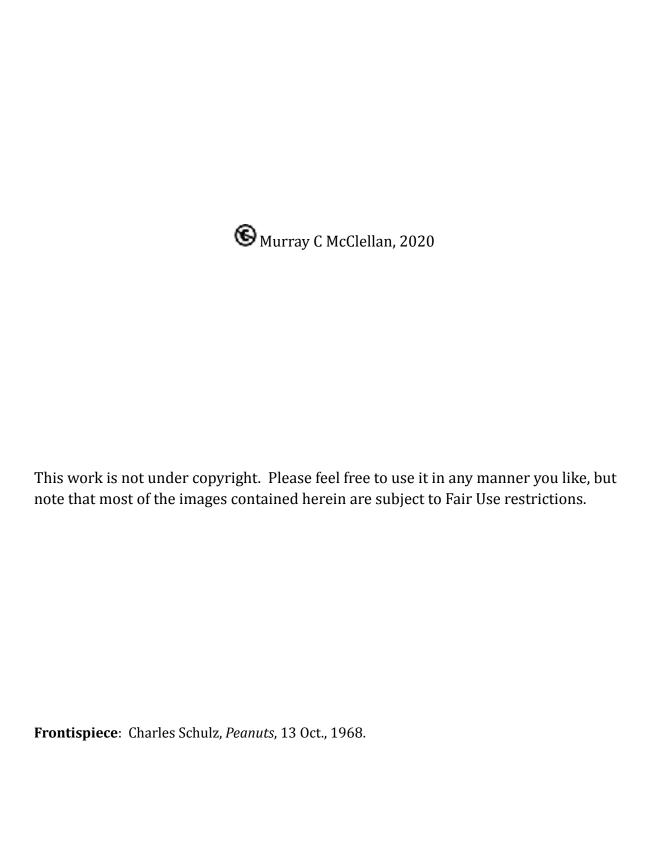
## Art and Archaeology in the American Funny Pages Part VI

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The art of René Magritte's fellow Surrealist, the Catalan Joan Miró, is only occasionally parodied in American cartoons (cf. **Fig. 138, 146, 330, 438**, and **592**), in stark contrast to how often that other Catalan Surrealist—Salvador Dalí—is quoted in American cartoons and comic strips. And, in contrast to how American cartoonists parody a wide range of René Magritte's paintings, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century only the melted clocks from Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* would be used by cartoonists as a stereotype of Dalí's version of Surrealism (cf. **Figs. 21, 430, 432, 435**, and **438**).

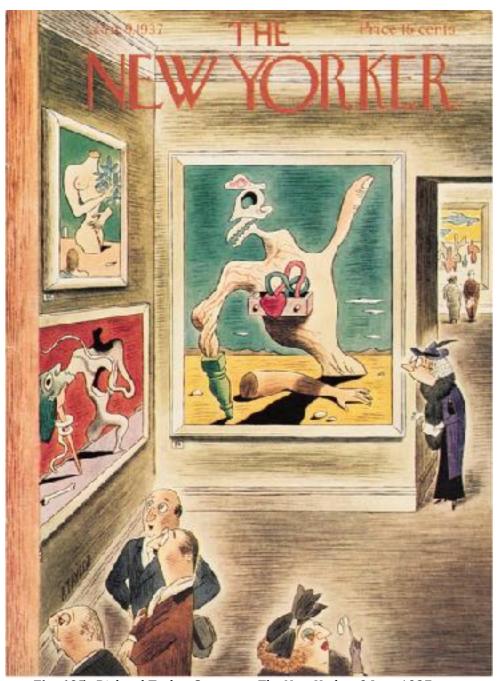


Fig. 605. Richard Taylor, Cover art, The New Yorker, 9 Jan., 1937.



"I knew we should have kept on Route 66 out of Flagstaff."

Fig. 606. Sam Cobean, The New Yorker, 1947.

If later cartoon parodies of Salvador Dalí's Surrealism are confined to the melted-watch cliché, such was not the case with earlier cartoon lampoons of the Catalan Surrealist. For instance, a 1937 Richard Taylor *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 605**), with its allusion to the motif of a woman with a chest of drawers that Dalí was playing with in his 1936 painting *The Anthropomorphic Cabinet* and in his 1936 take-off sculpture *Venus de Milo with Drawers*, seems particularly in tune with the latest work of Dalí—something not surprising given that the Canadian cartoonist Taylor also painted surrealist landscapes. A mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Sam Cobean *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 606**) lampoons Salvador Dalí with a comically surreal landscape that includes quotations of his *Puzzle of Autumn* (1935), *España* (1938), *Sleep* (1937), and *The Persistence of Memory* (1931). Cobean's made-a-wrong-turn gag is the same one that Dan Piraro would later use in one of his send-ups of M.C. Escher (cf. **Fig. 584**).



Fig. 607. Mike Peters, Mother Goose & Grimm, 21 Feb., 2014.



Fig. 608. Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman, Zits, 18 Nov., 2015.

One obvious way to parody Dalí's melted clocks is to imagine how they might function as timepieces in the "real" world. Mike Peters' *Mother Goose & Grimm* cartoon (**Fig. 607**) imagines a melted-clock wristwatch on a guard in the "Dali Museum." Dalí's melted clocks in Jerry Scott's and Jim Borgman's *Zits* strip (**Fig. 608**) are humorously draped around a typical American high-school hallway, here functioning as "representations" used to target the mind-numbing boredom which is all too often a feature of public secondary education in the country.

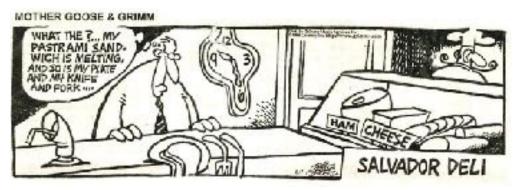


Fig. 609. Mike Peters, Mother Goose & Grimm, 7 July, 1996.



Fig. 610. Scott Hilburn, The Argyle Sweater, 1 Sept., 2012.

Nearly two decades before he came up with his "Dali Museum" melted-clock joke, Mike Peters had used the motif in a single-paneled 1996 *Mother Goose & Grim* strip (**Fig. 609**). Scott Hilburn's repetition of Peters' atrocious pun in a 2012 *The Argyle Sweater* cartoon (**Fig. 610**) is probably just another case of independent invention, although the striking similarity of the two chef-hatted, Dalí-moustachioed deli workers is suspicious.



Fig. 611. Mark Parisi, Off the Mark, 24 July, 2010.

Marc Parisi took another approach to parodying Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* in a cartoon gag (**Fig. 611**) set up by the thought bubble of the moustachioed artist, and with the visual punch line coming when we see the glasses on his head; although Parisi assumes viewers are familiar with the experience of looking for one's glasses only to

realize that they are on one's head, he felt that, in order for viewers to get the joke, it was necessary to give the title of Dalí's painting.



Fig. 612. Bob Thaves, Frank and Ernest, 7 Jan., 2003.



Fig. 613. Tom Thaves, Frank and Ernest, 9 June, 2010.

The master of the atrocious cartoon pun Bob Thaves gives us a silly strip (**Fig. 612**) where we are supposed to recognize *The Persistence of Memory* but not to worry how Frank and Ernest's art museum managed to purchase it from the Museum of Modern Art. Not to be outdone by his father, Tom Thaves, who took over the *Frank and Ernest* strip in 2006, made an even sillier double Dalí pun (**Fig. 613**).



**Fig. 614**. John Deering, *Strange Brew*, 20 July, 2017.



**Fig. 615**. Maria Scrivan, *Half Full*, 25 April, 2019.

It is only a small step to take the Dalai/Dalí pun and add a mustachioed llama painting *The Persistence of Memory*. Curiously, although the animal in John Deering's cartoon (**Fig. 614**) holds its paint-brush with human-like hands, its version of Dalí's painting is inferior to the one Maria Scrivan's llama created while holding a paintbrush in the hoof of one raised leg (**Fig. 615**). And again, let's be generous and attribute the similarities in these two cartoons to independent invention rather than plagiarism; it is not that hard to come up with a bad pun, after all.



Fig. 616. Dan Piraro and Wayne ("Wayno") Honath, Bizarro, 15 Jan., 2012.

As we have noted, comic strip artists seem to have a special affinity with Surrealist art, and, as we have seen in the above selection, some cartoonists such as Mike Peters and Mark Parisi seem to be especially drawn to Magritte and Dalí, no doubt because the absurdism of those Surrealists matches their own quirky sense of humor. Dan Piraro and his collaborator Wayne Honath have taken this trend one step further in a cartoon (Fig. 616) where they have combined elements from both Magritte and Dalí in what could properly be called a Surrealist landscape in its own right. Although the joke in this cartoon is ostensibly the silly pun on (sur)real estate agents, what really makes us smile is the striking visual landscape, vaguely reminiscent of Dalí's 1944 *Vogue* cover or his 1937 *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, where we see Magritte's *Son of Man* (sporting an arrow in his back, presumably a reference to the William Tell gags about this painting) talking to *The Lovers* (the man's head being unaccountably unwrapped) with, in the foreground, the *Bizarro* secret symbols the Eyeball of Observation, the Pie of Opportunity (floating in the air, carrying a fish like the one from which emerges a tiger

in Dalí's 1944 *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Waking*), and a stretched Bunny of Exuberance (held up on sticks with curved ends like the figure in Dalí's 1937 *Sleep*) while, in the background, the *Bizarro* Flying Saucer of Possibility and the Crown of Power ride on spindly-legged elephants like Dalí used in the *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee*, his 1946 *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, and in his 1948 *The Elephants* (cf. **Fig. 64**). Presumably, Piraro and Honath did not expect their viewers to recognize all of these Magritte and Dalí allusions, although a general awareness that the cartoonists were quoting Surrealist paintings is necessary to appreciate its humor; curiously, Piraro and Honath put their oversized "Eyeball of Observation" on the checkerboard ground rather than have it float in the air like Dalí's *The Eye*, a painting made in connection to the dream sequence that Dalí produced for Alfred Hitchcock's 1945 film *Spellbound*.

While American cartoonists and comic-strip artist have by no means neglected American artists of the early- to mid-  $20^{th}$  century, they have not lavished as much attention on them as they have on their European counterparts.

A case in point is Grant Wood's 1930 *American Gothic*, which figures in Annabel Sheen's "10 of the Most Parodied Artworks of All Time"—a list she compiled in 2017 on the occasion of the first time that *American Gothic* was displayed in the UK. Sheen's list includes, in addition to the Grant Wood painting, da Vinci's Mona Lisa and his Last Supper, Botticelli's The Birth of Venus, Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring, Munch's The Scream, Rodin's The Thinker, Van Gogh's Starry Night, Hopper's Nighthawks, and Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*; to this list Sheen affixed a "see also" addendum of Michelangelo's Creation of Adam fresco and his David statue, Dali's Persistence of *Memory*, and Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* silkscreens. It is instructive to note that the parodies Sheen cites in her list are mostly political cartoons or quotations employed in animated cartoons or in web memes. The fact that Grant Wood's American Gothic is so often used in political cartoons may explain why traditional American cartoonists and comic strip artist have generally not attempted humorous parodies of the stoic couple (but cf. **Figs**. **36**, **49**, **83**, **446**, **459**, and **462**). One exception is a Harry Bliss New Years Day cartoon (Fig. 617), the humor of which is especially appropriate for a cartoonist living in Vermont!



Fig. 617. Harry Bliss, 1 Jan., 2011.



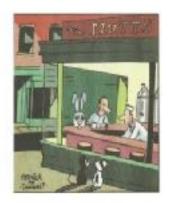
Fig. 618. Wayne Honath, WaynoVision, 16 Feb., 2015.

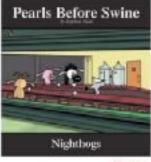
Georgia O'Keeffe is another American artist relatively neglected by cartoonists. Except for a Grant Snider homage to her 1963 *Sky Above Clouds III* in his "Who Needs Art" series (**Fig. 443**), the only allusion to O'Keeffe's *oeuvre* one finds in American cartoons is the stereotype that her flower painting are representations of female genitalia—an interpretation that the artist herself denied (cf. **Fig. 430**). A Wayne ("Wayno") Honath cartoon (**Fig. 618**), assumes that viewers are aware of this interpretation, as well as being familiar with his stereotype of an American family—the dad in the recliner, TV remote in hand and snacks on his belly, and the mom with hands on hips, upset with a teenage son for hiding dirty pictures under the mattress.

[A similar cartoon flattening of a female artist *oeuvre* has occurred with the Mexican artist Freida Kahlo, whose striking self-portraits have been reduced to a single "unibrow" stereotype, cf. **Figs. 430** and **435**.]

## Hopper's Nighthawks









Metalistics in American Comic Strips, Jesús A. Gorzález

**Fig. 619**. Jesús Ángel González López, "Metafiction in American Comic Strips," Slide 11, *slideshare.net*, 5 Nov., 2015.



Fig. 620. Jef Mallett, Frazz, 23 Sept., 2003.

The other work by an American artist on Annabel Sheen's list of "10 of the Most Parodied Artworks of All Time" is Edward Hopper's 1942 *Nighthawks*, which has come to be the main cartoon cliché of Hopper's *oeuvre*, often "re-presented" as a symbol of urban isolation and social alienation (cf. **Figs. 79**, **430**, and **619**; cf. also Sofi Siente, 1 Dec., 2014 and 8 Dec., 2014). Jef Mallett gives us a *Nighthawk* comic strip (**Fig. 620**) where the school custodian Frazz's response to the precocious eight-year-old student Caufield provides the metafictional humor: just as the third panel of Mallett's strip has morphed into a parody of Hopper's *Nighthawk*, so too, in the *Frazz* cartoon universe, life imitates art.

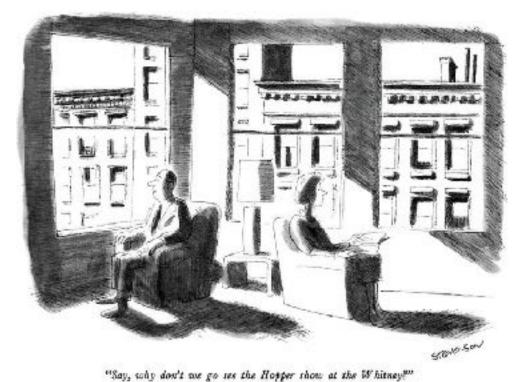


Fig. 621. James Stevenson, *The New Yorker*, 20 Oct., 1980.



Fig. 622. Bill Griffith, Zippy, 3 Nov., 1989.

Unlike his iconic *Nighthawks*, Edward Hopper's other paintings have garnered little attention from American cartoonists. [But for Spanish pandemic art mashups of Hopper paintings, cf. **Figs. 61–62**).] The humor in James Stevenson's 1980 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 621**) depends on viewers recognizing that the scene of the couple in their New York apartment evokes the spirit of Hopper's paintings. Bill Griffith's 1989 zany parody of Hopper's 1952 *Morning Sun* (**Fig. 622**) gives us the absurdity of Griffy and Zippy finding themselves in Hopper's bleak room; that they are there together, however,

does break the spell of isolation and loneliness of the original painting. (For Grant Snider's pastiche homage to this painting, cf. **Fig. 443**.)

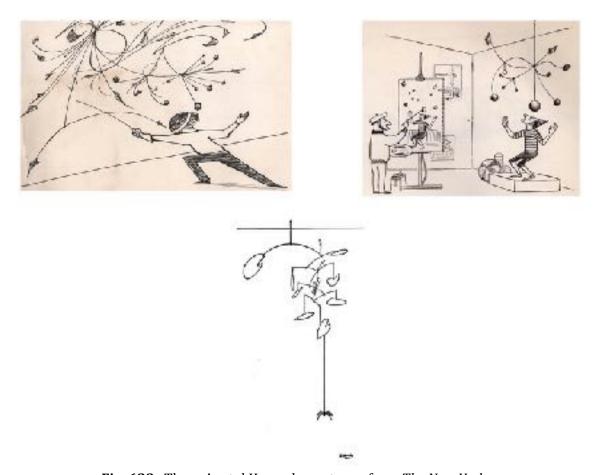


Fig. 623. Three Anatol Kovarsky cartoons from *The New Yorker*.

