Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages

Part V

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

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Sculpting Humor

Almost all of the cartoons and comic strips we examined in the previous section poke fun at the *act* of painting and only occasionally lampoon the actual paintings their cartoon characters create. In contrast, cartoon and comic-strip gags about sculpting tend to find humor as much in the sculptures themselves as in the *act* of sculpting. It would seem that American cartoonists and comic-strip artists, trained within the traditions of the graphic arts, find the plastic arts intrinsically funny.'

Fig. 380. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 2 March, 2013.

Fig. 381. Bill Amend, *FoxTrot*, 22 Nov., 2015.

Fig. 382. Brant Parker and Jonny Hart, *The Wizard of Id*, 10 April, 2015.

Hilary Price's sculpture cartoon (**Fig. 380**) obliquely pokes fun at the process of sculpting, as we imagine Ernest taking his box home and using the enclosed chisel; the humor in this gag depends on the viewer's "culturally bound background knowledge" to recognize the incongruous substitution of "sculpture" for "paint" in the childish activity of creating art by number. (We have already seen "paint by number" Michelangelo cartoons, **Figs**. **7**, **8**, and **19**, in the first two essays). The gag in Bill Amend's comic strip (**Fig**. **381**) makes us chuckle in seeing the father consider his son Jason's suggestion not to be artistically lazy in carving the turkey; by first showing us Jason's suggestions in the four panels on the left, Amend makes us identify with the father's puzzlement as we see him read them in the punch-line panel on the right. Brant Parker's and Johnny Hart's *The Wizard of Id* comic strip (**Fig. 382**) does show us an actual sculptor at work, although here the target of the joke is not the sculpting itself but rather the vanity of the big-nosed king, revealed in the elongated punch-line frame; while regular viewers of Parker's and Hart's strip would have been prepared for the king's vanity, knowing who Leonardo DiCaprio is, is part of the "contextually and culturally bound knowledge" necessary to get the gag.

Unlike cartoons and comic strips about painters, which tend to focus their gags on professionals or serious adult amateurs, American comics about sculptors target a broad range of cartoon characters of different social positions and ages— all non-professionals who try their hand at sculpting, usually with comical results.

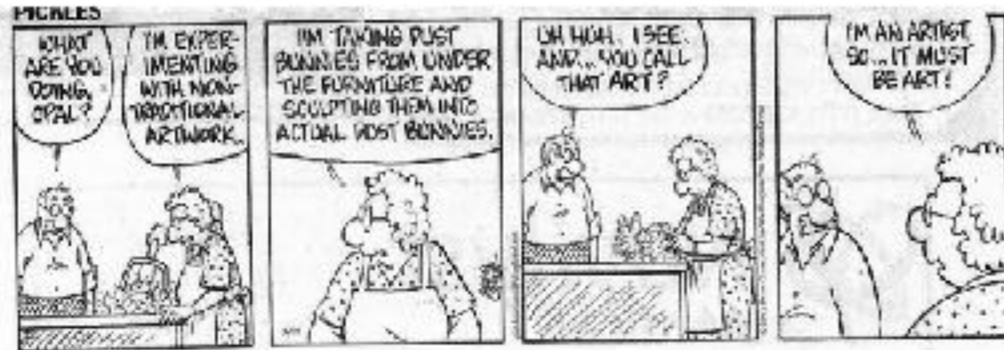


Fig. 383. Brian Crane, *Pickles*, 20–21 March, 2012.

Fig. 384. Paul Jon Boscacci, *Fort Knox*, 8 April, 2013.

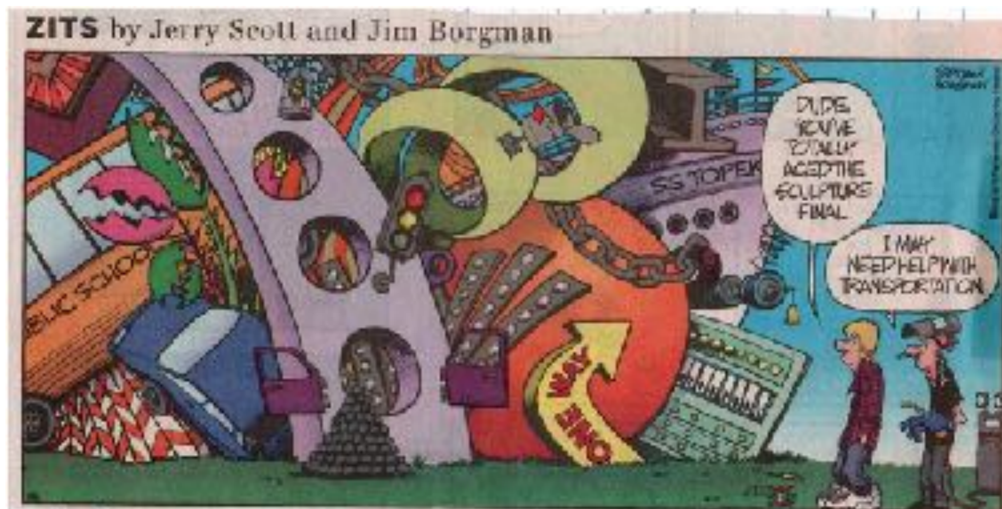


Fig. 385. Jerry Scoot and Jim Borgman, *Zits*, 8 Dec., 2013.

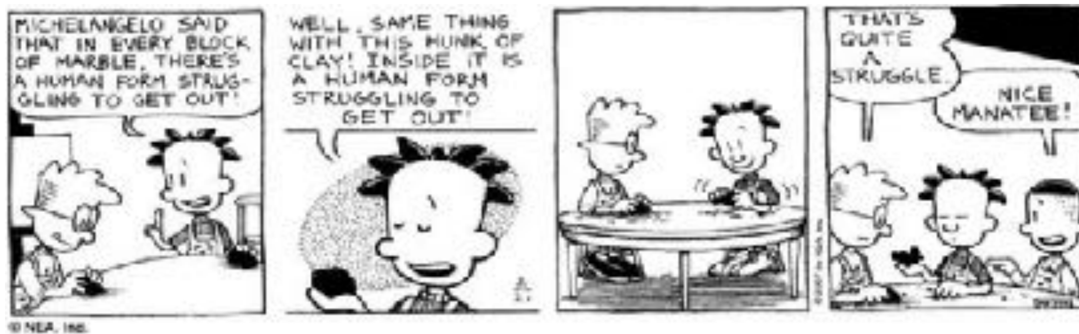


Fig. 386. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 21 Feb., 2011.

Fig. 387. Darby Conley, *Get Fuzzy*, 14 July, 2008.

As we have seen (**Figs. 376–379** above), Brian Crane's Opel Pickle is a retired grandmother whose aspiration to be a painter is little appreciated by those around her. Opel's attempt to be a non-traditional sculptor and create wonderfully metafictional dust-bunny dust bunnies (**Fig. 383**) is, literally, *not* taken by her husband and friend as "nothing to sneeze at." Another elderly would-be cartoon sculptor, the kindly general in Paul Jon Boscacci's *Fort Knox* comic strip (**Fig. 384**), similarly has a critic in his sarcastic major. In contrast, Jeremy, the main character in Jerry Scoot's and Jim Borgman's comic strip *Zits*, does appreciate the fantastic sculpture his high-school friend Pierce has incongruously welded from, among other things, a school bus, a car, and a US Navy vessel (**Fig. 385**). The sixth-grader title character in Lincoln Peirce's *Big Nate* pompously evokes Michelangelo as he sculpts clay in an art class, setting up the gag of his classmates' reaction (**Fig. 386**). (We will look more at Nate's exploits in his art class in the next section of this essay.) An anthropomorphized cartoon animal also gets into the humorous sculpting act in a Darby Conley *Get Fuzzy* comic strip (**Fig. 387**), where the irascible Bucky Katt has stuck a spork into a pot of dead cat grass to create what he and his fellow pet, the dim-witted Satchel Pooch, consider to be a great work of art.

Fig. 388. Hank Ketcham (Ron Ferdinand), *Dennis the Menace*, 3 Feb., 2013.

Fig. 389. Bill Amend, *FoxTrot*, 10 Jan., 2016.

Although we will examine in the next section of this essay how American cartoonists and comic-strip artist find humor in children making art, I present here two more examples of cartoon kids' sculpture, both involving the typical American suburban child's activity of playing in the snow. Rob Ferdinand, who, together with Marcus Hamilton, took over the *Dennis the Menace* strip after Hank Ketcham retired in 1994, creates an interesting rhythm for his silly textual/visual gag (**Fig. 388**) by placing a silhouetted central panel in the top row, in which Mr. Wilson sarcastically evokes Michelangelo, followed by a lower row in which the "camera" increasingly pans in on

Dennis' father's pointed nose before swinging around in the final reveal. Like Ferdinand's comic, the humor in Bill Amend's *Fox Trot* strip (**Fig. 389**) also comes from contrast between what we read and what we see, as we realized that Jason and his friend Marcus are clever enough to create Calderesque mobiles out of snow but innocent enough not to realize why no one is stopping to buy them.

Fig. 390. Chad Carpenter, *Tundra Comics*, 11 Dec., 2014.

In a humorous metafictional cartoon (**Fig. 390**), the Alaska-based comics artist Chad Carpenter has combined two different aspects of how children make things while playing in the snow. Carpenter's animated snowman trying to make a snow angel is facing an existential question which has turned his coal mouth into a frown.

Fig. 391. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, reprinted 11 Jan., 2011.

The Washington DC-based cartoonist Richard Thompson has made fun of adults making snow sculptures (**Fig. 391**), with allusions to the local ABC weatherman Bob Ryan (now retired), to the National Gallery of Art, and to J. Stewart Johnson, Jr.'s 1980 sculpture *The Awakening* (which is now displayed in the National Harbor, having been moved there from the Hains Point park in 2007). The humor in these *Richard's Poor Almanac* vignettes derives from the our seeing the incongruous creations these snow sculptors described in Thompson's typical text-heaven fashion. In addition, beyond these individual gags, we are also asked to laugh at the inherent funniness of grown men playing in the snow. [Like Thompson's *Richard's Poor Almanac* comic about the National Portrait Gallery, **Fig. 199**, this comic is another example of a "composite cartoon" that we will discuss in the first section of the next essay.]

In addition to making fun of cartoon characters making sculptures, American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have made fun of the genre of sculpture itself in ways that they rarely do with paintings.

Fig. 392. Tony Carrillo, *F Minus*, 29 Dec., 2013.

Although Western cartoons and comic strips are designed to be read left to right, we quickly scan Tony Carrillo's cartoon (**Fig. 392**) to focus on what Big Reg says in the prominent white speech bubble on the right, after which we go back to look at the inscription on his over-life-sized bust, and then cringe a bit when we compare the two faces and get the incongruity of a man not dying after his vain death-bed commission of a memorial statue of himself.

Fig. 393. Jimmy Johnson, *Arlo and Janis*, 5 April, 2015.

The gag in Jimmy Johnson's comic strip of a husband and wife replacing a broken bird bath (**Fig. 393**) depends on viewers recognizing the "very famous statue" Arlo carries in the final panel. While viewers may not know that this is a copy of the *Manneken Pis* bronze statue in Brussels, they are expected to recognize it as a common type of American kitsch concrete ornament. Beyond this specific background knowledge, other assumed cultural values are at play in this strip: the suburban bourgeois desire to have a manicured back yard; the gender roles where the wife directs with hand gestures while the man does the heavy lifting; the Puritan attitudes behind Janis' rejection of the statue and the fact that even in a comic strip setting, the statue's genitals have to be discretely covered by Arlo's arm.

Fig. 394. Harry Bliss, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 3 June, 2002.

The visual joke in Harry Bliss'*New Yorker* cover cartoon (**Fig. 394**) assumes that, even if viewers somehow did not recognize the famous lion in front of the New York Public Library, they would at least be aware of the phenomenon of pigeons congregating

on urban statues. Our appreciation of the gag is heightened by Bliss making us work for it; in front of the sepia-colored photographic image of the library, the cartoon pigeons point to the discrete dot of red and the tail feathers in the mouth of the statue that had apparently been animated just a second before.

Fig. 395a. Dan Piraro, 1985.

Fig. 395b. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 15 March, 2015.

Fig. 396. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 22 March, 2015.

In 1985, in one of his first efforts as a cartoonist, Dan Piraro drew a black-and-white cartoon of soldiers, apparently having come to life from statues commemorating past wars, sitting on an incongruous statue of a pigeon (**Fig. 395a**). Thirty years later, he republished a colorized version of this humorous metafictional reversal of roles (**Fig. 395b**). While it is obvious that Piraro's skills as a graphic artist had improved over this time span, it is not clear that the colorized version—with its hidden "Flying Saucer of

Possibility"—is any funnier than the B&W original, where the soldiers seem to retain more of their original statuary quality. A week after Piraro republished his pigeon-statue cartoon, he produced another statue gag (**Fig. 396**), this time with the incongruous twist of a leopard-skin-clad Tarzan figure sitting on a war memorial like a pigeon. Although we are looking up at the pigeon-Tarzan from the oblique perspective of the guys photographing him, Piraro's secret "Eyeball of Observation" at the base of the statue has a better view.

Fig. 397. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, reprinted 11 Jan., 2011.

Richard Thompson takes a different comic look at the heroic war statue (**Fig. 397**), comically decoding the symbolic relationship between a general's fate and how his horse is portrayed. To get the verbal/visual gags in this "composite cartoon," viewers are assumed to know, among other things, what Henry Moore sculptures look like, the association of moose with Canada, and Ulysses S. Grant's alcoholism.

Kidding Art

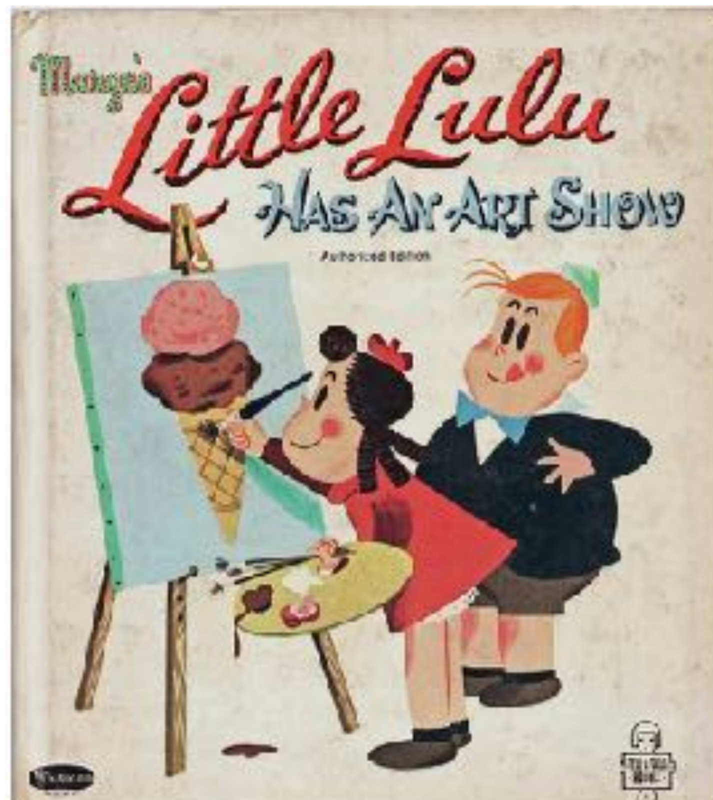


Fig. 398. Front cover of Marjorie Henderson Buell, *Little Lulu Has an Art Show*, Atlanta: Whitman Publishing Co., 1964.

Fig. 399. Guy and Brad Gilchrist, *Nancy*, 22 April, 1996.

If comics are low-brow art meant for children, then comics about children's art must be the lowest form of this low-brow art form. Right?

As we have seen in the previous essays, the first premise of this dubious statement is clearly false, and comics is firmly established as a "high" art form that must be appreciated on its own terms. And, as we will examine in this section, the gags in American cartoons and comic strips about children's art, while sometimes just saccharine pap designed to entertain the little ones (e.g. **Figs. 398–399**), are more often sophisticated jokes directed at an adult audience.

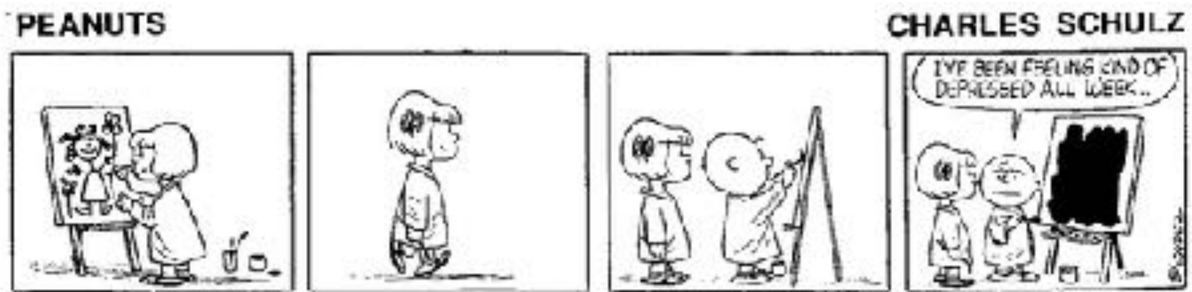


Fig. 400. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 9 May, 1959.

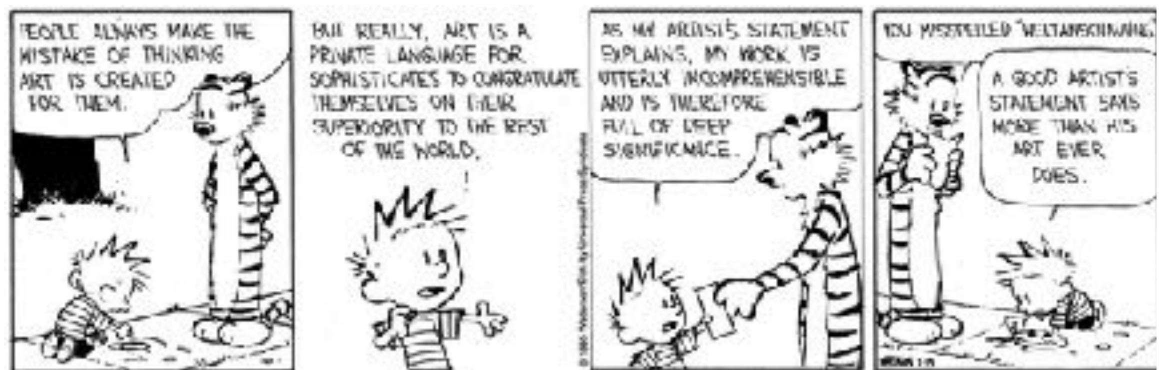


Fig. 401. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 15 July, 1995.

As we noted in the "Introduction" to this essay, Umberto Eco in 1964 described the children of Charles Schulz' *Peanuts* comic strip as "monstrous infantile reductions of all the neuroses of a modern citizen of industrial civilization." The humor in many American cartoons and comics strips about children's art revolves around the incongruity of youngsters acting out these Schulzian infantile reductions, mimicking adult artists with their own child-like psychologies and in their own miniature worlds. Charlie Brown, for instance, grapples with his precocious feelings of depression by creating a Reinhardt-esque black painting in a grade-school art class (**Fig. 400**). Bill Watterson's Calvin is precocious enough to use "Weltanschauung" in his artist's statement, but too immature to spell it correctly (**Fig. 401**). These adult/child incongruities are supported by the strips' point-of-view perspectives, which switch from our viewing the child characters at their levels —the first three panels of the Schulz strip and the second, borderless, panel of the Watterson strip—to end with our looking down at them from an adult level in the final punch-line panel.

No household appliance is featured in American cartoons and comics strips more than the refrigerator. And the refrigerator is one of the most popular loci for cartoon gags about kids' art.

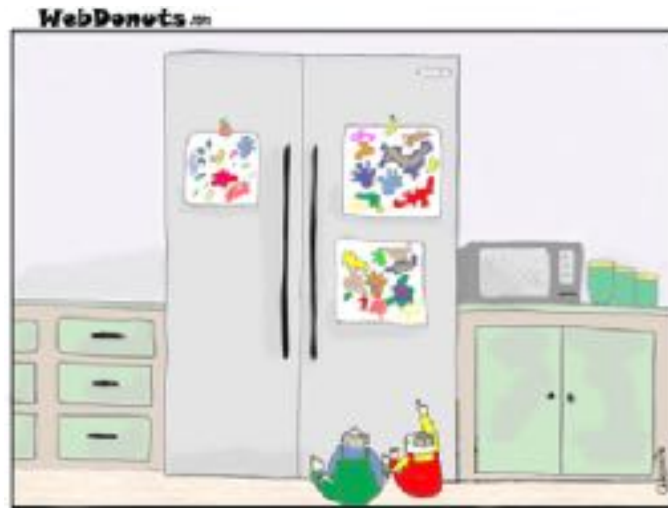
Fig. 402. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 16 July, 1997.

Three years before Hilary Price published her "The Cartoon Art Museum" cartoon, where comic strips were displayed on household refrigerators incongruously placed in an art gallery (**Fig. 137** above), Dave Whamond drew his "Refrigerator Art Shows" cartoon (**Fig. 402**), which turns a typical kitchen into a kiddie art museum. Whamond's children incongruously mimic adult art-gallery visitors, pondering the artwork with a hand-to-chin gesture or sipping a drink—here Kool-aid instead of wine. [For these cartoon art-gallery stereotypes, cf. **Fig. 740** below.]

Fig. 403. Chris Cassatt, Gary Brookins, and Susie MacNelly, *Jeff MacNelly's Shoe*, 12 Feb., 2012.

A 2012 *Jeff MacNelly's Shoe* comic strip—created by the team of Chris Cassatt, Gary Brookins, and Jeff MacNelly's widow Susie who took over the strip after Jeff MacNelly died in 2000—takes another variation on the refrigerator/art museum theme (**Fig. 403**). We are not sure if the still life Skyler painted for the title row's rather lame pun is going to be displayed in the appliance store transformed into a student art gallery, but the Pop Art quality of Skyler's painting is certainly remarkable for a young student artist.

There seems to be no limit to the number of different cartoon and comic-strip gags about children's art magnetically pegged on a frig. [One wonders how long this nearly universal American method of displaying the artistic efforts of one's children will continue in the digital age.] One common comic cliché is to have a character point to a picture on the refrigerator and make an incongruously humorous comment about it.



That one represents my bondage during nap time.
Fig. 404. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 19 Oct., 2009.

Fig. 405. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 14 Aug., 2006.

"This is one of her more important paintings from her early period."
Fig. 406. Harry Bliss, 27 March, 2012.

The webcomic Mike Gruhn, for instance, gives us an incongruously precocious rug-rat artist's statement about his paintings that appear to be completely random blobs of color (**Fig. 404**). The child in a Thaves' *Frank and Ernest* cartoon (**Fig. 405**) similarly

describes his work in incongruously adult terms; his "mixed media" work is certainly more interesting than the simplistic drawings of a bird and a car pegged to the frig above it! A related gag in a Harry Bliss cartoon (**Fig. 406**) comes from the visual contrast between the little girl's childish scribbles and the praise her mother gives them when talking to her wine-sipping friend.

Fig. 407. Guy Gilchrist, *Nancy*, 11 Jan. 2006.

Fig. 408. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 28 Aug., 2018.

Putting scribblings up on the refrigerator is of course an endearing sign of parental support for a child's artistic endeavors. A *Nancy* comic strip (**Fig. 407**) by Guy Gilchrist, who continued Ernie Bushmiller's strip from 1995 to 2018, starts off with us looking down at Aunt Fritzi—decidedly more sexy than the Bushmiller original—and ends with our looking up at her from Nancy's level as she sweetly elevates her ward's artwork from the refrigerator to the hall wall. Similarly, the overindulgent parents in a Paul Trap *Thatababy* strip (**Fig. 408**) go overboard in supporting their child's artistic inclinations—here curiously crude in comparison to the sophistication of the eponymous baby's other work (e.g., **Fig. 19** above and **Figs. 414–418** below).

Fig. 409. Jason Love and Vladimir Stankovski, *Snapshots.*

The humor in a Jason Love and Vladimir Stankovski *Snapshots* cartoon (**Fig. 409**) comes from the incongruous reversal of our expectation of this parental support, as the mother's rejection surprises both the wide-eyed Timmy and us with its frank cruelty. Judging from the quality of the child's drawings that were good enough for the refrigerator, his latest offering, which we aren't allowed to make out, must have been pretty bad indeed!

Of course, the refrigerator is not the only locus for cartoon gags about children's art. Cartoon kids make art all over the house—sometimes even drawing on the walls and ceilings!

Fig. 410. Lee Lorenz, *The New Yorker*, 5 Jan., 1987.

Lee Lorenz’ *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 410**) is apparently set in a child’s playroom that has been transformed into an artist’s studio. Like other cartoon portraitist jokes (cf. **Figs**. **335–337**), Lorenz’ gag depends on our seeing the flawed portrait, here explained away by the child’s incongruous excuse.

Fig. 411. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 2 Sept., 1990.

Like his other comic strips about Lucy reacting to her brother Linus making crayon drawings (**Frontispiece** and **Fig. 86**), a 1990 Charles Schulz offering (**Fig. 411**) gives us a Lucy losing her patience in the penultimate panel, this time exasperated by her brother’s incongruously precocious concern over which crayons to use. In order to appreciate this joke, viewers would have to bring a “culturally bound background knowledge” of the myriad of color names used in the Crayola company’s expanded crayon packs.

Fig. 412. Brian Basset, *Red and Rover*, 21 May, 2013.

Fig. 413. Robb Armstrong, *Jump Start*, 21 Aug., 2016.

We have noted in looking at Gary Larson's and John McPherson's imaginary museum cartoons (**Fig. 196** above) that there is something inherently funny about the Etch A Sketch toy. The reply that Brian Basset's character Red gives to the thought-bubble question of his beloved dog Rover (**Fig. 412**) sums up the frustration of using a toy where it is so easy to erase what one has just drawn. Similarly, the joke in a *Jump Start* strip (**Fig. 413**) depends on our knowing the ephemeral nature of Etch A Sketch drawings. In illustrating the baby Teddy's reaction to his twin sister Tommi's erasure of his Etch A Sketch masterpiece, Robb Armstrong gives us specific visualizations of what we assume Teddy is saying to his sister, the last one of which would seem to be an echo of Hokusai's *The Great Wave of Kanagawa*.

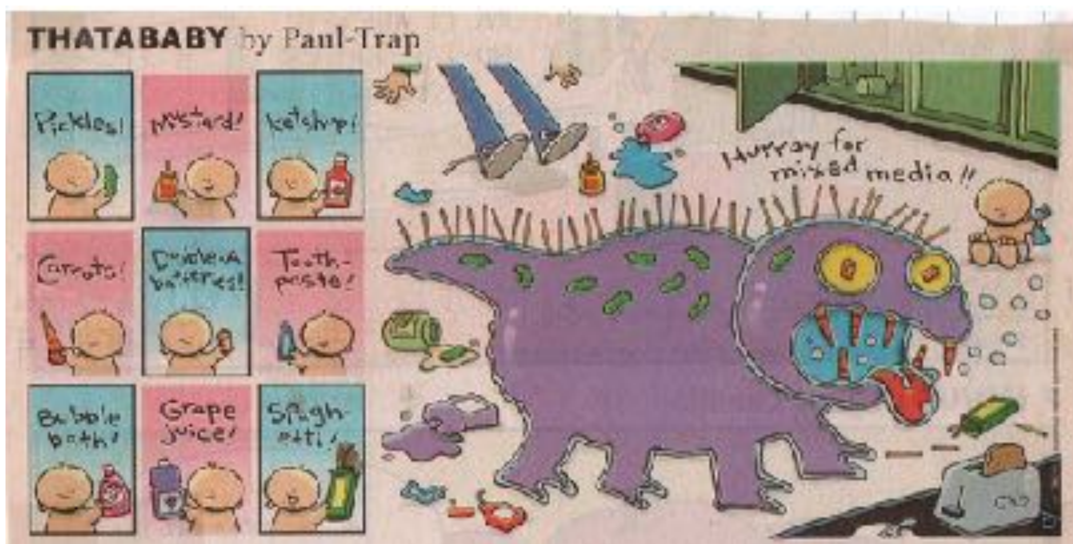


Fig. 414. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 8 Sept., 2013.

