on either side of the guard, like the nondescript abstract paintings in the background, do not evoke an “associative inversion” effect; one can presume, however, that Gregory would expect some of his *New Yorker* viewers would recognize his allusion to Rothko’s “multiform” paintings with their pulsating colors.



As a quasi authority figure, the museum guard embodies an ambiguous cultural code. On the one hand, museum guards are not real police officers, and, as the comics we examined above demonstrate, we can imagine them acting in silly ways like normal civilians. On the other hand, these uniformed officials carry an inherently threatening *authoritas* necessary in their role as protectors of art.



“Just a moment, sir.”
Fig. 187. Jim Unger, *Herman*, 28 April, 2012.

It is this latter role of the museum guard that the British-Canadian cartoonist Jim Unger gives us in one of the last *Herman* cartoons he ever drew (**Fig. 187**). Here, the guard’s comment and the sign provide the verbal set-up to the gag, and the punch line comes with the visual absurdity of a thief trying to walk out of the exhibit with what we assume is a framed Van Gogh hidden under his jacket.

For Freud, humor functions to release nervous energy built up from repressed aggressive impulses. This interpretation may help to explain the existence of art-theft jokes. While not everyone who ever visited an art museum has had the urge to make off with a valuable work of art, many of us certainly have. And cartoonists and comic-strip artists—creators of “low” art for whom the gates of museums of “high” art are closed—may be particularly susceptible to this impulse.

Grant Snider’s 2012 “Art theft for amateurs” cartoon gives us a hilarious Freudian release to such base urges (**Fig. 188**). Laid out in his signature storyboard format, the top row of Snider’s cartoon comically suggests that René Magritte’s *La Trahison des images* (*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*) is a more practical choice for an art thief than is a Jeff Koon’s *Balloon Dog* or Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. (In choosing these three examples, Snider seems to be making a comment about contemporary art: whereas the Surrealist Magritte’s 1928 expropriation of an everyday object is now recognized as brilliant visual irony, Koon’s contemporary giant steel sculptures and Hirst’s formaldehyde shark are seen by many

as hucksterisms created solely to make money in an obscenely inflated art market.) The second part of Snider's cartoon is not a sequential comic strip, but rather a series of independent ideas for what disguise an amateur thief might use; note the inattentive guard, and the fact that one cannot tell the difference between a reception freeloader and an artist! The final section of this cartoon does tell a story, as we follow the amateur using his "artistic" skills to pull off a museum heist.



Fig. 188. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 3 July, 2012.



Fig. 189. Liana Finck, *The New Yorker*, 19 Nov., 2018.

Rather than being portrayed as a violent criminal, the cartoon art thief has become a sympathetic character whose bumbblings make us smile. Liana Finck, for instance, is making a joke about her thieves wondering whether they should also steal the label (**Fig. 189**); the landscape paintings in the museum they are robbing are depicted in a cartoonish fashion, allowing us to focus on the gag rather than experience the “associative inversion” that occurs when quoted art is rendered realistically.



Fig. 190. Daniel Beyer, *Long Story Short*, 24 Jan., 2019.

As we will examine in the “Miming the Masters” section in the next essay, Edvard Munch’s iconic painting *The Scream* is one of the most frequently parodied works of art in the world. One example relevant here is Daniel Beyer’s cartoon where he humorously suggests that the painting is screaming because it is being carted away by two thieves (Fig. 190). Here the quasi-realistic painting stands out against the muted background and the absurdly minimalistic canvas behind it, but is no more “real” than are the robbers.. It is unclear whether Beyer was aware that, of the four versions Munch made of *The Scream* (two oils and two pastels), both of the oil paintings have in fact been stolen. In 1994, bandits made off with the original 1893 version housed in the National Gallery of Oslo; it was recovered a few months later. In 2004, a different group of thieves stole the 1910 version housed in the Munch Museum of Oslo; although the thieves were caught soon thereafter, it took another two years before the painting was returned to the museum. Knowing the history of these real art thefts would seem to detract from the humor of Beyer’s cartoon!



Fig. 191. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 13 April, 2004.



Fig. 192. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 19 July, 2015.

Mike Baldwin and Mark Parisi have given us two art-theft cartoons, the humor of which derive from the unresolved, “nonsense,” incongruity of our not knowing if a theft has actually taken place. Like the befuddled couple in Baldwin’s offering (Fig. 191), we do not know if we are looking at a multimodal painting and sculptural work of art, or if in fact an actual stubble-bearded art thief is lurking behind the painting. Similarly, the visual punchline of an empty hook in Parisi’s cartoon (Fig. 192) leaves us wondering if the man listening to the museum audio guide is looking at a real, amusing, work of conceptual art, or if someone has made a joke out of an actual art theft caused by a lazy guard.

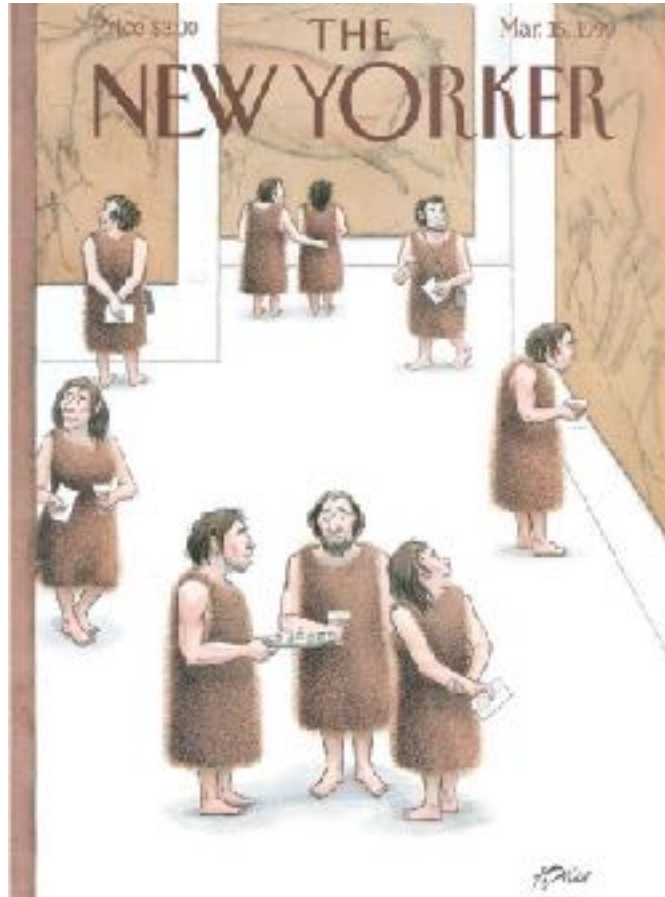


Fig. 193. Harry Bliss, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 15 March, 1999.