One might have thought that more American cartoonists would have parodied Alexander Calder's mobile sculptures. As Anatol Kovarsky's mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century *New Yorker* cartoons demonstrate (**Fig. 623**), there is something intrinsically playful about Calder's delicately balanced forms slowly twisting in the air. Kovarsky's light-hearted parodies do not make fun *of* Calder's mobiles as much as they make fun *with* them: the fencer lunging at a mobile; the artist using a mobile as a prop to paint a juggler; a spider becoming an additional part of the sculpture. A similar playful humor can be seen in the black Calder-esque mobile in Arthur Getz's 1972 *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 624**), which seems to be composed of umbrellas that have taken flight from the umbrella stand inside the doorway of the art gallery. Like Harry Bliss' 2012 cartoon (**Fig. 206**) and Bill Amend's 2016 *FoxTrot* (**Fig. 389**) comic strip, these Kovarsky and Getz cartoons assume that we the viewers would at least be familiar with Calder's mobile sculptures.



Fig. 624. Arthur Getz, Cover art, *The New Yorker*, 7 Oct., 1972.



**Fig. 625**. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled* ca. 1945. Crayon, colored pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper, 51.5 x 63.5 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Blake Gopnik, an art critic at *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast*, published a 2016 "Art World" *artnet* column subtitled "The Daily Pic: Did Pollock have a cartoonist's soul?":

When I first saw today's Pic [**Fig. 625**] I couldn't ignore its roots in cartoons and caricatures – its origins in Saul Steinberg more than in Kandinsky. And it made me realize that there's a funny, absurdist streak in all of the famous works Pollock went on to make. What could be funnier – sillier, even – than splashing paint on a canvas? It's not a million miles from the Dada abstractions of Hans Arp . . .

Whether or not one takes seriously Gopnik's claim that Pollock had a cartoonist's soul, it is clear that cartoonists are drawn to him more than to any other 20<sup>th</sup> century American artist (cf. **Figs. 356**, **373**, **435**, **436**, **444**, **449**, and **467**). And while some American cartoons allude to specific Pollock paintings, the vast majority parody his drip-painting technique, taking it as emblematic of the Abstract Expressionism dominant in New York as that city became the center of modern art in the Western world following WWII. [We will discuss the more general topic of cartoonists' and comic-strip artists' reactions to modern art in the following "Mocking Modernism" section of this essay.]

And just as cartoonists use a "scrambled-face" stereotype to parody the art of Pablo Picasso and "crazy-quit" architecture to stereotype M. C. Escher's optical illusions, so too do they rely on a "chaotic mess" stereotype to represent Jackson Pollock's paintings.



Fig. 626. Rob Harrell, Adam@Home, 8 May, 2001.



Fig. 627. Harry Bliss, 29 Jan., 2013.



Fig. 628. Wayne Honath, *Wayno Vision*, 6 Feb., 2015.

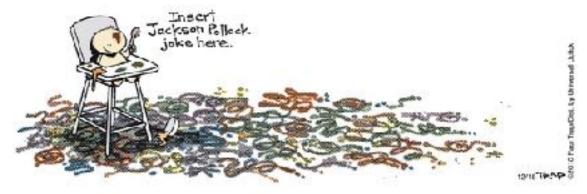


Fig. 629. Paul Trap, Thatababy, 15 Dec., 2010.



**Fig. 630**. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 5 Sept., 2016.

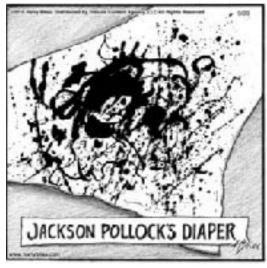


Fig. 631. Harry Bliss, 29 Sept., 2018.

As anyone who has ever fed an infant in a high chair or changed a diaper knows, babies are messy. So what better way to poke fun at Jackson Pollock's art than to project

the "chaotic mess" stereotype back into his infancy? This gag is so obvious that it has become a stock comic cliché that cartoonists can exploit in novel ways, much like the child-Michelangelo-painting-on-the-ceiling cartoons we examined in the "Webcomics and Internet Memes" essay (Figs. 16–18). Thus, the patient parents in Rob Harrell's Adam@Home cartoon (Fig. 626) wonder if their messy baby might become a famous painter, and Harry Bliss' and Wayne Honath's patient mothers endure the precocious food painting of a baby Jackson Pollock (Figs. 627–628). Paul Trap utilizes the stock baby-Pollock-in-a-highchair gag template to make a "metacomics" joke where the baby breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the viewer (Fig. 629). Scott Hilburn's and Harry Bliss' cartoons connecting the "chaotic mess" Pollock stereotype with a messy diaper (Figs. 630–631) should be considered as variations of a common comic cliché rather than as plagiarism.

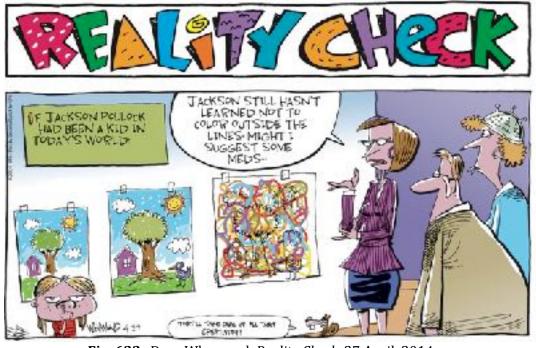


Fig. 632. Dave Whamond, Reality Check, 27 April, 2014.

The Canadian cartoonist Dave Whamond has extended the precocious-baby-Pollock gag into the artist's grade-school years in a cartoon that targets North Americans' propensity to over-medicate their children (Fig. 632); in addition to the comment of Ralph—Whamond's signature squirrel—that makes this point explicit, Whamond has added a presumably over-mediated child sticking a finger up her nose and has incongruously put a metal strainer on the head of Pollock's cigarette-smoking mother, perhaps to suggest that she the is one who needs the meds.



Fig. 633. Steve Breen, Grand Avenue, 20 July, 1999.



Fig. 634. Mark Tatulli, Heart of the City, 2 Feb., 2003.

Other cartoonists have used the "chaotic mess" Pollock motif to make gags about children's art—a sub-genre of humorous comics we explored in the "Kidding Art" section of the "Making Fun of Making Art" essay above. Steve Breen, for instance, gives us a strip about Pollock-esque sneeze art (**Fig. 633**), and Mark Tatulli has made a comic about Pollock-esque paint-ball art (**Fig. 634**). Breen's standard, four-panel format fits his simple gag, with only a sweat drop and a little motion rune added to the artistically challenged girl's loud "ACHooo"; viewers are probably glad that Breen does not allow us to see the resulting snotty art. On the other hand, Tatulli has used a radical, off-set panel-within-a-panel format to convey the violent motion of the boy's "p-fooping" painting; we need to see the resulting splatter art in the final punch-line panel in order to get the gag.

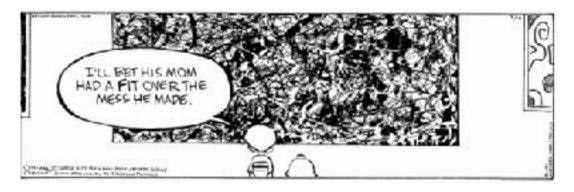


Fig. 635. Brian Basset, Red and Rover, 12 March, 2008.



Fig. 636. Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman, Zits, 2012.

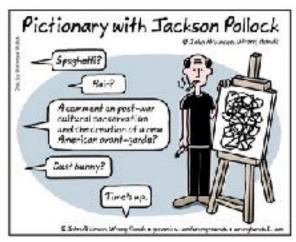
Another tack American cartoonists have taken is to use the "chaotic mess" Pollock motif to make a joke about stereotypically messy "snips and snails/ and puppy dogs' tails" boys. We assume, for example, that Brian Bassett's Red knows about giving a mother fits by making a mess (Fig. 635); we are presumably not supposed to worry how this boy and his dog ruminating over a Pollock painting managed to get into the museum by themselves in the first place. The jest in Jerry Scott's and Jim Borgman's *Zits* strip (Fig. 636) rests on the parallelism between the teenager Jeremy's art historical ignorance and his cluelessness of why his suburban housewife mother might be upset for having to clean up the mess he has made in what appears to be his own private bathroom; one suspects that, in illustrating the first four panels, Jim Borgman had a lot of fun trying his hand at Pollock's action-painting technique—much like Norman Rockwell had in his parody of the abstract expressionist (cf. Fig. 466 above).

The popularity of cartoon gags projecting the "chaotic mess" Pollock stereotype back into his childhood may in part be due to the fact that it is difficult to make fun of

the adult artist, a troubled alcoholic who died at age 44 in a car crash. It is not clear if Scott Hilburn's and John Atkinson's what-if-Pollock-played-Pictionary cartoons (**Figs**. **638–639**) assume that viewers had this "culturally bound background knowledge" of Pollock's reclusive and volatile personality. We should attribute the similarity in Hilburn's and Atkinson's cartoons to the use of a common Pollock-Pictionary cliché and not plagiarism. Hilburn's cartoon focuses on the outraged reaction to Pollock splashing paint around in trying to represent a clue we can see; Atkinson's joke comes from his off-camera fellow Pictionary gamers trying to guess what clue led to Pollock's scribbling, with the punch line being the long, hilariously accurate, description of the philosophy behind the Abstract Expressionist movement.



**Fig. 637**. Scott Hilburn, *The Argyle Sweater*, 22 Jan., 2011.



**Fig. 638**. John Atkinson, *Wrong Hands*, 21 May, 2019.



Fig. 639. Hector D. Cantú and Carlos Castellanos, Baldo, 3 Sept., 2006.

In one of their *Baldo* comic strips (**Fig. 639**), Hector D. Cantú and Carlos Castellanos took a different tack in finding humor in Jackson Pollock's paintings, using a "it says that dude can't paint" gag that, as we will see in the next section, is a standard cartoon putdown of abstract art. The rather lame humor of Baldo's dismissive comment is augmented by the incongruity of the set-up, where his clearly more intelligent younger sister Gracie is trying to teach her older brother about modern art. The quotations of Munch's *The Scream* and Pollock's *Number 1, 1950, Lavender Mist* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) in the middle panels of each row—both of which are labeled in the book Gracie is holding—is designed to elicit an "associative inversion" effect, forcing us to take Baldo's perspective and to consider what "message" each contains. It is not clear if Cantú and Castellanos wants us to laugh *with* Baldo or *at* him for his indifference to Expressionism and hostility to Abstract Expressionism.



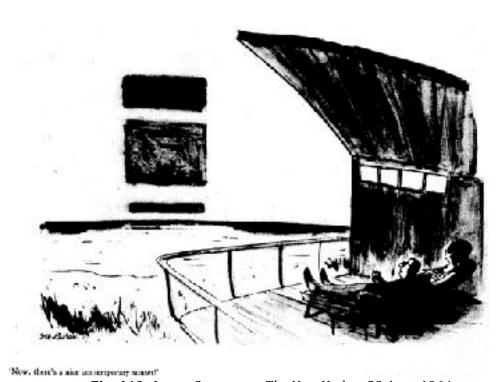


Fig. 640. James Stevenson, The New Yorker, 29 Aug., 1964.

One would have to look hard to find allusions to Abstract Expressionist artists other than Jackson Pollock among the corpus of American cartoons and comic strips. Notable exceptions include Anatol Kovarsky's 1957 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 171**) and Grant Snider's "quasi-narrative" 2013 "American Art" cartoon (**Fig. 443**), with its pastiches of, among other American artists, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, and Stuart

Davis. James Stevenson's 1964 *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 640**) gives us a parody of a Mark Rothko "multiform" painting. Stevenson's cartoon came out when Rothko was at the height of his fame, and the gag assumes that viewers were aware of Rothko's use of dark red and russet colors in his abstract rectangular forms—sophisticated "culturally bound background knowledge" necessary to get the joke in a cartoon printed in blackand-white. (Cf. **Fig. 186** for a similar allusion to Rothko).

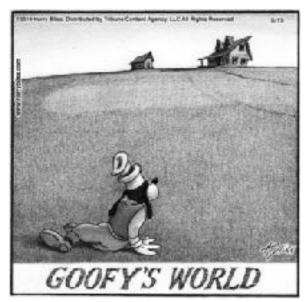


Fig. 641. Pat Oliphant, 11 August, 1986.

In 1986, a Philadelphian art dealer purchased some 240 paintings and drawings that Andrew Wyeth had made of his Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, neighbor Helga Testorf, who had posed—both clothed and in the nude—for Wyeth over the course of some fifteen years without the knowledge of either her husband or of Wyeth's wife. When the existence of the "Helga Pictures" became public and later exhibited at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, they caused a scandal. Although Wyeth denied that he had had a physical affair with Helga, the intense intimacy revealed in these paintings and drawings left many unconvinced and caused a strain on Wyeth's marriage. The joke in Pat Oliphant's contemporaneous cartoon (**Fig. 641**) assumes that viewers were well aware of this controversy, even if fewer people today would understand the humor in the incongruously innocuous paintings on display in the cartoon.



Fig. 642. Paul Trap *Thatababy*, 15 Sept., 2015.



**Fig. 643**. Harry Bliss, 19 Aug., 2019.

As with many others in the cartoon pantheon of artists, Andrew Wyeth's *oeuvre* has come to be represented by a single work, in Wyeth's case his famous 1948 *Christina's World*. As one would expect from Paul Trap's artistically precocious baby, the version of *Christina's World* he has drawn on the wall knocks his mother off her feet (**Fig. 642**); that the baby also adds a pun is remarkable, however lame the word play. The "intertextuality" in Harry Bliss' recent *Christina's World* parody (**Fig. 643**) is a bit confusing, as it is not clear why Disney's Goofy has incongruously replaced Wyeth's paraplegic Maine neighbor Anna Christina Olsen.

Although a commercially successful painter, for most of his long career Andrew Wyeth was not hailed as the great American artist he is now taken to be, and during his lifetime he was largely ignored by elite New York art critics enthralled by Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. Nevertheless, Wyeth's haunting, realistic paintings have had a special appeal for American cartoonists and comic-strip artists (cf. Jimmy

Johnson's comic-strip paean to Wyeth on the occasion of the artist's death in 2009, **Fig. 279**). Charles Schulz was particularly partial to the Brandywine artist. In his long-running gag about Snoopy having an impossibly large and lavish underground doghouse Schulz chose to replace the Van Gogh Snoopy lost in a fire with an Andrew Wyeth painting (**Fig. 644**).



Charles Schulz, Peanuts, 29 Feb., 1964.



Charles Schulz, Peanuts, 19 Sept., 1966.



Charles Schulz, Peanuts, 4 Nov., 1966.



Charles Schulz, Peanuts, 25 Nov., 1968.

Fig. 644. Selection of Charles Schulz, Peanuts, 1964—1968.



Fig. 645. Charles Schulz, Peanuts, 29 Jan., 1999.

Charles Schulz returned to Andrew Wyeth in the final strip (**Fig 645**) of his 1999 series about Charlie Brown and company going on a school trip to the art museum (cf. **Figs. 231** and **272** for the previous strips). We see Linus back at school, crushed by his realization that he will never be as good an artist as Wyeth—a sentiment we suspect is actually Schulz' own; in the year before his death, we can imagine Schulz looking back over his own long career as an American cartoonist and feeling that his work did not rise to the level of "high" art.

In the first section of our "Comic Art in Museums" essay, we have noted that several American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have poked metafictional fun at Pop Art, turning the tables on that movement's expropriation of "low" comics for "high" art (cf. **Figs. 155–159** above). As Bill Watterson's Calvin paradoxically declared in a 1993 comic strip, a painting of a comic-strip panel is "Sophisticated irony. Philosophically challenging 'High' art" but a cartoon of a painting of a comic-strip panel would be "Sophomoric. Intellectually sterile 'Low' art" (**Fig. 136** above).



Fig. 646. Bob Thaves, Frank and Ernest, 5 July, 1994.