Fig. 415. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 2015.

Fig. 416. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 7 Feb., 2016.

Like cartoons of the mischievous child Michelangelo who precociously paints on ceilings (**Figs. 16–18**), Paul Trap's *Thatababy* baby is forever coming up with ways to drive his parents to distraction by making artistic messes on the floors and walls (**Figs. 414–416**). While a real child defacing a wall is not particularly funny, Trap has used this cartoon motif to make us smile at how the baby's precocious sense of humor knocks his parents for a loop. We see the parents but not their reaction in a Trap baby furniture-art cartoon (**Fig. 417**), giving us an extra, "anticipatory," joke as we imagine what they will do when they see the decorated armchairs. The *Thatababy* parents do not figure in Trap's "Let's Built a Couch Fort" cartoon (**Fig. 418**); we the viewers have taken parents' point of view as we look down and smile at the baby's creativity. [This strip is an

example of the class of "composite cartoons" we will discuss in the "Humorous Art History 101" section of the next essay.]

Fig. 417. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 17 Feb., 2013.

Fig. 418. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 3 May., 2015.

☺ ☺

As we have seen in the 1959 *Peanuts* strip at the beginning of this section (**Fig. 400**), the grade-school art class is another locus for cartoon humor about children incongruously mimicking adult artists. A 1995 Charles Schultz *Peanuts* strip (**Fig. 419**),

for instance, gives us a Linus disingenuously praising his off-camera teacher for the inanity of their art project.

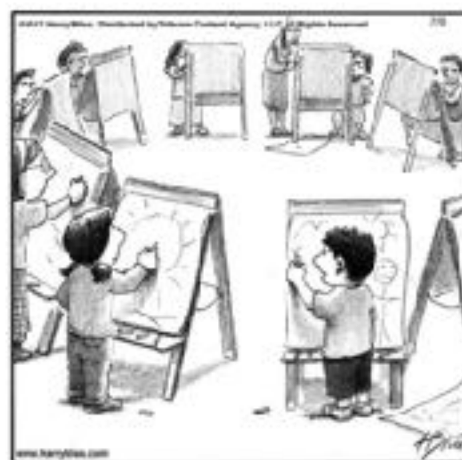
Fig. 419. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts Classics*, 6 Jan., 2011 (1995).

Fig. 420. Richard Thompson, *Cul de Sac*, 8 March, 2009.

If Linus' sarcasm is rather subtle, Alice's artist statement about her "No More Stupid Naps" painting in a Richard Thompson *Cul de Sac* strip (**Fig. 320**) is over-the-top incongruously adult, as is her classmate's "No More Stupid Baby Carrots" performance piece. The target of Thompson's joke here is not only the ridiculously uncomprehending art teacher, but also all adults who simply do not listen to the real psychological angst children can feel (cf. Mike Gruhn's **Fig. 404** cartoon above); Thompson supports his point by starting the strip from the teacher's point of view, looking down at Alice, and concluding with us being down at her eye-level in the final panel.

Fig. 421 Tony Carrillo, *F Minus*, 1 Sept., 2013.

Fig. 422. Harry Bliss, 13 March, 2014.



"This gives me the inner fulfillment I could never achieve through dodgeball."

Fig. 423. Harry Bliss, 6 July, 2017.

The same adult/child humorous incongruity is at play in cartoons by Tony Carrillo (**Fig. 421**) and Harry Bliss (**Fig. 422–423**). The incongruously adult comment by the boy in the Carillo cartoon is depicted at the child-artist's level, while the similarly incongruously adult comment by the boy in the Bliss cartoon (**Fig. 423**) is presented at a more removed, adult, perspective. In addition to being amazed by the incongruity of a first grader in Miss Dillof's class being able to draw an anatomically accurate life study (**Fig. 422**) we, like the parent staring up at it, wonder whether the child had actually used a live, nude, male model; note that the discrete pose of the model does not break the American cartoon taboo against depicting genitalia.

Fig. 424. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 29 Dec., 2006.

Fig. 425. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 7 Nov., 2012.

Dave Coverly and Paul Trap also exploit the humorous incongruity of a child artist miming an adult. In a clever variation of the cartoon motif of a child writing out "I will not talk . . . " on a blackboard, the child serving detention in Coverly's *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 424**) has created artworks that seem incongruously advanced for her age; note that in this Coverly cartoon, the textual information has been transformed into visual humor. The baby in Trap's *Thatababy* comic strip (**Fig. 425**)—apparently now in nursery school or kindergarten—has similarly made a visual metafictional joke that we would scarcely expect from someone his age.

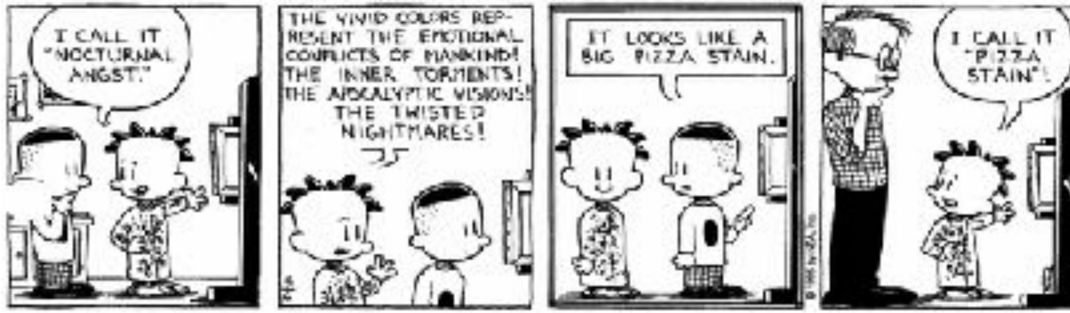


Fig. 426. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 6 May, 1995.

No American comic strip features grade-school art classes more than Lincoln Peirce's *Big Nate*. The title character Nate, an eleven-year-old sixth-grade student, is a humorously over-confident boy who thinks he excels at everything in spite of his lack of abilities. Among other things, Nate considers himself a budding artist, and Lincoln Peirce has written dozens of strips of Nate with his mild-mannered art teacher, Mr. Rosa; while Peirce never lets us see what Nate paints in class, we can tell by Mr. Rosa's reactions that Nate's artistic talents are decidedly mediocre. Although in one strip (**Fig. 426**)—presented at the child's eye-level view Peirce typically uses—Nate gives an incongruously adult description of his work, more normally he approaches art from a decidedly eleven-year-old boy's point of view.

Fig. 427. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 23, 25 May, 1991.

One of the running jokes early in the *Big Nate* art-class series is Nate's admiration for Rusty Sienna—a barely disguised reference to the painting instructor

and television host Bob Ross, a high-school drop-out and a retired Air Force sergeant whose *The Joy of Painting* show ran on PBS stations from 1983 to 1994. (Guy and Brad Gilchrist's Nancy apparently also watched Bob Ross, cf. **Fig. 399**.) The jests in these Rusty Sienna strips assumes that the viewer knows that the landscapes Ross painted using his "wet-on-wet" quick-painting technique are considered the height of kitsch, an evaluation that goes over the head of the young Nate. In strips from the first year Peirce drew *Big Nate* (**Fig. 427**), where the characters are more crudely rendered than they would be in later years, we see Nate humorously equating commercial success with artistic talent; the 25 May strip in this series is particularly notable for its metafictional narration where we see Nate's hand-written report before we see Mr. Rosa reading it in the final punch-line panel.

Fig. 428. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 2–4 April, 1997.

Fig. 429. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 4 March, 2016.

Most *Big Nate* running art-class jokes target Nate's over-inflated sense of his own artistic talents. In the first strip of a 1997 series where Nate is channeling Van Gogh (**Fig. 428**), Mr. Rosa's horrified reaction to Nate's alien autopsy painting is given from an adult eye-level view that Peirce rarely uses; in later strips in this series, Nate's classmates crack jokes at his expense, demonstrating more knowledge about Van Gogh than one might suspect normal sixth-graders would have. Nearly a decade later, in another art-class comic strip with Nate comparing himself to Van Gogh (**Fig. 429**), the thought bubble in the final panel would seem to represent the sentiment of Lincoln Peirce—who early in his own career had been an art teacher—as much as it does Mr. Rosa's.

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Amusing Art

In the last two essays we examined how American cartoonists and comics strip artists find humor in the institution of the art museum and in the process of making art. In this essay, we look at how comics artists make jokes about art itself.

The art-themed comics included in this essay which make references to actual works of art or to actual artists assume that these references are part of the "contextually and culturally bound knowledge" audiences bring to the reading of humorous cartoons and comic strips. As such, they provide insights into what Americans consider to be the corpus of great art and what assumptions they have about the styles and personalities of individual famous artists. The illustrated humorous rhyming couplets of Grant Snider's "Art History" cartoon (**Fig. 430**), for instance, follow established stereotypes we will see repeated again and again in American cartoons and comic strips: O'Keefe's sexualized flowers; Dalí's melted watches; Hopper's melancholy; Kahlo's unibrow; van Gogh's mutilation.

Just to reiterate two points we have made in previous essays. Comics can incorporate works of art into their cartoon universes either as pastiches (quotations meant to mimic the graphic styles of their originals) or as parodies (quotations that differ in style, tone, or setting from their originals). When we encounter these quotations in a cartoon or a comic strip, however, we are not always required to decode their metafictional "intertextual" allusions to an original work of art or to an individual artist; once established, these quotations function as cartoon stereotypes that we immediately recognize as a set-up to a visual gag, much like we do not have to decode the verbal semantics when someone starts a "knock-knock" joke.

Humorous Art History 101

Fig. 430. Grant Snider *Incidental Comics*, 25 March, 2010.

But it's not quite as simple as that.

In an era when many Americans—even college graduates—do not have a basic grasp of the history of art, comic pastiches and parodies of famous artworks can sometimes serve an educational function. Even when viewers have a sufficient "contextually and culturally bound" background to get the gist of a cartoon art gag, they might not recognize all of the specific references the cartoonist uses in that gag. As we have noted, most American cartoonists and comic-strip artists studied art in college, and it is not surprising that they would incorporate pastiches and parodies about art which go over the heads of many Americans. It is ironic, then, that comics—that supposedly low-brow, childish medium—have thus become a venue where many Americans learn

about fine art, as if cartoons and comic strips are a sort of a game where one tries to decipher the art references one encounters.

[We might observe that over the past decade France has witnessed an explosion of graphic narratives about famous painters, a phenomenon that has no parallel in the United States. In his recent article, "Biographies of Famous Painters in Comics: What Becomes of the Paintings?," Thierry Groensteen notes, as an example of this trend, that the French publishing firm Glénat Editions announced in 2015 thirty projected graphic narratives in its new "Les Grands Peintres" series.]

One class of American "Art History 101" comics are those that we might call "composite cartoons"—compilations of discrete comic images about a single subject which do not form a sequential narrative but which, taken together, create a general humorous comment about that subject. In a "composite cartoon," the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Any single panel in Grant Snider's "Art History" cartoon (**Fig. 430**), for instance, would not be funny, but the compilation of silly rhyming couplets of the stereotypes of these artists might make some smile.

Fig. 431. Neal Skorpen *Cyclotoon*, 2003.

Two Neal Skorpen *Cyclotoon* offerings exemplify this class of "composite cartoons." A 2003 *Cyclotoon* cartoon (**Fig. 431**) presents four examples of ancient bicycles: an ancient Egyptian bike ridden by a pharaoh depicted in typical two-dimensional style; a draped Classical Greek bike mounted on a column, with a *kline* (ancient Greek couch) seat and handlebars humorously modeled on the armless Venus

de Milo; an ancient Hindu bike designed for Shiva as Nataraja, with multiple handlebars and a ring of fire; and a Celtic bike that appears to be a stone monolithic with attached seat and handlebars—to this latter a befuddled contemporary person is added to help clarify the joke. A viewer of this cartoon need not have recognized every one of the ancient allusions in this cartoon to realize that each of these four ancient bicycles is comically incongruous in its own right. Taken as a whole, however, the ”composite cartoon” makes a further joke, namely that the entire concept of an ancient bicycle is itself funny. We are almost asked to imagine other silly examples of this class: what would an ancient Assyrian bicycle have looked like? An Aztec bike?

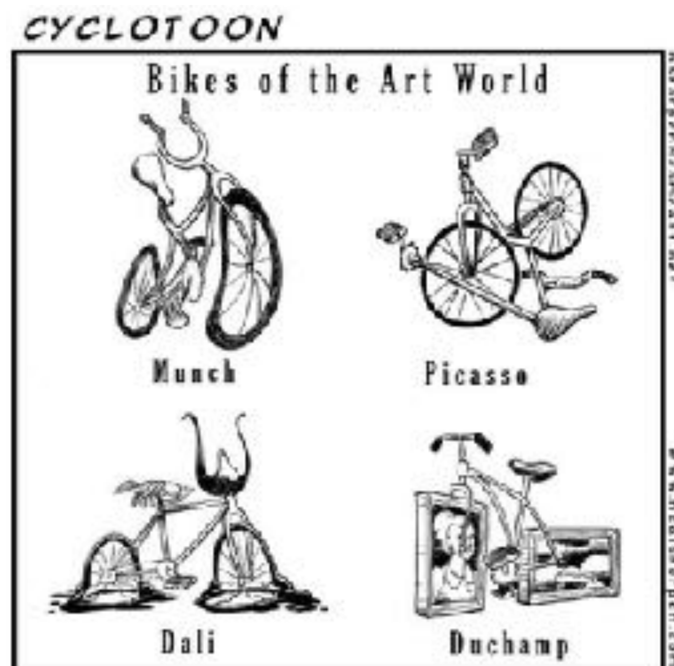


Fig. 432. Neal Skorpen *Cyclotoon*, 2007.

Similarly, Neal Skorpen's 2007 “Bikes of the Art World” (**Fig. 432**) is a “composite cartoon” that, in addition to the individual humorous examples of bikes made in the style of famous artists, targets the very idea of an art bicycle. We smile at the seat and handlebars deformed into Munch's *The Scream*, at the absurdity of a cubist Picasso bike, and at the melted tires and handlebar-mustache handlebars of a Dalí bike; we can understand that the Duchamp bike with its non-functional portrait and landscape painting wheels is supposed to be a humorous take-off of dadaesque art, but we might be a little confused if we knew that Ducamp's famous 1913 “ready-made” *Bicycle Wheel* —a single bicycle wheel attached upside down to a kitchen stool—bears no resemblance to this. That latter quibble aside, this “composite-cartoon” also asks us to

imagine other examples that might fit into this incongruous category: an Escher bike, an Alexander Calder bike, a Basquiat bike?

Fig. 433. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 9 Dec., 2012.

As we saw in the last section of the previous essay, Paul Trap's eponymous baby, who sometimes seems old enough to talk and go to nursery school, is an amazingly creative, if occasionally destructive, artist. In a variation of a weekly cartoon he had published the previous month (**Fig. 425** above), Trap drew a 2012 Sunday "composite cartoon" where the macaroni creations of the baby and his classmates demonstrate their precocious understanding of art history (**Fig. 433**). Unlike a later *Thatababy* "composite cartoon" (**Fig. 418** above) where we view the baby's couch forts from an adult perspective, in this cartoon we are down at the youngsters' levels, watching each hold up his or her macaroni art under a prominent informative label. Again, while we laugh at each of these children's incongruously precocious creations, we are also invited to think of other art styles that might be humorous depicted with pieces of macaroni, or to imagine other ways that precocious children can teach us about art.

Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 22 Feb., 2006.

Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 12 Jan., 2011.

Fig. 434. Two Mark Parisi, "How Artists Are Inspired" *Off the Mark* cartoons.

Mark Parisi has utilized the "composite cartoon" format on a number of occasions in his *Off the Mark* cartoons. His "How Artists Are Inspired" series (**Fig. 434**) uses comic stereotypes of the artwork of famous artists in humorous variations of the cartoon light-bulb symbol for inspiration: Picasso's cubism; Monet's impressionism (which looks more like Seurat's pointillism); Christo's environmental art; da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*; Van Gogh's ear; Michelangelo's depictions of genitalia; Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*; and Ruben's nudes. Parisi assumes that his viewers will immediately recognize these established stereotypes without having to take the time to decode the references, although one might suspect that some Americans may not have been familiar with the allusion to Christo's environmental art. [We have already seen in previous essays these Picasso and Michelangelo cartoon stereotypes, and we will examine the others in the following essay.] Just as Parisi himself came up with new variations after he first published this "composition cartoon" trope, so too can we imagine other laughable light bulbs—Escher, Calder, and Basquiat again come to mind.

Fig. 435. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 25 Nov.., 2018.

Another *Off the Mark* comic strip (**Fig. 435**), published on a Thanksgiving weekend, appropriately targets turkeys for this variation of the "composite cartoon." Here again we see easily recognizable comic stereotypes of artists used to create incongruous iterations of the subject matter: Van Gogh's ear, Picasso's cubism, Warhol's Pop Art, Dali's melting, Rubens' rubenesqueness, Magritte's apple face, Kahlo's unibrow, Duchamp's bike, and Pollock's abstraction. [We might note again that the association of a bicycle with Duchamp is a misrepresentation of his single bicycle-wheel ready-made sculpture, but a cartoon cliché need not strive for authenticity as long as it is easily recognized by viewers.] And here again, the humor of the cartoon rests on our viewing the compilation as a whole rather than our evaluating it merely as a summation of its parts.

The Canadian webcomic artist John Atkinson has uploaded several art historical "composite cartoons" to his website (**Figs**. **436–437**). As we have noted in the "Webcomics and Internet Memes" essay, webcomics can address more esoteric subjects than would be acceptable in syndicated newspaper comic strips, and while some of the cartoon stereotypes in these Atkinson *Wrong Hands* webcomics are standard fare, others—such as references to "Fauvism," "De Stijl," and "Constructivism" styles or to the artists Emily Carr and Yahoo Kusama—might not have been familiar to most North American viewers.

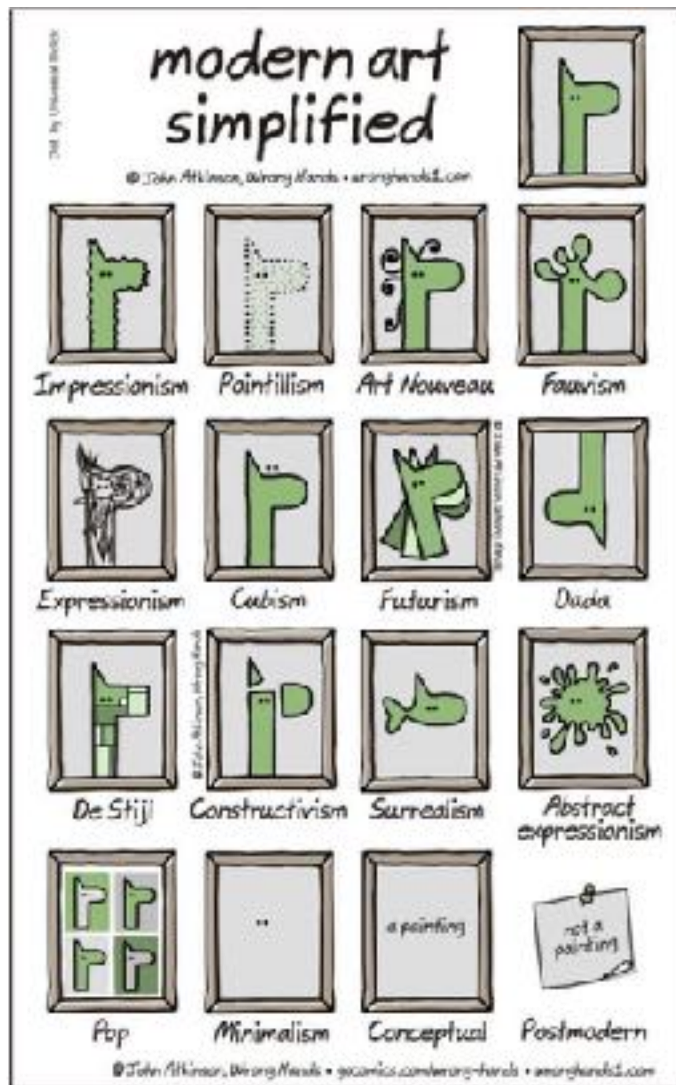


Fig. 436. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 4 Sept., 2015.

Fig. 437. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 8 June, 2018.

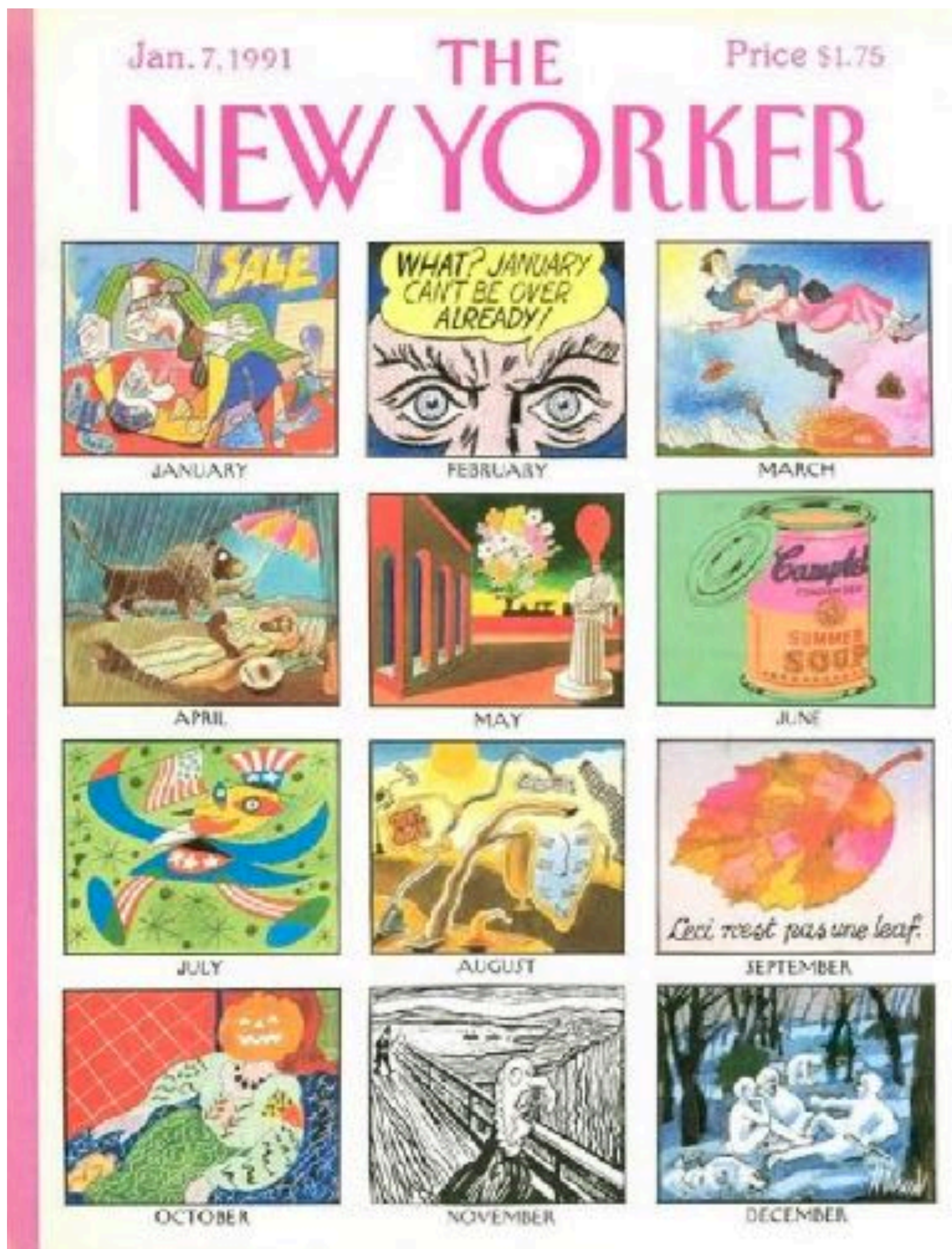


Fig. 438. Kenneth Mahood, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 7 Jan., 1991.

A 1991 *New Yorker* cover by the Irish painter and political cartoonist Kenneth Mahood (**Fig. 438**) presents us with a humorous "composite cartoon" art-themed calendar. Mahood (and Lee Lorenz, the art editor of the *New Yorker* in 1991) presumably thought that the magazine readers would have the "contextually and culturally bound background knowledge" to recognize that the illustrations of the months were comic pastiches of well known works of art or parodies of the style of well known artists, as well as being able to appreciate the American cultural contexts to which they refer, even if viewers might not be able to identify each of the art allusions:

Picasso-esque cubist figures fighting over January sales; a Lichtenstein-esque February regret; the flying couple from Chagall's *Over the Town* lifted into the air by a March tornado; the lion in Rousseau *The Sleeping Gypsy* holding an umbrella in April showers; a pastiche of a di Chirico *Piazza d'Italia* with the train in the background incongruously puffing out May flowers; summer months with a Warhol soup can; a 4th of July Miró parody; a Dali clock melting in the August heat; fall months with a Magritte *The Treachery of Images* autumnal leaf; a pumpkin-headed woman from Matisse's *The Persian Robe;* a turkey-headed Munch screamer; and a December Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* snow sculpture.