Another way cartoonists mock museums is to view them through an incongruous “inverse humorous ucronía” temporal anomaly. Harry Bliss’s 1999 *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 193**), for instance, gives us Neanderthals solemnly admiring what appear to be Paleolithic cave paintings hanging in a contemporary art gallery. The incongruity of fur-clad Neanderthals sipping cocktails, eating canopies, and walking around the gallery with printed brochures and audio guides, is really targeting the ostentatiousness of the modern museum and the pomposity of its elite patrons. The quizzical looks on the faces of Bliss’s Neanderthals—who in reality went extinct sometime around 40,000 years ago—may be because they are wondering why these “Paleolithic” paintings are actually combinations of Lascaux cave paintings (dating to the early Magdalenian period, ca. 17,000 years ago) and much later Spanish Levantine rock-shelter paintings (dating to the Mesolithic to Neolithic periods, ca. 10,000 to 5,500 years ago)—a chronological confusion that Helena Bonet Rosado, in her introduction to the catalogue of the 2016

exhibition *Prehistoria y Cómico* held in Valencia, noted is a common, erroneous, cartoon stereotype.



Fig. 194. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 30 July, 2013.

The Canadian cartoonist John Atkinson has reversed Bliss’s “humorous uchronía” temporal anomaly, projecting onto the past a contemporary museological concern with chronological organization (Fig. 194). It is not clear if Atkinson’s stereotyped Neanderthal caveman is bemused by the truncated timespan represented in the artifacts of the first museum, or if he is wondering how the wheel—which in reality wasn’t invented until 25,000 years after the Neanderthals went extinct—made its way into the display.

[For more on “humorous uchronía” chronological confusions in American cartoons and comic strips about the prehistoric past, see Part III below; for cavemen-inventing-the-wheel cartoons, cf. Figs. 1008–1032.]

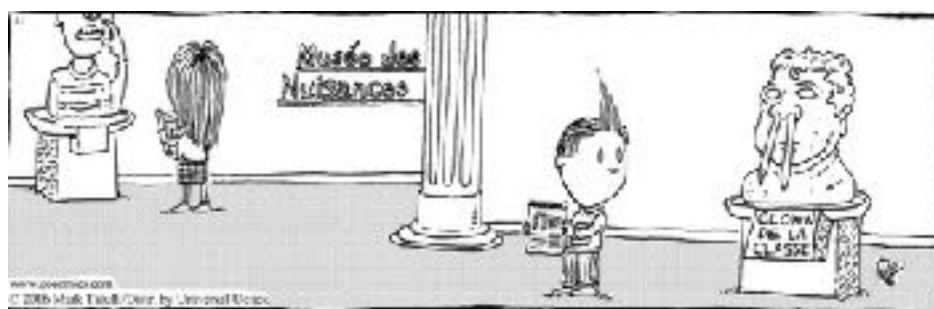
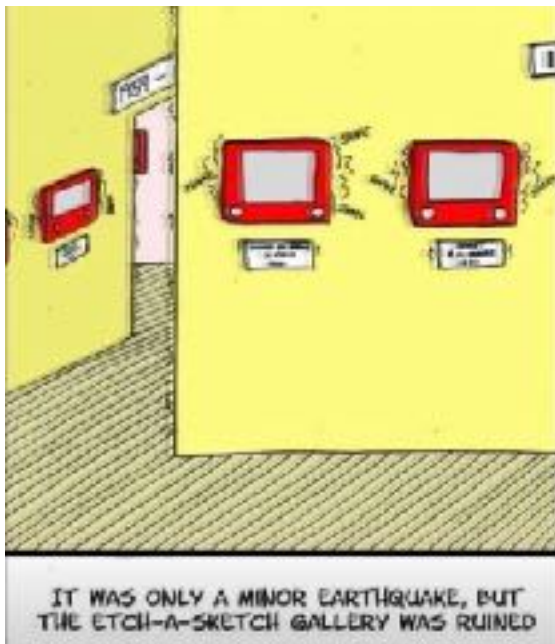


Fig. 195. Mark Tatulli, *Liō*, 1 April, 2016.

Closely related to Bliss’s and Atkinson’s caveman museums is another category of museum comics: the “imaginary museum,” where the humor comes from making a museum for some incongruous subject. Mark Tatulli’s *Liō* cartoon, for instance, portrays the title character on a school trip to a “Musée des Nuisances” (Fig. 184); the use of pompous-sounding French labels only adds to the humorous incongruity.



Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, pre-1995.



John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 2 May, 2000.

Fig. 196. Gary Larson and John McPherson Etch-A-Sketch cartoons.

A comparison of Gary Larson’s and John McPherson’s imaginary etch-a-sketch museum cartoons (Fig. 196) raises several questions. At some point in time before he retired in 1995 and ceased drawing his *Far Side* cartoons, Larson made his etch-a-sketch cartoon that has been widely reposted (without date or attribution) on Pinterest and other social media sites. Although John McPherson has cited Larson as an important influence for his *Close to Home* cartoons and it might seem that McPherson’s etch-a-sketch museum cartoon was plagiarized, it is also possible that it was an independent invention; after all, the cartoon motif of the humorous “imaginary museum” is one that many comics artists have explored, and imagining what might happen to an etch-a-sketch drawing during an earthquake is something that more than one creative humorist could have thought of.

A second question: which of these two etch-a-sketch museum cartoons is funnier? In his article “Comedy at the Junction of Word and Image,” Robert Harvey

posits that the ideal gag cartoon should exploit the full potential of the comics medium, that is, that it should involve a creative interplay of verbal *and* visual elements. Although both of our cartoons are based on the same two humorous incongruities (the idea that there could be such a thing as an etch-a-sketch museum, and, secondly, an earthquake wiping out its contents), by Harvey's criterion, Gary Larson's example would seem to be more successful than John McPherson's. McPherson's humor is almost entirely conveyed by the interviewed curator's words. Yes, having the façade of the museum in the shape of an etch-a-sketch pad is funny, but the fact that the building's epigraph was not affected by the earthquake detracts from that humor; McPherson's cartoon might be funnier if the museum's title were rendered with shaky letters. Given its verbosity, and given the fact that it is not immediately clear who is speaking the words below the visual image, McPherson's cartoon makes the viewer work to get the gag. In contrast, Larson's cartoon has a much more immediate impact. One does need to read the verbal description below the cartoon to get the set-up to the joke, but the visual punch line comes at a glance. There is something intrinsically humorous about the etch-a-sketch game as well as in the idea of creating serious works of art in this medium (which, by the way, actually is a *thing!*). Thus, seeing Larson's gallery of etch-a-sketch pads shaking during the earthquake, with their comically rendered labeled motion lines, strikes our funny bone more directly than just imagining them, as we are required to do in McPherson's cartoon.

While Robert Harvey's ideal cartoon gag does seem useful in evaluating the relative humor of these Larson and McPherson works, we need not adhere to this model unconditionally. There are some jokes that are best told entirely with images and others that need to be spelled out in words.