Just as American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have reduced the artistic movement of Impressionism to parodies of Monet, of Expressionism to parodies of Munch, and Abstract Expressionism to parodies of Jackson Pollock, so too has the American cartoon representation of Pop Art been restricted to the Ben-Day dot

paintings of Roy Lichtenstein and the commercial expropriations of Andy Warhol (cf. **Figs. 67**, **78**, **435**, **436**, **438**, and **443**). The rather lame joke in a 1994 Bob Thaves cartoon (**Fig. 646**) assumes that viewers would be familiar with both Warhol's soup can painting as well as with his famous fifteen-minutes-of-fame statement. Scott Hilburn's 2012 *The Argyle Sweater* cartoon (**Fig. 647**)—yet one more example of projecting an artist's style onto their childhood—assumes that viewers would recognize the parody of Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* silkscreens.



Fig. 647. Scott Hilburn, The Argyle Sweater, 18 Nov., 2012.

It should come as little surprise that contemporary artists have rarely been spoofed by American cartoonists and comic-strip artists. First of all, once a given artist has gained notoriety in the art market or has been elevated by art historians into the canon, there is a time-lag before that artist's works become sufficiently well known so that they can serve as stereotyped clichés in cartoons and comics directed to the general public. To be sure, some comics artists, such as Grant Snider or Richard Thompson, trust their viewers to be attuned to contemporary art enough to appreciate their allusions to the self-promoting Jeff Koons (**Fig. 188**; cf. also **Fig. 76**) and Damien Hirst (**Figs. 188** and **440**). Furthermore, the non-traditional forms of multi-media presentations that characterize much of contemporary art pose particular problems for cartoonists and comic-strip artists used to lampooning static paintings and sculptures.



Fig. 648. Mike Peters, Mother Goose & Grimm, 17 May, 2014.

The environmental installations of Christo and Jeanne-Claude are one example of non-traditional, later 20<sup>th</sup>-century art that has been parodied by American cartoonists (cf. **Fig. 434**). Mike Peters' example (**Fig. 648**) assumes that viewers are familiar with Christo's draped buildings, here ironically applied to his own studio.

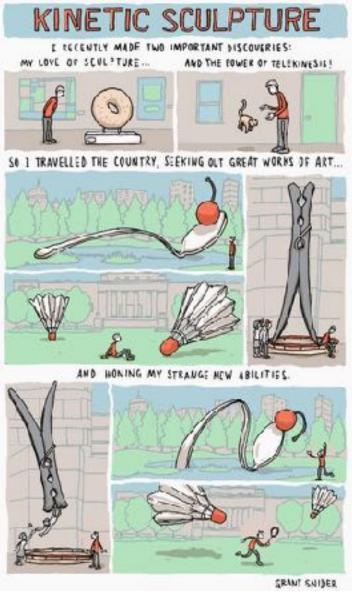


Fig. 649. Grant Snider, Incidental Comics, 13 June, 2012.

Grant Snider has given us a parody of the large-scale sculptures of mundane objects created by the husband and wife team of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen (**Fig. 649**). Laid out in Snider's typical storyboard format, this *Incidental Comic* uses the imaginative absurdity of combining telekinesis with Oldenburg's *Clothespin* (Center Square, Philadelphia, 1976); Spoonbridge and Cherry (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1985-1988); and *Shuttlecocks* (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1994).



**Fig. 650**. Grant Snider, *Incidental Comics*, 13 Jan., 2014 (originally posted on *medium.com*, 7 Oct., 2013).

As we have noted, Grant Snider helpfully identifies the original artworks used in his "Who Needs Art?" pastiches. The "How to Look at Art" comic in this series (**Fig. 650**) humorously suggests ways to interact with the sculptures of Auguste Rodin,

Fernando Botero, Alberto Giacometti, Louise Bourgeois, Henry Moore, Henri Matisse, Max Ernst, Émile-Antoine Bourdelle, Barbara Hepworth, Isamu Noguchi, and Jean (Hans) Arp. In encouraging his viewers to engage with art, Snider says:

Art is there to be experienced. It can inspire wonder, provoke strong emotions, and alter perception. It is meant to be loved, despised, or puzzled over, but never politely ignored. Go to a museum, a gallery, a sculpture garden, a public space. Look at art. Experience art. Make art.

It should go without saying that Snider's own comic engagements with art are themselves a form of art.

We have observed that the corpus of American cartoons and comic strips about famous works of art is restricted to a narrow group from the Western canon. One exception to this rule is the ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai's woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1829–1833), a work which made Annabel Sheen's "10 of the Most Parodied Artworks of All Time" list. The humor in Anatol Kovarsky's pastiche (**Fig. 651**) comes from its incongruous substitution of two marooned men on a raft for the Japanese boats in the famous print from Hokusai's *Views of Mount Fuji* series.

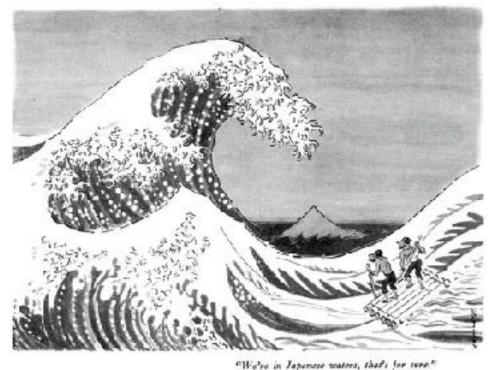


Fig. 651. Anatol Kovarsky, The New Yorker, 26 Sept., 1959.

Although it is outside of the scope of this survey of art-themed American humorous cartoons and comic strips, we should note that both animated cartoons as well as superhero comic books and graphic novels are replete with quotations of famous works of art and allusions to famous artists. Here we mention just a few examples.



Fig. 652. Disney commemorative pins, 2004, 2018.

The mass media Disney conglomeration has on several occasions parodied famous works of art by inserting Disney characters into paintings, such as on a commemorative pin issued in 2004 with the dwarves from *Snow White* mimicking Matisse's *The Dance* (cf. **Fig. 563**) or on the commemorative pins created for the 2018 Festival of the Arts at the Epcot Center, with the character Figment from the Journey into the Imagination ride inserted into Monet's *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge*, Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy*, Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, the *Mona Lisa*, and Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (**Fig. 652**).

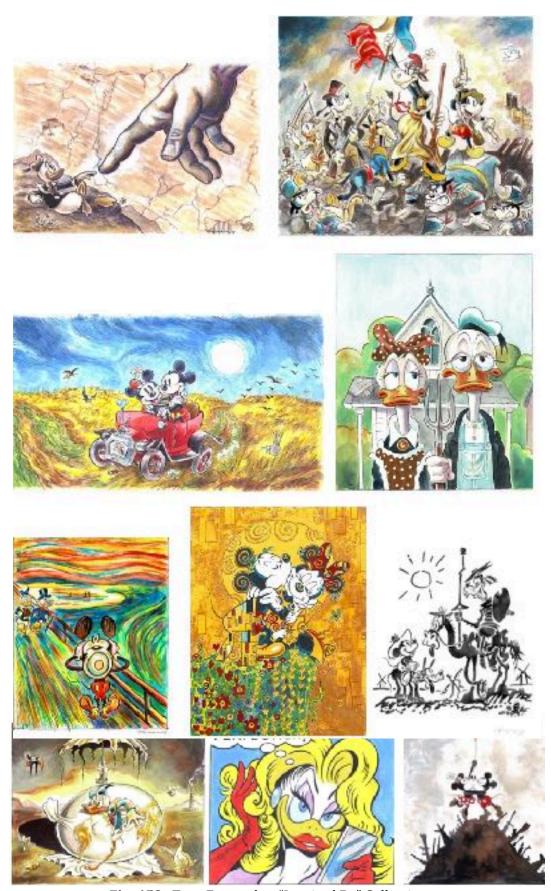


Fig. 653. Tony Fernandez, "Inspired By" Collection.

The Spanish artist and long-time Disney illustrator Tony Fernandez has created a series of "Inspired By" Disney crossovers of famous paintings, where viewers are expected to recognize both the inserted Disney characters as well as the original works of art. Of the selection of Fernandez "Inspired By" works in Fig. 653, the quotations of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows*, Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, Munch's *The Scream*, Klimt's *The Kiss*, and Bansky's *Balloon Girl* are, as we have seen, well established clichés used in cartoons and internet memes. American viewers would, presumably, also recognize Delacroix's 1830 *Liberty Leading the People* (which is often used in European political cartoons), Picasso's 1955 sketch of Don Quijote, and the Lichtenstein pastiche, although the Donald Duck parody of Salvador Dalí's 1943 *Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man* may not be as familiar to those who do not know the collection of the Salvador Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Another example of art quotations in animated cartoons comes from Matt Groening's *The Simpsons*, the longest-running American cartoon sitcom.



**Fig. 654**. Two stills from Matt Groening, "The Crepes of Wrath," *The Simpsons*, Season 1, Episode 11, 15 April, 1990.

Megan Ann Wilson observed in her 2012 article "The Complete History of Art References in the Simpsons":

. . . the obvious laughs are often low-brow, but what has made the show such a success season after season are the satirical takes on popular culture. While the film, television and music references are easy to recognize, *The Simpsons* is often rather erudite with frequent nods to the art world.

Of the 115 "nods to the art world" Wilson records, many served the same function that newspaper or web comic references to famous works of art serve, that is as quotations whose immediate recognition is crucial for viewers getting the joke. Other *Simpson* 

cartoon art quotations are not so obvious, such as the allusions to Édouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) or Henri Rousseau's *Le Rêve* (1910) that flashed by the screen in an episode where Bart is being driven across France as an exchange student (**Fig. 654**); note that, even though few people in 1990 would have had the technology to pause their television screens to scrutinize these references to Manet and Rousseau, the producers of *The Simpsons* nevertheless felt compelled to cover up the nudity of the originals.

Some of the most striking examples of cross-over art quotations come from the Marvel Comics' Art Appreciation variant comic-book covers that the comic book company commissioned graphic artists to create in the style of their favorite artists—the first set of which came out in 2009 in conjunction with the opening of the movie *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, with the second set appearing in 2012 with the opening of the movie *The Avengers*.



**Fig. 655**. Alina Urusov, Cover art for *Ghost Rider*, #34, June, 2009.



**Fig. 656**. Laura Martin, Cover art for *Uncanny X-Men*, #508, June, 2009.



**Fig. 657**. Juan Doe, Cover art for *Moon Knight*, #29, June, 2009.



**Fig. 659**. Paolo Rivera, Cover art for *The Amazing Spider-Man*, #592, June, 2009.



**Fig. 658**. Jason Chan, Cover art for *Exiles*, #1, June, 2009.



**Fig. 660.** Morry Hollowell, Cover art for *Wolverine: Legacy*, #223, June, 2009.



**Fig. 661**. Juan Doe and Russ Heath, Cover art for *Daredevil*, #118, June, 2009.



**Fig. 662**. Skottie Young, Cover art for *Captain Britain and M113*, #12, June, 2009.



Fig. 663. Chris Eliopoulos, Cover art for Wolverine: First Class, #14, June, 2009.

The comics artists who participated in the 2009 Marvel Comics Wolverine Art Appreciation Month were not, of course, trying to be humorous, nor were their variant covers in any way related to the contents of the superhero comic books they adorned. Instead, these Marvel comics artists used the opportunity to represent Wolverine on the cover of every Marvel comic book that came out in June, 2009 as a way to demonstrate their graphic skills and to pay homage to artists whom they admired. Many chose to substitute their versions of Wolverine with the subjects of well known portrait paintings, such as with Alina Urusov's pastiche of the ukiyo-e artist Tōshūsai Sharaku's 1794 woodblock print Kabuki Actor Ōtani Oniji III in the Role of the Yakko Edobei (Fig. **655**), with Laura Martin's quotation of Van Gogh's Self Portrait with a Felt Hat (Fig. **656**), with Jason Chan's parody of Magritte's *The Son of Man* (**Fig. 658**), or with Morry Hollowell's take-off of Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* (Fig. 660). Others chose to loosely model their Wolverine cover art in the recognizable style of other famous artists, such as with Paolo Rivera's adaptation of Dali's The Persistence of Memory (Fig. 659), or Juan Doe's Picasso-esque "scrambled face" Wolverine reminiscent of Les Demoiselles *d'Avignon* (**Fig. 657**).

Other comics artists who participated in the 2009 Marvel Comics Wolverine Art Appreciation Month used the opportunity to make statements about comics art itself. For their June 2009 Daredevil cover (Fig. 661), Juan Doe and Russ Heath give us a Wolverine knocking out a man who tried to talk to his girl, shown in the foreground in a style reminiscent of Lichtenstein's 1964 Oh Jeff... I Love You Too... But... While Doe and Ross' cover can be seen as an homage to Lichtenstein, it also functions as a metafictional "re-appropriation" of Pop Art's appropriation of comics art in the 1960's; the contrast between the flat, Ben-Day dot, cartoon girl and the dynamic, radically foreshortened, Wolverine evokes a reverse "associative inversion" effect wherein the Marvel comic universe seems more real than the realistically rendered art. Skottie Young's Marvel cover (Fig. 662) gives us a menacing Wolverine looming over an innocent child, a scene rendered in a style evocative of Edward Gorey's disquieting gothic pen-and-ink drawings; with a commission to honor an artist of his choice, that Young chose to pay homage to the book illustrator and narrative graphic artist Gorey may have been his way of suggesting that illustrators like those who work at Marvel are also great artists. Chris Eliopoulos' cover (Fig. 663) makes the same point about comicstrip artists, giving us what is meant to appear as a real page from the newspaper

funnies—an example of comic-strip "intertexuality" we examined in the "'Amusing Metafictional Mashups" section of the "Making Fun of Making Art" essay above. Although presented at an oblique angle, we can still read Eliopoulos' versions of comic strips where a cartoon Wolverine has been substituted for (from top to bottom): Charlie Brown in Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*, with a masked Lucy pulling the football away; Jon Arbuckle in Jim Davis' *Garfield*, with a masked Garfield making a snide jab at Wolverine's northern Canadian origins; and Calvin in Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*, with Wolverine/Calvin threatening to slash a masked Susie Derkins when she told him that he is "really a sweet and caring person."

When considering our selection of Wolverine variant covers, one might wonder the degree to which the quotations of art were recognized by the readers of these superhero comic books. Given that the works of Van Gogh, Magritte, Warhol, Dalí, and Picasso to which the covers allude are also frequently lampooned in American humorous cartoons and comic strips, we can reasonably assume that the ability to recognize these works would be part of the "culturally bound background knowledge" of the readers of these superhero comic books. The same assumption can be made with Young's cover alluding to Gorey or with Eliopoulos' allusions to Schulz, Davis, and Watterson. It is less clear whether the readers of *Ghost Rider* #34 would have immediately recognized Urusov's reference to Tōshūsai Sharaku, although, given the popularity of manga comics in America, most readers probably could have identified Urusov's cover as Japanese in style, if not even as a copy of an ukiyo-e woodblock print.

These Wolverine variant covers are also "re-presentations," that is, they build upon the symbolism we ascribe to the quoted works of art—in this case an inherent mental instability or violence that serves to heighten the threatening quality of the antihero Wolverine. The yakko in Tōshūsai Sharaku's print (Fig. 655), for instance, is a brutal manservant used by samurai to perform violent acts; Van Gogh's mutilation of his ear was the act of a mentally disturbed artist. (Laura Martin's gruesome representation in Fig. 656 is in marked contrast to the cartoon cliché, cf. Figs. 545–552); the demoiselles of Avignon (Fig. 657) are prostitutes staring at us with hostility; Magritte's faceless men (Fig. 658) live in an unstable surreal world, much like Dali's dream landscape (Fig. 659); Warhol began his Marilyn silkscreens (Fig. 660) shortly after the actress' suicide in 1962; Lichtenstein's cartoon women (Fig. 661) are dominated by brutal men; Gorey's prints (Fig. 662) ooze Victorian gore; and the cruelty of children

can be seen behind the slapstick humor of Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown (**Fig. 663**). Even if some readers of these Marvel comic books were unaware of the coded messages behind the "re-presentations" of particular works of art in the variant covers, the overall effect of presenting a threatening, mentally unstable, Wolverine is unmistakable.