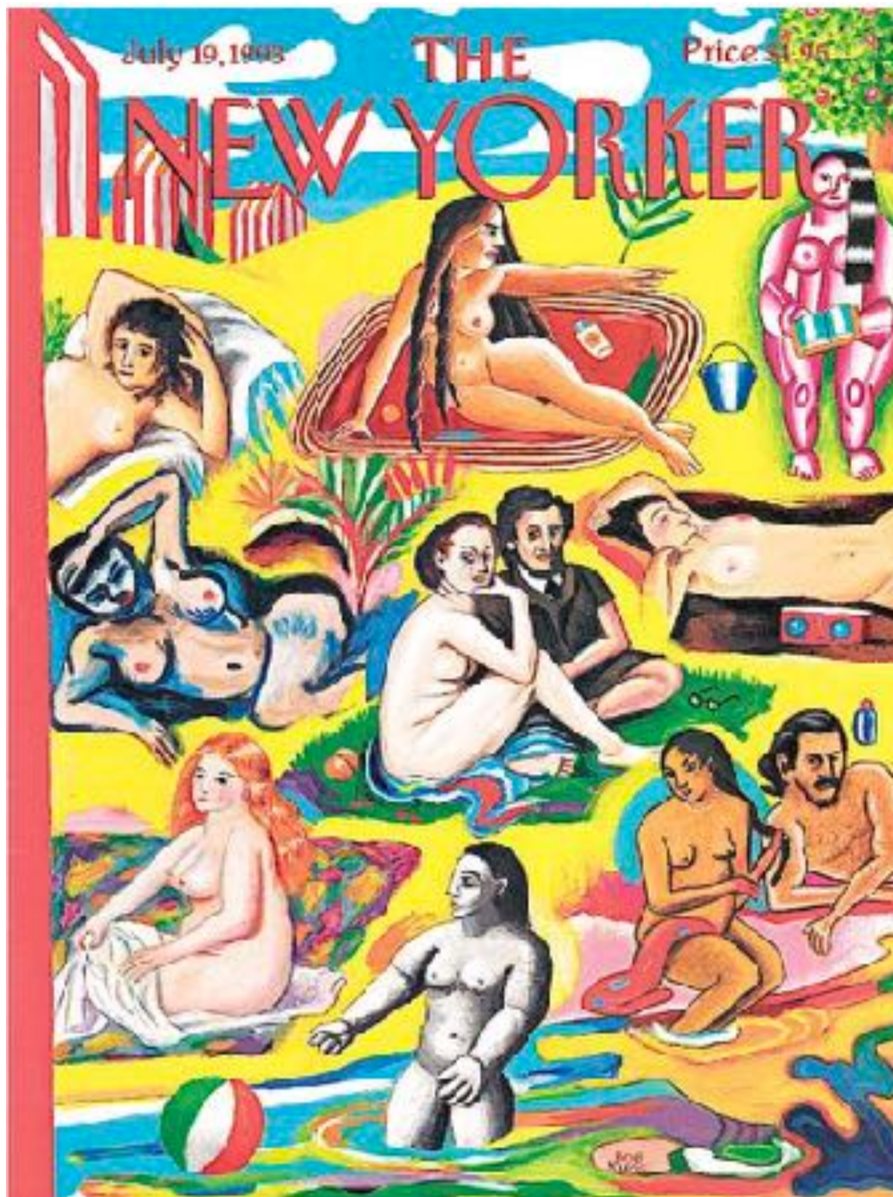


Fig. 439. Bob Knox, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 19 July, 1993.

In a similar fashion, a summer-time *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 439**) by Bob Knox—a New York painter who had studied art at the L'Ecole de Beaux Arts in Rennes, France, before becoming a prolific contributor of cover art to the magazine—only requires viewers to recognize that the pastiches of nudes Knox has incongruously transformed into sunbathers at a beach come from famous paintings; we can get the joke without being able to identity each of the references to Goya, Rousseau, Léger, Manet, Modigliani, Renoir, Picasso, and Gauguin.

Fig. 440. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, 16 May, 2011.

Richard Thompson has often employed the "composite cartoon" format in his *Richard's Poor Almanac* cartoons which were originally published in the *Washington Post* (cf. **Figs. 199**, **391**, and **397**). His "Beyond Whistler's Mother" comic (**Fig. 440**), which came out just after Mother's Day, gives us humorous gags of complaining mothers

incongruously represented as artworks created in the style of their artist sons. Thompson helpfully labels each of his patisches, although, while he might have expected his audience would generally be familiar with Giacometti and perhaps Kinkade, his visual allusions to Botero, Arcimboldo, and Hirst likely went over the heads of many of his viewers; clearly, the *Washington Post* editors were quite tolerant of the by then well established Thompson.

A variation of the "composite cartoon" format is one in which the separate comic vignettes do not form a single sequential story but nonetheless are designed to be viewed in the order presented in the cartoon. Unlike most of the cartoons we have examined so far in this section—cartoons where switching the order of the images would not alter the overall affect of the gag—the order of presentation in these "quasi-narrative composite cartoons" is integral to the overall humorous comment on their subjects; the Atkinson "Modern Art Simplified" cartoon (**Fig. 436**) and the Mahood *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 438**) would fall into this category as their chronological progressions are part of the joke.

Fig. 441. Richard Thompson, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1999 (redrawn in 2008).

Richard Thompson also used this "quasi-narrative composite cartoon" format in some of his *Poor Richard's Almanac* comics, often making fun of local, topical subjects. Inspired by a visit to the 1999 exhibition of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres portraits held at the National Gallery of Art in DC, Thompson drew a *Poor Richard's Almanac* strip (**Fig. 441**) showing a series of cartoon characters standing before Ingres paintings while trying to pronounce his name. (In a 2008 blog post about this cartoon, Thompson said Ingres is pronounced "kind of AHNggghh, all the way in the back of the throat, using mostly your tonsils.") After the first five cartoon exhibition visitors mangle the pronunciation in successively worse ways as the Ingres portraits stare down in disbelief, the final panel has a boy pronouncing Ingres as "Anal," prompting Ingres' portrait of *Louis-François Bertin* (which was in the exhibition on loan from the Louvre) to call him an "imbécile." The panels in this Thompson cartoon are presented as a sequential series of snapshots, and one cannot alter the order of their presentation without disrupting the timing of the joke.

As Thompson recalled in his 2008 blog post: "So I did this cartoon with that usual feeling of, Who's going to get this? My editor just asked if this guy was real, and was his name spelled right. And the Post printed it, a few people read it, and life went on." Thompson goes on to relate that curators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art—the next venue for the 1999 Ingres show—loved his cartoon and asked permission to use it on a tee-shirt they would sell in their gift shop, a request to which Thompson readily assented. Later, a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece, "I Went to the Met And They Sold Me This Lousy T-Shirt," lambasted the Met for its supposed crassness in selling these cartoon tee-shirts:

> Even without the punchline, the T-shirt is staggeringly inappropriate. Consider the scene: You've just gone through a magnificent exhibition. The museum has gone to great trouble to make it accessible: wall texts, scholarly catalog, beguiling installation. Then, still in the grip of its vivid images, you are presented with something that spoofs the painter's art and the museum's didactic efforts. It's like a wink telling you: "No need to take this art stuff too seriously. We don't."

Over and above the fact that the *WSJ* piece didn't get the joke of the Thompson cartoon —which targets our American inability to pronounce the artist's name, not the paintings themselves, much less the didactic efforts of the museum—the opinion given here is a haughty, elitist, expression of distain for "low-brow" comics art that have no place in a

bastion of high art like the Met; that this retrograde belief was expressed nearly a decade after the 1990 MOMA *High & Low* exhibition is remarkable. [For more on this topic, see the "High Art Lowdown" section of the "Comic Art in Museums and Museums in Comic Art" essay above.] Ironically, as Thompson noted, the Met never returned the original drawing he sent them for the tee-shirt, so one of his comic strips is now in the collection of that august fine arts museum.

Fig. 442. Richard Thompson, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 2006.

A later *Richard's Poor Almanac* cartoon (**Fig. 442**) similarly uses the "quasi-narrative" variation of the "composite cartoon" format, this time with silly rhymes related to Robert Lauder's 2006 purchase of a Gustav Klimt painting for $135 million. Here, although each panel is an independent humorous couplet, the chronological order of the painters builds up to the final punch line. Note that, once again, Thompson also targets American mispronunciation of European artists' names!

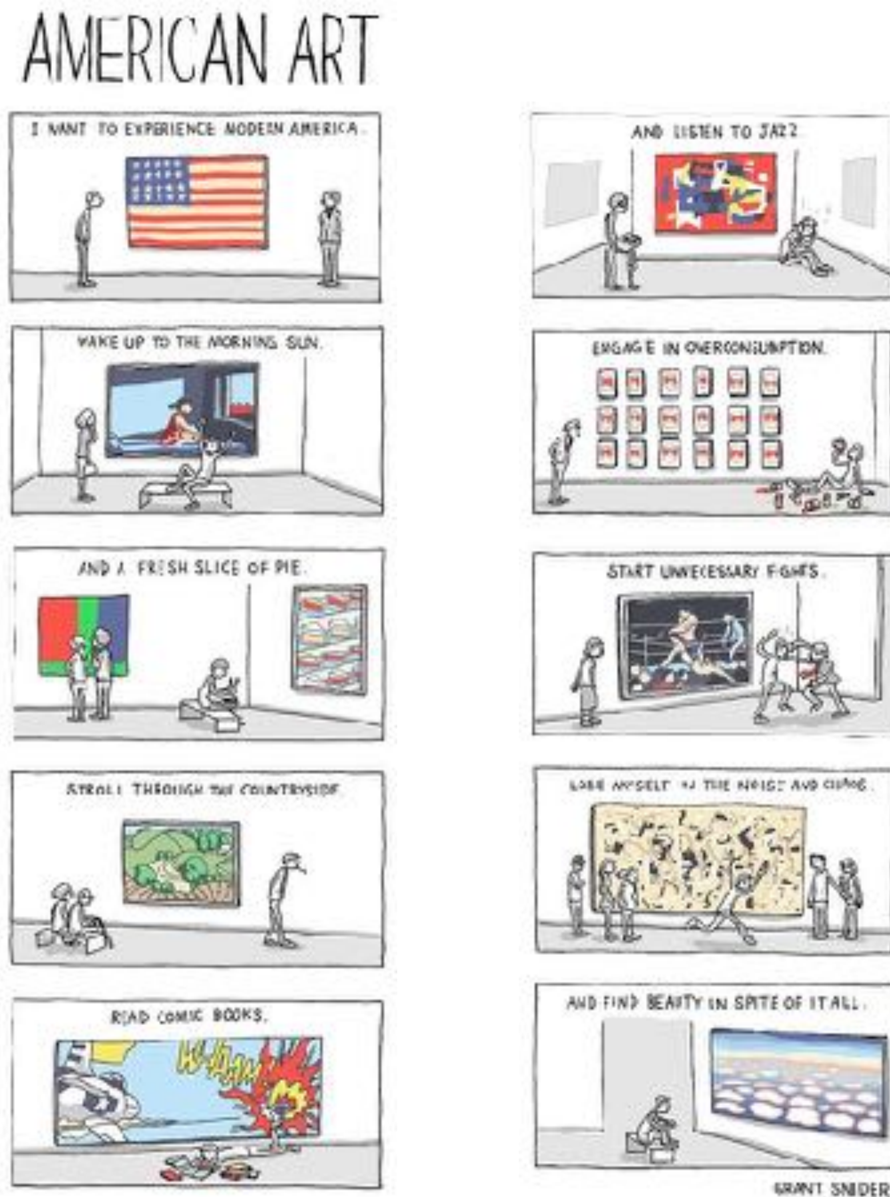


Fig. 443. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 1 Oct., 2013.

Grant Snider also employs the "quasi-narrative" variation of the "composite cartoon" format in many of his comics, including his masterful "Who Needs Art?" series originally uploaded to *Medium.com* between May and October of 2013 and later reposted to his *Incidental Comics* website. (For an earlier Grant Snider "Who Needs

Art?” cartoon see **Fig. 330** above.) Snider’s “American Art” cartoon (**Fig. 443**), for instance, presents a series of vertically stacked panels showing a man walking through what Snider described as his curation of “my ideal collection of 20th-century American art”—a collection inspired by a childhood visit to the Art Institute of Chicago. [Note that in **Fig. 443**, for ease of reading, I’ve divided Snider’s single vertical presentation of panels into two vertical strips.] While each panel is a self-contained vignette, the timing of Snider’s homage to American art requires that we view them in the order presented. Although viewers of this cartoon need not be able to identify each of the paintings in order to appreciate the spirit of his homage, Snider helpfully lists them in his *Medium.com* discussion of this piece: Jasper Johns, “Flag”; Edward Hopper, “Morning Sun”; Ellsworth Kelly,”Red Blue Green”; Wayne Thiebaud, “Refrigerator Pie”; Grant Wood, “Young Corn”; Roy Lichtenstein, “Whaam!”; Stuart Davis, “Colonial Cubism”; Andy Warhol, “Campbell’s Soup Cans”; George Bellows, “Dempsey and Firpo”; Jackson Pollock, “Autumn Rhythm”; and Georgia O’Keeffe, “Sky Above Clouds III”

[I have been tempted to discuss all of Grant Snider’s wonderfully pedagogical ten-part series of “Who Needs Art?” cartoons in this essay, but have restrained myself to including only a few more, **Figs**. **594** and **649–650**; it is not clear if Snider was consciously modeling his “Who Needs Art?” series on the minimalist painter/cartoonist Ad Reinhardt’s similar 1946 “How to Look at Art” series, for which cf. **Fig. 687**.]

Fig. 444. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 15 April, 2012.

Of course, not all art-historical comic strips are “composite cartoons.” Some, such as the Mark Parisi **Fig. 444** strip, incorporate a series of cartoon pastiches of real works of art as part of a sequential narrative joke. Parisi presumes his viewers would at least know that the baby’s preternatural identifications of the general styles of the paintings

in the top row of the strip are correct, even if they could not name the actual paintings (Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians,* 1921 (cf. **Fig. 278** above); René Magritte's *The False Mirror,* 1929; and Claude Monet's *Water Lilies,* 1914–1926). I suspect that fewer would have recognized Max Ernst's *The Hat Makes the Man* (1920) in the bottom row, and, like the baby, had to wait for the father's thought bubble to identify the style; I also suspect that even fewer would have known that all four of these paintings are in the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

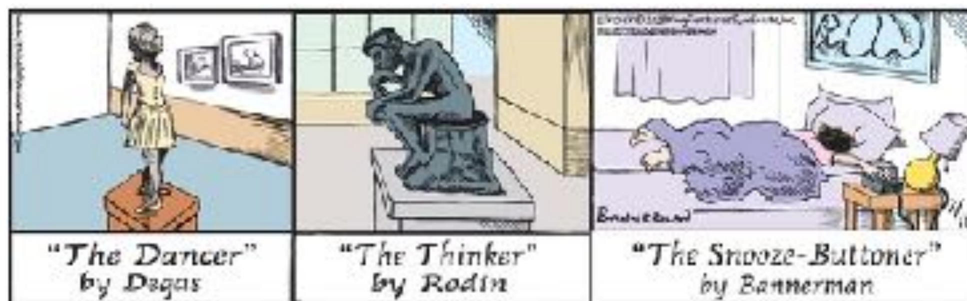


Fig. 445. Isabella Bannerman, *Six Chix*, 16 July, 2018.

For the gag in her *Six Chix* strip (**Fig. 445**), Isabella Bannerman identified the set-up sculptures, although one assumes that viewers would have recognized them anyway. Viewers are also assumed to be familiar with the experience of a person hitting the snooze button to try to grab a few more moments of sleep before the working day began.

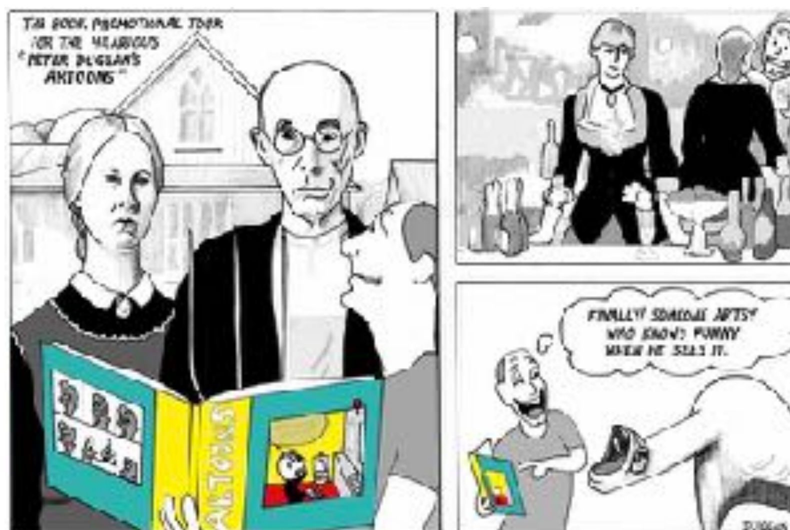


Fig. 446. Peter Duggan, *Artoons*, 9 Feb., 2016.

Although outside of the scope of these essays on American art- and archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips, I would be remiss not to mention here the amazing *Artoons* of Peter Duggan, the Australian graphic designer, writer, film director, and cartoonist who has been publishing art-related comics for the London newspaper, *The*

Guardian, since 2011. For his online cartoons, some of which were published in book form in 2015, Duggan generally assumes his viewers possess a more advanced knowledge of art and art history than one could expect from an American newspaper audience. For instance, both British and American viewers of a strip Duggan drew to promote his new book (**Fig. 446**) could be expected to recognize Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930, Art Institute of Chicago) and Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1888, Courtauld Gallery, London), but few Americans would probably get the reference to Francis Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944, Tate Gallery, London).

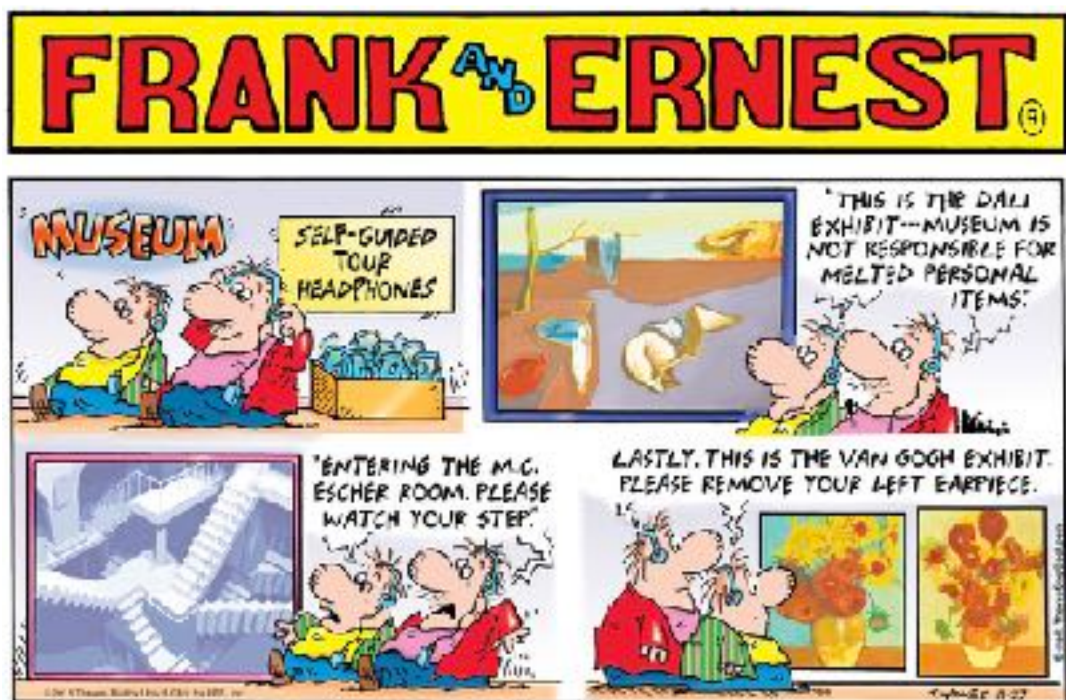


Fig. 447. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 27 Nov., 2011.

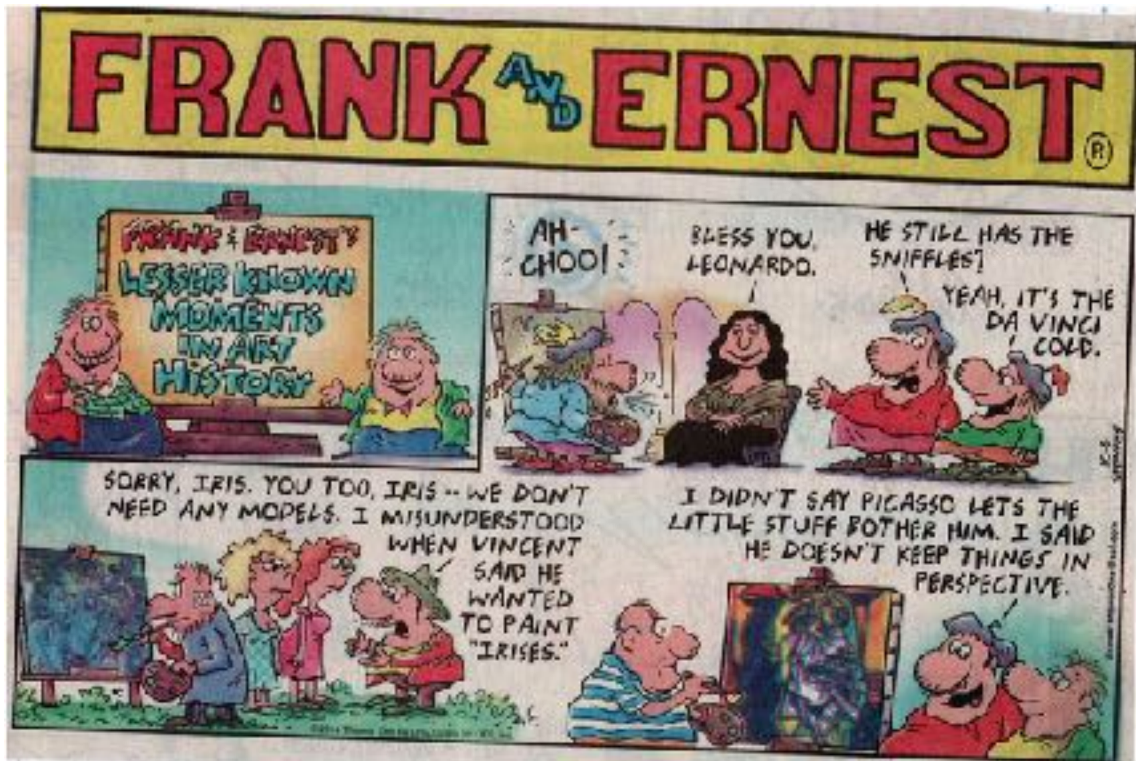


Fig. 448. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 5 Oct., 2014.

Fig. 449. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 16 April, 2017.

Tom Thaves, who took over his father's *Frank and Ernest* strip in 2006, frequently uses cartoon pastiches of fine art as a venue for the strip's silly gags and atrocious puns (**Figs. 447–449**). Although Thaves' pastiches are easily recognizable and refer to well-known works of art, the characters' dialogue nonetheless identifies the artists and, in

the case of **Fig. 449**, even the titles of the works. Presumably, Thaves felt that his American viewers needed such help.

Fig. 450. Jimmy Johnson, *Arlo and Janis*, 10 Aug., 2014.

It would seem that Jimmy Johnson had a rather high estimation of the "culturally bound background knowledge" his American viewers would bring to his art-historical *Arlo and Janis* comics strip (**Fig. 450**). While his viewers might not have recognized every one of his pastiches of self portraits by da Vinci, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Monet, and Rockwell, they would only need to be aware that these were "selfies" of famous artists in the past in order to get the gag.

Not surprisingly, cartoons and comic strip clichés targeting selfies have proliferated in the past decade (cf. **Fig. 10**; cf. also the modification of famous works of art into selfies by Dito Von Tease, **Fig. 36**). Those which refer to famous artists, like Johnson's strip, find humor in the incongruous "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly of projecting onto the past a contemporary cultural phenomenon—a feature of many other jokes about famous artists we will examine in the next section of this essay and a feature of so many of the archaeology-themed cartoons and comic strips we will examine in the Part III essays below.

Fig. 451. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 28 Dec., 2014.

Mikael Wulff's and Anders Morgenthaler's *Wumo* cartoon (**Fig. 451**), for instance, gives us a parody of a beret-wearing Leonardo da Vinci looking into a large mirror while painting an oil "selfie" and being berated by what we are to assume is his nagging spouse. The humor in this Wulff 's and Morgenthaler's gag, of course, derives from the incongruous difference in the time it takes to paint a self portrait and the instantaneousness of a smart-phone selfie. The modern viewer of this cartoon is not supposed to be bothered by the fact that da Vinci never married and never painted an oil self portrait, and that such large silver-backed mirrors were not invented until two centuries after da Vinci's death.

Fig. 452. Benjamin Schwartz, *The New Yorker*, 24 June, 2013.

Fig. 453. Ros Chast, *The New Yorker*, 4 June, 2014.

Rembrandt painted some forty self-portraits over his lifetime, a *corpus* of work that, naturally, cartoonists and comic strip artists have exploited to make anachronistic selfie jokes. The gag in Benjamin Schwartz's 2013 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 452**) is the incongruous equation of a Rembrandt self-portrait with a selfie; it is not clear if Schwartz expected his viewers to know that the chin-hugging young woman explaining the painting to the brochure-carrying man is correct to assign this portrait to early in Rembrandt's career, or whether viewers would recognize the painting, the cartoon rendering of which is apparently meant to represent a 1630 self-portrait now in the collection of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. Ros Chast's *New Yorker* parody of Rembrandt selfies (**Fig. 453**) more directly projects the contemporary world onto the past, with the Dutch artist mimicking common, pretentious, selfie poses.

Fig. 454. Dan Piraro, *Bizzaro*, 27 Sept. 2017.

Dan Piraro's cartoon (**Fig. 454**) projects the "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly of the selfie back into the Paleolithic past. Although Piraro's portrayal of the man blowing powered red ochre through a tube to create his handprint is an accurate reflection of how this common type of Paleolithic cave art was created, this cartoon continues the mistaken cartoon stereotype of "cavemen" living in caves that were the equivalent of a modern home, with living rooms decorated with paintings on the walls just inside of the cave opening rather than in deep, unlit, passages. [For more on this erroneous Paleolithic cave cartoon cliché, cf. **Figs. 47–55** above and **Figs. 1048–1054** in Part III below.] The child on the woman's lap is more simian than a human; this was no doubt intended to suggest the antiquity of the scene, but the little monkey merely adds an unnecessary level of evolutionary confusion. Piraro's trademark secret symbols of the "Pie of Opportunity" on the rock in the foreground and the "Dynamite of Unintended Consequences" behind the seated boy are particularly jarring in this prehistoric context.

Fig. 455. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 17 Jan., 2017.

The anachronistic projection of selfies onto the past has also been extended to the Classical world, such as in Bill Whitehead's cartoon (**Fig. 455**) of an ancient Greek couple using an incongruous selfie-stick hammer and chisel to carve a statue of themselves—again, humorously contrasting the instantaneousness of the selfie with the time-consuming task of creating a work of art. It is notable that the Classical Greek couple is shown carving a statue rather than painting a self portrait. Although our written sources clearly show that painting was as highly prized as sculpture in ancient Greece and that works by famous painters were prominently displayed in the public

spaces of ancient Greek city-states, none of these Classical Greek paintings have survived and we can only speculate what they may have looked like from how they influenced contemporaneous vase painters or later tomb fresco painters; in our modern popular cartoon reconstructions of ancient Greece, then, the only art we can imagine is sculptural.

"Hey, would you mind taking a quick sculpture of me and my family?"

Fig. 456. Benjamin Schwartz, *The New Yorker*, 6 Nov., 2013.

We can also see this sculptural bias at play in another Benjamin Schwartz 2013 *New Yorker* selfie-cartoon (**Fig. 456**). Rather than finding humor in the "ucronía" temporal anomaly of ancient Greeks taking selfies, the gag in this cartoon comes from projecting onto the past the related modern phenomenon of asking a stranger to take a picture of us as we pose in front of a monument. We can smile at the absurdity of a wife carrying around a block of marble and asking a stranger to "take a quick sculpture" of her and her family, although our grins might not be so wide if we knew that in Classical Greece housewives would never have been allowed to stroll around the agora with their families, much less approach or talk to an unknown man.

Fig. 457. Dan Piraro and Andy Cowan, *Bizarro*, 10 Feb., 2011.

A cartoon by Dan Piraro and his collaborator Andy Cowan (**Fig. 457**) similarly finds humor in the "ucronía" projection of modern cellphone photography onto the past —in this case the phenomenon of a stranger offering to take a picture of a couple when one of them is snapping a shot of the other in a scenic setting; Piraro and Cowan presumably want their viewers to ignore the fact that no Renaissance artist would have painted a portrait of a client *en plein air*.

Fig. 458. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*, 2017.