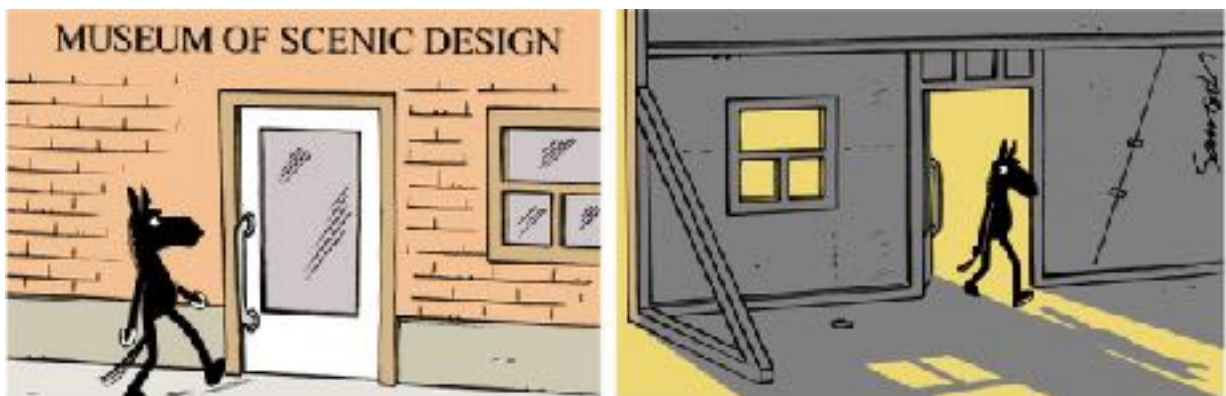


Fig. 197. Samson (Samuli Lintula), *Dark Side of the Horse*, 6 Nov., 2015.

Most cartoons and comic strips about “imaginary museums” derive their humor from the ridiculousness of their subject matter, as with the above examples (and cf. **Figs. 137** and **139**). Others, such as Samuli Lintula’s *Dark Side of the Horse* strip (**Fig. 197**), give us museums that purport to house collections which on the surface seem reasonable. The Finnish cartoonist Lintula, who goes by the pseudonym Samson and whose work is syndicated in the U.S., uses this reasonableness to create the humor of his comic strip. We, like the horse going into the museum in the first panel, expect to see examples of notable scene designs, an expectation that sets up the visual punch line of the second panel. While Samson’s horse may seem disappointed to realize that the museum façade *is* the scene design, we the viewers smile at this visual double entendre.



Fig. 198. Weingartens & Clark, *Barney and Clyde*, 9 June, 2013.

The father and son team of Gene and Dan Weingarten and cartoonist David Clark also present us with an imaginary museum that at first glance appears to be a real one (**Fig. 198**). As our eyes go from left to right across this comic strip, we seem to be looking at a continuous museum wall hung with clearly recognizable paintings by Stuart, Modigliani, and Van Gogh; when we come to the end, however, the sign tells us that these are forgeries, and the dialogue between Clyde and his billionaire friend Barney Pillsbury gives us the punch line to the joke—that this museum is a tax fraud to make up for Barney having been swindled into buying these fakes. When we go back to the beginning of the strip, we now notice the names of the forgers below the paintings. If we look more closely, we will also notice that, rather than being hung on a continuous gallery wall, each painting in fact is set within a separate, gutterless, comic-strip panel. Weingartens & Clark seem to be playing with a visual metafiction of comparing the spacial arrangement of paintings in a museum to that of panels in a comic strip.



Fig. 199. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, 2008.

A Richard Thompson *Richard's Poor Almanac* cartoon puts a new spin on the imaginary museum motif by giving us imaginary paintings in a real museum (Fig. 199). Thompson, whose syndicated comic strip *Cul de Sac* and *Richard's Poor Almanac* cartoons were first published by the *Washington Post* newspaper, sets this cartoon in the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, which is housed in the same Washington D.C. building as the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. The cartoon is composed of three

vignettes stacked on top of each other: “Hall of Imaginary Americans;” “Party Characters of the XXth Century;” and “The Unknown Gilbert Stuart.” As is his wont, Thompson conveys humor in this cartoon almost entirely with words; seeing people looking at portraits of Eustace Tilley and Alfred E. Newman, seeing Cowboy Ed Caricaturist Extraordinaire at work, and seeing visitors staring at Stuart’s George Washington setting his teeth on fire, does help us to visualize Thompson’ joke, but these images do not add anything to the humorous incongruities of the cartoon. [For more on Thompson’s use of the “composite cartoon” format, see the “Humorous Art History 101” section of the “Amusing Art” essay below.]

Amusing Museum Visitors

On the occasion of its centennial in 2006, the American Association of Museums (AAM) published a collection of museum cartoons from *The New Yorker*; Edward Able, then president of the AAM, noted in his introduction to this collection that, although “museums are serious institutions devoted to public service, education, and the stewardship of our shared cultural heritage,” these cartoons show that they are also spaces where we can interact and react in humorous ways.

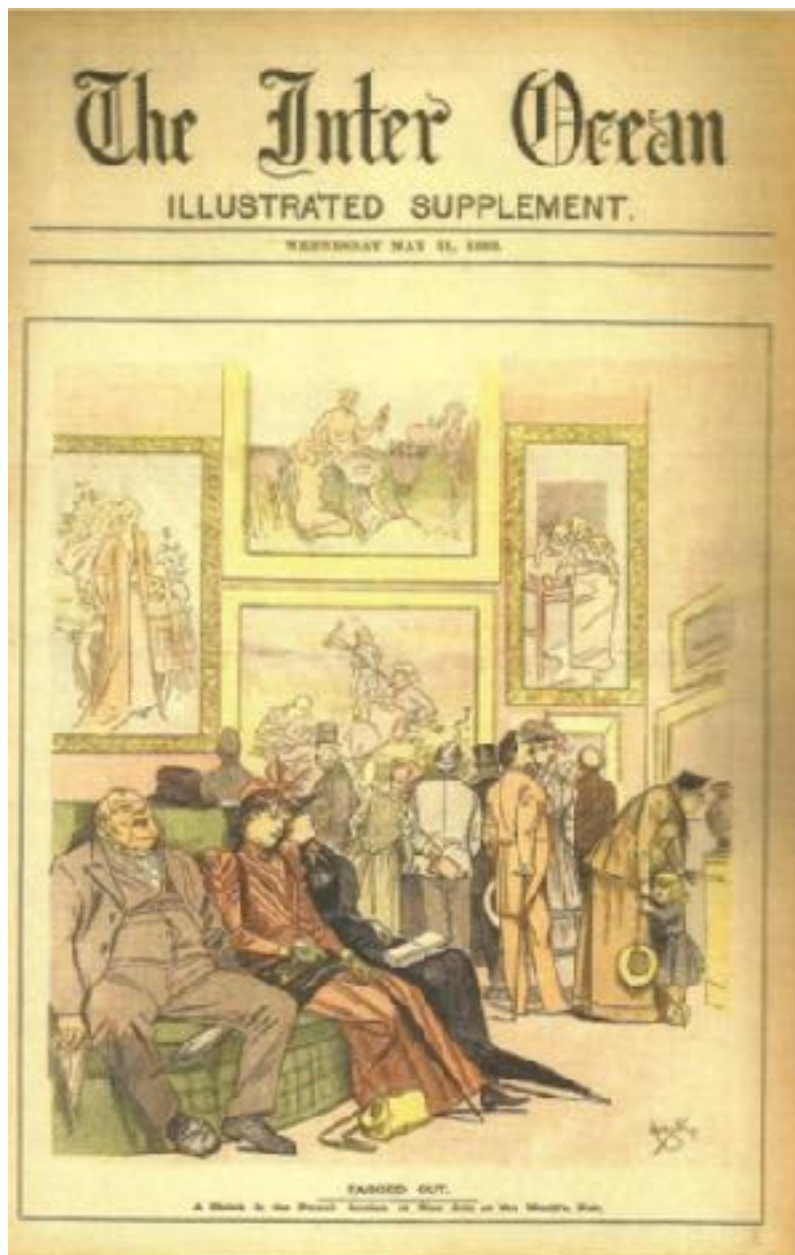


Fig. 200. Art Young, “Fagged Out. A Sketch of the French Section of Fine Arts at the World’s Fair,” *The Inter Ocean*, 31 May, 1893.