The comic-book covers created by Marvel graphic artists for the April 2012 Art Appreciation variants are slightly different from those created for the June 2009 Marvel Comics Wolverine Art Appreciation Month. Whereas the earlier Wolverine covers paid homage to a rather eclectic group of 19th- and 20th-century artists, the twenty Art Appreciation variant covers celebrating the 2012 Avengers movie give us something more like a survey of art history—almost as if, for the source of their comic-book homages, each of the comic-book cover artists were supplied with a page from the putative Art History 101 textbook we facetiously suggested American cartoonists and comic-strip artists use to parody artworks in the Western canon.



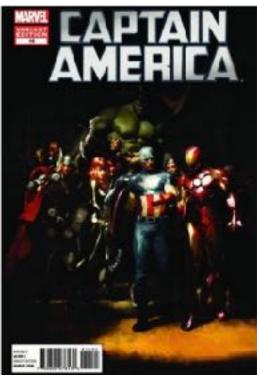
**Fig. 664**. Christian Nauck, Cover art for *Age of Apocalypse*, No. 2, April, 2012.



**Fig. 665**. Greg Horn, Cover art for *Invincible Iron Man*, No. 515, April, 2012.



**Fig. 666**. Julian Totino Tedesco, Cover art for *Future Foundation*, No. 17, April, 2012.



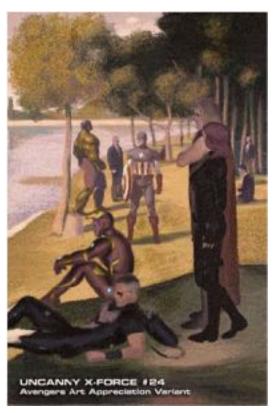
**Fig. 667**. Richard Isanove, Cover art for *Captain America*, No. 10, April, 2012.



**Fig. 668**. Greg Horn, Cover art for *Uncanny X-Men*, No. 11, April, 2012.



**Fig. 669**. Gabriele Dell'Otto, Cover art for *Avengers*, No. 25, April, 2012.



**Fig. 670**. Gerald Parel, Cover art for *Uncanny X-Force*, No. 24, April, 2012.



**Fig. 672**. Alex Maleev, Cover art for *Wolverine & the X-Men*, No. 9, April, 2012.



**Fig. 671**. Julian Totino Tedesco, Cover art for *Secret Avengers*, No. 26, April, 2012.



**Fig. 673**. Joe Quinones, Cover art for *The Mighty Thor*, No. 13, April, 2012.



**Fig. 674**. Mike del Mundo, Cover art for *Amazing Spiderman*, No. 683, April, 2012.



**Fig. 675**. Michael Kaluta, Cover art for *Fantastic Four*, No. 605. April, 2012.



Fig. 676. Steffi Schutzee, Cover art for *Daredevil*, No. 11, April, 2012.

If the 2012 Marvel variant comic-book covers were inspired by pages from our putative Art History 101 textbook, the first comic artists who bought the book would seem to have been Christian Nauck and Greg Horn. Nauck's cover for *Future Foundation*, (**Fig. 664**) is a quotation of an Egyptian tomb painting, with Captain America, Ironman, Thor, the Hulk, the Scarlet Witch, and Hawkeye posed in typical Egyptian New Kingdom two-dimensional profile views. Horn's variant cover of the *Invincible Ironman* (**Fig. 665**) is a parody of Easter Island moai, with the visages of some of the Avengers replacing those of the monumental sculptures created by the Rapa Nui people on the island in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries; the Hawkeye/moai in Horn's variant cover is incongruously adorned with a Classical victory wreath, and the Hulk/moai has an open, shouting mouth. [For more on cartoons and comic strips about ancient Egypt and the Easter Island moai, see the "Comical Cultures" essay in Part III below.]

Just as quotations of art in American cartoons and comic strips are limited to a narrow range of famous works from the Western canon, so too do the 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation variant comic-book covers jump from antiquity to the Renaissance, ignoring the Byzantine and Medieval worlds. Julian Totino's variant cover for *Future Foundation* (**Fig. 666**) is a pastiche of Botticelli's 15<sup>th</sup>-century *The Birth of Venus*, with a modestly clad Scarlet Witch replacing Venus Anadyomeme, Captain America as Zephyr carrying the Ironman instead of Aura, and Thor in role of the Hora of Spring. Richard Isanove's variant cover for *Captain America* (**Fig. 667**) parodies Rembrandt's 1642 *The Night Watch*, with Captain America playing the role of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq leading a militia of Avengers through the dark streets; the glints of light reflecting off the superheroes' armor and muscles mirrors the tenebrism of the original painting. For his *Uncanny X-Men* variant cover (**Fig. 668**), Greg Horn returned to parodying sculpture, this time giving us a Captain America as Rodin's *Thinker*, Thor as Michelangelo's *David*, and an abstract Ironman as a Brancusi *Bird in Space*.

And just as American cartoonists and comic-strip artists virtually ignored late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century art before the Impressionists, so too the only mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century painting quoted by the 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation variant comic-book cover artists is Emanuel Leutze's 1851 *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, which Gabriele Dell'Otto parodies with Captain America replacing the noble George Washington of the original (**Fig. 669**). Later 19<sup>th</sup>-century paintings parodied by the 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation artists include Georges Seurat's pointillist *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande* 

Jette (1884–1886), which Gerald Parel (**Fig. 670**) populates with Thor, the Scarlet Witch, her husband Vision, Hawkeye, Captain America, and the Hulk; curiously Parel puts a few non-Avenger Parisians in the background, two of whom stare at the superhero crew, no doubt wondering what happened to Seurat's ladies with parasols, men in top hats, the children and dogs, and that little monkey on a leach. Another late 19<sup>th</sup>-century artwork quoted by the 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation artists is Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *Moulon Rouge* poster (1891), which Julian Totino transforms into a brawl, with the cancan dancer of the original being replaced by a karate-kicking Scarlet Witch (**Fig. 671**).

And, moreover, just as was the case with the 2009 Wolverine Art Appreciation Month, several 2012 Art Appreciation graphic artists created variant covers in the style of a given painter rather than parodying a specific work. Alex Maleev's cover art for *Wolverine & the X-Men* ( **Fig. 672**), for instance, parodies the Expressionism of Egon Schiele, and Joe Quinones cover of *The Mighty Thor* (**Fig. 673**) was made in the style of Jackson Pollock. Mike del Mundo's variant cover for the *Amazing Spiderman* (**Fig. 674**) is a pastiche of the artwork of the graphic designer Saul Bass—an appropriate metafictional nod, given the fact that Bass is most known for the posters he made to advertise Hollywood movies, a function that this comic-book cover also serves.

The 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation variant comic-book covers, like their 2009 predecessors, also include "intertextual" allusions to other comics art, again suggesting that illustrators like those who work at Marvel are also great artists. Michael Kaluta's variant *Fantastic Four* cover, with its surreal architecture and Avengers falling out of beds (**Fig. 675**) is a homage to Winsor McCay (compare **Figs. 89** and **90**). The German artist Steffi Schutzee drew her cover art for *Daredevil* (**Fig. 676**) in the style of the caricaturist Al Hirschfeld; those of us who grew up searching Hirschfeld's drawings for "NINAs"—the name of Hirschfeld's daughter that he would hide in his *New York Times* caricatures—will look in vain for any hidden names among Schutzee's Avengers.

Again like the 2009 Marvel Art Appreciation series, most of the quotations of art in the 2012 Avenger variant covers also function as "re-presentations," in this case as symbols of the unity and self-sacrifice this band of superheroes display in battling an evil enemy intent on destroying life as we know it in the universe. Richard Isanove's quotation of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* and Gabriele Dell'Otto's parody of Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (**Figs. 667** and **669**) are "re-presentations" of noble military virtue. Christian Nauck's and Greg Horn's covers evoke humanity's timeless,

mythological, battle of life over death (**Figs. 674–675**). Gerald Parel's quotation of Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jette* presents the Avengers as protectors of peace and tranquility (**Fig. 670**). In his two 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation variant covers (**Figs. 666** and **671**), Julian Totino transforms the stereotype of women as passive, sexual objects by replacing the goddess of love and a burlesque dancer with the kick-ass Scarlet Witch.

Further, as was the case with the 2009 Marvel Wolverine Art Appreciation covers, one wonders the degree to which the art allusions in the 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation covers were understood by those who purchased these variant comic books. Again, one suspects that art which is frequently parodied in traditional cartoons and comic strips would be part of the "culturally bound background knowledge" of Marvel comic-book readers. On the other hand, however, comments posted on comic-book fan blogs suggest that many of these art references went over the heads of the Marvel-comicbook-reading crowd. One person posted on a ifanboy blog about these 2012 Marvel variant covers "I'm pretty savy with the art history and i'm only getting maybe half the references." Another person, named stuclach, posted on the same blog "I am not even remotely capable of identifying these, but I'm looking forward to finding out what they reference. The first one [Christian Nauck's quotation of an Egyptian New Kingdom tomb painting, Fig. 664] is obviously a cave painting." Stuclach's incorrect identification was soon corrected by other commenters to the blog. Indeed, all of the allusions to art in the 2012 Marvel Art Appreciation variant covers were correctly identified on this ifanboy blog—an example of how comics, as I suggested in the above "Humorous Art History 101" section of this essay, play a role in augmenting Americans' inadequate arthistorical education.

JM Ringuet, a commenter on a <u>comicsbeat.com</u> blog about these 2012 Avenger Art Appreciation covers raised an interesting point: "So are they saying that comics are not art, since you need a special reference to some classic painting to make it 'art'? Mind-boggling." However, rather than being a "mind-boggling" put-down of comics art, the intent of the Marvel Art Appreciation initiative is clearly the opposite, that is, "they" are saying that the work of Marvel graphic artists belong in the same league as the "classic paintings" expropriated for these variant covers.

The Marvel Comics Art Appreciation initiatives are not only an opportunity to celebrate great art, be that "highbrow" or "lowbrow." The Marvel company also has an

economic interest in producing limited edition covers, which they and other comic-book companies such as DC Comics have been doing since 1986. By creating a limited production run, usually in a 1:15 or 1:20 ratio of variant to regular covers, these companies could charge substantially more for the comic books with variant covers, which collectors trying to buy every issue featuring their favorite superhero or speculators investing with an eye towards the substantial second-hand comic-book market would be willing to pay.

A few final thoughts to conclude this section of this essay.

I have been guilty of treating all of the examples of cartoon and comic-strip parodies and pastiches of famous works of art we have examined in the above pages as if the contexts in which they appeared were equal. Obviously, the "culturally bound background knowledge" that viewers bring to cartoons and comic strips evolves over time, and one cannot assume that how viewers might have reacted to a cartoon art parody in the mid-20th century is the same as how viewers would react to a similar cartoon in the first quarter of the 21st century. Further, there is a clear difference between the background knowledge of viewers of traditional newspapers funny pages or comic books versus the background knowledge that cartoonists and comic-strip artists can assume readers bring to the *New Yorker* or to esoteric web sites.

Nevertheless, American cartoon and comic-strip quotations of famous works of art display a remarkable degree of conservatism across time and publication context. Rarely do cartoonists or comic-strip artists allude to an artwork that has not already been parodied by others, and rarely do they make reference to any work of contemporary artists. And, as we have seen, even within the accepted canon of masterworks of Western art, many artists and many works of art are neglected by American cartoonists and comic-strip artists. There is, moreover, an unwritten taboo among traditional, syndicated cartoonists and comic-strip artists against poking fun at religious art or depicting nudity.

In his recent article, "Biographies of Famous Painters in Comics," Thierry Groensteen opines that

For a cartoonist, a painting is something like an artistic ideal and, also, 'a zone of resistance that must be overcome or contaminated by any

possible means'... In the best cases, this leads to a creative tension. When they are confronted with this other form of visual art, cartoonists make a statement about painting; however, at the same time, they always, necessarily, make a statement about their own medium: comic art.

A few American art-related cartoons and comic strips express this "zone of resistance" with a level of hostility towards art, such as with the museum art thief jokes (cf. **Figs**. **187-192**) or with the **Fig. 516** *Doonesbury* comic strip where mayonnaise is smeared over a Monet. For the most part, however, American cartoonists and comic-strip humorists "contaminate" famous works of art simply by incorporating them into their gags. If "fine" art is supposed to make a statement about the human condition, comic art highlights life's absurdity by poking fun at those statements. He who laughs last . . .

## Mocking Modernism



**Fig. 677**. M. T. "Penny" Ross, "Mamma's Angel Child has a Cubist Nightmare in the Studio of Monsier Paul Vincent Cezanne Van Gogen Ganguin," *The Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 1916.

M. T. "Penny" Ross' 1916 *Mama's Angel Child* comic strip (**Fig. 677**) portrays modern art as literally the stuff of nightmares. Using the hallucinatory dream-trope

pioneered by Winsor McCay (cf., e.g., **Figs. 89–90**, **93–95**, and **242**), Ross has the Angel Child Esther fall asleep in the studio of the dandy "Monsieur Paul Vincent Cezanne Van Gogen Ganguin" and enter a Cubist dream world, one where the abstracted figure of the artist says "If we look queer remember crazy artists painted us so." After the child is colorized by a rainbow-colored rain, the artist—now rendered in a less abstracted form—decides to paint her portrait. The artist tells us that "My method of painting is to blindfold myself so that I can't see my subject and then cast my colors gracefully on the canvas without the use of brushes." When he throws a bucket of paint towards the canvas (just as the "Post-Impressionist" painter did in John T. McCutcheon 1913 *New York Evening Sun* comic, cf. **Fig. 112**), he misses and the paint lands instead on Esther, who dissolves into a puddle of colors before she wakes up from her "awful dream."

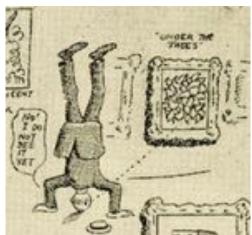
Thierry Groensteen, in his article "quand la bande dessinée parle d'art . . . l'insolence du dominé," maintains that Ross' portrayal of Modernism ". . . clearly appears here as inherently threatening: the place of a loss of bearings, a wavering of reason, the expression of an unnatural humanity." While this strip certainly has a threatening, nightmarish quality, I am not sure that Ross is really trying to denounce modern art as an "expression of unnatural humanity." As I argued in the Armory Show essay, the newspaper and magazine cartoons drawn in response to that seminal 1913 exhibition would seem to be more sympathetic to the show's radical Post-Impressionist, Cubist, and Futurist works than were the reactions of the general public or tradition-bound art critics. We have also noted, at the end of the previous section, Thierry Groensteen's assertion that for comic artists a painting is both an artistic ideal and a "zone of resistance"—something to be overcome to make a statement about the comics medium. It would seem, then, that in his 1916 strip Ross is simply having fun in creating his own arresting images to explore how comic art can ridicule avant garde art.

Rube Goldberg's 1928 *Cosmopolitan* magazine cartoon (**Fig. 678**) represents a continuation of the playfulness with which American cartoonists and comic-strip artists greeted the *avant garde* art in the 1913 Armory Show. In this cartoon, Goldberg (whose name by 1928 had already become synonymous with crazy, over-complicated inventions designed to perform simple daily tasks) was clearly referring to earlier New York newspaper reactions to the Armory Show, such as Alex Sass' tongue-in-cheek article that described how an elderly man dressed in a frock coat and high silk hat stood on his head while trying to make sense of a John Marin painting (cf. **Fig. 96**) or T.E. Powers vignette

of a man who, in spite of standing on his head when looking at Francis Picabia's *The Procession* (mislabeled as "Under the Trees") says "I do not get it yet" (**Fig. 679**). It is unclear why Goldberg's man in a silly plaid suit felt compelled to stand on his head and use binoculars to look at what appears to be a straight-forward, non abstracted, version of Marcel Duchamps' *Nude Descending a Staircase*. (We might note that Goldberg, who had trained as an engineer at UC Berkeley before becoming a cartoonist, has the man anchor himself with a foot hooked behind the frame and use his hat to cushion his head against the railing.)