Mark Anderson's ancient Greek selfie cartoon (**Fig. 458**) brings the "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly full circle by putting an actual cellphone and selfie stick into the hand of his portmanteau mythological "Narcisyphus." The gag is both verbal and visual: the silly combination of Narcissus' and Sisyphus' names is matched by the tension between stopping to take a selfie with one hand while trying to hold on to the boulder with the other. [As we will see in the Part III "Goofy Greeks" essay below, Sisyphus pushing his boulder up the hill is one of the most common cartoon clichés about ancient Greece; Narcissus' narcissism, on the other hand, is almost never alluded to by modern cartoonists—**Figs. 34** and **217** being rare exceptions.]

We began this essay by asserting that the corpus of American cartoons and comic strips about art can be seen as both reflecting the nation's ideas about what belongs in the canon of great art as well as serving as a means to educate Americans about that canon. As we will see in the next section, however, if this corpus of cartoons and comic strips were to be considered as an Art History 101 textbook, it would look like a text missing many essential chapters.

Miming the Masters

Fig. 459. Charles Addams, *The New Yorker*, 20 Aug. 1979.

Fig. 460. Edward Sorel, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 21 May, 2001.

Fig. 461. Harry Bliss, 2014.

Thirty-five years separate these Charles Addams, Edward Sorel, and Harry Bliss cartoons (**Figs. 459–461**) but they share the same visual gag: figures from famous paintings have apparently walked off of their canvases and into settings where we do not expect them. The viewer need not be able to identify each one of the art quotations in these cartoons to get the joke, although one can hardly imagine that anyone would not recognize the *Mona Lisa*, *Whistler's Mother*, or the *Scream*; these artistic pastiches, rather, function as a unit, and a viewer only need to have sufficient "culturally bound background knowledge" to recognize that the painting brought to life are famous works from the Western art canon—much like the crowd of cartoon characters in the **Fig. 257** Dumas and Walker *Sam's Strip* were representative of comic strips from the past.

The hostess in Charles Addams' rounded-shaped cartoon (**Fig. 459**) has invited, among other guests, a woman from Degas' *Les Repasseuses* (1886), a boater from Renoir's *Le déjeuner des canotiers* (1880), the couple from Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930), Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* (1770), da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503), Munch's Screamer (1893), Modigliani's Jean Cocteau (1916), Goya's nude Maja (1800), Whistler's Mother (1871), and Velázquez' Menina (1656). That pastiches from over four hundred years of Western art should be assembled together is anomalous enough; that they should be invited to a party by a hippy hostess whose own artistic tastes seem to run to

abstract modernism only heightens the cartoon's absurdity. We identify with the man who has just come in from the open door and stares at the motley crew, no doubt, like us, seeing if he indeed knows everyone.

For his May, 2001, *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 460**), Edward Sorel populates the front steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with characters from famous paintings enjoying a spring day by eating ice cream. Given its context, one might expect that most viewers of Sorel's cartoon would realize that the animated characters were from painting in the Met's collection, even if every viewer could not identify: in the foreground, John Singer Sargent's *Madame X* (1883–1884), with her arm around Goya's *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga* (1787–1788), standing next to, on one side, the Madonna and Child from Paul Gauguin 's *La Orana Maria* (1891), and what appears to Rembrandt's 1660 *Self-Portrait* buying ice cream, and, on the other side, Rubens, his wife Helena Fourment, and their son Frans from Peter Paul Rubens' 1635 painting; and in the background: El Greco's *Cardinal Fernando Niño de Guevara* (ca. 1600) munching on an ice cream bar next to the young woman from Johannes Vermeer's Y*oung Woman with a Water Pitcher* (ca. 1662), and Victorine Meurent (the model in Édouard Manet *Young Lady in 1866*) in the shadows of the doorway, in front of whom sit two women from Honoré Daumier's *The Third-Class Carriage* (ca. 1862–64), while off to the side Antoine Watteau's *Mezzetin* (ca. 1718–20) serenades the scene.

Harry Bliss' cartoon (**Fig. 461**) closely resembles the Charles Addams one, both in shape and tone, and with presenting us with a cartoon universe where a "normal" person is shocked to find themselves in the company of characters who have walked off the canvases of famous paintings. The particular gag that Bliss uses is a variation of a comic trope we have seen in cartoons by Gary Larson (**Fig. 20**), Rea Irvin (**Fig. 123**), and Jeff Berry (**Fig. 333**), where abstracted *avant-garde* art is humorously suggested to be naturalistic because the cartoon representation of the artist or the subject of the painting is itself an abstraction. Thus, the pastiche characters sitting next to the wide-eyed woman on the bench— from Modigliani's *Jeanne Hébuterne with Yellow Sweater* (1919), Léger's *Three Women* (1922), Munch's *The Scream* (1893) and Picasso's *The Dream* (1932)—imply that these modernist artists had captured their models with photographic accuracy. It is not clear what Whistler's naturalistic Mother is doing in this cartoon other than to extend the temporal anomaly of early 20th-century European painters obtaining their models from an American "Famous Artist Modeling Agency."

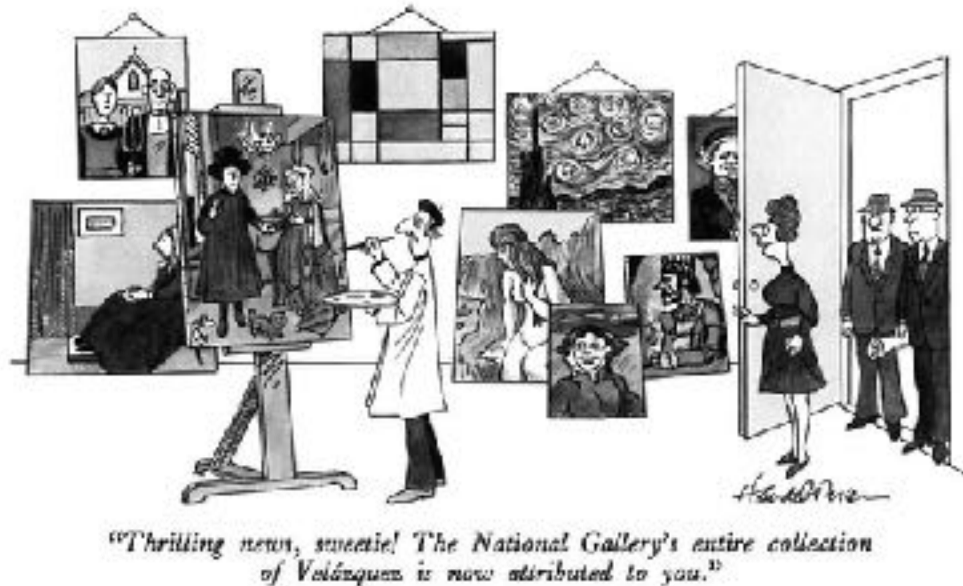


Fig. 462. J. B. Handelsman, *The New Yorker*, 3 Oct., 1988.

A J. B. Handelsman cartoon (**Fig. 462**) similarly presents a lineup of famous paintings, this time as literal copies made by an art forger. The gag here comes from the humorous incongruity of the wife's reaction to the news that her husband' forgeries have been uncovered. Handelsman assumes that the viewers of his *New Yorker* cartoon would know who Velázquez was and would recognize most, if not all, of the forged paintings: in addition to the Jan van Eyck *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) the forger is working on, we see *Whistler's Mother* and Grant Wood's *American Gothic* as well as a Mondrian, Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889), a Rembrandt self portrait, Renoir's *Bather Seated on a Rock* (1882), and George Rouault's *The Old King* (1916–1936)—the latter perhaps not being familiar to many viewers.

These four cartoons by Addams, Sorel, Bliss, and Handelsman are illustrative of two trends we will see repeated over and over again in our examination of American cartoons and comic strips about famous works of art: 1) the incongruous "humorous ucronía" temporal projection of a past work of art into a contemporary American setting; 2) the conservatism of cartoon stereotypes of canonical Western art.

Not one of the quotations of artworks in these cartoons comes from a painting dating to after the 1930's—an indication of the conservative nature of American art-themed cartoons and comic strips. Of course, cartoon quotations of artworks need to be understood by the general viewing public, and such quotations are naturally restricted to established works that have entered the canon. Still, the limited range of art represented in American cartoon pastiches and parodies is remarkable. In our corpus of

American art-themed cartoons and comic strips only a handful of artists and works of art are targets of gags—exemplified by the repetition of Whistler, Munch, and Modigliani in the Addams and Bliss cartoons. [Luis Gasca and Asier Mensuro, in their 2014 book, *La Pintura en el Cómic*, detected a similar restricted range of artists whose paintings were quoted in the, mostly European, comics they surveyed: da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Goya, Toulouse-Lautrec, Mucha, Dalí, and Norman Rockwell.] Further, with only a few exceptions, almost all American cartoon quotations of art come from works dating to before the mid-20th century, and virtually all of these are from the Western artistic canon.

The conservatism of American art-themed cartoons and comic strips is not only to be found in the limited range of artists and artwork that appear in their gags. As we have seen in our examination of art-historical "composite cartoons" (cf. **Figs. 430–437**), the range of cartoon stereotypes of specific artists or works of art is also very limited, and, once established, tends to be used over and over again in variations on a comic theme—even when those stereotypes do not accurately reflect the original works of art or the actual lives of the artists.

A distinction needs to be made between the "intertextuality" of art-themed cartoon stereotypes which are merely "representations" and those which are, to use Nancy Pedri's neologism, "re-presentations." All of the quotations of art in the above Charles Addams, Edward Sorel, and J. B. Handelsman cartoons belong to the former type; they serve as mere "representations" of famous works of art, and they carry no additional symbolic meanings that must be decoded in order to appreciate the gag. Similarly, the cast of art figures on the bench in the Harry Bliss cartoon are mere "representations" of modernist abstracted art, and each figure in itself does not carry a further symbolic meaning. For instance, when we see the character from Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, which appears in both the Addams and Bliss cartoons, we are asked to view him just as a figure from a well known work of art and not—as it is commonly taken to be in many cartoons—as a "re-presentation" symbol of angst or agony.

A further example of this "representation"/"re-presentation" distinction:

Fig. 463. A panel from Dan Piraro, *Bizaro*, 9 Sept., 2012.

Dan Piraro has invited readers to send in ideas for puns that he would would illustrate in his *Bizaro* comic strip—an example of the interactivity between cartoon creator and viewer that we discussed in the "Webcomics and Internet Memes" essay (cf. **Figs**. **54–56**). One of these reader-inspired puns—an atrocious double entendre based on the *Wizard of Oz*—uses cartoon quotations from Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* and da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (**Fig. 463**). These two figures are merely easily recognizable representatives of oil paintings; any number of examples from other famous canvases would have worked just as well.

Fig. 464. Darren Bell, *Candorville*, 21 July, 2004.

On the other hand, the quotations from the *Mona Lisa* and *The Scream* in Darren Bell's *Condorville* comic strip (**Fig. 464**) are symbolic. Bell's comic strip African-American character Lemont Brown has a troubled relationship with his egotistical

Latino wife Roxanne, and when she brags about being "pretty as a picture," the contrasting "re-presentations" of beauty and horror that come to the couple's minds provides the visual punch line to the joke.

Two more general points before we turn to a chronological survey of American cartoons and comic strips about famous works of art:

Cartoon stereotypes of art and of artists—whether "representations" or "re-presentations"—can be used in a number of ways. They themselves can be the targets of gags, or they can be used in targeting other subjects. But, as we saw in the metafictional "intertextual" comics of Jimmy Johnson (**Fig. 279**) and Patrick O'Donnell (**Fig. 280**), cartoon pastiches of art can also be used as homages to artworks the comic artists admire.

Fig. 465. Norman Rockwell, *The Connoisseur*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 96 x 80 cm. Cover illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 13, 1962. Private Collection.

Almost everyone assumes that *The Connoisseur*, Norman Rockwell's famous illustration for a 1962 *Saturday Evening Post* cover (**Fig. 465**) is poking fun at the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollack. When we look at the well-dressed, balding

man looking at what appears to be a Pollock action-style painting, we think that we know what he is thinking. Surely this epitome of the establishment is aghast at—or at least confused by—Pollock's radical break with the long history of pictorial representation in Western painting. We might also assume that the man is a stand-in for Rockwell himself, whose often sentimental realistic style of illustration was mocked by contemporary critics as bourgeois kitsch unworthy of consideration as "serious" art.

Fig. 466. Photograph of Norman Rockwell painting his model for *The Connoisseur*, 1961. Norman Rockwell Museum.

These assumptions, however, are too simplistic. By 1961, abstract expressionism was nothing new, and the second generation of artists working in that style were on the cusp of being eclipsed by the emerging realism of postmodern Pop Art. Rockwell himself, at age 67, was facing several issues at this time: he had just taken a break from painting after the sudden death of his wife in 1959; he was about to end his 45-year-long association with *The Saturday Evening Post*, whose advertisers were criticizing him for being too old-fashioned; and he was about to start painting for *Life* magazine, where, over the next decade, he would tackle such controversial subjects as racism and poverty. Thus, when we see Rockwell obviously enjoying himself while painting his own Pollock-esque canvas to use as a model for his 1962 *Post* illustration (**Fig. 466**), we can suggest that, far from targeting Jackson Pollock, *The Connoisseur* should instead be viewed as an homage to abstract expressionism. The title need not be ironic.

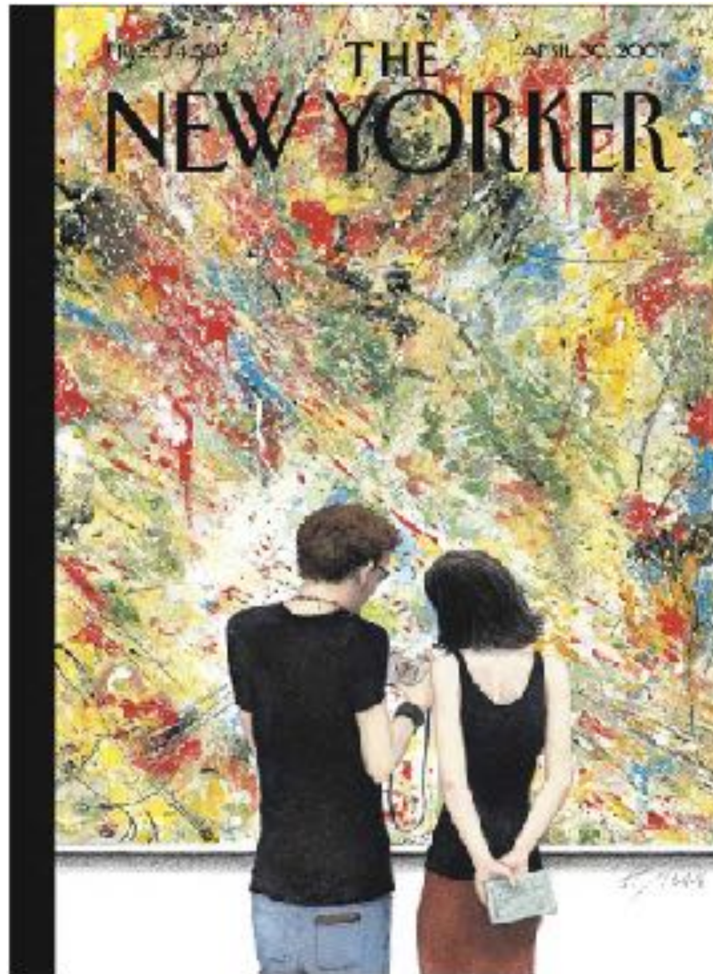


Fig. 467. Harry Bliss, “Paint by Pixel,” *The New Yorker*, 30 April, 2007.

And almost everyone who saw Harry Bliss’ “Paint by Pixel” *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 467**) would have recognized it as a quotation of Norman Rockwell’s earlier *Saturday Evening Post* illustration, but few would have realized that the painting quoted in Bliss' cartoon was not painted by Jackson Pollock but rather was a pastiche of the Pollock pastiche painted by Rockwell. Most people, then, would have missed the metafictional twist of Bliss’ homage to Rockwell’s homage to Jackson Pollock. Even without this background knowledge, however, the gag in Bliss’ cartoon is readily apparent: the Millennial “connoisseurs” are incongruously looking at their cellphones rather than at the actual painting—a phenomenon all too familiar to anyone who has been in an art museum within the past decade. [For other cartoons targeting how Millennial’s reliance on technology interferes with their appreciation of art, cf. **Figs. 207–208** and **363**; for another quotation of Rockwell’s *The Connoisseur*, cf. the Armory Show US Postal stamp, **Fig. 135**.]

Unlike many of his contemporary "serious" artists, Norman Rockwell was ignored during his lifetime by cartoonists and comic-strip gagsters who apparently could find no humor in his sentimental kitsch. However, as Rockwell's own stature as a legitimate artist has grown over the past decades, a number of cartoons—of both the print and the animated kind—have parodied his iconic visions of America (cf. **Figs. 67** and **316**).

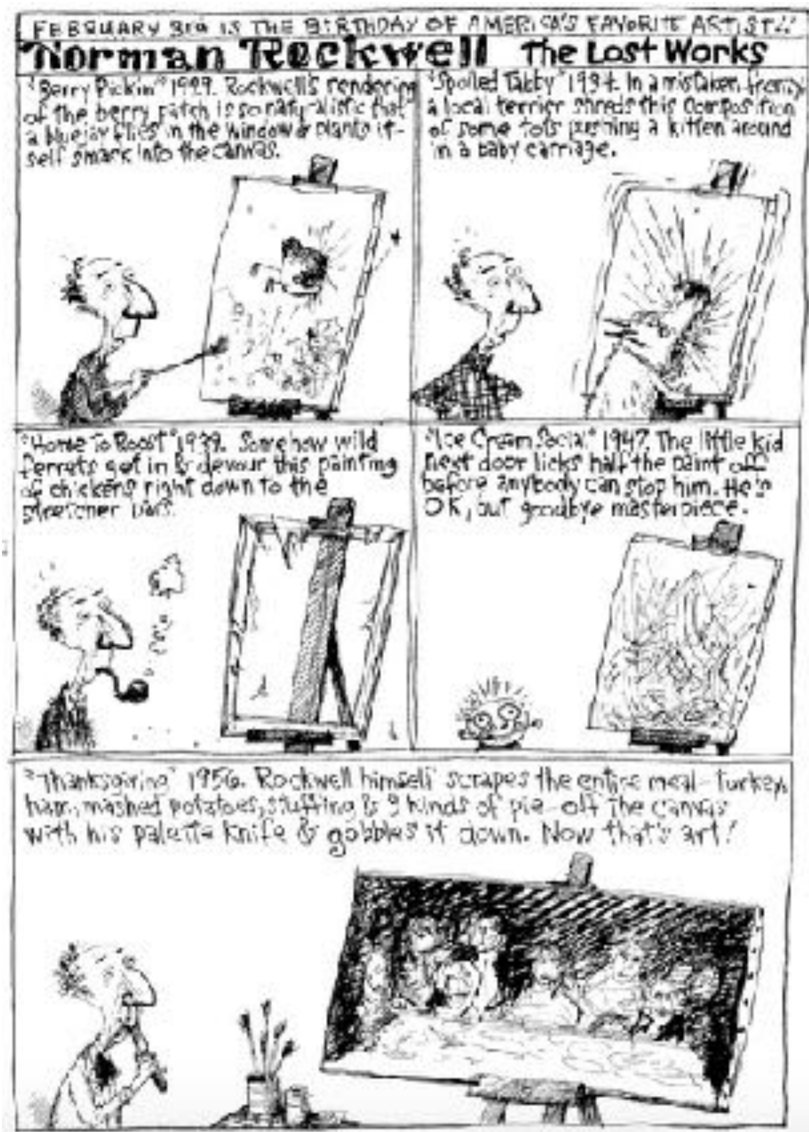


Fig. 468. Richard Thompson, *Richard's Poor Almanac*, 25 Jan., 2011.

And not all of these recent pastiches and parodies of Norman Rockwell are homages. Although Richard Thompson's quirky parody (**Fig. 468**) does not target Rockwell's paintings as sentimental kitsch, his gags about Rockwell's realism do harken back to mid-20th-century critics. Note that, like his *Richard's Poor Almanac* strips about the Ingres exhibition and the Klimt auction (**Figs. 441–442**), this Thompson comic strip

utilizes the “quasi-narrative composite cartoon” format, with a progression of vignettes meant to be read in chronological order.

Before we survey cartoons and comic strips about famous artists and artworks, one more general point, an elaboration on Michael Picone’s concept of “associative inversion” we discussed in the “A Test Case” essay in Part I.

Picone observed that when we are standing in front of a painting we are aware that the static, two-dimensional artwork is “embedded in a surrounding where everything else has higher resolution than the objects contained in the paintings” but that when a painting is quoted in a comic it “very often has [a] higher resolution and looks more substantial than the graphics in which it is embedded.” Given Scott McCloud’s “masking effect”—the phenomenon that comics readers identify with the abstracted iconic presentation of cartoonish characters—this leads to the “associative inversion” effect wherein “everything is reversed. It is the mimetic ‘reality’ that has low resolution and it is the embedded painting that, in comparison, has high resolution.” As we identify with the characters in a cartoon universe, the realistically rendered artwork in that universe is now more real than we are.

Of course not all cartoon quotations of art are portrayed in a realistic fashion that would evoke this “associative inversion” effect. Many depict the quoted art in the same cartoonish fashion as the rest of the comic; others intentionally make the art *less* realistic than the cartoon universe in which it appears. In his museum gag **Fig**. **179**, for instance, Dan Piraro hangs cartoonish paintings of his trademark secret symbols—the “Flying Saucer of Possibility” and the “Bunny of Exuberance”—which contrast with the much more realistically rendered museum surroundings. Similarly, to focus our attention on Charlie Brown and his classmates on their trip to a museum, Charles Schultz (**Fig. 469**) has blacked-out the artwork in the strip.

Fig. 469. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 27 Jan., 1999 (cf. **Fig. 231**).

On the other hand, many cartoon and comic-strip quotations of art *do* evoke an "associative inversion." We have seen this with Garry Trudeau's representation of the *Creation of Man* in our test case **Fig. 1**, which we suggested might have been an opportunity for Trudeau to brag about his graphic skills; other such "associative inversion" quotations of Michelangelo's work include **Figs**. **3**, **6**, **9**, **11**, and **13**. The realistic quotations of artwork in Jimmy Johnson's comic-strip homage to Andrew Wyeth (**Fig. 279**) and in some of the "Art History 101" comics (e.g. **443–449**) also evoke the "associative inversion" effect. We can also see this "associative inversion" with the "presentation" and "re-presentation" quotations of paintings in Dan Piraro's and Darren Bell's comic strips (**Figs. 463–464**).

Fig. 470. Detail from Jim Meddick, *Monty*, 23 Aug., 2013 (cf. **Fig. 159**).

As we discussed above, Jim Meddick played with the "associative inversion" effect in a metafictional *Monty* strip (**Fig. 470**) where two museum guards, inexplicably aware that they are cartoon characters, stand in front of a Lichtenstein painting and realize that a realistic comic-strip quotation of a Pop-Art quotation of a comic strip appears as realistic as the rest of their cartoon universe.

Fig. 471. Two panels from Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 21 April, 2013.

Garry Trudeau has given us an interesting variation on the "associative inversion" effect in a metafictional comic-strip-within-a-comic-strip about the Red Rascal, the fictional cartoon character created by the fictional *Doonesbury* cartoon character Jeff Redfern (**Fig. 471**). To show the exhaustion of the Red Rascal (aka Rorkh Razil), who has been fighting Al Qaeda all night and texting about his exploits all day, Jeff's comic strip quotes Jacques-Louis David's 1793 painting *The Death of Marat*, with a "humorous ucronía" substitution of a laptop for the dead revolutionary's papers. In addition to this sight gag, which assumes viewers would recognize the David painting, Trudeau has also subtly rendered the Red Rascal more realistically in the parody than he is shown in the rest of the comic-strip-within-a-comic-strip; when the Red Rascal stepped into Marat's bathtub, his musculature became more distinct and his body developed realistic shading. Now there is no "associative inversion." We the viewers, like the cartoon character Jeff's cartoon character the Red Rascal, can leave the low-resolution "mimetic 'reality'" of the cartoon universe and enter the higher resolution of the quoted art.

Several things strike one when surveying the corpus of American cartoons and comic strips about famous works of art. First of all, the quotations of art are almost exclusively from the Western canon; expect no reference to Chinese pen-and-ink landscapes, to Persian miniatures, or to African bronze sculptures. Secondly, quotations from the Western art canon are limited to a relatively narrow time span. It is almost as if American cartoonists were working from a "Western Art History 101" textbook where all of the chapters between ancient Greece and the High Renaissance had been ripped out; references to Byzantine icons, medieval illuminated manuscripts, or Gothic architecture do not appear.

In addition, as we noted above, American cartoon and comic strip use only a handful of stereotypes in their allusions to famous artists or works of art. Once these comic clichés have entered the general "contextually bound" culture, they are repeated over and over again to create almost endless variations of the same joke.

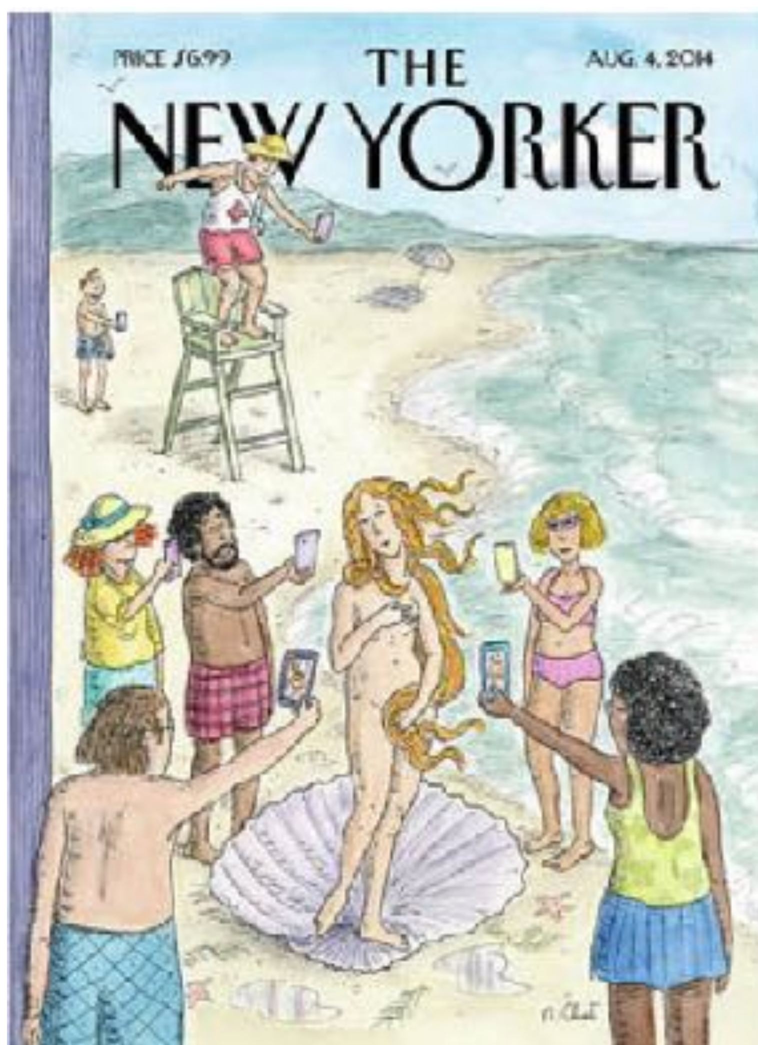


Fig. 472. Ros Chast, *The New Yorker*, 4 August, 2014.