Fig. 201. Isabella Bannerman, *Six Chix*, 20 May, 2013.

Cartoonists and comic-strip artists have found humor in a number of aspects of visiting an art museum. For instance, in what may be the earliest American cartoon about an art museum, Art Young pokes fun at visitors falling asleep in the fine arts gallery of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (Fig. 200). Young produced this work early in his career, when he was employed by the Chicago *Inter World*, the world's first newspaper Sunday supplement to be printed in color. [For more on Young's later work cf. Fig. 125 above.] One hundred and twenty years later, the syndicated cartoonist Isabella Bannerman returned to the topic of people falling asleep in an art museum (Fig. 201). As she explained in a 2016 interview, Bannerman drew her *Six Chix* cartoon based on a visit she made to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., where she saw wall panels suggesting which works of art visitors should see if they had a limited amount of time in the museum.

Although these Young and Bannerman cartoons share the same humorous incongruity of the sleeping art museum visitor, there are several notable differences between the two. Whereas Young's comic is drawn in a naturalistic style that now seems archaic to us, Bannerman's is presented in the flat, cartoonish mode which has characterized the gag cartoon for the past half-century. Moreover, the humor in Young's 1893 drawing is entirely visual, with the foreground sleepers—a portly man with an open mouth and two elegantly dressed women leaning against each other—snoozing apart from the crowd of people admiring salon-hung paintings, here rendered in muted tones that do not draw our attention to them; the title to Young's drawing is merely informative and adds nothing to its humor. [Contemporary viewers may be confused by the term "fagged out," but it carried no homosexual connotations in the 19th century.] In contrast, the punch line to Bannerman's joke is carried by the written label describing why we see an open-mouthed man with a tourist camera sleeping in a comfy chair.

Bannerman's cartoon also evokes the metafictional comparison of museums and comic strips, with the wall behind the sleeping man being divided into four zones on which pictures of artwork are hung like sequential panels in a comic strip.



"Don't click me. I'm just here to buy cards."

Fig. 202. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker*, 30 Nov., 1968.



Fig. 203. Todd Clark, *Lola*, 15 Oct., 2007.



Fig. 204. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 9 Sept., 2010.

Targeting the museum visitor in humorous cartoons and comic strips has taken many forms other than just laughing at those who fall asleep in these august institutions. Lee Lorenz, for example, mocks the fur-clad matron who steps into what appears to be the Metropolitan Museum just to buy cards (**Fig. 202**). In a similar vein, Todd Clark pokes fun at an elderly woman who mistakes a restroom sign for a minimalist painting (**Fig. 203**). Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry make a humorous twist on this gag with a line of women being fooled by a painting of a ladies room bathroom door (**Fig. 204**); we might sympathize with them for not expecting a 21st-century post-modern work in a gallery of mid-20th century abstract paintings!



Fig. 205. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 15 Nov., 1952.

Another perennial comic motif is the clumsy museum visitor. Anatol Kovarsky's 1952 *The New Yorker* cartoon has visitors bump heads while staring at the painted ceiling in a statue-filled gallery (Fig. 205). Sixty years later, Harry Bliss gives us a clumsy visitor who knocks over Brancusi's *Bird in Space* while staring up at a Calder mobile (Fig. 206).



Fig. 206. Harry Bliss, 26 April, 2012.

More recently, mocking the Millennial museum visitor has become a popular cartoon subject, invariably involving the incongruity of a Gen-Y'er using digital technology to mediate the museum experience. Willey Miller's Millennials assume that software was used to create the oil painting they are looking at (Fig. 207), while the Canadian cartoonist Kaamran Hafeez gives us Millennials whose apps allow them not to even bother going into the museum at all (Fig. 208).



Fig. 207. Willey Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 4 Aug., 2012.



"With this new center app I can enjoy the museum's entire collection."

Fig. 208. Kaamran Hafeez, *Barron's*, 17 Aug, 2015.



Fig. 209. Harry Bliss, 31 March, 2015.

Yet one more way to take a joking jab at museum visitors is to replace them with animal avatars. Of course not all cartoon characters are human, but even when cartoonists populate their comics with talking animals, they frequently behave as if they were human. The incongruous humor in Harry Bliss's cartoon about cats in a museum (**Fig. 209**) plays on the ambiguous status of the cat admiring the still life. On the one hand, the painting—unlike the landscape and cafe scene in the background—is particularly appealing to felines; on the other hand, the cat, standing upright with a

museum brochure in hand, is mimicking those museum visitors who ooh and aah over how realistically a still life painter has represented apples and oranges.



Anyone who has spent any time in an art museum gallery will have noticed the phenomenon that when a couple is viewing a work of art together, one of them—usually the man—will feel compelled to “explain” the work to the other. Often this “explanation” takes the form of “this painting speaks to me”—a phrase that has become a cliché in humorous museum cartoons and comic strips.

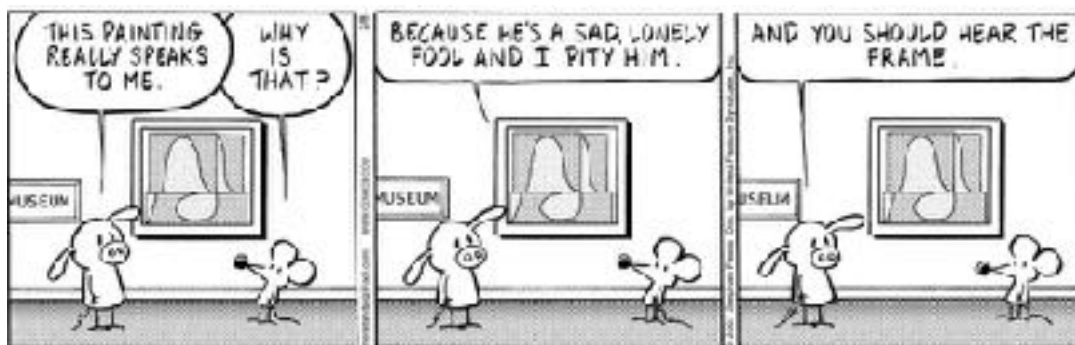
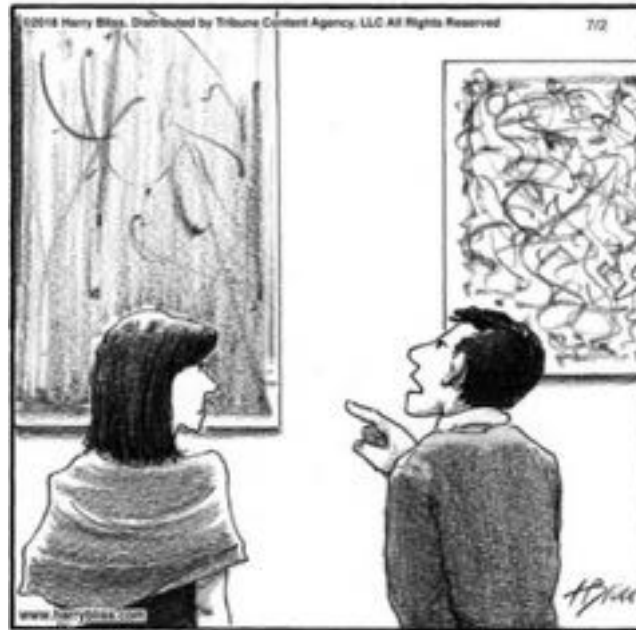