Fig. 678. Rube Goldberg, Cosmopolitan, 1928.



**Fig. 679**. Detail of Thomas E. Powers, "Art at the Armory by Powers, Futurist," *New York American*, 22 Feb., 1913 (from Fig. 98).

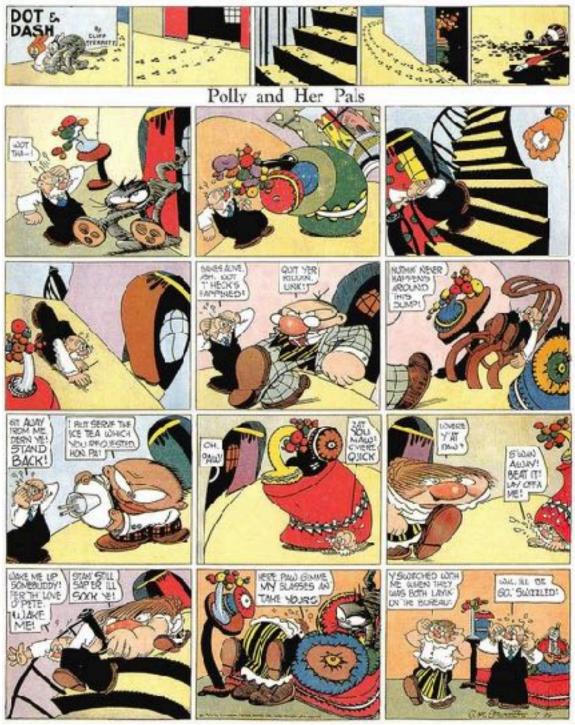


Fig. 680. Cliff Sterrett, Polly and Her Pals, 26 Sept., 1929.

The year after Rube Goldberg's cartoon appeared in *Cosmopolitan*, a Cliff Sterrett *Polly and Her Pals* comic strip (**Fig. 680**) took an oblique swipe at the "loss of bearings" engendered by Modernist abstractions. Sterrett's Sunday offering begins with a topper "Dot & Dash" strip, a five-panel pantomime that traces the pet's footprints back to the cartoonist's spilled ink bottle—a metafictional joke about the cartooning craft like those we examined in the "Cartooning Cartoonists" section of the previous essay. The "Polly

and Her Pals" section below begins *in media res*, with Paw wandering through the house, confused and frightened by the dizzyingly abstracted world in which he finds himself; the gag's resolution comes in the final panel, where we are brought back to "reality" with the revelation that Paw's disorientation was due to his accidentally having put on his wife's glasses. The joke is rather lame, but it serves as a wonderful vehicle for Sterrett to play with comic versions of Modernist abstractions; note the dizzying staircase in the third panel of the top row, an echo of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* as well as the falling-down-the-staircase comic trope used by Charles Forbell and Winsor McCay (cf. **Figs. 93–95**). [Note also the connection between altered vision and artistic abstraction that later cartoonists would associate with Picasso; cf. **Figs. 573** –**575**).



Fig. 681. Ernie Bushmiller, Nancy, from Groensteen (2017).

Ernie Bushmiller similarly plays with blurred vision and abstracted Modernist art in a *Nancy* strip (**Fig. 681**) where the title character wobbles through a disorienting world after becoming dizzy from spinning on a piano stool. In the final panels we the viewer (but not the still dizzy Nancy) are brought back to "reality" as the shop-keeper picks her up and takes her into his store—an act that would probably be considered child abduction today! Unlike the previous Strerrett gag, Bushmiller's joke is explicitly tied to *avant garde* art as Nancy is startled by the "modern paintings" in the final, elongated, panel—paintings that resemble the watercolors John Marin exhibited in the 1913 Armory Show (cf. **Figs. 99**). Groensteen maintains that this Bushmiller strip portrays Modernism as something frightening and nightmarish: "... in the face of modern painting, the feeling one experiences is analogous to seasickness and gagging. It is an art that, literally, indisposes." I would argue, again, that rather than an expression of genuine hostility towards modern art, Nancy's dizzy nausea is a merely a set-up for Bushmiller to create a humorous visual satire.



Fig. 682. Cliff Sterrett, Polly and Her Pals, 31 March, 1936.

A later, 1936, Cliff Sterrett *Poly and Her Pals* strip (**Fig. 682**) explicitly addresses modern art as Paw wonders through an exhibition of abstracted nudes, increasingly disturbed by their portrayals of femininity; when he emerges from the exhibition, Paw grabs and kisses the first woman he sees, relieved that she doesn't resemble the women in the show—an act that doesn't seem to bother the woman but that today would land him in prison for sexual assault! While it would seem Sterrett expects that we the viewers share Paw's abhorrence of artistic abstraction, the Canadian comics scholar Jeet Heer thinks that there is a double-joke in the strip: "One the one hand, we have the typical joke of Paw being scared by modern art. But Sterrett himself was influenced by cubism. The figures he draws aren't that different than the paintings that Paw sees." Again, under a surface hostility lies a playful co-optation of modern art to serve the purposes of comics art.



Fig. 683. Richard Taylor, Frontispiece from Taylor (1947).

The Canadian cartoonist Richard Taylor used the same abstract-art-perverts-feminine-beauty joke in a *New Yorker* cartoon that he republished as the frontispiece to his 1947 "how-to" book, *Introduction to Cartooning*. Taylor, a formally trained artist who stressed in his book the importance of life drawing for cartoonists, expected his viewers to laugh at the contrast between the "pretty as a picture" model who walks into the artist's studio and the Picasso-esque abstract nudes hanging on the walls (**Fig. 683**).

Frank King's 1930 *Gasoline Alley* strip (**Fig. 684**) also presents what on the surface appears to be a frightening vision of Modernist painting. Walt and his nephew Skeezix visit an art museum where Walt says "Modernism confuses me. I'd hate to live in the place that picture was painted"—a convoluted phrase that, as Groensteen points out, confuses the represented with the representation. The pair then, mysteriously, enters that world of Modernist representations where they wonder through abstracted rural and urban landscapes; at the end of their tour, Walt and Skeezix encounter a Picasso-esque figure who tells them that there is "no way out," after which they dissolve into a rainbow colored stream as they head off into the horizon. Skeezix's final comment, "That was an awful dream . . . Or was it a dream," provides a metafictional allusion to the dream-trope popular in earlier American 20<sup>th</sup> century comic strips.

As Thierry Groensteen has observed, in this *Gasoline Alley* comic strip Frank King is more interested in exploring the possibilities of comic graphic experimentation than he is in expressing hostility towards modern art:

What this strip tells us is that for a comics artist, an image is always a window open to a habitable world or at least one that is visitable. In this sense, any represented place exists for the good. . . . The "detour" through Modernist paintings is a way to remember that the creation of universes is a privilege of the comic author. . . . The space of the canvas is not an airlock giving access to a habitable world, but only a surface covered with pigments; they also become pigments in their turn.

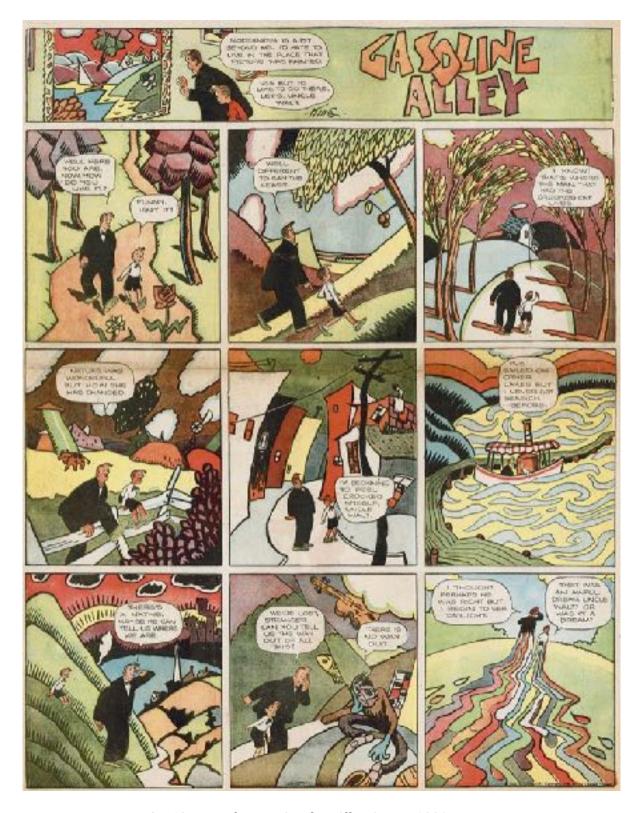
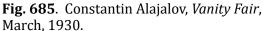
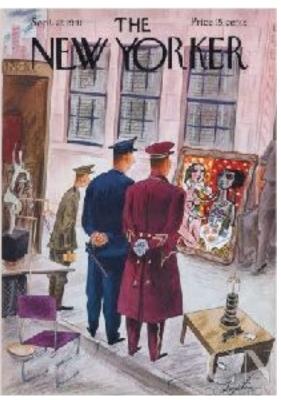


Fig. 684. Frank King, Gasoline Alley, 2 Nov., 1930.







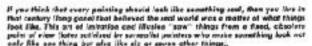
**Fig. 686**. Constantin Alajalov, *New Yorker*, 27 Sept., 1941.

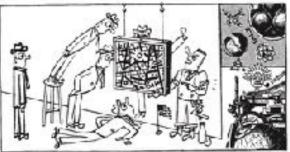
A more overtly playful attitude towards Modernist art can be seen in two magazine covers made by Constantin Alajalov, an Armenian-American who trained as a painter in Russia before fleeing the Soviet Union in 1923 and emigrating to the U.S., where he pursued a career as a muralist, book illustrator, and magazine-cover artist. The joke in Alajalov's 1930 Vanity Fair cover (Fig. 685) would seem to be the incongruity of the man on the left, with dapper polka-dot scarf and raised eyebrow, looking at the two women on his right rather than at the abstract art on display in front of him. This may be a museum male-gaze gag (cf. Ellison Hoover's 1940 cartoon below, **Fig. 701**), with Alajalov's man comparing the flesh-and-blood women to what appears to be a weird Futurist version of Praxiteles' Capitoline Venus, reacting much like the sexual assaulter in Cliff Sterrett's 1936 cartoon (Fig. 682); on the other hand, Alajalov's man may simply be trying to overhear the conversation of the women, one of whom seems to have a museum guidebook tucked under her arm, hoping that they could explain why a Suprematist painting was hung next to what appears to be cubist paintings by Picasso and Braque. Alajalov returned to the motif of gazing at abstract art for his 1941 *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 686**), this time with a Western-Union telegraph boy, a policeman, and a uniformed doorman incongruously fascinated by what appears to be an abstract painting by Picasso of two women, the canvas casually propped up against an apartment building into which abstract art and modernist furniture is being unloaded from a moving van; to our modern sensibilities, knowing how valuable an original Picasso is today, we might be shocked by the cavalier way the moving man, who we can just see on the far right entering the building with a painting in one hand, has left the artwork strewn about the sidewalk and street curb.

## A HOW TO LOOK AT A CUBIST PAINTING

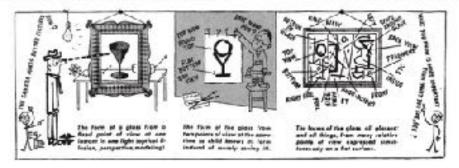
Hare's the beginning of an applicable of medium out. After mains studied it is little more, we'll tell you a little more subset surrentism, obstration, as what over you want. — By Ad Reisberd

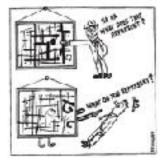






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**Fig. 687**. Ad Reinhardt, "How to Look at a Cubist Painting," *PM* 1946.

The minimalist Abstract Expressionist artist Ad Reinhardt is best known today for the famous (infamous?) black-on-black, "last" canvases he painted shortly before his death in 1967 (for cartoon parodies of which, cf. **Fig. 372** above and the examples cited in Mouly, 2013). Reinhardt was also a socialist and a prolific cartoonist, creating cartoons in the 1930's and 1940's for, among other venues, the communist party affiliated newspaper *New Masses*. In 1946, Reinhardt published in the leftist newspaper *PM* a series of "How to Look" comics designed to educate his readers about modern art.

Reinhardt maintained that fine art "is not practical, useful, related, applicable or subservient to anything else." That, however, modern art can also serve to raise social consciousness is suggested by the final panel in one of these Reinhardt "How to Look" comics (**Fig. 687**): a man scoffingly asks what an abstract painting represents only to have the anthropomorphized painting ask him, in return, what he represents.

Reinhardt's "How to Look" comics were little noticed at the time they were published and hardly had any influence on public attitudes towards modern art—the *PM* newspaper never had a circulation greater than 200,000 and the socialist publication folded in 1948 in spite of the financial support given by the businessman Marshal Field III. Reinhardt's comics do, however, represent a shift in American attitudes toward Modernism following WWII, as New York City became the epicenter of Western contemporary art and Abstract Expressionism became all the rage. American cartoonists continued to make fun of this new art, but their parodies and pastiches no longer portrayed it as inherently threatening—as George Melly put it "... that somehow an assault on accepted visual standards masks an attack on moral standards."

And it is after WWII that the representation of Modernist art in American cartoons and comic strips began to be frozen into stereotyped comic motifs that continue to be employed up to the present day. As a demonstrative exercise to illustrate this post-WWII trend, we look here at a sample of *New Yorker* cartoons about modern art published in a single year, 1952 (cf. also **Fig. 318** for a Robert J. Day cartoon published in the *New Yorker* on 5 Jan., 1952, **Figs. 205**, **308**, **358**, for Anatol Kovarsky cartoons published in the *New Yorker* on 15 Nov., 3 May, and 21 June, 1952, **Fig. 521** for an L.H. Siggs cartoon published in the *New Yorker* on 30 Aug., 1952, and **Fig. 1180** for a Claude Smith cartoon published in the *New Yorker* on 26 July, 1952).

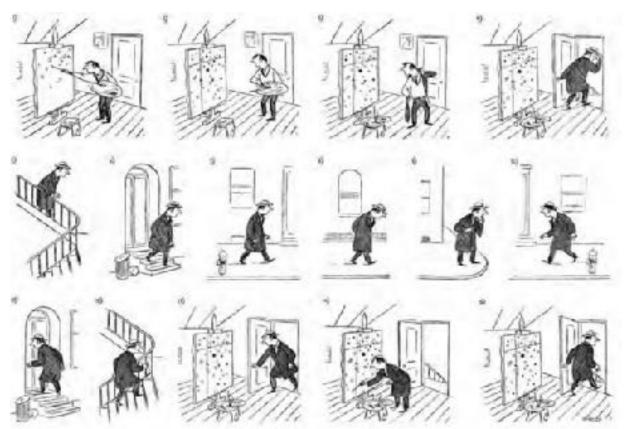


Fig. 688. Anatol Kovarsky, The New Yorker, 12 Jan., 1952.



**Fig. 689**. Chon Day, *The New Yorker*, 8 March, 1952.



**Fig. 690**. Garrett Price, *The New Yorker*, 22 March, 1952.



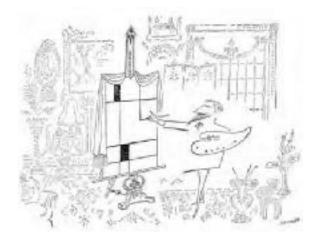
"Why, isn't that Kiki Faster? She used to pose for me."