The gag in Ros Chast's *New Yorker* parody (**Fig. 472**) of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1484–1486) is an example of projecting an older work of art onto a contemporary American setting—a "humorous uncronía" incongruity that we have seen many times before. Chast has transplanted the arrival of the nude goddess of love and her giant scallop shell from the island of Cyprus to an American beach where everyone—lifeguard included—snaps a photo of her with their cellphones. The Venus-on-a-half-shell trope is almost the only allusion to Botticelli's paintings one will find in the corpus of art-themed comics (cf. **Figs. 57** and **434**) . [A notable exception was the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum commission of Karl Stevens to produce comic strips for its 2019 exhibition, *Botticelli: Heroines + Heroes*, cf. **Fig. 167–169**.] Chast's Venus is a fairly close pastiche of the Botticelli goddess, although she is modified with a coy smile and—in keeping with American Puritan tastes—is much less voluptuous and overtly sensual than the Italian Renaissance original.

Fig. 473. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 2 Nov., 1995.

Fig. 474. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 28 Oct. 1998.

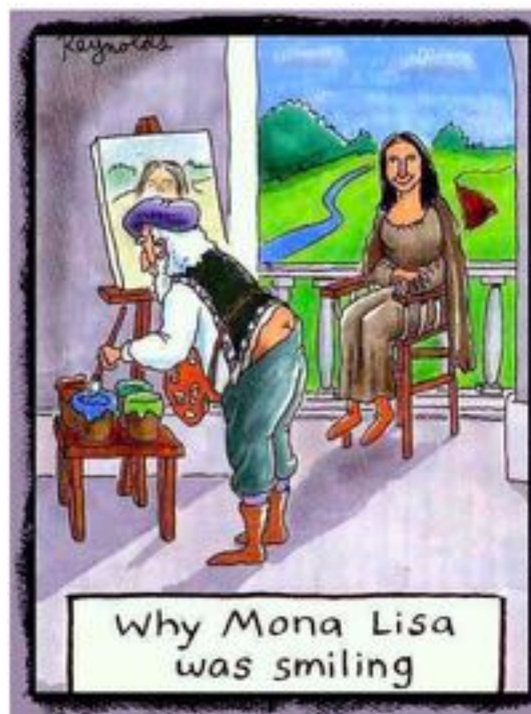


Fig. 475. Dan Reynolds, 2009.

Fig. 476. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 9 June, 2018.

Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is arguably the most famous, and most commonly parodied, painting in the world (e.g., **Figs. 34**, **36**, **38–42**, **44–45**, **65**, **172**, **416**, **447**, **459**, and **463–464**; cf. also Sofi Siente, 16 June, 2014). And the humor in almost all American cartoon gags about the *Mona Lisa* comes from the incongruous "humorous ucronía" temporal projection of da Vinci's masterpiece into a contemporary American context. American cartoonists have generally focused on poking fun at La Gioconda's enigmatic smile. For instance, when the sixth-grader Nate listens to his art teacher Mr. Rosa talk about the *Mona Lisa* (**Fig. 473**), he imagines that she is wincing as da Vinci told her a lame joke about a duck and a Viking; in the final panel of this comic strip Peirce allows us to see how Nate drew this scene in his lined notebook, although he doesn't actually give us the punch line to the lame joke. The humor in Wiley Miller's *Mona Lisa* enigmatic-smile gag (**Fig. 474**) comes from its reference to stunt doubles and to our modern fascination with cats and their aloofness. The cartoonist and greeting-card artist Dan Reynolds has made several versions of a cartoon (**Fig. 475**) suggesting that *Mona Lisa's* enigmatic smile came from seeing da Vinci's butt-crack. The enigmatic-smile gag in a Wulff and Morgenthaler's *Mona Lisa* cartoon (**Fig. 476**) depends on our understanding the reference to the social dynamics among modern young couples; viewers might, however, wonder why Leonardo is asking for an enigmatic smile when his canvas—here rendered in full "associative inversion" glory—appears to be completed.

Fig. 477. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 7 Nov., 2012.

Another comic trope cartoonists use to make fun of the *Mona Lisa* is the belief that her eyes follow one around the Louvre gallery in which the painting is hung. Mark Parisi's following-eyes gag (**Fig. 477**) humorously projects the stereotypical American "time-out" punishment for mischievous children back into the 16th century.

Fig. 478. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 26 Aug., 2017.

Fig. 479. Bob Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 13 Sept., 2005.

Wulff and Morgenthaler have also lampooned the *Mona Lisa* in another incongruous "humorous ucronía" cellphone gag (**Fig. 478**), this time poking fun at the trend of posting on social media photos of the food we are eating. A *Frank and Ernest* strip (**Fig. 479**) assumes viewers recognize the reference to *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown's best-selling mystery thriller that, at the time Bob Thaves drew this cartoon shortly before his death, was being turned into a block-buster movie by Tom Hanks. The silly joke uses the paint-by-number cartoon motif we have seen applied to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel (**Figs. 8** and **19**); one might wonder how Leonardo will manage to paint the etherial background landscape of the *Mona Lisa* in only four numbers!

Fig. 480. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 13 Nov., 2007.

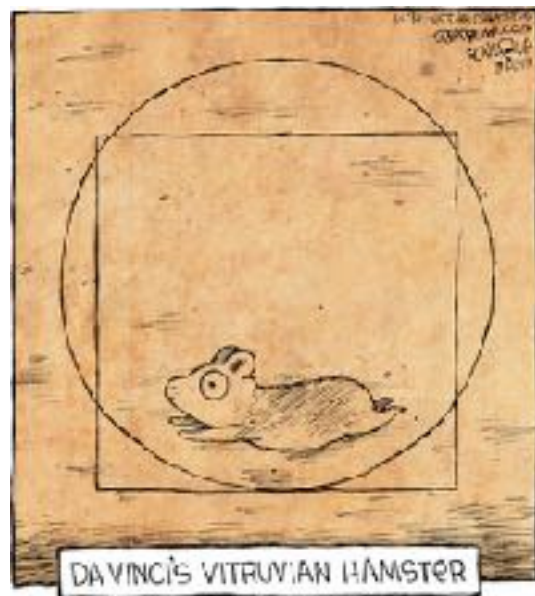


Fig. 481. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 31 Jan., 2019.

A McCoy brother's cartoon (**Fig. 480**) incorporates a pastiche of the *Mona Lisa* with one of da Vinci's less frequently quoted works, his 1490 drawing *Vitruvian Man* (cf. **Figs. 434** and **474** , and the title panels of Jim Meddick's *Monty* strips). The incongruous picture-in-a-picture gag the McCoys employ in uniting these two quotations is the same "humorous ucronía" temporal anomaly as the one Mark Parisi used in a 2003 cartoon (**Fig. 172**). A Dave Coverly *Speed Bump* cartoon (**Fig. 481**) turns da Vinci's delicate mathematical study of human proportions on its head, transforming the innovative off-centered circle of the *Vitruvian Man* into what American viewers would instantly recognize as a pet hamster's exercise wheel.

Fig. 482. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 31 July, 2016.

Fig. 483. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 19 Sept., 2008.

Curiously, allusions to da Vinci's famous *The Last Supper* are not commonly encountered in American syndicated cartoons and comic strips, which may be due to their general avoidance of religious topics (but cf. **Figs. 37**, **38**, **45**, **60**, and **68**). Scott Hilburn's silly pun (**Fig. 482**) does not seem to be particularly sacrilegious, although perhaps dismissive of Jesus' ability to feed the multitudes. Dave Whamond's *The Last Supper* cartoon (**Fig. 483**) makes the humorous suggestion that da Vinci "originally started out as a cartoonist . . . "—a "little known fact" that would seem to be a metafictional comment by a cartoonist on the high/low debate about the artistic merits of comics; while we might smile at this joke, it is still fun to imagine what da Vinci might have put in that speech bubble!

Fig. 484. Gary Larson, *The Far Side*, 30 Jan., 1991.

As we have seen in the Part I essays, Michelangelo Buonarroti's Sistine Chapel is a favorite subject for American humorous cartoons and comic strips (cf. **Figs**. **1**, **3–13**, **16–19**, **27**, **43**, **60**, **64**, and **69**). Gary Larson has humorously shifted our focus from Michelangelo's iconic ceiling fresco to the floor (**Fig. 484**), adding the extra incongruous detail of a pipe-smoking Lambini *padre* reading a completely superfluous blueprint scroll.

Fig. 485. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 2 Nov., 2009.

Fig. 486. Guy Endore-Kaiser, Rodd Perry, and Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 25 April, 2012.

Fig. 487. Dan Thompson, *Brevity*, 20 Dec., 2016.

Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504) has been a frequent target of American comic humor. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, the creators of the cartoon *Brevity,* made fun of the statue with a beret-wearing Michelangelo incongruously using Medusa to turn David to stone (**Fig. 485**). When Dan Thompson joined the *Brevity* team, he repeated this same gag, this time with a hatless Michelangelo in Renaissance garb (**Fig. 486**). Thompson's outright plagiarism of his predecessors might be forgiven because his version, with Medusa's head in a bag like Perseus used, at least avoids the logical problem of how Michelangelo managed to get the Gorgon into his studio without

petrifying everyone else. [For more on Medusa cartoons, cf. **Figs. 1466–1482** below.] Thompson returned to *David* in 2016 (**Fig. 487**) with a version set in the present; to get his double-pun on "Letterman," viewers need a "culturally bound background knowledge" about the now-retired TV host and the American tradition of awarding school letters to successful athletes. [We should note that all of these *Brevity* gags evoke an "associative inversion," with Michelangelo's model/statue being much more realistically rendered than the other, more cartoonish, figures.]

The rise of capitalism marked a change of patronage for artists.

Fig. 488. Peter Duggan, *The Guardian*, 25 April., 2012.

And just as cartoonists have bowdlerized their cartoon versions Michelangelo's *Creation of Man* by covering up "the glory of his nakedness," so too have these *Brevity* cartoons placed strategically outstretched hands over David's genitals. This American prudishness can be contrasted with Peter Duggan's cartoon (**Fig. 488**) published in the London newspaper, *The Guardian*—a cartoon that assumes viewers would recognize the snide visual reference to Ronald McDonald.

[We should also note that, just as is the case with cartoon and comic-strip quotations of artworks by Botticelli and da Vinci, allusions to other works by Michelangelo that one might have expected seem to be neglected by American cartoonists. No cartoons of his *Moses* or his *Pieta* appear in American syndicated comics, for instance.]

Not only are the chapters between Classical Antiquity and the High Renaissance missing from the hypothetical "Western Art History 101 textbook" we facetiously suggested American cartoonists used to draw inspirations for their comic gags, but the pages covering the period between the Renaissance and Impressionism are also particularly thin. Mannerist painters such as Bronzino, Tintoretto, or el Greco are not parodied in American art-themed cartoons, and while there are a handful of comic allusions to 17th-century Baroque painters, one would look in vain to find quotations of Caravaggio, Gentileschi, or Zurbarán. Neo-Classical, Rococo, Romantic, and Realist art is almost shunned entirely.

"Dauphin! Stop teasing La Infanta!"

Fig. 489. Peter Porges, *The New Yorker*, 16 Nov., 1987.

The handful of American cartoons and comic strips that do refer to European art from the 17th century rely on easily recognized stereotypes. To get the visual gag in Peter Porges' 1987 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 489**), for instance, viewers need only realize that it is parodying the way that Velázquez portrayed the costumes and coiffures of the Spanish royal family, without necessarily recognizing its reference to his *Portrait of Mariana of Austria* (1653) and his *Las Meninas* (1656).

Fig. 490. J. B. Handelsman, *The New Yorker*.

As we have seen, American cartoon allusions to Rembrandt are restricted to tropes about his self-portraits (cf. **Figs**. **185**, **450**, **452–453**, and **462**). The humor in J. B. Handelsman cartoon (**Fig. 490**) is dampered to a degree if the viewer was aware that, among the nearly one hundred self-portrait paintings, etchings, and drawings Rembrandt produced in his lifetime, he often donned antique fancy clothes as a way of making a playful, ironic, comment about aging.

Fig. 491. T. Lewis and Michael Fry, *Over the Hedge*, 16 Aug., 2015.

Fig. 492. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 14 Sept., 2014.

Johannes Vermeer's 1665 *A Girl with a Pearl Earring*, one of the most parodied artwork of all time, is a favorite of humorous meme-makers, as we have seen with a "Distracted Boyfriend" meme (**Fig. 33**), with the photoshopped composites of Dan Cretu (**Fig. 34**), Shusaku Takaoka (**Fig. 35**), Ditto Von Tease (**Fig. 36**), and Ertan Atay (**Figs. 38** and **40–43**), and in an #artathome response (**Fig. 58**). Other works by Vermeer have been parodied much less frequently, although the Getty Museum #artathome and Olivier Ménégol's pastiches of *The Milkmaid* (**Figs. 67** and **68**), and Edward Sorel's pastiche of Y*oung Woman with a Water Pitcher* (**Fig. 460**) all assume that their viewers would recognize those paintings. T. Lewis' and Michael Fry's *Over the Hedge* comic strip (**Fig. 491**) assumes viewers recognize the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, even though they may not have seen Penn and Teller's 2013 *Tim's Vermeer*, which documented the inventor Tim Jenison's attempts to prove that Vermeer painted with the aid of optical devices. The "associative inversion" effect is particularly effective in this cartoon, emphasizing the silly gag—that the beret-wearing squirrel Sammy is able to paint a realistic copy of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* using butterflies. The absurdity of painting a *Star Wars* alien in the style of a Dutch Master provides the humor in Paul Trap's *Thatababy* cartoon (**Fig. 492**); as with other Paul Trap strips, the beret-wearing baby's precocious artistic skills is another, underlying, humorous incongruity in the gag.

The sole American cartoon stereotype of Peter Paul Rubens' art derives from his paintings of full-figured, Ruben-esque, nudes (cf. **Figs. 434–435**). Lynn Johnston's *For Better or Worse* strip (**Fig. 493**) takes this trope and gives it a "humorous ucronía" temporal twist, targeting the destructive psychological effects on women of our modern,

unrealistic, concept of ideal feminine beauty. Again, in line with the prohibition against showing nudity in American syndicated cartoons and comic strips, no cartoon employing this Rubens stereotype actually portrays one of his nude paintings.

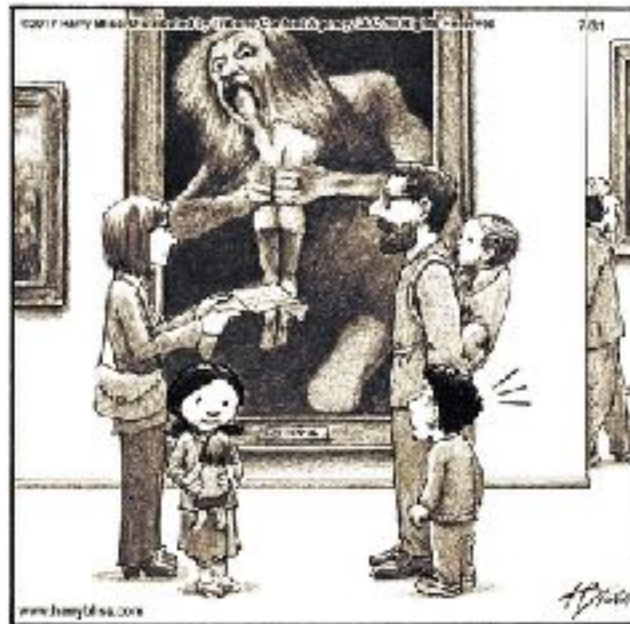
Fig. 493. Lynn Johnston, *For Better or for Worse*, 26 Jan., 2014.

Fig. 494. John Zakour and Scott Roberts, *Working Daze*, 7 March, 2009.

18th- and early 19th-century European art is relatively under-represented in American cartoons and comic strips. In a rare exception, a John Zahour and Scott Roberts *Working Daze* cartoon (**Fig. 494**) gives us an accurate rendition of the French Neoclassical painter Jean-Victor Bertin's *Classical Landscape* (1800, National Galleries, Scotland). The point of the accuracy in Scott Roberts' quotation of the Bertin painting, is not to evoke an "associative inversion" effect, but rather is to make us believe that Roy could really have mistaken the painting for a wall-mounted television; as such, Bertin's *Classical Landscape* serves merely as a "presentation" of a realistic landscape, not as "re-presentation" symbolic of 19th-century European idealization of ancient Greek Arcadian pastoralism.

Fig. 495. Kara Walker, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 27 Aug., 2007.

Among the handful of early 19th-century European paintings parodied in American cartoons is Théodore Géricault's *The Wreck of the Medusa* (1818–1819). [Cf. **Fig. 37** for the Spanish artist José Manuel Ballester's depopulated version.] A Kara Walker *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 495**) assumes that her viewers would recognize the allusion to *The Wreck of the Medusa* in order to appreciate the incongruous humor of replacing the figures in the Géricault painting with her trademark silhouettes of African-Americans.



"OK, let's all meet back here at 'Saturn Devouring His Son' in one hour."

Fig. 496. Harry Bliss, 31 July, 2017.

Another early 19th-century European painting that makes a cameo in American cartoons is Francisco Goya's *Saturn* (1820–1823) . Because a Harry Bliss cartoon (**Fig. 496**) gives us the painting's title in the verbal set-up, a viewer isn't required to immediately recognize the Goya painting in order to get the visual gag. However, knowing that this late work was originally painted when the Spanish painter was 73 years old and confronting his own mortality and disillusionment over the civil strife that had been roiling Spain since the Napoleonic Wars, does help one to appreciate the cartoon's gruesome humor. That Bliss' rendering of the painting is no more realistic than the rest of the cartoon universe helps us focus on the comic contrast between the calm daughter looking directly at us and the worried son with consternation marks flying out of his head.

American cartoonists and comic strip artists have made fun of the works of two 19th-century American artists: Gilbert Stuart's portraits of George Washington (cf. **Figs. 198–199**) and Emanuel Leutze's 1851 *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (cf. **Fig. 230**).

Fig. 497. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 20 Feb., 1977.

Fig. 498. Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, 19 Dec., 1999.

Two Charles Schulz *Peanuts* Sunday comic strips quote Leutze's patriotic celebration of the Continental Army's surprise attack on Trenton, NJ, in December 26, 1776. Schulz's 1977 comic (**Fig. 497**), which came out just before Presidents Day that

year, is a variation of the children's snow-sculpture jokes we discussed in the previous essay (cf. **Figs. 388–389**). The reveal of the visual gag in this comic is provided in the elongated penultimate panel, where Linus' outrageously competent snow sculpture puts Lucy's pathetic snowman to shame and literally knocks the hat off of his older sister's head; as has been noted, Schulz often saves the final panel for a comic coda to the main gag, in this case an allusion to Mason Weam's famous, apocryphal, story of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. While Schulz' parody of Leutze in the 1977 cartoon is a "presentation" used in targeting Lucy, his 1999 comic strip's photographic reproduction of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* in is a "re-presentation" (**Fig. 498**). Here, in one of the last Sunday strips Schulz drew before his death in February 2000, the quotation represents American patriotism, and its striking "associative inversion" is an exclamation point to the wordless panels of the first two rows, overshadowing the rather pale missing-the-boat gag. The gloomy tonality of the strip, broken only by the colorful ornaments on the pathetic Christmas tree in the title panel and the American flag in the final panel, seems appropriate for a man who had recently been told that he had terminal colon cancer. Just as Snoopy and Woodstock were time-traveled back into the Revolutionary War era, the WWII veteran Schulz is reflecting on his half-century as a comics artist, uniting his love of country with his Christian faith.

Fig. 499. Tim Rickard, *Brewster Rockit: Space Guy!*, 22 Feb., 2012.

Tim Rickard's *Brewster Rockit* comic strip (**Fig. 499**) also has time travel and a photographic reproduction of Leutze's painting, but both are used for quite different purposes than in Schulz' 1999 strip. Rickard's retro-futuristic comic often features Dr. Mel Practice's time machine, in this case transporting the dim-witted Captain Rockit back in time to meet George Washington. The pastiche of the Leutze painting here is a mere "presentation," a setting to make fun of Rockit's idiocy. Similarly, the Leutze quotation in Paul Trap's cartoon (**Fig. 500**) is also just a "presentation" of a famous work

of art, used as yet another example of the *Thatababy*'s baby's preternatural artistic skills.

Fig. 500. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 18 Aug. 2013.

In contrast to our putative cartoon "Western Art History 101" textbook's thin coverage of earlier 19th-century European art, the chapters on the last quarter of the century are especially expansive.

Fig. 501. U.S. Post Office, 1934.

James Abbott Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* (1871)—better known as *Whistler's Mother*—is one of the most quoted works of art to appear in the American funny pages (cf. **Figs. 459**, and **461–462** above). Although born in the United States, the London-based Whistler painted exclusively in Europe, first in the circle of Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet and later alongside Camille Pissarro and Claude Monet when those French impressionists were in exile in London. Yet, as one might expect, American cartoonists only quote the iconic *Whistler's Mother*, ignoring the artist's other important works such as his impressionistic *Nocturnes* or his japonisme

Peacock Room. And these parodies also ignore what most interested Whistler in the piece—its subtile arrangement of form and its limited color palette—and have instead taken this "Victorian *Mona Lisa*" as a portrait "re-presenting" motherhood and family values. As humorists, of course, American cartoonists are going to poke fun at this sanctimonious symbol (cf. **Fig. 501**), though the dozens of American cartoons which parody *Whistler's Mother* have done so in a surprisingly limited number of ways.

Fig. 502. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 14 Dec., 1957.

Fig. 503. Bill Whitehead, *Free Range*, 28 Dec., 2007.

Although separated by a half-century, Anatol Kovarsky's and Bill Whitehead's cartoons (**Figs. 502–503**) both find humor in imagining a dialogue between mother and son. (We might note that our interest in the origin of Whistler's iconic painting has given rise to a number of unverified stories, such as Anna Whistler's offer to substitute for a model who didn't show up, or Whistler putting his mother in a chair when she became too tired having her portrait painted while standing up.)

Fig. 504. Gary Wise and Lance Aldrich, *Real Life Adventures*, 13 Dec., 2009.

Fig. 505. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 20 June, 2011.

Like Bill Whitehead's comic, the Gary Wise and Lance Aldrich and the Glenn and Gary McCoy two-panel cartoons (**Figs. 504–505**) project Whistler's 19th-century painting into a contemporary American setting to make fun of a cartoon Whistler's father. (Whistler's real father had died in Russia working as a railroad engineer when the painter was still in his teens.) The remarkable similarities of the Wise/Aldrich and the McCoy brothers cartoons—depicting the father in a recliner while drinking beer and watching TV—might be put down to plagiarism, but, given the obviousness of the gag, one might want to be generous and view these as independent inventions.

Edward Sorel's *New Yorker* pastiche of *Whistler's Mother* (**Fig. 506**) similarly employs a "humorous uchronía" projection to make a Mother's Day joke, in this case, the stereotype of the American mother forever waiting for a phone call from a child that never comes.

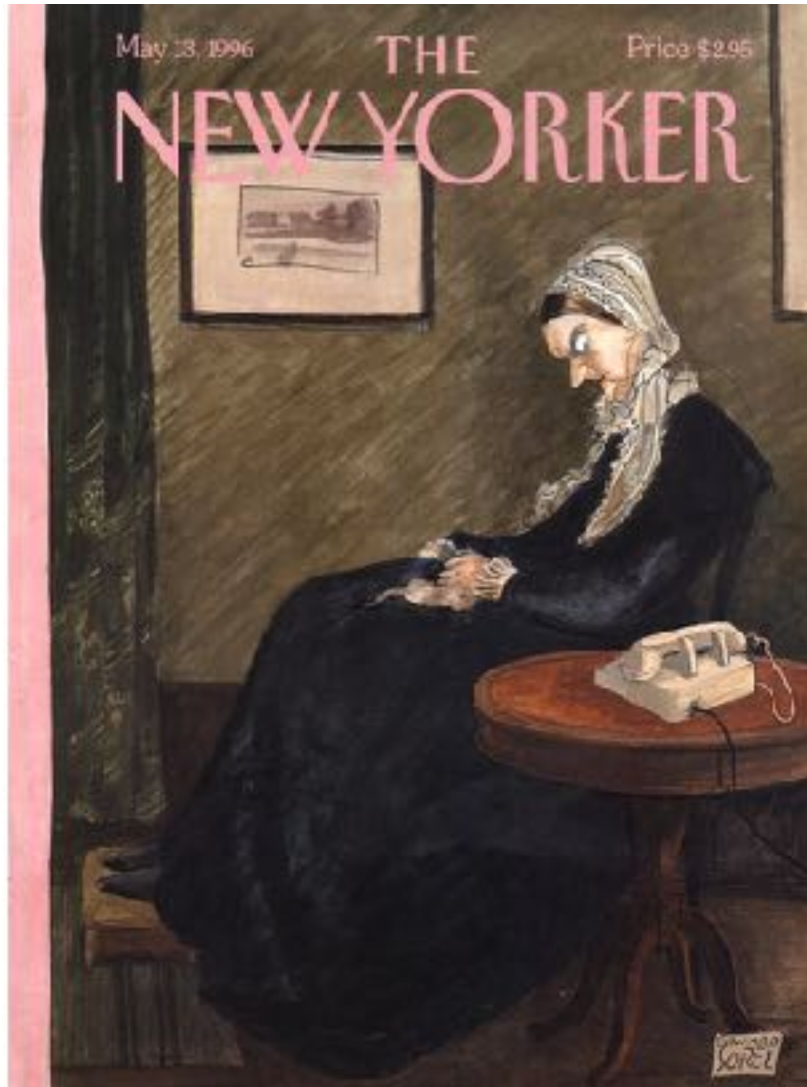


Fig. 506. Edward Sorel, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 13 May, 1996.

Fig. 507. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 31 July, 2006.

Fig. 508. Mike Gruhn, *WebDonuts*, 15 Oct., 2007.

Dave Coverly and Mike Gruhn have taken a third approach to lampooning *Whistler's Mother*, humorously renaming the subject of the portrait. The gag in Coverly's cartoon (**Fig. 507**) relies on an American mother-in-law stereotype, while Gruhn's *WebDounuts* offering (**Fig. 508**) gives us a silly pun.

The Impressionists have not made as much of an impression on American cartoonists as one might have imagined. (If my word-play here is irksome, you will want to skip the next comic strip, **Fig. 509**.)

Fig. 509. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 1 May, 2013.

"I'm Monet. Who the hell is Manet?"

Fig. 510. Jason Adam Katzenstein, *The New Yorker*, 12 Sept., 2016.

Although Éduard Manet's highly influential painting *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) has made guest appearances in the comic world (cf. **Figs. 73**, **438**, **439**, and **654**), of the

French Impressionist who followed him, Claude Monet is one of the only painters who appears with any frequency in American cartoons and comic strips (cf. **Figs**. **34**, **227**, **434**, **437**, **444**, and **450**; for allusions to Edgar Degas, cf. **Figs. 26**, **57**, **439**, **445**, and **459**). And, like the woman in J. A. Katzenstein's cartoon (**Fig. 510**), many Americans would probably confuse him with his predecessor Manet; in addition to the Manet/ Monet word play, Katzenstein's cartoon gives us a parody of a Monet's self portrait as well as a "presentation" of *The Haystacks* hanging above an anachronistically modern bed with two side tables.

Fig. 511. Scott Hilburn, *Close to Home*, 28 Dec., 2010.

"If Monet knew Photoshop, it wouldn't look so blurry."

Fig. 512. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 21 Oct., 2014.