Fig. 210. Stephen Pastis, *Pearls Before Swine*, 8 Feb., 2007.

Stephen Pastis' *Pearls Before Swine* strip (Fig. 210) takes this phrase literally, with the abstract painting speaking directly to the kindhearted, but rather dumb, Pig and his cynical friend Rat—here both acting in a fully human manner. Mike Gruhn's *WebDonuts* cartoon (Fig. 211) presents a similar joke, with the painting “raining on the parade” of the man whose partner is not “into” him.



Fig. 211. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 19 Oct., 2009.



"This one speaks to me. It's asking why I'm not home watching the playoffs."

Fig. 212. Harry Bliss, 2 July, 2018.

Harry Bliss's "this painting speaks to me" joke (Fig. 212) employs the gender stereotype that men would rather be watching (American) football than visiting a museum (cf. Fig. 172 above). That the couple are looking at indistinctly rendered but clearly identifiable abstract expressionist paintings also puts this cartoon in the genre of comics that mock modern art—a subject to which we will return in the last section of the "Amusing Art" essay below.



Fig. 213. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 11 Nov., 2011.

Mike Gruhn gives us a variant of the “this painting speaks to me” comic trope by articulating what the painting “says” to the cartoon visitor. His cartoon about two people trying to make sense of a ridiculous modern painting (**Fig. 213**) asks us to infer that the woman’s partner had just said he thought the artist was making fun of them. The ridiculousness of the other paintings in the gallery—a silly unicorn and the top of the head of an evil rabbit—make us agree with this implied comment, and we, presumably like the “LOL” painter, are laughing at her for thinking that she is included in the joke.



Fig. 214. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 12 April, 2015.

Along the same lines, the humor in a Hilary B. Price’s *Rhymes with Orange* cartoon (**Fig. 214**) comes when we connect the man’s words to the image of medieval fighting in the painting, and it dawns on us that this is in fact an in-law joke. Mark Anderson similarly has a man explaining a painting to his partner, although this cartoon is less successful because the minimalist painting really does look more like a bar graph than an actual work of art (**Fig. 215**).



Fig. 215. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*, 29 Feb., 2016.



Fig. 216. Bruce McCall, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 13 Jan., 2020.

The Canadian cartoon artist Bruce McCall has given us a humorously metafictional twist on the cartoon motif of people standing in front of a painting and discussing it (**Fig. 216**). Playing on our “culturally bound” class prejudice that a group of housepainters—presumably contracted to paint the walls of the museum—would not be interested in the museum’s collection of “fine” art, McCall’s housepainters are incongruously intent on looking at a painting that is inexplicably mounted on a pedestal under glass; although we cannot “hear” what the gesticulating painter on the right is saying, we might suspect that he is explaining to his fellow painters how unusual it is to encounter what appears to be a miniature Rembrandt self-portrait!



Art museums are for lovers. Or at least that is what some comic-strip artists would seem to have you believe.



Fig. 217. George Herriman, *Krazy Kat and Ignatz*, *New York American*, 17 Nov, 1911.

An early version of a George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* comic strip (Fig. 217) begins with Ignatz Mouse in a museum looking at a painting of a curiously winged Narcissus staring at his own reflection in a pool of water. Apparently inspired by this, Ignatz runs down to a “real” pool that is the mirror image of the one depicted in the painting; when, as he is staring at his own reflection in the pool and Krazy Kat swims up, Ignatz pushes the ledge off at her and then goes back to the museum to throw a brick at the “Krazy Kupid” painting. As an origin story for the *Krazy Kat* comic strip, which ran until Herriman’s death in 1944, this 1911 comic is remarkable; just as the self-centered mythological Narcissus rejected the advances of the nymph Echo, so too will the egotistical Ignatz continually throw bricks at the love-sick, masochistic, Krazy Kat.



Fig. 218. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Duplex*, 14 July, 2000.

If men in cartoons and comic strips (and in real life!) seem to dominate giving “what this painting says” explanations when they are in an art museum with their

partners, the power roles seem to be reversed when a cartoon couple goes to the museum on a date. The McCoy brothers' character Eno, for example, explains to his dog Fang that his date to an art museum went south when his attempt to listen to his own music rather than the taped audio guide was discovered (Fig. 218). The target of this joke is not the audio guide itself but rather the doofus male who feels uncomfortable in the "feminine" world of culture; making Eno's embarrassment revealed through an after-the-fact confession rather than illustrating the actual disastrous date is a more effective way to convey the strip's humorous zing.



Fig. 219. Nina Paley and Stephen Hersh, *The Hots*, 2003.

A similar gender stereotype is at play in *The Hots*, a comic strip written by Stephen Hersh and drawn by Nina Paley that appeared for two years in the *Chicago Tribune* but was never successfully syndicated (Fig. 219). Here we do see the young married couple Hannah and Max in the art museum, where the husband is clearly out of his league and finds it exhausting to decide whether he likes the works of art. Hannah is kindly sympathetic to Max's plight, unlike the scowling wife in Harry Bliss's museum cartoon (Fig. 212 above), where the man said he would rather be watching football than looking at abstract expressionist art. One wonders if *The Hots* had continued and Paley

and Hersh had their characters age in real time, what a Hannah and Max trip to the museum would look like today.



Fig. 220. Jef Mallett, *Frazz*, 12 June, 2004.

Jef Mallett gives us a different type of an art-museum-date comic strip (Fig. 220). In this before-the-fact account, the couple—Frazz, an intellectual, song-writing elementary-school custodian, and Miss Jane, an athletic first-grade teacher—seem to be on equal footing. When they explain to a student that they are going to a Fragonard exhibition, the youngster displays the humorously incongruous wisdom of not only knowing who Fragonard is, but also predicting that the exhibition would be empty. Ironically, the real target of Mallett’s joke are the readers who, unlike the cartoon characters, wouldn’t be drawn to a Fragonard show.

Kidding Museums



Fig. 221. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, 13 May, 1950.