**Fig. 691.** Charles E. Martin, *The New Yorker*, 9 Aug., 1952.



"Field it, Benners bold at Yorks been shifted to Flemish Renansumed"

**Fig. 692**. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 18 Oct., 1952.



**Fig. 693**. Saul Steinberg, *The New Yorker*, 1 Nov., 1952.



**Fig. 694**. Robert Krauss, *The New Yorker*, 27 Dec., 1952.

The gags in these 1952 *New Yorker* cartoons are based on a number of simple comic incongruities, all of which are meant to make us laugh rather than to be outraged at the conventions of modern art. Some poke fun at artists making art, such as with Anatol Kovarsky's January cartoon (**Fig. 688**), which targets the minimalist painter who has an epiphany about his work and then comes back into the studio to absurdly add a single dot to the canvas, with Kovarsky's May cartoon (**Fig. 308**) targeting the greedy painter who paints dollar bills, his June cartoon (**Fig. 358**) targeting the conformity of art students in a nude modeling class, or with Saul Steinberg's cartoon (**Fig. 693**) which humorously contrasts the rococo ornateness of an artist's studio with the minimalist Mondrian-esque canvas he is painting. Anatol Kovarsky's October offering (**Fig. 692**) is a museum-guard joke, targeting the modern art gallery that has driven the guard to

attempt suicide by hanging himself from a Calder-esque mobile. Robert Krauss' cartoon (**Fig. 694**) surprises us with a man who has decorated his apartment with the most upto-date modern furniture and art only to use an abstract painting to disguise his wall safe. Chon Day's, Garrett Price's and Charles E. Martin's cartoons (**Figs. 689–691**) all take the form of a person standing next to a beret-wearing painter while commenting on his art; we the viewers can see the canvases in each of these cartoons and are expected to agree with the woman's frank disapproval in the Day cartoon, laugh at the man's affirmation in the Krauss comic, and be surprised by the fellow painter's comment in the Martin cartoon, which humorously suggests that the artist's Picasso-esque painting is naturalistic because the model was herself an abstraction—a comic trope we have already seen in **Figs. 20, 110, 320**, and **461**.



Fig. 695. Ollie Harrington, Bootsie, Pittsburgh Currier, 17 Oct., 1959.

In one of his *Bootsie* cartoons, Ollie Harrington also uses the motif of a conversation in front of a canvas painted by a beret-wearing artist (**Fig. 695**). Harrington was a pioneer African-American cartoonist, artist, and civil rights activist who received a BFA at Yale's School of Art in 1940 before he fled to Paris in 1951 while under investigation by the FBI, eventually claiming political asylum in East Germany,

where he spent the rest of his life continuing to work as a cartoonist. The humor in Harrington's 1959 *Bootsie* cartoon comes from the painter's incongruous statement that he is painting the way he does only because his white customers "jus' won't buy nothin' if it makes sense;" being able to see his silly canvas, we the viewers wince at his honesty!

[One wonders what Jean-Michel Basquiat thought of this Ollie Harrington cartoon!]



WHAT was haryblas con

"I like it, Julian – it speaks to what a waste of time and money your MFA was."

Fig. 696. Jim Berry, Berry's World 1974.

Fig. 697. Harry Bliss, 22 June, 2011.

Critiquing an Abstract Expressionist artist in front of his canvas has become a stock cliché cartoonists have gone back to time and time again. Given the quality of the paintings presented in the remarkably similar 1974 Jim Berry (**Fig. 696**) and the 2011 Harry Bliss (**Fig. 697**) cartoons, we the viewers are likely to agree with the hand-to-chin critics.

These critiquing-the-artist cartoons are a sub-category of the more general type of comic set-up where two people are talking in front of a work of art. We have seen this format, for instance, being used in the "this-painting-speaks-to-me" jokes targeting museum visitors (cf. **Figs. 210–215**). More commonly, this comic format has been employed to target modern art itself, such as we have seen in the "my-child-of-six-could-do-that" cartoons (cf. **Fig. 87**) or as it is used in John Ruge's 1963 *Playboy* cartoon (**Fig.** 

**698**) of an elegantly dressed couple standing in front of a stereotypical "chaotic mess" Pollock-esque painting, with the man making the same comment that Cantú and Castellanos put into the mouth of their title character in a 2006 *Baldo* strip (**Fig. 639**).



**Fig. 698**. John Ruge,"I know what he's trying to say, - he's trying to say that he can't paint worth a damn!" *Playboy*, April, 1963.



**Fig. 699**. Abel Faivre, "At an Exhibition of 'Cubist' or 'Futurist' Pictures," *The Century*, Vol. 85:6, April, 1913, p. 960.

The comic motif of a couple befuddled by an abstract painting originated in the American newspaper and magazine cartoon reactions to the 1913 Armory Show.

Perhaps the earliest example of this type is Abe Faivre's 1913 *Century* magazine cartoon

(**Fig. 699**) where the elegantly dressed woman humorously suggests to her topped-hatted husband that Francis Picabia's *The Procession, Seville* (1912) "Perhaps it is a map of the Balkan Mountains?" [Note that contemporary museum curators would cringe at the placement of live plants in the gallery, not to mention at visitors resting their arms on statue bases or carrying sharp-pointed walking sticks!]



Fig. 700. Wiley Miller, 1981.

An early Wiley Miller cartoon (**Fig. 700**) repeats this same gag, this time with a couple in front of silly abstraction that in fact looks nothing like a Picasso. The real target in this Miller's cartoon, however, is not modern art but rather political gerrymandering.



**Fig. 701**. Ellison Hoover, "At the Museum," 1940. Lithograph, 25 x 36 cm.

Ellison Hoover's wordless 1940 cartoon (**Fig. 701**) presents a variation on the couple-standing-in-front-of-abstract-art cartoon motif. Here the fur-clad woman is reading a museum brochure, presumably making a sincere effort to understand the childishly rendered abstract art in front of her while her husband is laser-eyed focused on the nude in the naturalistic landscape incongruously hung amid the abstract art. The target of this comic gag, again, is not modern art *per se*, but in this case the male gaze.



**Fig. 702**. Gary Brookins & Susie MacNelly, *Shoe*, 5 April, 2015.



**Fig. 703**. Jeff Stahler, *Moderately Confused*, 10 March, 2018.



"What are they worth? Well, it's difficult to put a price on such extraordinary works of art. How much you got?"

**Fig. 704**. Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 2 Dec., 2010.



"I like this one. It makes me think – but not as hard as the others."

**Fig. 705.** Mike Baldwin, *Cornered*, 28 Sept., 2018.



Fig. 706. P. C. Vey, Narrative Magazine, 2018.



**Fig. 707**. P. C. Vey, *Barron's*, 2019.

Gary Brookins and Susie MacNelly, who continued Jeff MacNelly's comic strip *Shoe* after Jeff's death in 2000, use the "a picture is worth a thousand words" adage for their cartoon gag (**Fig. 702**); here the Professor and his editor Shoemaker stand in front of a carefully rendered painting reminiscent of a Helen Frankenthaler—creating an "associative inversion" which suggests that the Brookins/MacNelly team is in fact not hostile to non-figurative art. Jeff Stahler uses the same gag for his 2018 cartoon (**Fig. 703**), here with a couple standing in front of a "scrambled-face" Picasso parody. Both Mike Baldwin and Peter Vey have used the couple-standing-in-front-of-abstract-art motif for multiple jokes. The abstract art in both of Baldwin's *Cornered* cartoons (**Fig.** 

704–705) is ridiculous but not the actual targets of his gags: the joke in his 2010 cartoon is on the contemporary art market, the blatant commercialization of which is revealed by the gallery owner's incongruously blunt question; the gag in Baldwin's 2018 cartoon is directed toward the museum-brochure-holding woman, although, being able to see the art, we the viewers are inclined to agree that it doesn't make us think very hard. Similarly, the abstract art in in Peter Vey's cartoons (Figs. 645–646) is not the target of his gags, although its ridiculous repetitive simplicity does set up the jokes: we are supposed to think that the artist is *still* deluding himself in Vey's 2018 cartoon; and we doubt that the man in the 2019 cartoon is looking at the "perfect piece of art" that will help him learn something about art. [For another cartoon targeting a doofus man out of place in a modern art gallery, cf. Nina Paley's and Stephen Hersh's *The Hots* strip, Fig. 219.]

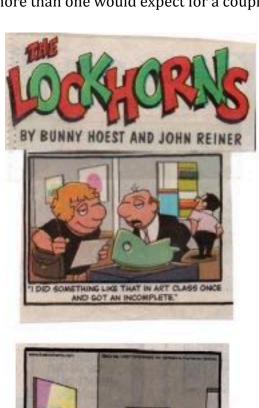


Fig. 708. Pat Byrnes, *Barron's*, 5 Dec. 2018.

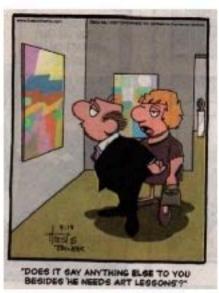
Pat Byrnes' 2018 *Barron's* cartoon (**Fig. 708**) gives us a couple in front of an abstract painting, with, typically, the man feeling compelled to "explain" the work to his female partner; without seeing it in color, we cannot fully appreciate the painting represented in the cartoon, but even in the black-and-white version it seems to be a sophisticated treatment of the sleeping *odelisque* type, suggesting that—contrary to the man's snide comment— the artist had in fact received a solid art history education.

Perhaps no other cartoon uses the comic set-up of a couple talking in front of abstract art more than *The Lockhorns*, the strip created by Bill Hoest in 1968 and

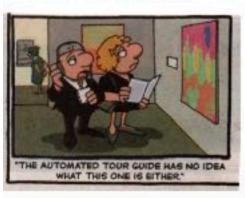
continued by his widow Bunny and his assistant John Reiner after Hoest's death in 1988. The perennially arguing Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn seem to go to modern art museums more than one would expect for a couple from Levittown.



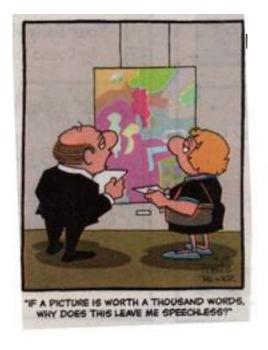


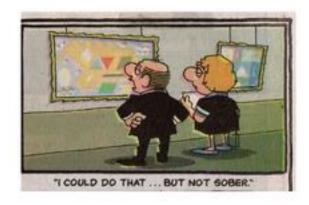












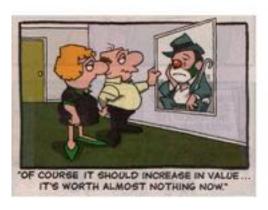




Fig. 709. Selection of Bunny Hoest and John Reiner, *The Lockhorns*, 2011–2017.

In the selection of *Lockhorns* cartoons my wife and I cut out from our local newspapers in New Hampshire from 2011 to 2017 (**Fig. 709**), Hoest and Reiner use this comic set-up for a number of common abstract-art cartoon gags: Leroy compares an abstract sculpture to a failed school project (cf. **Fig. 384**) or, like the "a-child-of-six-could-do-that" jokes, says that he could paint an abstract work if he were drunk; he is awarded an installation-art prize for falling asleep in a modern art gallery (cf. **Figs. 200** –**201** and **239**); he thinks the abstract artist needs art lessons (cf. **Figs. 689**, **696**–**697**), and uses the picture-is-worth-a-thousand-words gag (cf. **Figs. 702**–**703**); there is a museum audio-guide joke (cf. **Figs. 178**–**179**) and a gag about understanding abstract art (cf. **Fig. 705**, **707**); and there are black-velvet art jokes and a gag about hanging an abstract painting over the couch (cf. **Figs. 724**–**725**). Although these cartoons ridicule modern art, their parodies of abstract painting—all reminiscent of color-field paintings

of the 1950's an 1960's—are sensitively done, suggesting that, like Gary Brookins and Susie MacNelly (**Fig. 702**), the Hoest/Reiner team does not actually view abstract art with hostility.

Almost all couple-standing-in-front-of-abstract-art cartoons are set in museums. As we have seen in the above "Comic Art in Museums" essay, abstract art also features in cartoons targeting museum visitors. Other museum cartoons more directly target modern art itself.

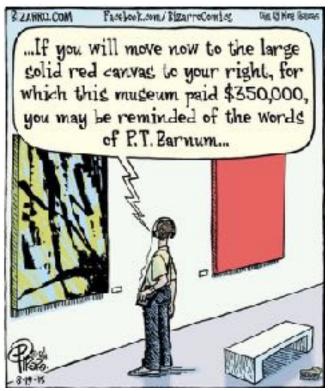


Fig. 710. Dan Piraro, Bizarro, 19 Aug., 2015.

A Dan Piraro cartoon (**Fig. 6710**), for instance, uses the comic museum audioguide set-up (cf. **Figs. 178–179**) to poke fun at a solid red canvas that looks like a section of a Barnett Newman painting. Piraro assumes his viewers can fill in the ellipse with "a sucker is born every minute." Even though there is no evidence for attributing this saying to P. T. Barnum, the sentiment matches the evocation of Barnum that Teddy Roosevelt made in his attack on modern art (see the last section of the "Armory Show Pastiches and Parodies" essay above). [One wonders what the museum audio guide had to say about the previous, slightly more pleasing, Pollock-esque, canvas.]

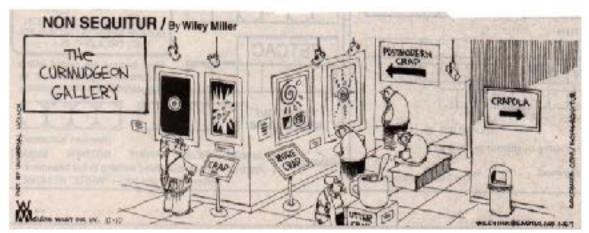


Fig. 711. Wiley Miller, Non Sequitur, 10 Oct., 2016.

Wiley Miller's *Non Sequitur* comic strip (**Fig. 711**) belongs to the "imaginary museum" category of cartoons (cf. **Figs. 193–199**). Given the cartoon quality of the abstract paintings and sculptures displayed in the "Curmudgeon Gallery," it is not clear if this Miller gag is really targeting modern art or if we are meant to agree with the curmudgeon's assessment that it is all crap!

The majority of American cartoons and comic strips poking fun at modern art target Abstract Expressionist paintings—a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century artistic trend that, frozen in cartoon time, continues to be parodied up to the present day. As we have seen, however, modern sculpture has also on occasion been subject to the satirical gaze of the comic humorist. Curiously, cartoons ridiculing modern sculpture are more frequently encountered in comics from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in those from the later 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries. We have seen several pastiches of *avant garde* sculpture in cartoons about the 1913 Armory Show (cf. **Figs. 97**, **99bis**, **101**, **103**, **107**, and **121**) and have noted Anatol Kovarsky's mid-century parodies of Alexander Calder's mobiles (**Fig. 623**). Of more recent comic-strip artists, Richard Thompson (**Figs. 352**, **358**, and **399**) and Grant Snider (**Figs. 188** and **649–650**) are notable for their pastiches and parodies of modernist sculpture.



**Fig. 712**. Barbara Shermund, "Of course it's a woman. They don't do landscapes in marble," *The New Yorker*, 29 Oct., 1939.

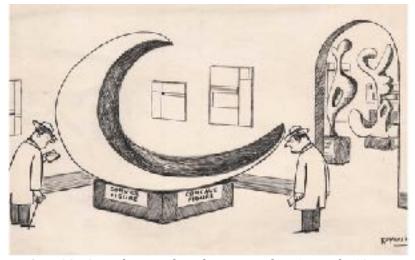


Fig. 713. Anatol Kovarsky, *The New Yorker*, 1 March, 1947.

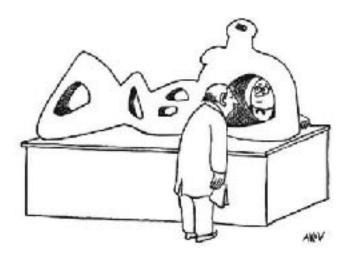


Fig. 714. Anatol Kovarsky, The New Yorker, 1955.



Fig. 715. Charles E. Martin, Cover art, The New Yorker, 15 Jan. 1955.