Scott Hilburn (**Fig. 511**) has humorously suggested that Monet's Impressionism was the result of poor eyesight—a joke, as we will see below, that is more often applied to Picasso's Cubism. A Harry Bliss *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 512**) also focuses on the Impressionists' rejection of photographic realism; the target of Bliss' joke, which uses the trope of a mother and child talking in front of a painting in a museum (cf. e.g., **Figs**. **158,** and **223–226**) is not Impressionism itself but, rather, the younger generation's tendency to view art in terms of technology (cf. **Figs. 207–208** , **363**, and **467**).

Ian Falconer's *New Yorker* cover pastiche of *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge* (**Fig. 513**) targets the commercialization of Monet's gardens at Giverny; in a sort of reverse "associative inversion" effect, Falconer's faithful, even loving, rendition of Monet's painting seems more real than the garish, over-weight, merchandized-laden tourists who make us cringe with their crassness.

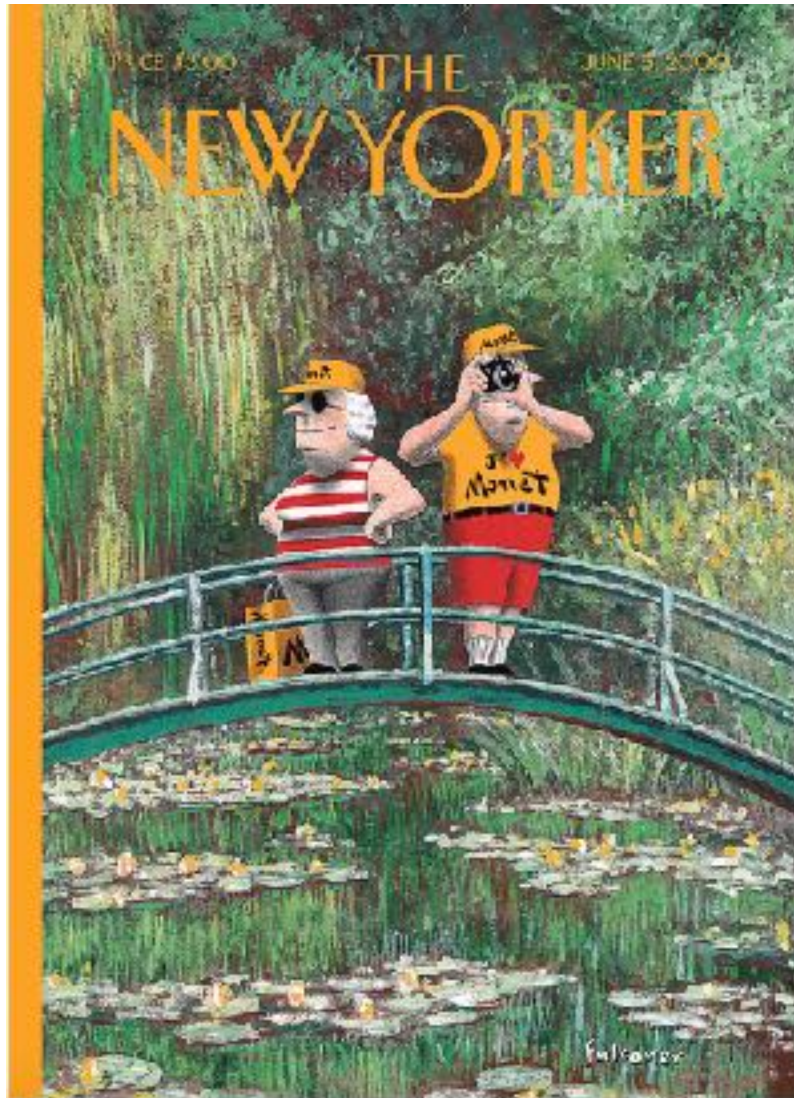


Fig. 513. Ian Falconer, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 5 June, 2000.

"Why don't you paint a picture—it'll last longer!"

Fig. 514. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 24 Sept., 2018.

"Yo, Cézanne, paint faster. I need those grapes for the Madeira sauce."

Fig. 515. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker,* 11 Feb., 2015.

Harry Bliss, the *New Yorker* cartoonist and one of the founders of the Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction, Vermont, seems to have a particular fondness for French Impressionism. Harry Bliss again quoted Monet's *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge* in a 2018 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 514**) that gives us a humorous variation of the urban slang "take a picture, it'll last longer." The off-camera reference to Paul Cézanne in another Bliss cartoon (**Fig. 515**) assumes that readers would be familiar with that Post-Impressionist painter's still lifes; those familiar with Bliss' work would recognize the artist who is presumably painting in Cézanne's style from his 2012 cartoons (cf. **Fig. 342**).

Fig. 516. Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 1986.

Garry Trudeau incorporated a Monet painting in a 1986 series of comic strips about Zonker Harris, the slacker character who won millions of dollars in a lottery but had to spend most of it to save his dissolute Uncle Duke, leaving him with only with the valuable painting. The humor of this Doonesbury series lies in the incongruity of an unfocused hippie owning a great work of art, one that he mistreats by hanging it over the minibar in the pad he shares with his roommate. In the first three panels of one strip in this series (**Fig. 516**), Trudeau focuses in on a cartoon blob of mayonnaise on

the realistically rendered painting, creating a jarring "associative inversion" where viewers temporarily leave the "reality" of the cartoon universe only to be abruptly brought back into it in the final panel. The painting that Trudeau choose for this gag, Monet's 1868 *Fishing Boats, Calm Sea*, is a real work in a private collection, although it serves here merely as a "presentation" of a valuable artwork; there is no symbolism intrinsic to the painting that is "re-presented" as part of the joke, and any work of a notable artist in a private collection would have served Trudeau's purpose just as well.

Fig. 517. Jeff Stahler, *Moderately Confused*, 5 Nov., 2004.

Fig. 518. Marjorie Sarnat, 21 Sept., 2011.

Fig. 519. Mark Anderson, *Andertoons*.

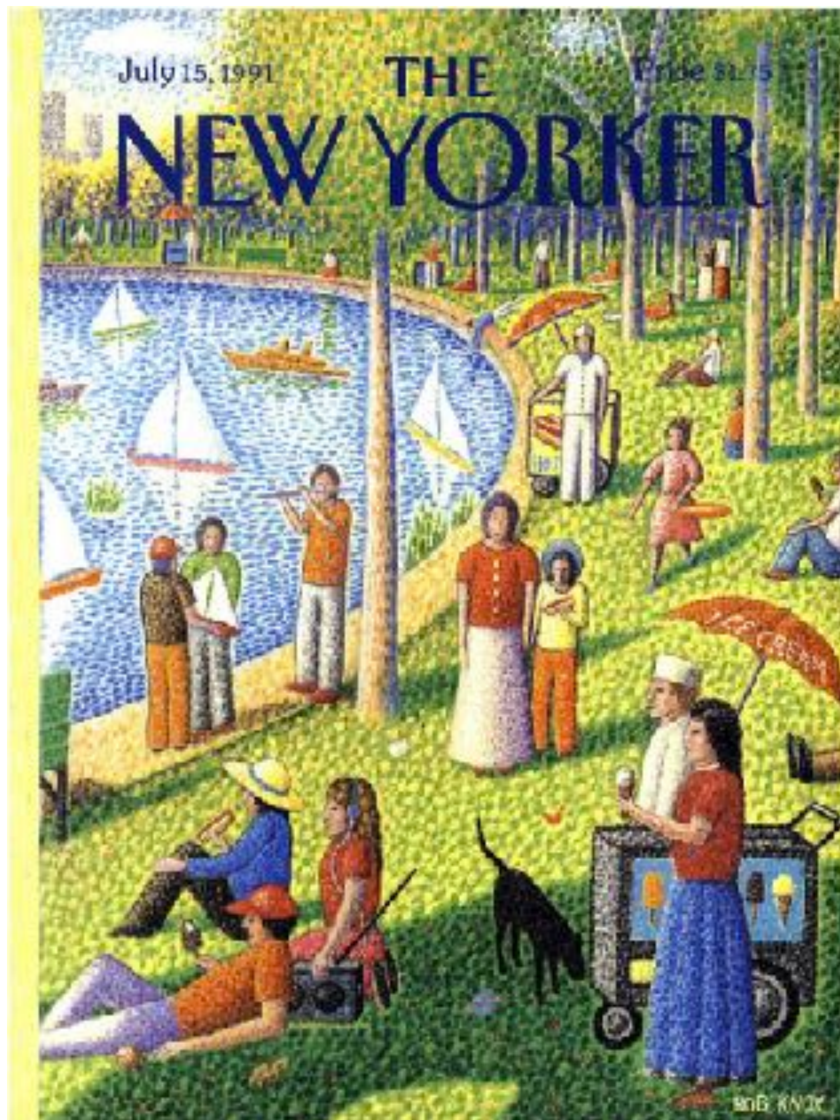


Fig. 520. Bob Knox, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 15 July, 1991.

The Post-Impressionist painter Georges Seurat is relatively underrepresented in the corpus of American humorous cartoons and comic strips. Still, the cartoons by Jeff Stahler (**Fig. 517**) and Marjorie Sarnat (**Fig. 518**) both assume that, to appreciate their jokes, viewers have a "contextually and culturally bound" awareness of Seurat's pointillism. A cartoon by the Chicago-based cartoonist Mark Anderson (**Fig. 519**) gives us a near photographic quotation of Seurat's most famous painting, his 1884 *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*—one of the masterworks in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago; the set-up for this museum-school-trip gag is identical to his cartoon about Monet's *Haystacks* (**Fig. 227**), with the same teacher teacher listening to a silly comment from one of her charges, in this case setting up another youth technology gag. For another one of his summertime-themed *New Yorker* covers (**Fig. 520**), Bob Knox assumes that viewers would recognize the hyper-pointillist parody of *A Sunday Afternoon* as well as to find it amusing that the Parisian bourgeois flaneurers have been transplanted to New York's Central Park where they carry boom-boxes, look at their cell phones, and eat hot dogs and ice cream. (For a similar *New Yorker* gag of art figures incongruously partaking in New York summertime ice cream, cf. **Fig. 460**; for Peter Kuper's pandemic de-populated pastiche of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, cf. **Fig. 80**)).

At the top of his monumental sculptural work *Le Porte de l'Enfer* (*The Gates of Hell*), Auguste Rodin placed a seated, hand-to-chin, brooding figure originally known as "Le Poète," presumably representing Dante looking down on Rodin's vision of the Italian poet's *Inferno*. Although Rodin actively worked on *The Gates of Hell* from 1880 to 1890 and continued to tinker with it until his death in 1917, he never finished the project. He did, however, make larger copies of several works from the group, including "Le Poète," which the foundry men casting the piece renamed *Le Penseur—The Thinker*.

Rodin's *The Thinker* soon entered the popular culture pantheon of immediately recognizable artworks and, like such fellow members of that pantheon as the *Mona Lisa*, *Whistler's Mother*, or Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, it took on a symbolic meaning—in this case, of serious philosophical contemplation. And of course, American cartoonists could not resist humorously "re-presenting" that symbolism.

Fig. 521. L.H. Siggs, *The New Yorker*, 30 Aug., 1952.

Fig. 522. Bunny Hoest and John Reiner, *The Lockhorns*, 2011.

The L.H. Siggs and the Bunny Hoest and John Reiner cartoons (**Figs. 521–522**), for instance, use the same set-up—two women talking about the sculpture in a museum—to deliver the same gag: complaining about their husbands. That these two cartoons are separated in time by nearly 60 years speaks volumes about the conservative nature of American comic humor.

Fig. 523. Greg Walker and Mort Walker, *Beetle Bailey*, 10 June, 2012.

Greg and Mort Walker's 2012 *Beetle Bailey* comic strip (**Fig. 523**) similarly uses *The Thinker* as a humorous prop to poke fun at a different target—here the hapless Beetle. The contrast between the Walkers' flat comic universe and the realistically rendered Rodin evokes an "associative inversion" that adds to our unease in watching a bored Beetle trying to be inspired by the iconic statue.

Fig. 524. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 10 June, 2011.

Rather than being used as a prop, *The Thinker* in Dave Whamond's *Reality Check* (**Fig. 524**) is the protagonist in the rather silly play on words given by Ralph, the squirrel who appears in most of Whamond's cartoons. The question of how the famous statue could have been delivered to a museum in a plain cardboard box and then left unattended on the loading dock is conveniently ignored.

Fig. 525. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker.*

Other American cartoonists have more directly targeted Rodin's sculpture itself, deriving humor by "re-presenting" this symbol of deep philosophical contemplation. Anatol Kovarsky's *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 525**), for instance, turns the table and represents the sculptor as *The Thinker*, a Rodin who is literally facing an artist's block.

Fig. 526. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 28 Feb., 2006.

Fig. 527. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 7 Nov., 2006.

Tom Thaves has twice gone to the what-is-*The Thinker*-thinking comic well for his *Frank and Ernest* gags. Thaves' February 2006 gag (**Fig. 526**) gives us a partially animated *Thinker* and a sculptural version of Botticelli *Venus* who is, again, more modestly depicted than she is in the original Renaissance painting. (We might note that this Thaves' cartoon about museum statues coming to life after closing time was published before 20th-Century Fox's movie *Night at the Museum* opened in December, 2006.) The joke in his November 2006 cartoon (**Fig. 527**) would have been more readily apparent to viewers accustomed to long download times on their 3G networks than we are today.

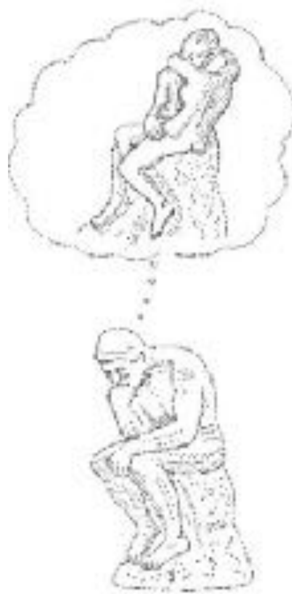


Fig. 528. Bob Mankoff, "Cartoon Desk: Inking and Thinking," *The New Yorker*, 16 June, 2010.

The stereotype (or perhaps truism?) that men only have sex on their minds is also used by Bob Mankoff in his 2010 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 528**). In his "Cartoon Desk" article, Mankoff—the cartoon editor of the *New Yorker* from 1997 to 2017—advises cartoonists who want to submit their work to his magazine that they should think before they ink. Presumably, Mankoff assumes viewers would recognize Rodin's *The Kiss* in *The Thinker*'s thought bubble; it is less clear if viewers are expected to know that *Le Baiser* had also originally been part of Rodin's *Gates of Hell*, where it represented the beginning of the damnation of Paolo and Francesca di Rimini. Having this extra background knowledge could, in fact, be confusing, as we might wonder if Mankoff's Thinker is thinking about matters amorous or if he is contemplating theological issues of damnation.

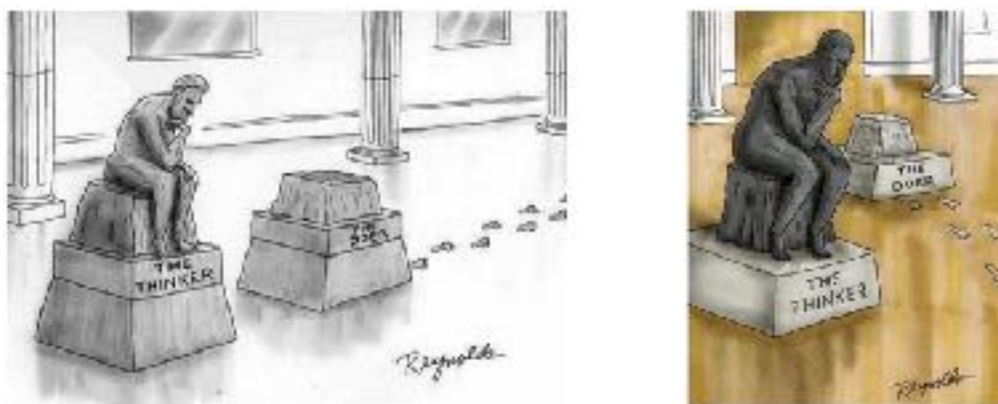


Fig. 529. Two versions of a Dan Reynolds cartoon, 2012.

Dan Reynolds, an American greeting-card artist and cartoonist for the *Reader's Digest*, also used the trope of a statue coming to life for his verbal/visual Thinker gag (**Fig. 529**). The cartoon version (on left) is much easier to decipher than is Reynold's greeting-card version (on right). The cartoon version also conforms to the way social semioticians describe visual communication in the Western world, with the "given" on the left and the "new" on the right; thus the "new" Doer in the cartoon version has walked away from the Thinker, while in the greeting-card version he has confusingly circled back towards us.

Writing in his diary, the Norwegian Expressionist artist Edvard Munch described the inspiration for his iconic 1893 painting he entitled *Skirk* (*Shriek*) in Norwegian and *Der Schrei der Natur* (*The Scream of Nature*) in German:

> suddenly the sky turned a bloody red. I stopped, leaned against the railing, tired to death – as the flaming skies hung like blood and sword over the blue-black fjord and the city… I stood there trembling with anxiety – and I felt a vast infinite scream through nature.

In other words, the figure in the painting we commonly just call *The Scream* is not screaming, but rather reacting to the scream of nature he hears around him. As Scott McCloud noted (**Fig. 530**), something scary was going on in the years leading up to World War I, a breakdown in cultural certainties requiring a new visual vocabulary for expressing emotions. And Munch's Expressionist vision of this uncertainty has resonated down the decades to become a universally recognized symbol of anxiety and horror. There is even a FACE SCREAMING IN FEAR emoji (unicode U+1F631)!

And, of course, cartoonists and comic-strip artists have made ample use of this symbol, "re-presenting" it more often than almost any other iconic work of art (cf. **Figs. 74**– **75. 190**, **432**, **438**, **449**, **459**, **461**, and **464**).

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Fig. 530. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1993. p. 122.

Fig. 531. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 17 April, 2000.

Fig. 532. John McPherson, *Close to Home*, 25 Sept, 2014.

Fig. 533. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, *Wumo*, 19 Jan., 2014.

One way American cartoonists have utilized *The Scream* is to quote it in a humorous museum setting, like Daniel Beyer's art-theft cartoon, **Fig. 190**. John McPherson's 2000 *Closer to Home* cartoon (**Fig. 531**) belongs to the class of comic spoofs of museum innovations we examined in the "Comic Art in Museums" essay above; the "surround sound" here perpetuates the mistaken belief that the figure in the painting is screaming. The humorous incongruity in McPherson's later 2014 cartoon (**Fig. 532**) comes when we wonder what *The Scream* figure looked like before the creepy museum visitor flashed him. The Wulff and Morgenthaler cartoon (**Fig. 533**) gives us a silly parody of the painting.

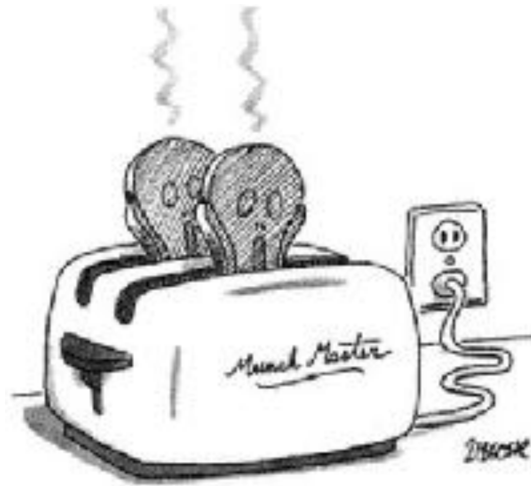


Fig. 534. Jack Ziegler, *The New Yorker*, 12 Dec., 1994.

Fig. 535. Harry Bliss, 4 May, 2012.

Fig. 536. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 19 April, 2018.

Fig. 537. Paul Trap, *Thatababy*, 21 June, 2015.

Fig. 538. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 26 Aug., 2012.

Another tactic American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have taken is to "re-present" *The Scream* in the setting of a typical American home: Jack Ziegler (**Fig. 534**) gives us screaming toast; Harry Bliss (**Fig. 535**) a distraught mother; Mark Parisi (**Fig. 536**) a print over a sofa; Paul Trap (**Fig. 537**) a baby in a highchair; and Lincoln Peirce (**Fig. 538**) an expression of the angst a schoolchild feels at the end of vacation.

Fig. 539. Dan Reynolds, 2009.

Fig. 540. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 11 Nov., 1997.

Fig. 541. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 14 June, 2016.

Yet another way American cartoonists have domesticated the Norwegian painting is to connect it to the ditty "I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream," which entered American popular culture from a 1920's novelty song (**Figs. 539–541**). The obviousness of such a connection would argue against plagiarism on the part of Dave Coverly (**Fig. 541**), whose cartoon gag of discovering an ice cream truck in the painting during a museum examination so closely mirrors the joke Dave Whamond had made almost twenty years earlier (**Fig. 540**).

Fig. 542. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 5 May, 2014.

Fig. 543. Harry Bliss, 18 Nov., 2017.

Harry Bliss, who lives in Vermont, has taken *The Scream* into the woods (**Figs. 542–543**), startling the man with the chainsaw and the man walking his dog at fall foliage time. One would like to think that Munch would have approved of Bliss'

screaming log and screaming leaf comic parodies, given that our current climate-change crisis is *The Scream of Nature* for the 21st century.

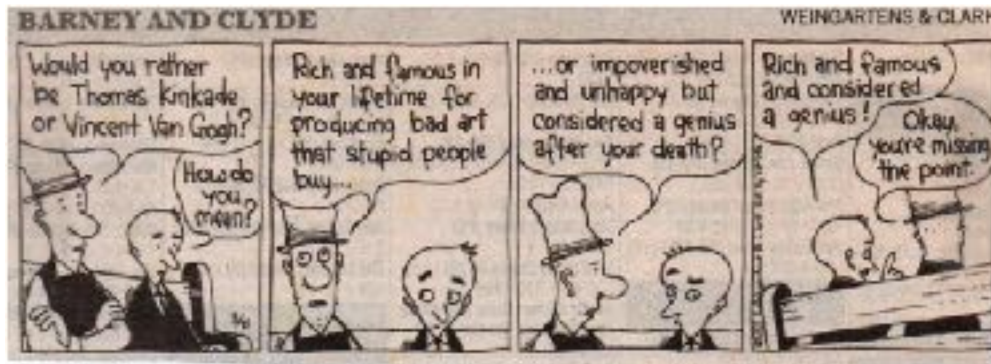


Fig. 544. Weingartens & Clark, *Barney and Clyde*. 21 March, 2011.

Fig. 545. Jim Davis, *Garfield*, 8 Jan., 1998.

As everyone knows, Vincent van Gogh cut off his ear.

In fact, judging by the corpus of American cartoons about Van Gogh, that is almost the only thing people know about the Dutch Expressionist painter. And even then many people mistakenly believe that Van Gogh mutilated his ear for a woman. (Although there is some uncertainty about the circumstances that led Van Gogh to cut off his left ear and deliver it to a prostitute in an Arles brothel, it is clear that he did so in a psychotic episode brought on by his conflicts with fellow artist Paul Gauguin and not out of unrequited love.)

Fig. 546. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 24 March, 2012.

Fig. 547. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 29 April, 2016.

Fig. 548. Ben Zaehringer, *Berkeley Mews*, 30 Nov., 2014.

Fig. 549. Harry Bliss, 11 Aug., 2012.

The fascination that American cartoonists have with Van Gogh's ear takes many forms (cf. **Figs. 334**, **428**, **430**, **434–435**, and **447–8**). Scott Hilburn comically suggests that the mutilation was the result of a verbal misunderstanding, whether in an anachronistically modern piano bar or fitness gym (**Figs. 546–547**). Ben Zaehringer jokes that it was to correct a mistake in one of his self portraits (**Fig. 548**). Harry Bliss hypothesizes that Van Gogh lost his ear when painting *Wheatfield with Crows* (**Fig. 549**)—an gag that blithely ignores the fact that this 1890 work, one of the last Van Gogh ever painted, was made in Auvers-sur-Oise two years after Van Gogh lost his ear in Arles.

Fig. 550. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, *Sweater*, 27 Oct., 2009.

Fig. 551. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle* 17 April, 2013.

Fig. 552. Leigh Rubin, *Rubes*, 2007.

Other cartoonists have found humor in Van Gogh's self-mutilation by projecting him into a modern American relationship. Dave Coverly puts the painter on a park bench with a woman in a contemporary blouse and skirt (**Fig. 550**); we might snidely note that Coverly erroneously shows Van Gogh with a bandaged right, not a left, ear. Scott Hilburn, who seems compelled to return to the Van-Gogh-ear trope every few years, puts the artist on a sofa with a TV remote in his hand (**Fig. 551**). In contrast to the misogynous stereotypes of the nagging or irritatingly chatty women Coverly and Hilburn use in their cartoons, Leigh Rubin's Van-Gogh-ear gag gives us a stereotypical

maternal figure with hair up in a bun (**Fig. 552**); note, again, the bandage on the wrong side of Van Gogh's head.

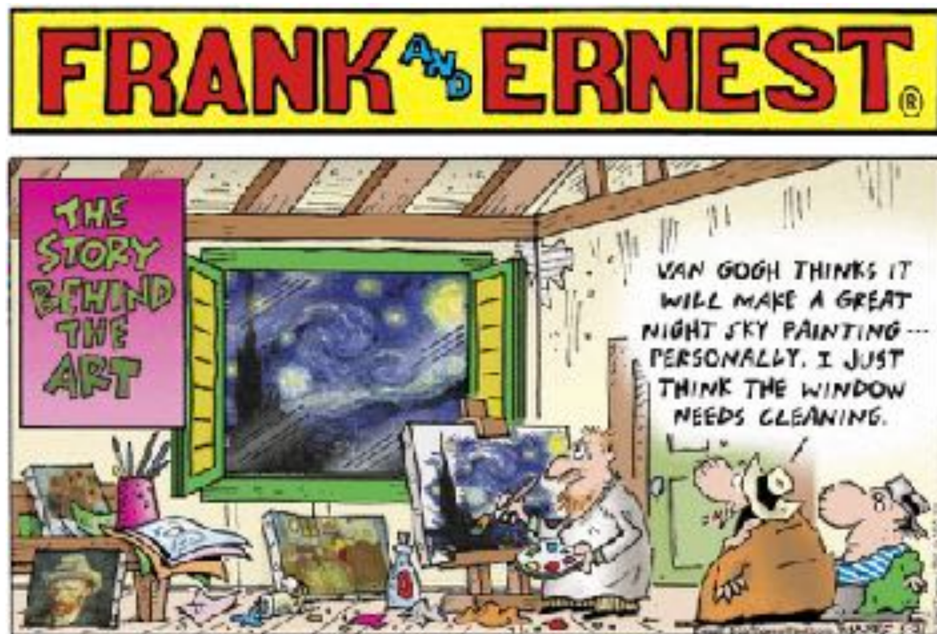


Fig. 553. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 21 May, 2006.

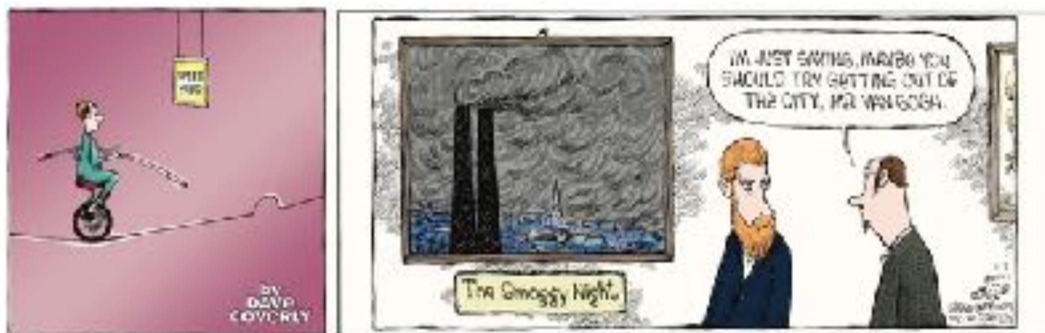


Fig. 554. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 9 July, 2017.