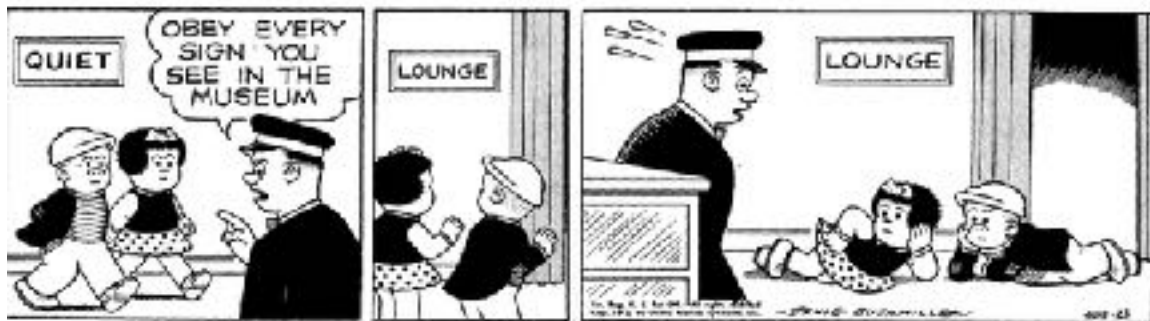


Fig. 222. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*, 23 June, 1971.

There is something intrinsically funny about kids and art. As we saw in Part I, some cartoonists find humor in projecting the artistic styles of artists back onto their childhoods; and as we saw in the “Introduction” section above, cartoons of children’s art can be used as an ironic metafictional rejection of the “my six-year-old could do that” critique of modern art. And as we will explore in the “Making Fun of Making Art” essay below, cartoonists and comic-strip artists have found humor in many aspects of children making art. Here, however, we examine the comedy to be found in children going to art museums.

Ernie Bushmiller’s cartoons of children in a museum are almost too silly to even raise a smile. Like the museum guard in Busmiller’s 1950 strip (**Fig. 221**), we are not amused by Sluggo’s claim that a squirt-gun helps him appreciate a painting of Niagara Falls. I’m not sure if Nancy and Sluggo taking the museum guard’s instructions literally warrants the three surprised sweat drops that come off of his head in Bushmiller’s 1971 strip, but at least this comic lives up to Harvey’s ideal in locating its humor in a combination of verbal and visual elements (**Fig. 222**).



Fig. 223. Mike Twohy, *The New Yorker*, 9 July, 2001.

Other cartoonists have been more successful in finding humor in “out-of-the-mouths-of-babes” comments kids make in art museums. We have already seen, for instance, the Harry Bliss cartoon with a mother and son in front of a Roy Lichtenstein Pop Art woman that the boy thought had measles (**Fig. 158**). Mike Twohy employs the same format in a 2001 *New Yorker* cartoon of a mother (**Fig. 223**) who is trying to inculcate the cultural norm of works of art “speaking” to us as she is responding to what we can assume her child had said in front of a painting in a museum. Given that we cannot see the painting the boy apparently thinks “sucks,” we are not sure if we agree with him or not.



Fig. 224. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 10 Jan., 2014.

Dan Piraro's 2014 cartoon (**Fig. 224**) doesn't give us the mother's response to what her son says about the ancient statue, but part of the humor here is in imagining the conversation she will have with her husband afterwards. While there is nothing unusual about the Knidian-type Aphrodite which provides the visual punch line to this cartoon gag, Piraro has snuck in an additional joke with his representation of the painting in the background next to the museum guard, where he has put one of his trademark hidden symbols—the "Pie of Opportunity"—on the divan where we might have expected an odalisque; this may be an oblique critique of art and the male gaze—which is, after all, the target of this cartoon humor.



"If it's in a museum, you're allowed to look."

Fig. 225. David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, 23 Sept., 2019.

A David Sipress *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 225**) similarly addresses the issue of the male gaze, again using the format of a mother responding to what we can assume her son had said in front of a painting in a museum; the mother's response is another example of the role of the American mother in inculcating cultural norms in their children, this time the hypocritical notion that it is only appropriate to view images of the nude female body if they are represented in "high" art. The reclining nude is graphically, though cartoonishly, depicted, with a painter incongruously shown behind the curtains.



Fig. 226. Lynda Barry, *The Near-Sighted Monkey*, May, 2016. Web.

In a Tumblr posting for her comics classes at the University of Wisconsin, the cartoonist, graphic novelist, teacher (and now MacArthur genius award recipient) Lynda Barry has drawn a sweet variation of the mother-and-child-in-the-museum cartoon motif (**Fig. 226**). Barry's four panels—presented vertically on her Tumblr site although they would seem to come from two notebook pages as reconstructed here—lead us through a metafictional joke; we, like the mother who is unsure of how to look art, have a sudden revelation when we get the visual pun of the last panel.



If one child in a museum can be funny, imagine what humor a whole bus load of kids can bring. A school trip to the art museum has become a favorite comic cliché for American cartoonists and comic-strip artists.



Fig. 227. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*.

Just as Mike Gruhn (**Fig. 213**) and Mike Twohy (**Fig. 223**) used an implied conversation to give sequential depth to their single-panel museum cartoons, so too does Mark Anderson's museum school trip cartoon ask us to imagine the patient teacher having to answer the same question her charges repeat over and over again (**Fig. 227**). It is unclear if the little tykes wanted to "find the ninja in the haystack" only for the Monet series, or if they were looking for hidden Japanese warriors in every painting they saw on their trip to what is presumably the Art Institute of Chicago museum (cf. **Fig. 519**). Given the "associative inversion" created by the striking contrast between the realistic color rendering of Monet's *Haystacks* and the simplistic black-and-white cartoon characters, we the viewers are forced into the painting, where we too might begin to look for hidden ninjas!



Fig. 228. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 23 Nov., 2016.

One of the exciting parts of any school trip is the bus ride, a subject that cartoonists and comic-strip artists have not neglected to mine for humorous content. Hilary B. Price’s cartoon, for example, looks at the bus ride home after a day of school outings; the prosaic conversation here sets up the visual humor which comes when we notice in the different entrance tokens the children sport (Fig. 228).



Fig. 229. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 7 May, 1971.

No other comic-strip artist has explored the humor of the school trip to an art museum more than Charles Schulz. He used this subject in a 1971 daily *Peanuts* strip (Fig. 229) where Marcie and Charlie Brown’s sister Sally walk around a museum being surprised that the paintings don’t have commercials and wondering if they would see the “Ramona Lisa.” These secondary jests of their childish naivety about art set up the gag’s punch line—that they believe doing something you enjoy cannot be educational.

Schulz returned to the art-museum-school-trip theme two years later in his animated television special *There’s No Time for Love, Charlie Brown*, which the CBS stations aired on 11 March, 1973. The plot of this show centers around the anxiety Charlie Brown felt when, under pressure to get a good grade on the report he had to write about a recent class trip to an art museum, he realized that he, Sally, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, and Snoopy had in fact gone to a supermarket which they had mistakenly taken to be the art museum; his crisis is resolved when the teacher, assuming that the report he wrote was a metaphor of an art museum as a supermarket, gives him the good grade he needed.