Barbara Shermund's 1939 New Yorker cartoon (Fig. 712) uses the comic motif of two people talking in front of a work of abstract art. Like museum cartoons where mothers or teachers respond to what we can presume a child had just said (cf. Figs. 158, 223, 224, and 227), we assume that one of the two smartly dressed "dames" had just asked her companion whether the odd lumpy modern sculpture represented a woman or a landscape; Shermund augments her clever swipe at Modernist art with the two wild abstract paintings in the background. Anatol Kovarsky's 1947 New Yorker cartoon (Fig. 713) makes fun of an abstract sculpture by giving it contrasting "convex/concave" labels being viewed by two nearly identical men holding museum brochures; the Mondrianesque paintings and the wild abstract sculptures in the background suggest that Kovarsky's mocking of modern art extends beyond this one sculpture. Kovarsky's wordless 1955 New Yorker cartoon (Fig. 714) uses the same two-men-looking-at-anabstract-sculpture format, the gag this time being entirely visual, with the two men startled to see each other through a hole in a parody of a Henry Moore reclining woman. [Note that these Kovarsky's playful jabs at abstract sculpture do not represent an underlying antipathy towards modern art is suggested by his sympathetic treatment of Abstract Expressionism in his 1957 New Yorker cartoon, Fig. 171. Charles Martin's 1955 New Yorker cover (Fig. 715) presents another, wordless, visual joke, with the humorous incongruity coming when we recognize the difference between the exaggerated slenderness of the Giacometti sculptures and plumpness of the two welldressed matrons staring at them.

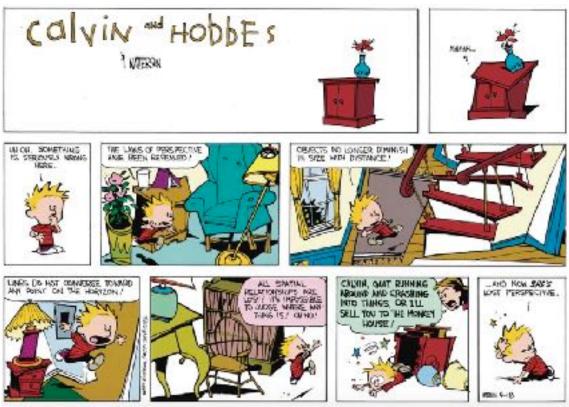
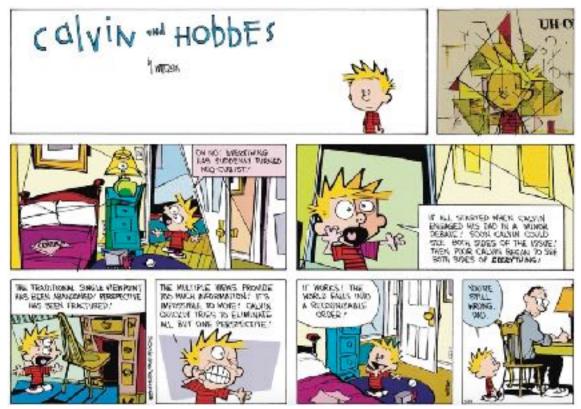


Fig. 716. Bill Watterson, Calvin and Hobbes, 18 April, 1989.



**Fig. 717**. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 30 April, 1990.

Given the prominence of children in cartoons making fun of museums (**Figs. 221** –**239**) and in cartoons making fun of making art (**Figs. 399–429**), it should come as no surprise that American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have used a child's perspective to mock modern art. Bill Watterson, for instance, pokes fun at Cubism in two comic strips where Calvin's wild imagination transforms his home into a "Neo-Cubist" world where "the laws of perspective have been repealed" and "the traditional single viewpoint has been abandoned" (**Figs. 716–717**). Like Watterson's 1987 strip about Calvin's family outing to an art museum (**Fig. 238**), these two comics focus on the youngster's hilariously fertile inner mental life, which here projects the concept of philosophical perspectives into his physical world. The creative title panels of each of these comic strips suggest that, like the "Penny" Ross, Cliff Sterrett, Ernie Bushmiller, and Frank King works we examined above, Watterson is more interested in having fun in creating arresting comic images than in mounting a hostile attack on modernist art; note the playful echoes of Duchamp's staircase and Picasso's "scrambled face" portraits.



Fig. 718. Ron Ferdinand and Scott Ketcham, Dennis the Menace, 6 March, 2016.

Ron Ferdinand and Scott Ketcham use the family-outing-to-the-art-museum trope in a 2016 *Dennis the Menace* comic strip where the Mitchell parents attempt to instill in their son an appreciation of modern art (**Fig. 718**). Given the cartoonish nature of the abstract art Ferdinand and Ketcham put on the museum walls, their efforts fail to convince us as well as Dennis, who makes the same bathroom-sign joke we saw in Todd Clark's 2007 *Lola* strip (**Fig. 203**) and in Guy Endore-Kaiser's and Rodd Perry's *Brevity* cartoon (**Fig. 204**).



Fig. 719. Bill Amend, Foxtrot, 12 June, 2011.

The humor in Bill Amend's *Foxtrot* comic strip (**Fig. 719**) lies in the incongruous contrast between Jason's innocent creation of a giant lego block and his mother's misinterpretation of it as "a meta, ironic statement about the futility of humankind's perpetual quest to elevate ourselves beyond our base nature via societal constructs." The target of this gag is not modern art *per se*, but rather the ridiculousness of the art critic..



**Fig. 720**. Lincoln Peirce, *Big Nate*, 30 Oct., 2016.

Lincoln Peirce makes a similar joke in a *Big Nate* Halloween comic strip poking fun at pontificating art historians (**Fig. 720**), with Nate's bespectacled friend Francis literally boring a toddler to tears with his recitation of the career of the Modernist architect Walter Gropius. Peirce times this gag by alternating wide-angle, adult-perspective views of the trick-or-treaters and the mother and child with close-up, child-perspective views of the pontificating Francis. Peirce, who grew up in New Hampshire, seems to assume that his viewers would recognize his reference to the Boston Rex Sox star baseball player David Ortiz and at least to recognize the name Walter Gropius, who spent the last third of his life in Massachusetts where he taught at Harvard College and where he built his National Landmark Bauhaus home in 1938.



The pretentious critic and art historian has also been humorously skewered in a number of other cartoons and comic strips. A Berkeley Breathed's 1985 *Bloom County* strip (**Fig. 721**), for example, lampoons Steve Dallas' outrageous interpretation of an abstract painting by "Pablo Gookman." As Dallas asks his audience to feel the "back street garbage boiling and steaming in gutters of decaying, stinking ROT," the words expand across the panel, pushing him off to one side; when Dallas learns that the piece is actually entitled "A Pink Snow Bunny," his hair pops straight out.



Fig. 721. Berkeley Breathed, Bloom County, 8 April, 1985.

In addition to skewering the pompous art historian and art critic, American cartoonists and comic strip artists have also targeted pontificating artists who gives overblown interpretations of their work—a joke we have already seen in a Bill Watterson strip (**Fig. 401**).



Fig. 722. Garry Trudeau, Doonesbury, 1985.

Garry Trudeau's 1985 strip (**Fig. 722**), part of a series where Mike is perplexed by his (then) wife J.J's abstract art, presents a variation on this theme, with the artist herself giving a pretentious interpretation of her work. The gag here is set up by the first two panels, with J.J.'s over-the-top declaration that her work speaks to "the vulgarity of recent image appropriation" and deplores "the sterility of post-graffiti solidism. A comment on a comment, if you will;" this is followed by Mike's simple "Oh" in a third panel which provides a skip-beat pause before the comic resolution in the final panel, where Mike recognizes the broken shards as coming from their wedding china.

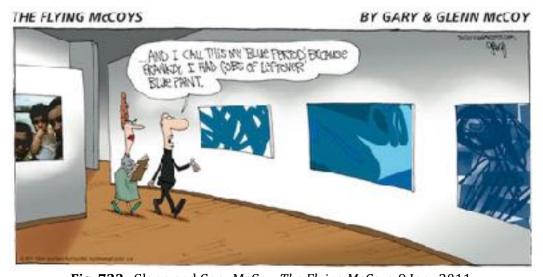


Fig. 723. Glenn and Gary McCoy, *The Flying McCoys*, 9 Jan., 2011.

The artist in a McCoy brother's cartoon (**Fig. 723**) gives a humorously honest description of his "Blue Period"—presumably an oblique swipe at Picasso. The three abstract paintings are actually quite pleasing and contrast with the cartoonishly rendered artist and clipboard-carrying gallery owner; the "associative inversion" in this

contrast is amplified by the photograph of a family that is incongruously hung next to the artist's abstracts.



Fig. 724. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, Wumo, 16 Sept., 2014.

Mikael Wulff and Anders Morgenthaler give us a cartoon (**Fig. 724**) where the pretentious interpretation is provided by the museum tour guide, with the joke coming from the paint-splattered artist expressing his surprise at what she said his abstract painting represents. Wulff and Anders Morgenthaler emphasize their gag by having the man in the striped shirt next to the artist turn and point at him, much like the child points to the Spirit in Will Eisner's 1996 metafictional cartoon made for the opening of the International Museum of Cartoon Art (**Fig. 164**).

Homeowners, as several American cartoonists have pointed out, can also be silly in their consumption of modern art.



**Fig. 725**. Tony Carrillo, *F Minus*, 19 May, 2006.



Fig. 726. Dean Young and John Marshall, Blondie, 19 Jan., 2014.

Tony Carrillo's metafictional joke (**Fig. 725**) assumes that viewers know the common put-down of people who buy art only because it goes well with their living room furniture. Dean Young and John Marshall use this same comic premise in a *Blondie* strip (**Fig. 726**) which is part of a running gag where Dagwood's neighbor Herb is forever borrowing things from him and never returning them. The target of both of these cartoons is the bourgeoise consumption of art and not modern art itself.



Fig. 727. Glenn McCoy and Gary McCoy, The Flying McCoys, 23 Oct., 2008.

A 2008 McCoy brothers cartoon (**Fig. 727**) targets the bourgeoise consumption of art with a silly play on words. We are meant to laugh at *both* the ridiculous paintings of oil barrels and at the capitalist who collects them.



Fig. 728. Mikael Wulff & Anders Morgenthaler, Wumo, 17 April, 2015.



Fig. 729. Jim Toomey, Sherman's Lagoon, 11 March, 2011.

Mikael Wulff's and Anders Morgenthaler's cartoon (**Fig. 728**) targets the "pretentious egghead" homeowners who are so enthralled by their ridiculous interpretations of an Abstract Expressionist painting that they fail to notice that they are being robbed. Jim Toomey's comic strip (**Fig. 729**), on the other hand, more directly targets modern art, suggesting that it is a scam like the gull-guano splatters that the scheming crab Hawthorne convinces the clueless sharks Sherman and Megan to buy.



"I'd any my biggest influence is probably Pollock." Fig. 730. Matthew Diffee, 2018.

Another pooping-bird-artist cartoon (**Fig. 730**), a 2018 Matthew Diffee offering that was apparently rejected by *The New Yorker*, likewise targets modern art—in this case, Jackson Pollock. While Diffee's joke belongs to the cartoon motif of pooping pigeons (cf. **Figs. 394–396**), he assumes that his viewers will have in mind the cartoon "chaotic mess" stereotype of Pollock's action-style paintings (cf. **Fig. 626–639**).

In the catalogue accompanying the 1973 *A Child of Six Could Do It: Cartoons About Modern Art* exhibition that he and J.R. Glaves-Smith curated at the Tate Galley, George Melly observed that there has been a wide spectrum of reactions to Modernism among cartoonists, ranging

... from affectionate pastiche to the most hostile rejection, from knowledgeable satire to ignorant misunderstanding. It's also worth underlining that with the passage of time, due no doubt to a general awareness of the direction of modern art, satirical sophistication has gradually gained ascendance over malicious approximation. Of late too, within the last five years or so, art as a subject for jokes has become less and less common.

While Melly is certainly correct in claiming that more recent cartoon jokes about modern art have generally been more sophisticatedly satirical than earlier versions, one might argue that in the past half-century cartoons and comic strips poking fun at modern art have become, if anything, more common than they were in the early 1970's.

So far in this essay, I have played fast and loose with the term "modern art," using it both to describe Modernism—a collective term encompassing the various art movements in the Western world from ca. 1860 to 1970 that rejected traditional forms of narration and naturalistic representation—as well as using it as a synonym for "contemporary art." While such a dual use of the term might be justified when describing "modern art" cartoons and comic strips created before the 1970's (e.g., **Figs. 677–695**, and **712–715**), using the term "modern art" when talking about later 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century cartoons that lampoon earlier Modernist art begs the question of how contemporary cartoonists and comic-strip artists have reacted to contemporary, "postmodern," art.

As we noted at the end of the previous section of this essay, few artists of the past half century have been the subjects of a humorous American cartoons or comic strips. Making fun of contemporary art—i.e. art made during one's lifetime—poses several problems for the contemporary cartoonist. First of all, contemporary art is eclectic, comprising a diverse set of artistic approaches and goals; lacking a single, uniform organizing principle or "ism," postmodern art doesn't present an easy target for the comic humorist. Another issue is the inevitable time-lag between when the work of a particular postmodern artist is put on display in contemporary art museums or galleries and when it enters the "culturally bound background knowledge" of the viewers of traditional cartoons and comic strips. Furthermore, is not clear how one could even go about lampooning contemporary performance or multimedia art in the static medium of cartoons.



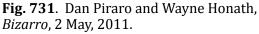




Fig. 732. Dan Piraro, Bizarro, 23 Jan. 2017.

Dan Piraro and his colleague Wayne ("Wayno") Honath have undertaken the challenge of making fun of contemporary art in two *Bizarro* cartoons. Honath's version (**Fig. 731**), with a precocious elementary-school student at his show-and-tell, is a clever play on the comic snowman motif (cf. **Figs. 388–391**); Piraro's offering (**Fig. 732**), with a precocious child performance artist, is a clever takeoff of the child-art-on-the-refrigerator theme (cf. **Figs. 402–409**). Both of these cartoons find humor in mocking postmodern irony—much like Bill Amend did in targeting the pretentiousness of Andy Fox (**Fig. 719**). [For another cartoon reference to performance art by children, cf. Richard Thompson's 2009 *Cul de Sac* comic, **Fig. 420**.]

If there is little that can be said about the handful of American humorous cartoons which target contemporary art, such is not the case with the issue of the relationship between contemporary art and the broader medium of comics itself—a subject that has engendered no small amount of discussion in comics scholarship. While this topic is really outside the scope of an essay about American cartoons and comic strips that make fun of art, a short excursus into the issue may not be totally out of line.

In his 2011 book *Bande dessinée et narration (Comics and Narration* 2013), Thierry Groensteen noted

In general terms, the art world and the comics world have long kept their distance from each other, to the point of seeming irreconcilable. And in high- cultural circles, comics has often been reproached for not keeping in step with the history of other arts in the twentieth century, for not being, in other words, contemporaneous with contemporary art.

As one might expect, Groensteen objects to the view that comics have not kept up with contemporary art.

Groensteen's main argument against this critique of comics, as we have noted at the end of the "High Art Lowdown" section of the "Comic Art in Museums" essay, is that comics should not be considered as a sub-category of contemporary art because the two are essentially different *forms* of art. Comics are visual *and* narrative, a form of visual story telling that calls for one to sit down with the comic in one's hands, rather than experience it while standing up, as one does when looking at monumental works of art hung in museum galleries.

That is not to say, of course, that contemporary visual arts and contemporary comics art are completely unrelated. From the Pop Art of Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol to the contemporary works of Rivanne Neuenschwander, Sammy Engramer, and others, comics have been inspiring other visual artists since the 1960's (cf. **Figs. 142**, **143**, **149–154**, **161**, **162** and **565**); we have seen, however, that museums and galleries which exhibit contemporary art and comics side by side have tended to present comics as "low" popular culture source material to be expropriated by contemporary artists creating "fine" art. On the other side of the coin, as we have seen in this essay, American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have been expropriating "modern" art for their own humorous purposes since the early  $20^{th}$  century.

Over the past few decades, abstract comics—comics composed of sequences of abstract images or of sequences of figural elements that do not form a coherent narrative—have developed in ways that make these comics essentially indistinguishable from other types of contemporary art. Groensteen points out that abstract comics challenge traditional norms of comics in much the same way that the more established genre of graphic novels and graphic narratives push against the boundaries of traditional comics story-telling; as he puts it, abstract comics are exploring "becoming contemporary art" just as graphic novels explore "becoming literature." Groensteen

further notes that while these new forms of comics art—what he calls "auteurist comics"—have flourished in recent decades, they have not replaced traditional, mass-produced, comics; the comics tent is big enough to include "high" art comics and the funny pages.