Fig. 555. Doug Savage, *Savage Chickens*, 17 October, 2013.

To be sure, American cartoonists and comic-strip artists on occasion have made reference to Van Gogh paintings, though for the most part these quotations are "representations" and not "re-presentations" humorously exploiting what the paintings are taken to symbolize. This is the case with the pastiches and parodies we have seen of cartoon allusions to Van Gogh's self portraits (**Figs. 28**, **33–35**, **38**, **41**, **46**, **56**, **59**, **64**, **66**, **198** and **450**), his *Irises* (**Fig. 447**), his *Sunflowers* (**Fig. 442** and **447**), his *Bedroom in Arles* (**Fig. 68**), and his *Starry Night* (**Figs. 433**, **437,** and **462**). Tom Thaves' and Dave Coverly's *Starry Night* parodies (**Figs. 553–554**) similarly make no direct allusion to the tortured anguish we attribute to Van Gogh's most famous work, painted when the artist was committed to a mental asylum in Saint-Rémy; instead, assuming that the viewer knows the painting, these cartoonists give us gags about smudged windows and urban smog. The Canadian webcomic artist Doug Savage uses *Starry Night* in a metafictional comic about plagiarism (**Fig. 555**), with Timmy the Tasteless Tofu's statement "Stealing is the new creativity" applying both to his forgery as well as to Savage's own expropriation of the Van Gogh painting; this gag, again, would not work if the viewer did not immediately recognize the painting.

Ruben Bolling (Ken Fisher) has taken the "humorous uchronía" temporal anomaly to the nth degree in imagining Vincent going to Facebook and Twitter to hype his paintings (**Fig. 556**). Bolling has Van Gogh use his 1889 *Self-Portrait* (Musée d'Orsay) for his Facebook profile picture and his 1887 version (The Art Institute of Chicago) for his Twitter account, cleverly adding Van Gogh's 1888 *Portrait of Eugène Boch* (Musée d'Orsay) for the profile picture of his wealthy Belgian friend and patron. Bolling's comic-strip vignettes that sandwich the imagined Facebook and Twitter postings likewise dispense with historical accuracy: Van Gogh was not living in Arles at the time of his death; Van Gogh's brother Theo did not find him in a field with a revolver next to him (and there is considerable controversy whether Van Gogh actually attempted suicide by shooting himself in the stomach or whether this was an accidental homicide); and he was never considered an Impressionist painter.

Fig. 556. Ruben Bolling (Ken Fisher), *Tom the Dancing Bug*, 2009 (republished 15 Nov., 2012).

Fig. 557. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 13 Oct., 2006.

Fig. 558. Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry, *Brevity*, 26 Nov., 2006.

The humor in a *Brevity* cartoon (**Fig. 557**) comes from *not* showing us a Van Gogh painting. Seeing the blank canvas where a Van Gogh used to be makes us cringe, and we wonder how long the amazingly patient father will remain dumbfounded by what his son has done. A month after this Guy Endore-Kaiser and Rodd Perry cartoon appeared, the pair turned the tables on their gag (**Fig. 558**), this time targeting the hapless painter of the "worthless" painting. Although a copy of the Declaration of Independence was in fact discovered in 1991 by a man who bought a painting at a flea market for its frame, these *Brevity* jokes depend on the urban legend that valuable paintings can be found underneath worthless ones, a myth promulgated in part by museum conservators using X-ray fluorescence to find pentimenti and re-used canvases.

As the above "Armory Show" essay demonstrated—in perhaps too much excruciating detail—American newspapers and magazines exploded with cartoon parodies of the radical art in that 1913 exhibition. While these parodies established the visual frameworks cartoonists would use to make fun of modern art for the next century—a topic we will explore in the next section of this essay—it is curious to note that in subsequent decades only a few of the many artists parodied in those cartoons continued to attract the attention of American cartoonists and comic-strip artists. The *avant-garde* art of Constantin Brancusi, Francis Picabia, Alexander Archipenko, or John Marin, which

was lampooned so extensively in that initial 1913 explosion of cartoon parodies, quickly faded from the American funny pages soon thereafter.

Fig. 559. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 3 Nov., 1993.

Fig. 560. Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 23 Sept., 2013.

And one of the artworks most frequently parodied in 1913, Marcel Duchamp's *Nu Descendant un Escalier*, has only occasionally been quoted by more recent American cartoonists, although when they do they assume their American viewers would immediately recognize the reference. And unlike the hostility heaped on Duchamp's painting in 1913— Alex Sass said it "resembled a fearful explosion in a lumber yard" (**Fig. 96**)—these modern allusions to *Nude Descending a Staircase* treat the work with humorous respect. Little Calvin's clever reenactment in Bill Watterson's comic strip (**Fig. 559**), for example, amuses us, if not his stern-faced mother; part of the humor in this gag comes from our filling in the narrative ellipse in the gutter between the last two panels, as we imagine what happened before the boy ended up in the bathtub talking to his now animated stuffed tiger. Harry Bliss' *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 560**)

transforms Duchamp's painting into a "humorous uchronía" parody of modern American married life. Likewise, we smile at the Dadaist absurdity of the gag in Bill Griffith's Christmas *Zippy* comic strip (**Fig. 561**), feeling smug that we get the allusion in Zebrina's question; that Griffith chose to depict Duchamp more realistically than his pinhead character elicits a curious "associative inversion" where the appearance of the dead French artist in this comic takes on a rather creepy aspect.

Fig. 561. Bill Griffith, *Zippy*, 25 Dec., 2003.

Fig. 562. Bill Griffith, "Cartoonist Descending a Staircase," 2003.

In his 2011 book *Lost and Found*, Bill Griffith recalls that when he was a 19-year-old art student he met Marcel Duchamp at a retrospective exhibition of that artist's works held at the Rose Fried Gallery in Manhattan in 1963, an event Griffith memorialized in a 2003 comic strip (**Fig. 562**). The borderless panel at the top center of this strip, which interrupts the left-to-right flow of the comic, gives us a parody of *Nude Descending a Staircase* with a partially clothed Zippy the Pinhead; to this, Griffith has added an echo of the staircase motif in the central panel of the bottom row.

Griffith reproduced this cartoon in a 2016 interview he gave to *Comics Kingdom* where he discussed how he felt when his own comic strips were on display in a 2013 Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art festival held in the same venue as the 1913 Armory Show:

> As an art student in New York in 1963, I was a huge fan of Duchamp and his Dada spirit. I read about the famous Armory show and vowed that, one day, I would also set the established art scene back on its heels with my unorthodox genius. . . .
>
> Flash forward 100 years [*sic*] [to] the MOCCA festival of comic art . . . As I walked into the show, it hit me—my work was hanging in the same spot that once outraged the staid American art world 100 years before. Things had come full circle for me.
>
> Only one problem—no one was shocked or outraged at my stuff. They just laughed. Oh, well, I'll keep trying.

Here is another example of the dichotomy between "highbrow" fine arts and "lowbrow" comics art. Contemporary, "serious" art can shock us—think Andres Serrano's 1987 *Immersion (Piss Christ)* photograph or Chris Ofili's 1999 elephant-dung mixed media painting *The Holy Virgin of Mary*. On the other hand, "childish" comics art—even Bill Griffith's often bizarrely surreal offerings—is at best merely entertaining.

Dance (I), 1909. Oil on canvas, 260 X 391 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Dance, 1910. Oil on canvas, 260 X 391 cm. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

Fig. 563. Henri Matisse, *Dance (I)* and *Dance*.

Another of the Armory Show *avant garde* artists whose work has continued to be parodied is Henri Matisse, whose painting *Dance* has become a cartoon cliché used for a variety of humorous purposed by American cartoonists. Painted as a commission for the Russian businessman and art collector Sergey Shchukin, Matisse created two versions of the *Dance* (**Fig. 563**), and, in an example of visual "intertextuality," Matisse included the preliminary version in the background to his 1912 *Nasturtiums with the Painting 'Dance I'* , which was displayed in the 1913 Armory Show (**Fig. 101**). Playing on that Matissean "intertextuality," Roy Lichtenstein parodied Matisse by putting the *Dance* into the background of two of his cartoon-inspired Pop Art creations (**Figs. 564** and **565**).

Fig. 564. Roy Lichtenstein, *Artist Studio "The Dance"*, 1974. Oil on canvas, 2.44 X 3.26 m. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Fig. 565. Roy Lichtenstein, *Tintin Reading*, 1994. Lithograph.

Fig. 566. Henri Matisse, *The Dessert: Harmony in Red*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 1.8 X 2.2 m. Hermitage Museum.

Fig. 567. Larry Rivers, *Déjà vu and the Red Room: Double Portrait of Matisse*, 1996.

In a similar fashion, the Pop Art artist Larry Rivers has co-opted another Matisse commission for Shchukin, the Fauvist *The Dessert: Harmony in Red* (**Fig. 566**). Rivers' version (**Fig. 567**) replaces the landscape in the window of the Matisse original with yet another quotation of the *Dance*; Rivers also inserted a portrait of Matisse behind the maid, whose profile, Rivers seems to be suggesting, is eerily similar to that of Matisse.

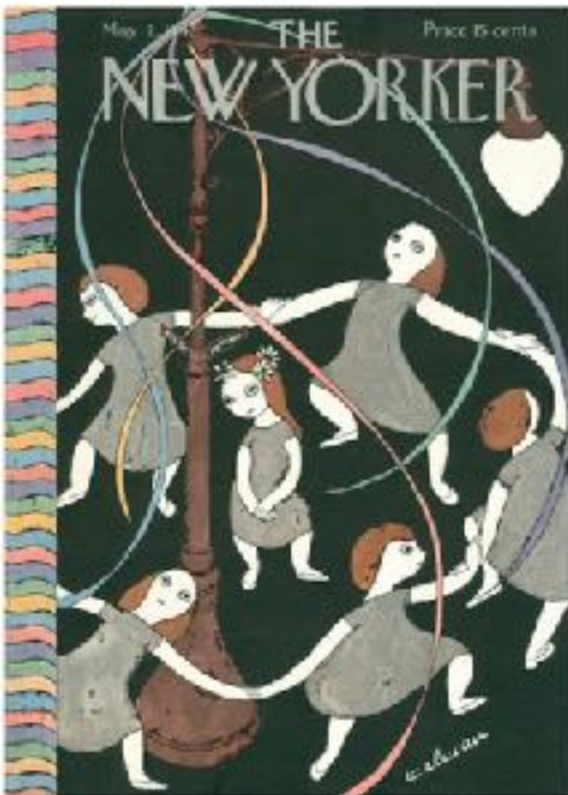


Fig. 568. Christina Malman, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 2 May, 1942.

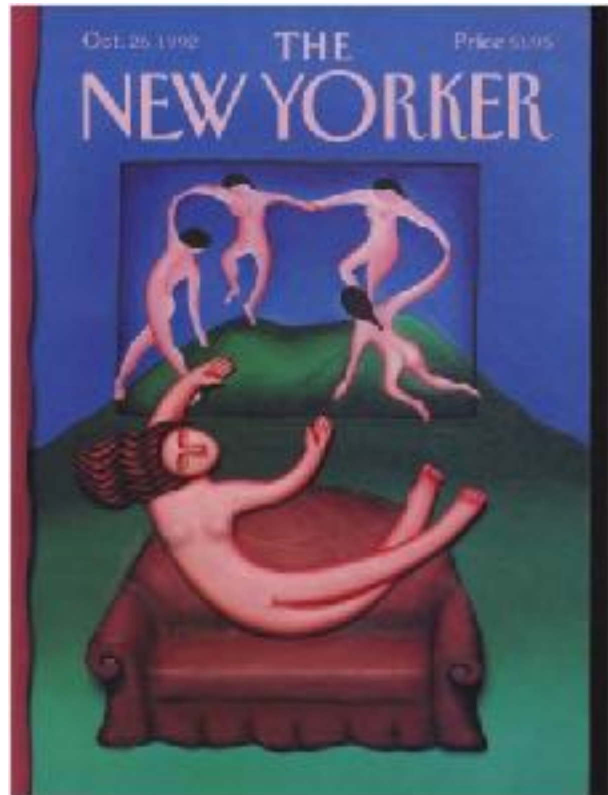


Fig. 569. Andrea Arroyo, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 26 Oct., 1992.

In 1942, the painter and *New Yorker* illustrator Christina Malman alluded to Matisse's *Dance* in a maypole dance cover, transforming the wild, nude, maenads of the original into cherubic, clothed, young girls (**Fig. 568**). A half-century later, the New York artist Andrea Arroyo parodied *Dance I* (**Fig. 569**) with a joke that one of the dancers has flown out of the canvas and onto a couch; although Arroyo assumes that her viewers would have the "culturally bound background knowledge" to appreciate her Matisse allusion, her joke, however, depends on her audience *not* knowing the Matisse original too well, as the woman who popped out of her cartoon version of the painting had not been between the two women whose hands were slipping apart in the original painting.

[We have noted that the *New Yorker* cartoonist David Sipress used a "socially distancing" version of the *Dance* in an April, 2020, COVID-19 pandemic joke (cf. **Fig. 82**).]

If Marcel Duchamp and Henri Matisse were frequently parodied in the American press in 1913 and only occasionally comically quoted thereafter, the *avant-garde* art of Pablo Picasso received only passing attention at the time of the Armory Show (cf. **Fig. 90**) but has become a mainstay target of American cartoons and comic strips ever since (cf., e.g., **Figs. 20**, **172**, **219**, **277**, **356**, **429**, **430**, **432**, **442**, **444**, and **461**; for parodies of Picasso in advertising, cf. Sofi Siente, 26 May, 2014).

Fig. 570. Wiley Miller, *Non Sequitur*, 6 Feb., 1995.

Fig. 571. *TubeyToons,* 13 March, 2015.

Fig. 572. Brian and Ron Boychuk, *Chuckle Bros*, 8 Nov., 2016.

American cartoonists ignore all of Picasso's artistic *oeuvre* other than his Cubist paintings and use a single stereotype of his art: a parody of a face with scrambled features. We see this in Wiley Miller's 1995 cartoon (**Fig. 570**), where the odd perspective of the viewer looking down on the scene from above adds a disquieting feeling as one tries to decipher which is the men's room and which the women's. Similarly, the webcomic TubeyToons uses the "scrambled-face" Picasso stereotype in a silly gag about the cubist painter trying his hand as a criminal sketch artist (**Fig. 571**). The Boychuk brother's cartoon (**Fig. 572**) uses the "scrambled-face" stereotype with a verbal gag that assumes viewers recognize the allusion to the safety warning "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear" engraved on automobile side mirrors.

Fig. 573. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 4 April, 1997.

Fig. 574. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 30 July, 2016.

Fig. 575. Jim Davis, *Garfield*, 3 March, 1983

A corollary to the cartoon Picasso stereotype is the comic supposition that the Spanish artist painted people with eyes on either side of their head because he himself had poor eyesight—a variation of a joke we have already seen applied to Monet (**Fig. 511**). Dan Piraro and Scott Hilburn use this supposition in their cartoon versions of Picasso going to the eye doctor (**Figs. 573–574**). Jim Davis blames Picasso's rose-colored glasses (**Fig. 575**). The gag in Mark Parisi's cartoon (**Fig. 576**) gives an alternative, pugilistic, explanation of Picasso's cubism.

Fig. 576. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 1 March., 2007.

While most American cartoon and comic-strip gags about Pablo Picasso are based on this generalized "scrambled-face" stereotype, some do refer to specific paintings, such as Robert Sikoryak's Team Cul de Sac homage quotation of *The Three Musicians* (**Fig. 277**). These quotations of Picasso artwork, however, are "presentations" rather than humorous "re-presentations" of cultural assumptions about the underlying symbolism in those works. Mark Tatulli's *Liō* strip (**Fig. 577**), for example, quotes Picasso's 1937 *Guernica*, but the title character's incongruously riding out of a museum on the gored horse does not allude to the anti-fascist message of Picasso's famous painting; it is simply one of the strange acts of Liō, whom Tatulli describes as a "weird little boy."

Fig. 577. Mark Tatulli, *Liō*, 26 Aug., 2009.

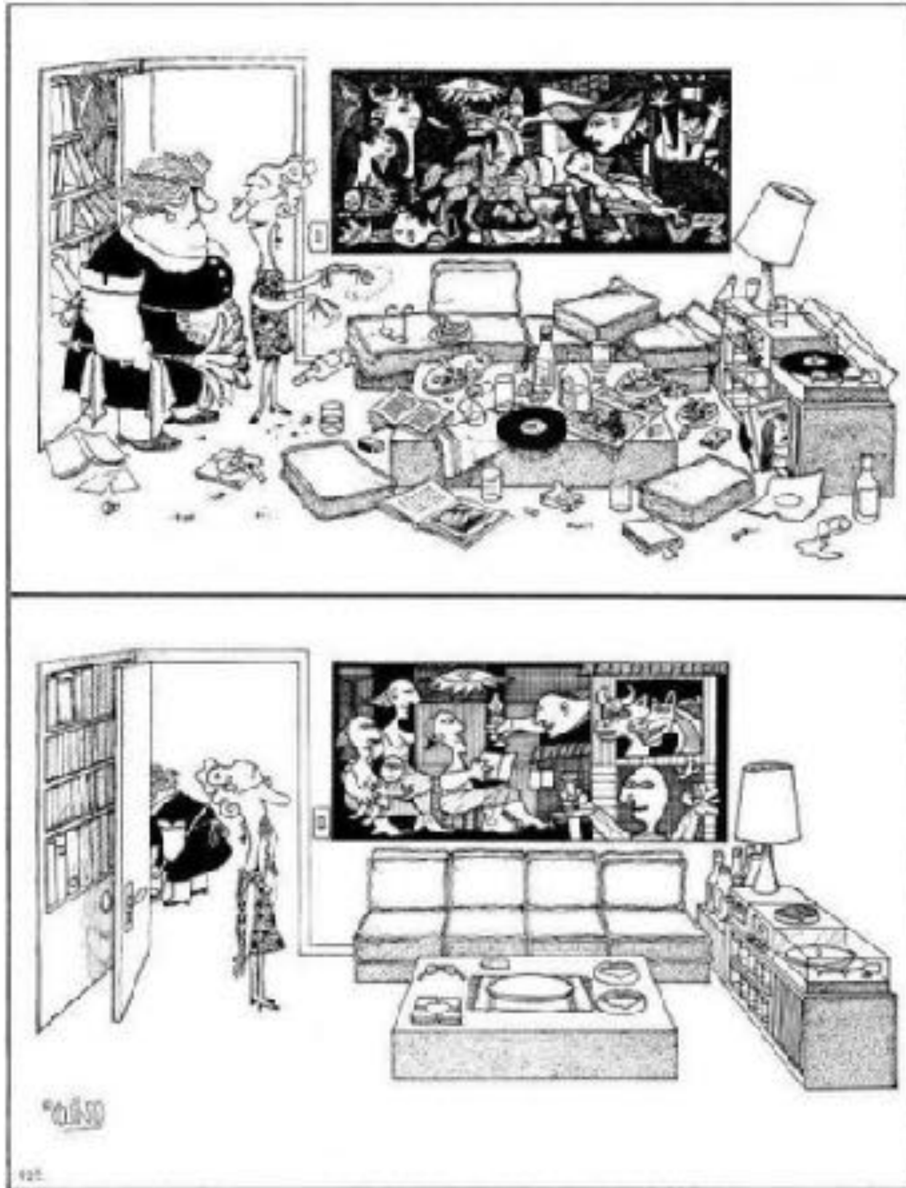


Fig. 578. Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado Tejón).

[Although including a work by the famous Argentinian cartoonist Quino is going outside of the boundaries of these essays on American funny pages, I can't resist. Quino's *Guernica* gag (**Fig. 578**) similarly is a "presentation," making no allusion to the anti-war message in Picasso's painting. Quino's quotation does, however, speak to class warfare: the cleaning woman doesn't see any difference between the after-party chaos in the bourgeois household and the chaos in the fancy art they have hanging on their wall; her job is simply to clean up the messes of the wealthy.]

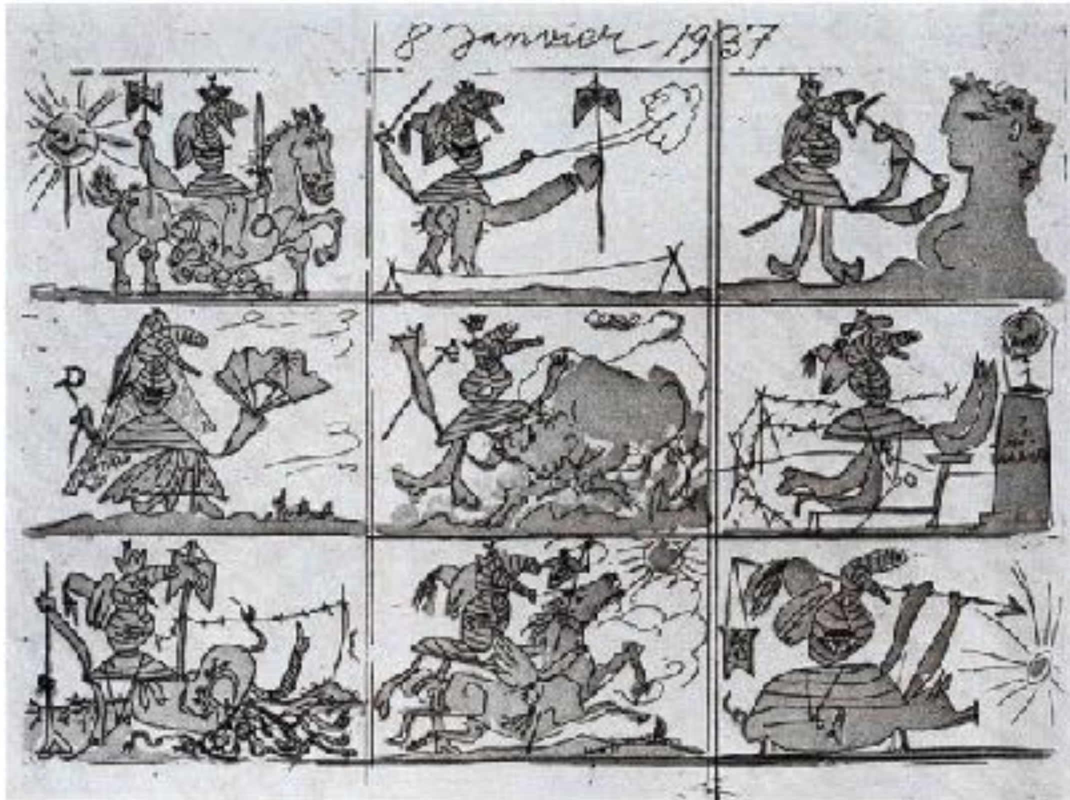


Fig. 579. Pablo Picasso, *Sueño y mentira de Franco* (*The Dream and Lie of Franco*), 1937. Etching and aquatint on paper, 31.2 x 40.0 cm. Sheet 1; Series of 150.

[And as long as I am breaking boundaries, I might as well add a comment about Pablo Picasso's own foray into comic-strip art. In January, 1937, Picasso, who had been living in Paris for decades, was commissioned to create a work of art for the Spanish pavilion at that year's Paris World's Fair. In preparation for this commission he made two prints (**Fig. 579**) to be sold to support the Spanish Republican government in its civil war against Franco's Nationalist forces. Laid out as rows of comic-strip panels to be read from left to right, these decidedly unfunny *grotesqueries* of the Generalissimo demonstrate Picasso's understanding of comic-strip sequential narration—something that he likely learned from American newspaper comics like George Herriman's K*razy Kat* that Gertrude Stein would pass on to him. In April of that year, after Hitler's and Mussolini's airplanes aided Franco by bombing the Basque town of Guernica, Picasso incorporated some of the imagery from these prints into his iconic *Guernica* painting.]

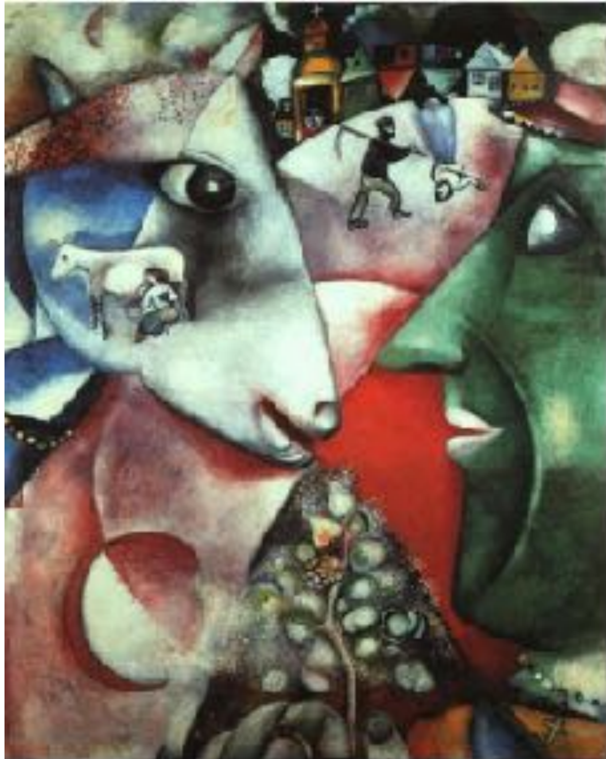


Fig. 580. Marc Chagall, *The Village and I*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 192 X 151 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

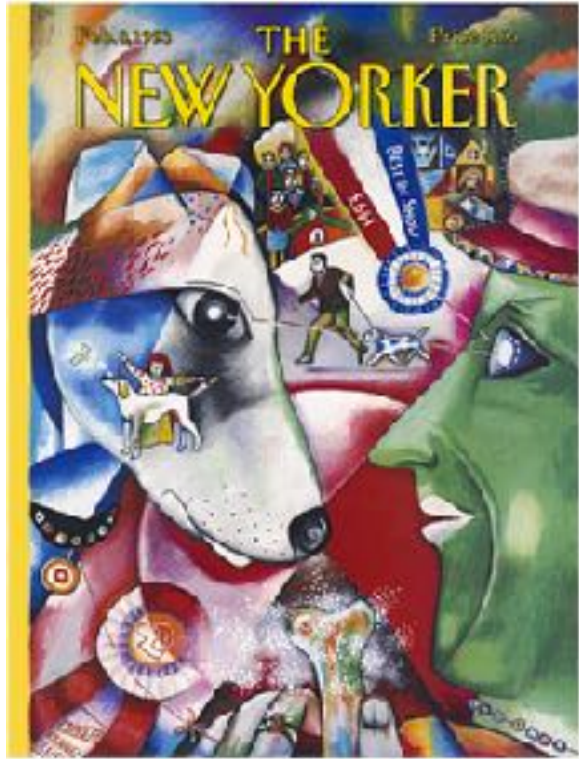


Fig. 581. Bob Knox, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 8 Feb., 1993.