Fig. 230. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 22 July, 1975.

A couple of years after the TV show aired, Schulz again dipped into the school-trip-to-the-art-museum theme, this time in one of his stock situation strips of Lucy leaning against Schroeder's toy piano (**Fig. 230**). In this side-on, child-level view of the pair, the second panel focuses in on Lucy as she reports her comic misinterpretation of *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Like Schroeder in the third panel, we look on in stunned silence, only to stick out our tongues at the end as Lucy goes on with her mash-up to hypothesize that the painting was a photograph of Beethoven on his way to Nashville. By having Lucy give an after-the-fact report of what she "saw" earlier in the day, Schulz's gag assumes that we can call to mind Emanuel Leutze's iconic image; the joke would simply not work had Lucy been shown talking in front of the actual painting in the Metropolitan Museum.



Fig. 231. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 25 - 27 Jan., 1999.

A year before he died, Charles Schulz came back once more to the school-trip-to-the-art-museum trope when he created a week-long set of comic strips that finally

allowed Charlie Brown to join the rest of the crew at the museum (the first three of this set are shown here in **Fig. 231**). By now, Schulz was conveying his humor through a much more sophisticated range of panel design for his daily strips than the standard four-panel format he used for most of his career. The first strip, for instance, has different panel sizes which match the gag's rhythm as we watch Lucy and her younger brother Rerun walk onto the school bus; as we have noted, Schulz tends to give the punch line to his jokes in the next-to-last panel, which here is a narrow close-up of Rerun as he expresses his fear of abandonment. The second strip also employs varying panel sizes, with the punch line now coming in the final panel, a pulled back view that is set off from the rest by an extra-wide gutter. The third strip in this set is a single elongated panel that, as we read from left to right, we are meant to interpret as a sequential narrative; Sally claiming that this is her first trip to an art museum would seem to be a reference to Schulz's 1973 television special and not a direct contradiction of the 1971 **Fig. 229** strip, which Schulz assumes we do not remember and may have forgotten about it himself.

[In later essays we will return to discuss the final two *Peanuts* strips in this series: cf. **Figs. 272** and **645**.]

As Umberto Eco and others have noted, Schulz's cartoon children use their childish psychology to negotiate a world where adults are off-stage. But in the real world, school children are chaperoned on trips to the art museum, and parents expect a report from their sons or daughters on what they did on those special outings. And, as we have seen in the museum cartoons **Figs. 224–225**, one issue that often arises in these child/adult interactions is students encountering sexually explicit art in the museum. And, naturally, cartoonists and comic-strip artists have exploited the uncomfortableness of this situation for humorous effect.



Fig. 232. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 11 April, 2015.

In 2015, Lincoln Peirce drew a set of comic strips where the title character's grandparents were chaperones on Nate's school trip to an art museum. In one of these strips (**Fig. 232**), the grandfather rounds up some boys by threatening to tell on them for having snuck off to see the exhibit on nudes. While we smile at his threat, the snide comment by his wife points to the real target of this joke, namely men, all of whom are pre-adolescent boys at heart.



Fig. 233. Kevin Fagan, *Drabble*, 18 March, 2005.

Ralph, the dad in Keven Fagan's 2005 *Drabble* strip (**Fig. 233**), calmly takes in the news that his son saw "a bunch of naked statues" during his museum field trip; the strip's gag hangs on the pun in the son's retort about being exposed to the arts.



Fig. 234. Weingartens & Clark, *Barney and Clyde*, 9 April, 2011.

In contrast, the Pillsbury parents in the 2011 Weingartens and Clark comic strip (**Fig. 234**) react with wide eyes and exclamation points over their heads when their daughter Cynthia announces that she had seen the work of Mapplethorpe on her school trip to the art museum. The humor in the final panel—the only one set off by a real gutter—is provided by the contrasting pair of thought bubbles; Cynthia's inauthentic switch to Matisse has fooled her father but, as we can tell by Lucretia's suspicious slide-long glance, not her mother. The strip's joke, of course, depends on viewers knowing about Robert Mapplethorpe's corpus of erotic photographs.



Fig. 235. Brian and Greg Walker, *Hi and Lois*, 16 Oct., 2011.

The art museum, in addition to being a place where a cartoon mother might take her child or to being the destination of a field trip for cartoon school children, is also a place where a cartoon families go for “together time.” We have already seen this with Brian and Greg Walker’s comic strip about the Flagston family taking a trip to the now defunct cartoon museum founded by the Walker family (Fig. 163 above). The Walkers returned to this theme in their 2011 strip (Fig. 235), which, with the dad driving the car and the mother explaining to the kids in the back seat why they are going to the museum, embodies the American bourgeois ideal of the cultured life.

Other cartoonists have poked comedic fun at this ideal. The children in Bil Keane’s *The Family Circus* cartoon, for instance, are more interested in the comic strips on the back of the museum guard’s newspaper than they are in the art on the museum walls (Fig. 236) [The Spanish comics artist Sento used this same metafictional gag on the cover of his 2019 *Historietas del Museo del Prado*, Fig. 166, lower right.] In addition to the questions raised by the eclectic group of paintings Keane has included in his cartoon, ranging from naturalistic western scenes and a view of an artist’s studio to rather prosaic impressionist and abstract works, a metafiction is also at play here in this newspaper comic showing people reading newspaper comics. [We will return to this issue in the “Amusing Metafictions” section of the following essay.]



Fig. 236. Bil Keane, *The Family Circus*, 11 June, 1975.



Fig. 237. Rob Harrell, *Adam@Home*, 24 March, 2010.

Rob Harrell pulls the same, the-kids-are-bored gag in his 2010 version of the take-the-family-to-the-museum cartoon (**Fig. 237**). Here, after looking at an absurdly drab abstract work of art, the crying baby lunges at a realistic outdoor scene while the family is moving on to the Cubism exhibit. The humor in Harrell's comic strip comes as we imagine what the family is thinking while they huddle around this work, which more resembles a picture window than a painting; the smiling faces on everyone on the playground in the final frame rewards us for guessing that they realized that they would rather be there than in the stuffy old museum.