It seems as if the Picasso "scrambled-face" cliché has sucked up all of the oxygen in the American cartoon universe of Cubist parodies, and one would look in vain for any allusions to the work of Georges Braque or to other Cubist-inspired modernist artists. One rare exception is Bob Knox's 1993 *New Yorker* cover takeoff (**Fig. 581**) of the Russian-French Jewish artist Marc Chagall's *The Village and I* painting (**Fig. 580**). Timed for the annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show held in NYC every February, Knox's cover replaces Chagall's cow thinking about being milked and the man offering it a flower for a dog thinking about being shown in the ring and a man offering it a bone. Clearly Knox expected that his *New Yorker* magazine audience would recognize his quotation of Chagall, although it is not clear if he expected that anyone would take the time to make a close comparison in order to catch all of his humorous modifications of the original.

Just as American cartoonists use the "scrambled-face" stereotype to represent Picasso's art, so too do they employ "crazy-quilt" architecture to stereotype the output of the Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher (cf. **Fig. 424**). Unlike Picasso, however, Escher was largely ignored by the art establishment until late in his life, and while his mathematically inspired woodcut and lithograph optical illusions were appreciated by the general public, they did not draw the attention of "fine" art dealers and museum curators—and of American cartoonists—until the later 20th century.

Fig. 582. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 24 Dec., 2017.

Escher and Picasso traveled in different artistic circles and certainly never sat down for a meal together as Dan Piraro humorously imagined in a 2017 cartoon which combines the "scrambled-face" and "crazy-quilt" architecture stereotypes, to which Piraro added his secret symbols—a "Bunny of Exuberance," incongruously emerging from the floor and a "Dynamite of Unintended Consequences" under the chair in the corner (**Fig. 582**). And were Escher and Picasso ever to have dined together, they would no doubt have applauded rather than argued about each other's experiments in representing reality from multiple perspectives; they might, however, had had serious disagreements about the very nature of art, with the Dutchman maintaining that it involves the creation of arresting images and the Spaniard insisting that art should express human emotions.

Fig. 583. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 30 May, 1997.

Fig. 584. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 24 Feb., 2013.

Over the course of his thirty plus years of drawing the *Bizarro* cartoon, Dan Piraro has come back to Escher time and time again, no doubt because the bizarreness of Escher's lithographs meshes so well with Piraro's own zany sense of humor. An early *Bizarro* cartoon (**Fig. 583**)—made before Piraro began to insert "secret symbols" into

his work—gives us a house with rooms projecting out at different perspectives from a single three-dimensional grid pattern; while not as sophisticated as the complex geometries of Escher's optical illusions, Piraro's technique does convey the confusion of "crazy-quilt" architecture. While Escher, who died in 1972, may have had a telephone like the one depicted in this cartoon, his wife would never have used the colloquial Americanism of the joke's punch line. For his 2013 Escher cartoon (**Fig. 584**), Piraro takes the absurdity one step further with his gravity-defying cowboys in an otherwise naturalistic setting; why the speech bubble is not upside down as well is conveniently side-stepped.

Fig. 585. Robert Leighon, *The New Yorker*, 4 Feb., 2013.

M.C. Escher was not trained in mathematics and he mostly relied on his visual intuition to play with creating illusions of three-dimensional space on two-dimensional sheets of paper. In the late 1950's, however, Escher was in contact with the British mathematician Roger Penrose and realized that some of his lithographs were based on the Penrose triangle—an "impossible tribar" that can be represented in a two-dimensional perspective drawing but that cannot exist in three dimensional space. Robert Leighon's *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 585**) cleverly uses this Penrose triangle in a gag that assumes viewers associate it with Escher; given the impossibility of such a configuration of steel girders in real life, we are not particularly concerned that the workers are not wearing safety harnesses.

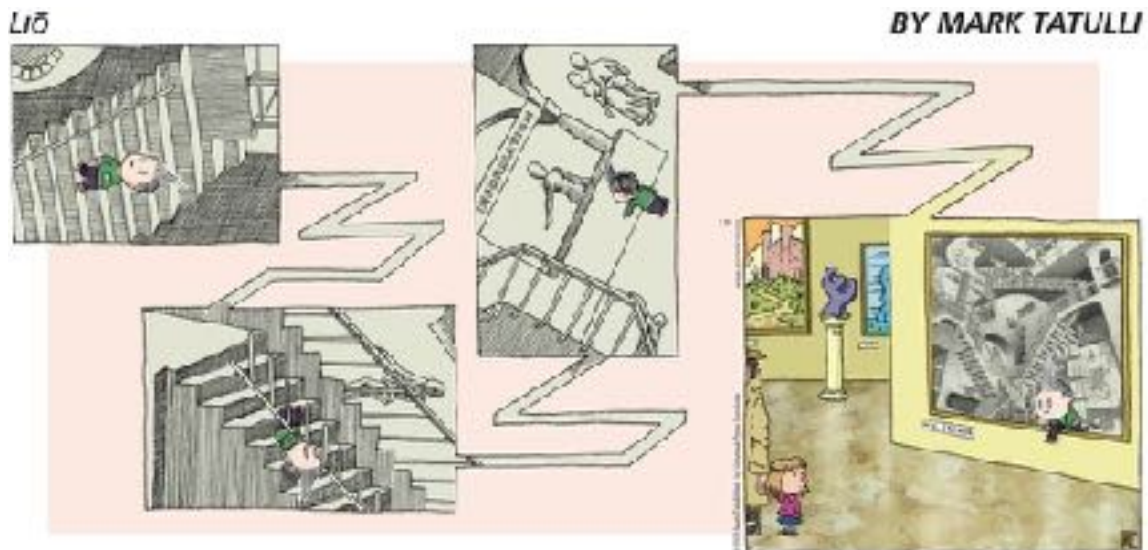


Fig. 586. Mark Tatulli, *Liō*, 26 July., 2006.

Some American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have quoted specific Escher drawings. Mark Tatulli's "weird little boy" Liō (**Fig. 586**), for instance, has inexplicably found himself trapped within the "crazy-quilt" building of Escher's 1953 lithograph *Relativity*, much like Little Nemo in one of Winsor McCay's hallucinatory dream cartoons (cf., e.g., **Figs. 89–90**). Tatulli's radical design for this strip transforms the gutters between panels into zig-zags that lead us from one scene to the next. Liō, depicted in color, stands out against the black-and-white parodies in the first three panels as we follow him being lost and then humorously being given directions to escape from this Escher maze. The gag of final, off-set, panel gives us a head-twisting reversal of the "associative inversion" effect: even though Tatulli's pastiche of *Relativity* is more realistically rendered than the colorized cartoon universe into which Liō returns, we feel that the little boy has come back into a world more real than the lithograph he has left.

Fig. 587. Hilary B. Price, *Rhymes with Orange*, 21 August, 2016.

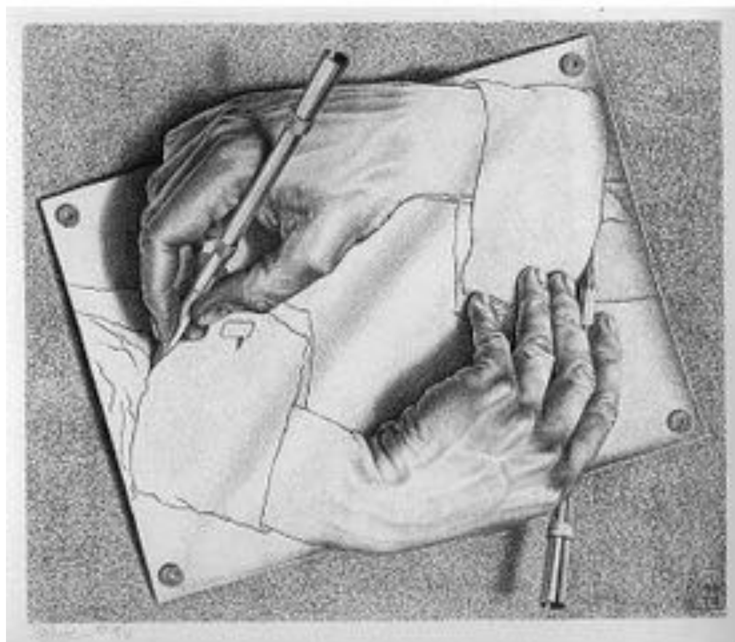


Fig. 588. M.C. Escher, *Drawing Hands*, 1948. Lithograph, 28.2 x 32.2 cm.

Hilary Price's cartoon (**Fig. 587**) assumes that viewers "get" the humorous allusion to Escher's famous *Drawing Hands* lithograph (**Fig. 588**), although the startling absurdity of Escher's original lithograph, with its two hands emerging into apparent three-dimensional reality while drawing each other on a flat piece of paper, is lost in Price's cartoon as those hands are attached to a person we are supposed to take as existing in three dimensions.

The thick chapter on modern art before WWII in the putative "Western Art History 101" textbook—the one we facetiously suggested American cartoonists cribbed from—includes many of the artists that one would expect to find in a real textbook.

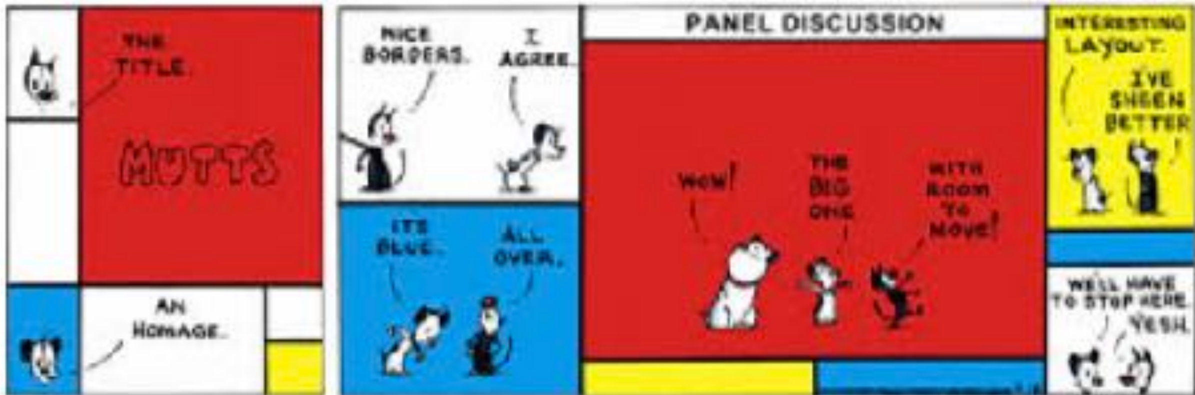


Fig. 589. Patrick O'Donnell, *Mutts*, 18 Oct., 1998.

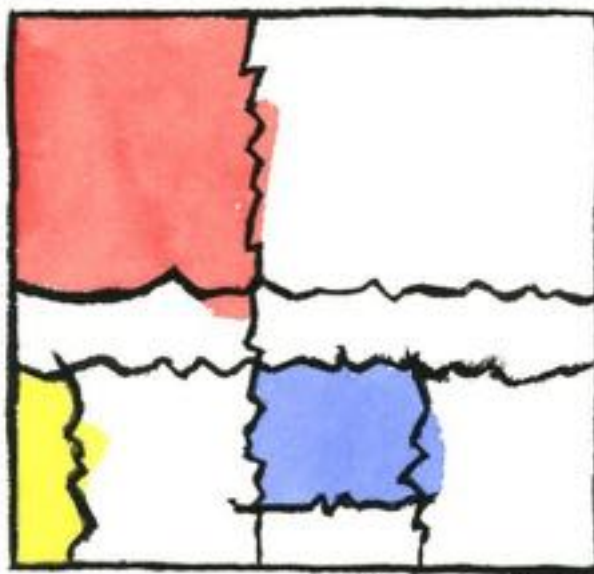
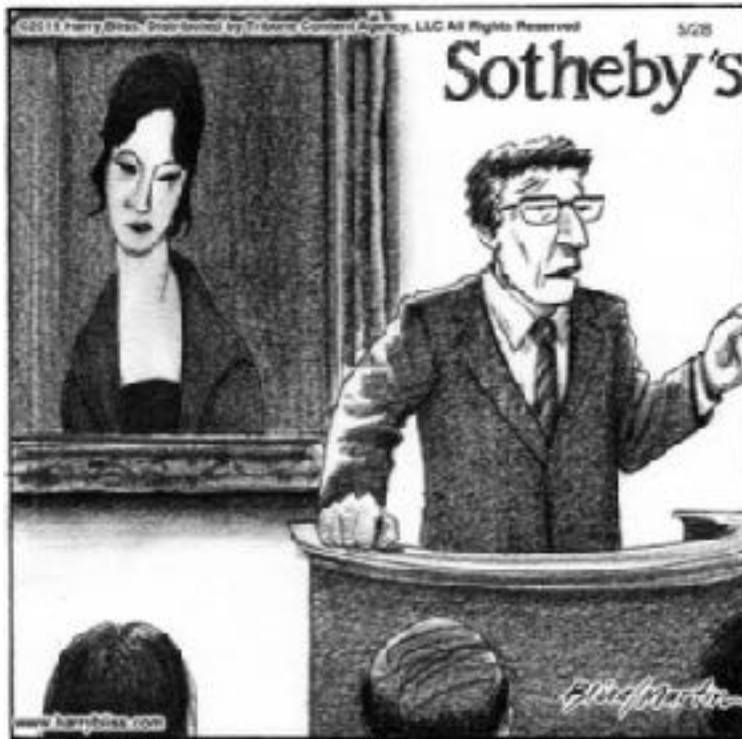


Fig. 590. Chis Cater, 24 July, 2013.

As part of his series of tributes to favorite works of art (cf. **Fig. 280**), Patrick O'Donnell drew an homage to Piet Mondrian 1929 *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (**Fig. 589**), with his cartoon animal menagerie giving a clever, metafictional, "panel discussion" within the panels of a Mondrian *De Stijl* abstraction. The gag in Chris Cater's parody of Mondrian's 1935 *Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue* (**Fig. 590**) relies on viewers recognizing Mondrian's style if not the actual work, as well as their being aware of the effects of too much coffee.



"Sir, did you just sneeze or spend $60 million?"

Fig. 591. Harry Bliss, 28 May, 2019.

Similarly, American cartoonists and comic-strip artists expect that their viewers recognize allusions to the distinctive elongated modernist style of Amadeo Modigliani, even if they could not identify a particular work of the Italian artist (cf. **Figs. 46**, **198**, **439**, **459**, and **461**). Indeed, the off-camera person who either just sneezed or made a bid at the Sotheby's auction in Harry Bliss' cartoon (**Fig. 591**) might have cause for concern, as the pastiche Modigliani that Bliss depicts may well be a fake. Although several genuine paintings by Modigliani have been auctioned off by Sotheby's in recent years—including a nude that went for over $150 million in 2018 and a clothed portrait of his mistress Jeanne Hébuterne that went for over $38 million in 2016—this particular work appears to be unknown; while there is no definitive *catalog raisonné* of Modigliani's works and there probably are undiscovered Modiglianis out there, the art market is also replete with fakes. Let's hope that it was just a sneeze.

Bob Mankoff began a 2014 *New Yorker* "Cartoon Desk" article which he ironically subtitled "Ce N'est Pas Un Newsletter":

There's a René Magritte retrospective at MoMA called "The Mystery of the Ordinary," which covers the artist's work from 1926 to 1938, the golden era of surrealism, during which Magritte and Salvador Dalí helped establish that art form in the public mind. And, in the public's mind, at least as reflected in the mind of *New Yorker* cartoonists, that art form was anything but ordinary, and begged to be spoofed.

Fig. 592. Carl Rose, *The New Yorker*, 1937.

Among the *New Yorker* spoofs Mankoff illustrates to support his point is Carl Rose's 1937 "A surrealist family has the neighbors in to tea" cartoon (**Fig. 592**). Rose drew this parody of Surrealist art as a response to the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," which opened in late 1936. Like many of the newspaper and magazine cartoons about the 1913 Armory Show we examined in an earlier essay, Rose's absurd tea party does not target any particular work that appeared in that MoMA show, but rather makes fun of Surrealist art in general; among the odd collection of objects in Rose's cartoon, however, one can see echoes of Magritte and Dalí as well as of works by Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Joseph Cornell, Mann Ray, and others. The black maid carrying in a turkey on the back of a cello is stereotyped with a leopard-skin coat and bangles on her ankles, which might have been thought to be acceptable in 1937, but is not today.

But there is something more in cartoon spoofs of Surrealism than merely targeting a style that is out of the ordinary, like the Cubist abstractions of Picasso or the optical illusions of Escher. Cartoonists and comic-strip artists are naturally drawn to Surrealist art (cf. **Figs. 36**, **39**, **57**, **60**, **63**, and **66**). Just as Surrealists such as René Magritte or Salvador Dalí explore psychological realms by depicting ordinary objects in incongruous settings, so too cartoonists use the incongruous to find humor in the ordinary.

Fig. 593. Bill Griffith, *Zippy*. 21 July, 2013.

Bill Griffith presents an homage to Magritte in a *Zippy* strip (**Fig. 593**) that quotes, against a background reminiscent of Magritte's *The Empire of Light* (1954), his *Not to be Reproduced* (1937), *The Portrait* (1935), *The Lovers II* (1928), *Perpetual Motion* (1935), *The Treachery of Images* (1929), *Golconda* (1953), and *The Son of Man* (1946). In spite of the tongue-in-check label "This is not a tribute to René Magritte" under the *Treachery* pipe, Zippy's walk-off comment is an accurate reflection of Griffith's admiration for Magritte's visual absurdities—an admiration in keeping with this former underground comix artist's love of Duchamp and the Dadists (cf. **Fig. 562**).

A few months after Griffith's strip appeared, Grant Snider published his Magritte comic strip (**Fig. 594**) as part of his "Who Needs Art?" series (cf. **Fig. 188** for another Snider comic strip that quotes Magritte). Although Snider admits to preferring the "bold color and shadowy mystery of a Giorgio di Chirico canvas," he thinks Magritte

> . . . is perhaps the most successful artist at achieving the purpose of the Surrealist movement, as stated by André Breton : "to resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality." By favoring direct representation of ethereal imagery over stylistic innovation, his works feel less like pieces of art than objective accounts of lucid dreams. And all those faceless men in suits and bowler hats are decidedly creepy.

Snider uses his own dream-like narrative style to compliment the strip's humorous premise of what it would be like to be next-door neighbors with the Surrealist painter. And, like other "Who Needs Art?" pieces he discusses on *Medium.com*, Snider helpfully

lists the Magritte works he parodies: *The Treachery of Images* (1929); *The Empire of Light* (1954); *The Man in the Bowler Hat* (1964); *The Castle of the Pyrenees* (1959); *Key to Dreams* (1930); *Personal Values* (1952); The Human Condition (1933); *The Portrait* (1935); *The Unexpected Answer* (1936); *The Son of Man* (1946); and *Golconda* (1953).

Fig. 594. Grant Snider, "My Neighbor Magritte," *Medium.com*, 3 Sept., 2013. Web.

At the beginning of "Chapter Two: The Vocabulary of Comics" in his seminal *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud riffs on the metafictional inscription "ceci n'est pas une pipe" in Magritte's *Treachery of Images* (**Fig. 595**). It is no surprise that McCloud would seize on Magritte's iconic pipe to begin his discussion of different levels of abstractions of "icons"—which McCloud defines as "images used to represent a person, place, thing, or idea." The Dadaist "this is not a pipe" joke resonates with cartoonists and comic-strip artists who navigate a multimodal medium that encompasses texts, images, pictorial runes, and speech bubbles.

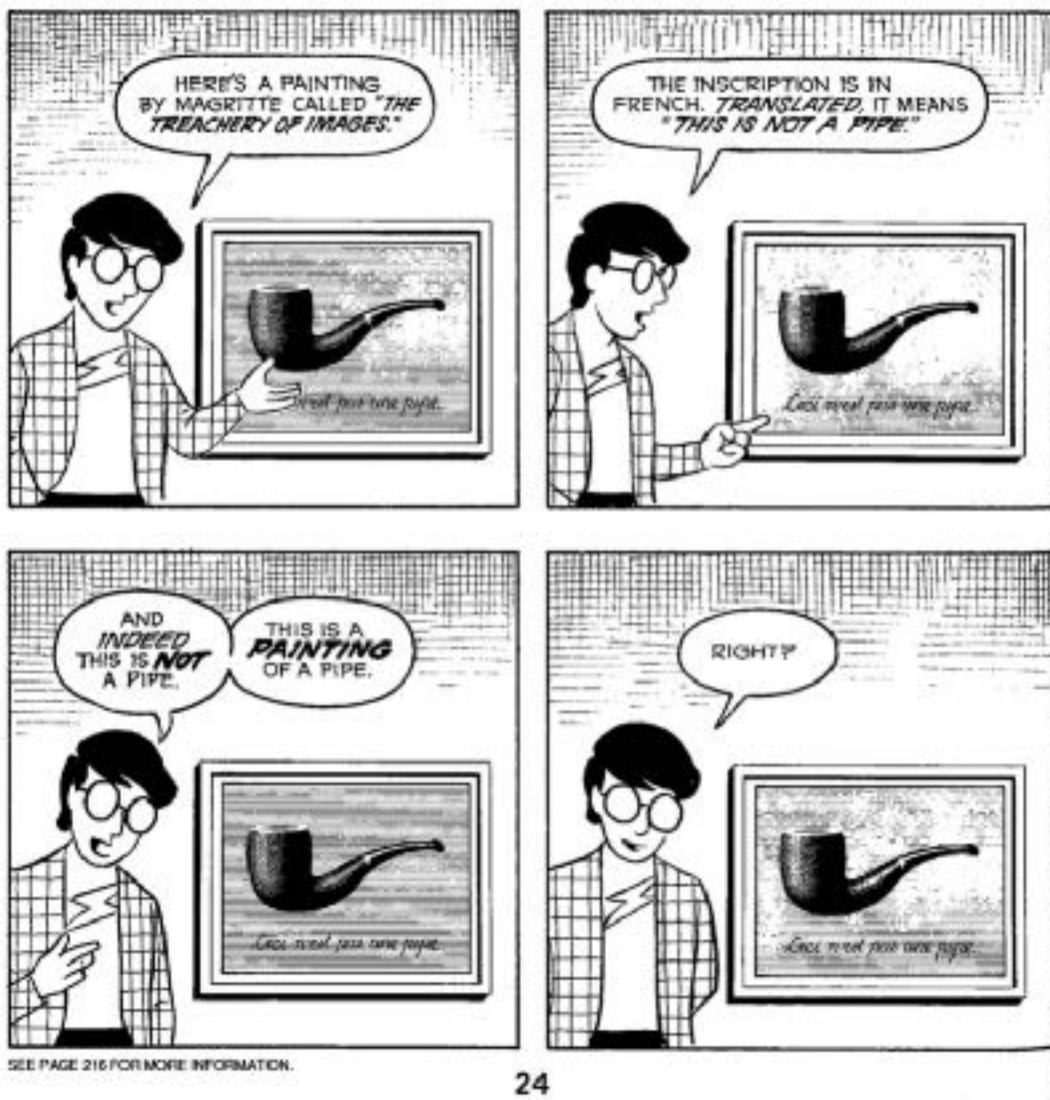


Fig. 595. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1993. pp. 24–25.

Fig. 596. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 1997.

Fig. 597. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 19 Feb., 2011.

Fig. 598. Harry Bliss, 27 Jan., 2014.

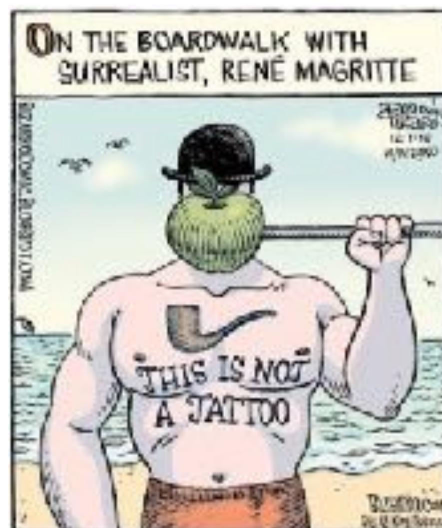


Fig. 599. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 1 Dec., 2010.

One obvious way to make a joke about the *Treachery of Images* is to exploit the double meaning of the word "pipe"—something that we will generously assume Mark Parisi (**Fig. 597**) came up with independently from Dan Piraro (**Fig. 596**) in their plumber gags. Harry Bliss (**Fig. 598**) took a different tack, transforming Magritte's painted pipe into an incongruously real smoking pipe. Dan Piraro returned to the *Treachery of Images* in a 2010 cartoon parody (**Fig. 599**) that puts a tattooed pipe on the chest of *The Son of Man*; while this combination is humorous, Piraro's joke falls flat when we realize that his quotation of Magritte's label, which is metafictionally humorous in the original because it is true, is in fact false in the universe of the Piraro cartoon.

Fig. 600. Dave Whamond, *Reality Check*, 17 Nov., 2005.

Fig. 601. Dan Piraro, *Bizarro*, 24 Aug. 2012.

Fig. 602. Wayne Honath, *Bizarro*, 16 May, 2018.

The apple-faced man in a bowler hat in Magritte's *The Son of Man* is a favorite target for cartoon parodies. Several cartoonists, including Dave Whamond (**Fig. 600**), have humorously introduced Will Tell to literally target the Son of Man. Dan Piraro sets his *Bizarro* 2012 gag (**Fig. 601**) within the context of a bourgeois household where the wife runs after the husband who had forgotten the lunch she packed for him; we might note that Piraro's secret "Eyeball of Observation" symbol might have the only view ever seen of the Son of Man's "real" face. Wayne ("Wayno") Honath, Dan Piraro's friend who

took over the daily *Bizarro* strip at the beginning of 2018, puts the Son of Man in a bar with the proverbial glass-half-full, glass-half-empty optimist and pessimist (**Fig. 602**); Wayno augments the humor in his gag by allowing us to see the Surrealist's missing beer in the reflections in glass countertop.

Fig. 603. Mark Parisi, *Off the Mark*, 4 Sept., 2012.

Fig. 604. Dave Coverly, *Speed Bump*, 4 April, 2016.

Mark Parisi and Dave Coverly have both parodied the *Son of Man* with almost identical Apple iPhone gags. Parisi's cartoon (**Fig. 603**) gives us a near-sighted man holding his phone right up to his nose; Coverly's Son of Man (**Fig. 604**) has a newer iPhone and is apparently taking an incredibly close selfie without using his hands. Coverly's parody closely resembles Magritte's apple-faced man—except for the eyes—and its realism better captures the surrealistic absurdity of the original than does Parisi's cartoonish version. Still, while we were willing to give Parisi the benefit of the doubt that he had not plagiarized his *Treachery* pipe cartoon from Piraro, it is difficult to be quite as generous in asserting that Coverly had not been influenced by Parisi's iPhone cliché.

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Fig. 1525. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 11 March, 2016.
Fig. 1526. Rob Murray, “Alternative Histories: Greece, c. 560 B.C.,” *History Today*, 23 April, 2015.
Fig. 1527. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*., 28 Sept., 2014.
Fig. 1528. Peter Duggan, *The Guardian*, 12 Oct., 2015.
Fig. 1529. Harry Bliss, illustration from *Bailey at the Museum*, 2012.
Fig. 1530. Bill Amend, *FoxTrot*, 5 Jan., 2014.
Fig. 1531. Jim Davis, *Garfield*. 2 Feb., 2013.
Fig. 1532. Tom Thaves, *Frank and Ernest*, 4 May, 2014.
Fig. 1533. Mike Peters, *Mother Goose & Grimm*, 18 Sept., 2016.
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Fig. 1542. Left: Attic Black-Figure olpe, ca. 550–520 B.C.E. Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology; right: vectorized drawing by Alexandre G. Mitchell, from Mitchell 2009, Fig. 1.
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