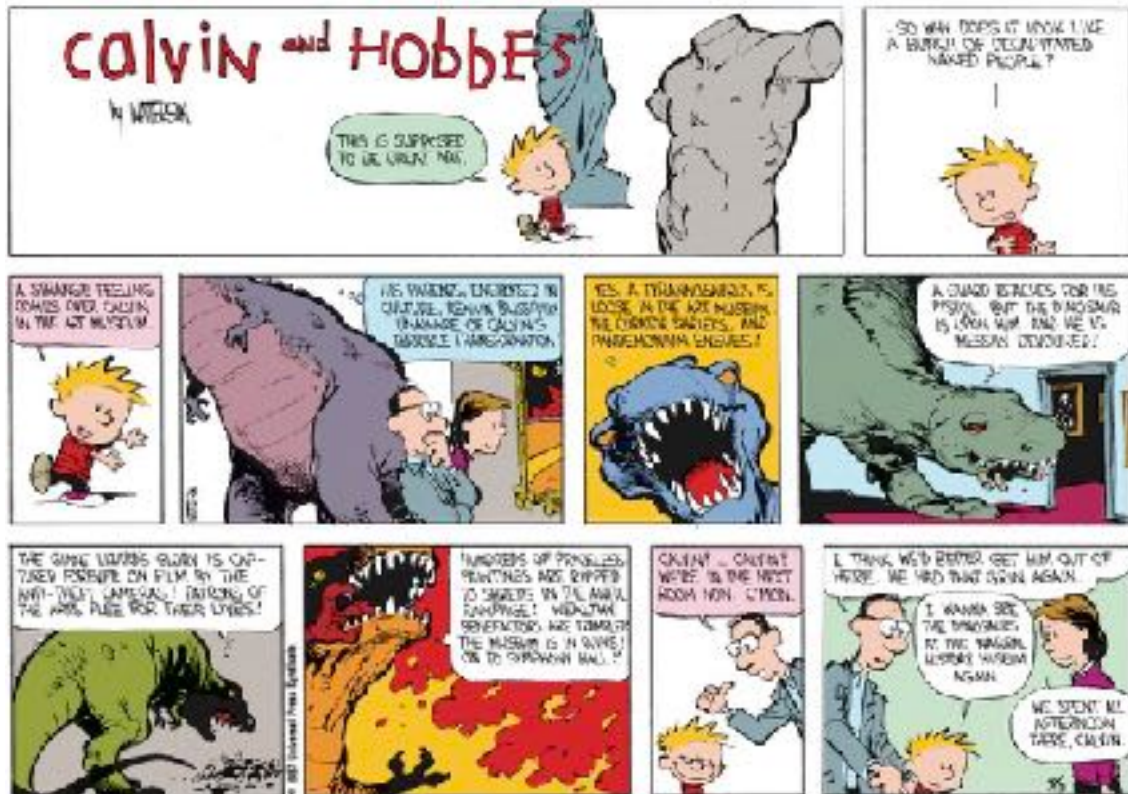


Fig. 238. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 17 May, 1987.

Another danger in dragging the family to the art museum is what the child's active imagination may come up with. And few comic strip characters have a more active imagination than Bill Watterson's Calvin! The title panels of Watterson's 1987 strip (Fig. 238) set up the gag, with Calvin wondering why statues of "decapitated naked people" are considered art. Calvin then goes on to self-narrate his fantasy of transforming into a Tyrannosaurus Rex and wreaking havoc in the museum. With Calvin's fantasy reaching the boiling point, Watterson switches our view back to reality as his father sees the diabolical grin on his son's face and decides that their family outing to the museum should be truncated.



Fig. 239. Pat Brady and Don Wimmer, *Rose is Rose*, 27 Oct., 2013.

Another comic-strip child prone to, literal, flights of fancy is Pat Brady and Don Wimmer’s Pasquale, who zooms off on spaceship adventures whenever he falls asleep. In one *Rose is Rose* comic strip (**Fig. 239**), Pasquale apparently conks out early on in their family museum jaunt as his mother Rose is looking at abstract sculpture; by the end of the strip, Pasquale has been joined by his father Jimbo, and both of them are shown asleep on a museum bench in the final panel. Not only does this Brady and Wimmer strip make use of the falling-asleep-in-the-art-museum and the doofus-husband-in-the-art-museum comic tropes we have seen before, but the final punch line—the visitor who mistakes the sleeping pair for an installation piece—is a cartoon stereotype for poking fun of modern art which we will discuss in the “Mocking Modernism” section of the “Amusing Art” essay below.



Comics art has found a place in the American art museum. Exhibitions of individual comics artists continue to be mounted in art galleries, and Futuropolis-style collaborations between museums and individual graphic artists will no doubt continue to be formed. Nonetheless, whether by mocking the institution itself or by poking fun at the experience of visitors, contemporary cartoonists and comic-strip artists also continue, like the sympathetic cartoon art thief, to express an underlying hostility towards museums. The chasm in attitudes about comics as high or low art may have bridges over it, but it remains a deep-seated feature of the American cultural landscape.



As we conclude this essay, a final few words about how humorous cartoons and comic strips narrate their gags:

As one can imagine, the issue of narration in comics has received a great deal of scholarly attention, much of it, of course, directed towards graphic novels and other longer comics works. In our essays so far, we have touched upon one aspect of this subject—how formal design elements of a humorous comic strip impart a rhythm to the timing of its joke.

Another way cartoon and comic-strip jokes are timed is by how time itself is represented. As we noted in the Preface to this study, Scott McCloud made a distinction between the single-panel cartoon and the multi-paneled comics. McCloud did recognize,

however, that single-panel cartoons with multiple speech bubbles can represent a sequential span of time; the conversation in Mike Gruhn's "this-painting-speaks-to me cartoon (**Fig. 211**) or Hilary Price's cartoon about children discussing their field trips (**Fig. 228**) would be examples of this. Another remarkable exception to McCloud's rule is Will Allen's 1913 "A Futurist Home Run" cartoon (**Fig. 128**), where a series of events are compressed, *à la* Marcel Duchamp, into a single set of overlapping psychedelic after-images.

A span of time in a cartoon or single comic-strip panel can also be revealed through motion. In two Jim Meddick strips about Moondog as museum guard (**Figs. 182 and 183**), for instance, single panels depicting a two-headed Moondog are meant to convey the lapse of time during which our miscreant guard looked left and right. Similarly, in the first of these strips, Meddick has overlapped Moondog's splayed-out body on top of the speech bubble of his fellow guard to indicate that what we see is his reaction to what she had just said.

For the most part, however, McCloud's rule does hold. All of the single-panel cartoon and the individual panels of the comic strips we have been examining in these essays do represent either a instant in time or a short span during which a conversation or a short movement takes place. As Thierry Groensteen noted, comics in the Western world tend to be narrated from the past: "that's how it all began" leading to "and this is what happens next"—an observation mirroring Gunther Kress' and Theo van Leeuwen's social semiotic interpretation of visual narratives moving from a "given" to a "new." Even in single-panel cartoons, there is an implied sequence of events which led up to the instance we are viewing; we have seen this in the museum cartoons where mothers or teachers respond to what we can presume a child had just said (**Figs. 158, 223, 225, and 227**).

Still, there is one more way that cartoons and comic strips can use time to create humor, namely by asking viewers to anticipate what will occur in the *future*, after the instant being portrayed within the frame has passed. For instance, the joke in Dan Piraro's museum cartoon (**Fig. 224**), as we have noted, is in part based on what we think will be the conversation between the mother and her husband after their son revealed that the father watches porn on his computer. We will see other examples of this sort of "anticipatory humor" in the following essay, such as in a Hilary Price cartoon (**Fig. 369**), where we giggle anticipating what an art teacher will think when she sees a student's

canvas, or in a Harry Bliss cartoon (**Fig. 373**), where we nervously anticipate a museum guard's reaction as he is about to walk in on a man trying to replicate a Jackson Pollack painting, or with a Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry *Brevity* cartoon (**Fig. 898**) in the "Digging the Past" essay in Part III below, where we anticipate the confusion of future archaeologists who find a man buried with an elephant bone.



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