Although, with publications like the 2009 Fantagraphics anthology *Abstract Comics*, abstract comics have only recently been recognized as a separate genre of comics art, they have in fact been around for some time. In 1958, for instance, the hard-to-categorize artist/cartoonist Saul Steinberg drew two sheets of non-narrative cartoons that playfully explore the comics apparatus of speech bubbles and thought balloons (**Fig. 733**); this abstract comic was displayed in the 1990 Museum of Modern Art's *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture exhibition*, where curator Adam Gopnik described it: "The simple oval outline was transformed into a variety of shapes and substances that surveyed the décor of modern art."

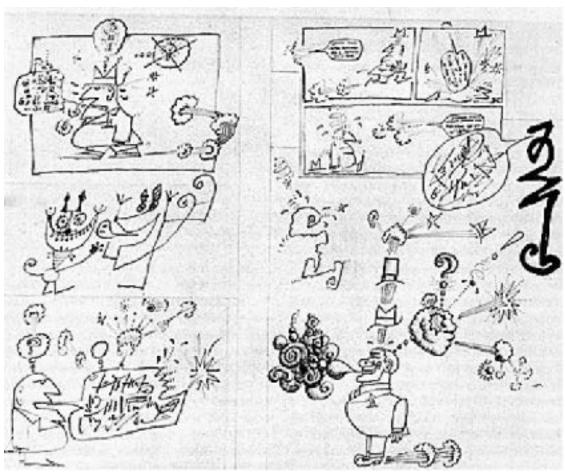
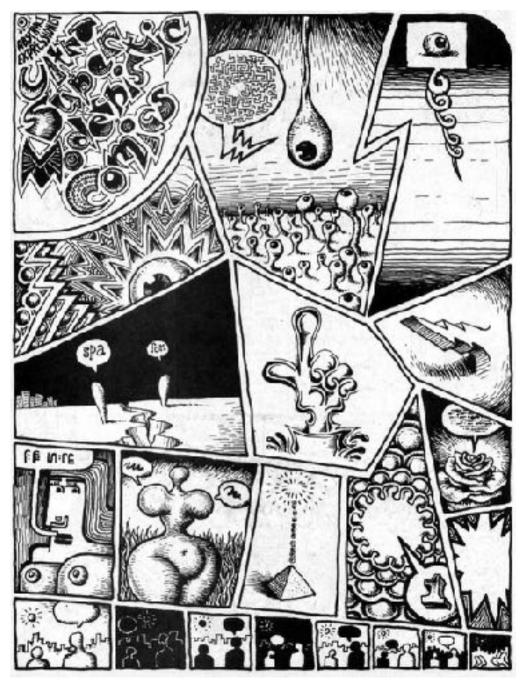


Fig. 733. Saul Steinberg, Detail from "Comic Strip," 1958.



**Fig. 734**. Robert Crumb, "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics," *Zap Comix*, No. 1, 1968.

A decade later, the underground comix artist Robert Crumb published his "Abstract Expressionist Ultra Super Modernistic Comics" in the first issue of *Zap Comix* (**Fig. 734**). Here Crumb presents us with a set of irregularly shaped panels inclosing figural images that have no apparent narrative coherence, though the collection may be intended as a humorous comment on the Modernist rejection of earlier narrative art.

Although both of these Saul Steinberg and Robert Crumb abstract comics are not traditional gag cartoons with humorous, "script opposition" incongruous punch lines,

both play with traditional comic-strip conventions in an "intertextual" manner that is clearly intended to make us smile: Steinberg gives us jet-powered speech bubbles crashing into the speaker, exploding thought bubbles coming out of thought bubbles, and hats popping off of hats popping off of heads; Crumb gives us speaking eyeballs and breasts, and a vignette of alternating silhouette views in increasingly smaller panels that end up squeezing the conversing couple off their feet.

Saul Steinberg's and Robert Crumb's non-narrative figural abstract comics
—"infranarrative comics" in Groensteen's jargon—retain a playful, cartoonish character consistent with Steinberg's production of gag cartoons and Crumb's humorous narrative underground comix; in other words, these abstract comics were clearly made by comics artists.

The line between the comics artist and the contemporary art artist, however, becomes blurred when one looks at purely abstract abstract comics. Are we, for instance, to consider Rivanne Neuenschwander's overpainting of *Zé Carioca* comic books (**Fig 150**) as comics or as contemporary art? Or, somehow, as both?



**Fig. 735**. Mike Getsiv, Tim Gaze, Jonny Gray, Maco, Steven LaRose, Satu Kaikkonen, Steven Bellitt, Rosaire Appel, Alexey Sokolin, Gareth A Hopkins, Chris Kreuter, A Decker, Daryl P. Morris, Charles Newton, Jase Daniels, Robukka, Rob, Ruela, Emmanuel, El Pájaro Mixto, Mauro Cesari, Amy Kuttab, Jenny Robins, Abi Daker, and Dellde Loport, *ABCOLAB #2*, 5–25 June, 2010. From Mike Getsiv, *Abstract Comics*, 5 July, 2010. Web.

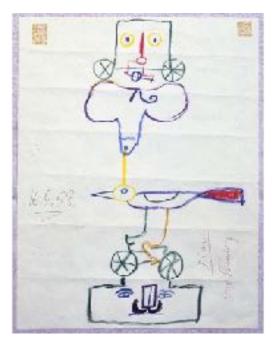
ABCOLAB #2 (**Fig. 735**) is a case in point. In June, 2010, Mike Getsiv, whose work had appeared in the Fantagraphic 2009 Abstract Comics anthology, asked fellow abstract comics artists to send him one square panel of "something abstract in black and white," and after receiving twenty-five responses from artists from ten different countries, he put them together into a single page in the order in which he received them. The resulting image of five rows of five panels is arresting, although it hardly tempts viewers to try to interpret it as a traditional narrative comic strip, much less to break out in a smile when viewing it.

Groensteen maintains that we can attempt to decode a purely abstract comic in one of two manners, either by "reading" it as a tableaux—a single image divided by orthogonal lines like a Mondrian painting—or by treating it as a comic page, where the apparatus of panels invites the viewer to a linear decoding, searching for discursive junctions and disjunctions between the panels. As Groensteen notes, context plays a large role in which of these two subjective approaches a viewer might take; a panelized image hung in an art museum might encourage one to view it as a tableaux, while the same image presented in a comics blog site might call for a linear, discursive, decoding. Given its context, then, our test case *ABCOLAB #2* abstract comic would seem to invite us to "read" it as a series, albeit one that frustrates any attempt to find discursive junctions between the panels.

It is unclear if, when he created his portmanteau abstract comic *ABCOLAB #2* in 2010, Mike Getsiv was aware of Thierry Groensteen's 1988 article, "La Narration comme supplément" (which wasn't translated into English until 2014). In this article, Groensteen said that "the theoretical possibility of a non-narrative comic has not, it would seem, yet materialized." Groensteen then went on in a thought experiment to create a "proto-page" comic strip composed of random panels he took from the works of different comic artists. Even given that the images he selected for his "haphazard mass of non-matching panels" were from figural narrative comics, Groensteen concluded that while we might try to create a narrative connection in our minds, because the "protopage" comic was not created from a prior narrative—a *script*—these attempts are doomed to failure.



**Fig. 736**. Man Ray, André Breton, Yves Tanguy, and Max Morise, "Exquisite Corpse" drawing, 1928. Art Institute, Chicago.



**Fig. 737**. Pablo Picasso and Saul Steinberg, Steinberg, "Exquisite Corpse" drawing, 16 May, 1958. Crayon and pencil on paper, 26 x 17 cm. Beinike Library, Yale University.



**Fig. 738**. Pablo Picasso and Saul "Exquisite Corpse" drawing, 16 May, 1958. Ink on paper, 26 x 17 cm. Private Collection.

It is also unclear if Getsiv recognized that his random compilation of panels of abstract art, *ABCOLAB #2*, can been seen as a digital analogue of the Exquisite Corpse

game where a player starts drawing a human figure on a piece of paper, folds it to conceal all but the last part of the drawing, and then passes it to the next player to continue drawing the figure; at the end of the game, the paper is unfolded to reveal what is usually a humorously incongruous picture. The Exquisite Corpse game was first created in 1925 by Andre Breton and other Surrealist artists who adapted an earlier parlor word game as a way to create images that would engage our unconscious (cf. **Fig. 736**). Pablo Picasso and Saul Steinberg, who played the game together in 1958, clearly enjoyed the exercise as a way to create—albeit perhaps unintentionally—humorous pictures (**Figs. 737–738**); they no doubt smiled, as we do, at a penis wearing a bicycle hat morphing into a bird whose feet, in turn, morphed into the arms and legs of a bodiless bicycle rider.

That non-narrative figural abstract comics like the Steinberg and Crumb examples and Exquisite Corpse drawings like the Picasso and Steinberg examples can be funny while humor does not seem to be a feature of purely abstract comics like *ABCOLAB #2* raises an interesting point relevant to our consideration of American humorous art- and archaeology-related cartoons and comics strips: What makes one group funny while the others do not raise a smile?

As we demonstrated in the first, "A Test Case," essay, a number of different analytical tools can be brought to bear when scrutinizing any particular humorous cartoon or comic strip. When viewing such a cartoon or comic strip from the perspective of comics theory, one can, for example, focus on its formal design elements or establish its place in the history of comics; when examining the same cartoon or comic strip from the perspective of social semiotics or cognitive linguistics, one can attempt to decode its embedded cultural references or uncover its narrative grammar. When trying to tease out what makes it funny from the perspective of humor theory, on the other hand, one looks for "script opposition" incongruities, where one's expectations are overturned in a humorous manner. Such incongruities can take the form of a narrative set-up/punch-line joke, but as our examples of humorous non-narrative figural abstract comics demonstrate, they do not necessarily need to do so. Comics are multimodal, comprising both visual and narrative elements. As we have seen, oftentimes a joke in a gag cartoon can consist of a narrative, textual, set-up and a purely visual punch line or it can consist of a visual set-up and an verbal punch line. The

humor in a humorous comic, however, can also reside in purely visual incongruities devoid of any narrative context, such as with the visual humor of figural abstract comics, unfolded Exquisite Corpse drawings, or even the "composite cartoons" we examined at the beginning of this essay (**Figs. 430–443**).

Visual humor, of course, has not been ignored by humor theorists. Christian F. Hempelmann and Andrea C. Samson begin their article "Cartoons: Drawn Jokes?" (published in Victor Raskin's 2008 *The Primer of Humor Research*): "Visual humor is, of course, humor, and cartoons are to visual humor what jokes are to verbal humor." But, as Hempelmann and Samson point out, there are many issues in trying integrate studies of visual humor with theories developed for the analysis of verbal humor. The approach most humor theorists take—and the approach I have taken in my analysis of many of the cartoons we have looked at in these essays—is to treat the visual components as part of a narrative that can be analyzed in terms of humorous incongruities.

But such an approach is problematic. As the humor theorist Villy Tsakona pointed out in her 2009 analyses of modern Greek political cartoons:

... cartoons cannot always be paraphrased verbally without any loss. In other words, the non-linearity of the visual mode and its inherent potential often result in complex messages which are not always easy (or even possible) to transfer to the verbal mode without killing the joke or, at least, ruining its condensed form . . .

"Killing the joke" would seem to be an occupational hazard for anyone who attempts to analyze visual humor. [As we noted at the beginning of our "A Test Case" essay, E. B. and Katherine S. White put it: "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind."]

In their study of how a cartoonist's gender affects the presentation of a cartoon joke, the humor theorists Andrea C. Samson and Oswald Huber divide visual humor in cartoons into three categories:

- (i) the picture provides supporting information not contained in the humorous text; hence both text and image contribute to the humorous effect;
- (ii) the picture is essential for the production of humor; hence, humor is based only on the picture, not in the text, if any.

(iii) the picture can be an illustration of the verbal joke, without adding to the humorous effect; hence, only the text is responsible for the humorous effect;

The visual humor we are concerned with here in looking at figural abstract comics and unfolded Exquisite Corpse drawings belong to Samson and Huber's category (ii).

But this begs the question of *how* viewing a type (ii) cartoon can produce a humorous response.

As I noted in the "Preface" to these essays, the philosopher Patrick Maynard raised, from the perspective of aesthetics, "... the problem of how a depiction, not just what it depicts, can be ... light or even funny—a problem concerning, as it were, the 'shape' of the mental 'bubble' enclosing the depiction, which expresses its conception and attitude regarding its content." Maynard cleverly adds: "It may seem funny that no standard account of depiction can account for funny pictures." While the close reading that Maynard gives of the formal pictorial elements in a 19th-century satirical print does not really answer the question he poses, he does suggest that the mental 'bubble' of funniness in comic strips and cartoons depends on artistic conventions—in the case of comic strips and cartoons, the absence of techniques used in realistic art—that we have absorbed since childhood. We might add that the context of comic strips and cartoons is a cultural code that, in itself, contributes to the creation of humor; when we encounter well-known comic strip characters in the funny pages or glance at a stylized cartoon drawing surrounded by blank space in a reserved area of an otherwise text-laden editorial or *New Yorker* page, we are already primed for a joke—just as we are when someone says "knock-knock" or "a rabbi, a priest, and an imam walk into a bar . . .".

To be sure, most wordless humorous cartoons can be unproblematically analyzed in terms of narrative incongruities. A few, illustrative examples: Of the many Harry Bliss wordless cartoons we have seen in the above essays, for instance, **Fig. 321** can be verbally paraphrased as "an *en-plein-air* artist was painting a picture of a deer when a hunter came up and shot the deer." Or Bliss' **Fig. 206** museum cartoon can be verbally translated as "a man was looking up at a Calder mobile when he accidentally knocked over a Brancusi sculpture." Similarly, Anatol Kovarsky's January, 1952, *New Yorker* cartoon (**Fig. 688**) can be described as "a minimalist painter has an epiphany about his work and comes back into the studio to absurdly add a single dot to the canvas."

Other types of visual humor are more resistant to such verbal paraphrasing without "killing the joke." One example:

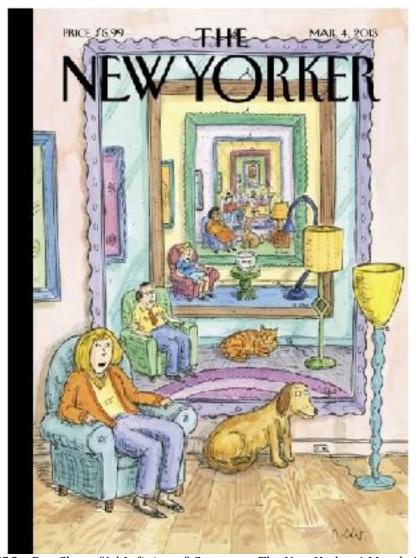


Fig. 739. Ros Chast, "Ad Infinitum," Cover art, *The New Yorker*,4 March, 2013.

Following the convention of *New Yorker* humorous covers to present wordless visual gags, Ros Chast's 2013 *New Yorker* cover (**Fig. 739**) gives us a humorous *mise en abysme* which makes us smile when we realize that, rather than portraying an infinite regression of images such as one experiences with opposed mirrors in a barber shop or a beauty salon, the woman in the foreground is in front of a painting that contains an infinite series of paintings-within-paintings. To our pleasure of noticing the differences in the people sitting on the comfy chair, in the floor lamps, and in the pets, Chast has added an additional joke in putting her signature on the magazine cover as well as on each of the regressive paintings.

Giving a verbal paraphrase of visual humor such as we have done with the Chast cover not only "kills the joke" but it also distorts the way that visual gags actually elicit a humorous response. Although we may be tempted to go back and put into words why we find a particular example of visual humor to be funny, our initial appreciation of such humor is immediate, and non-verbal. Like with the photoshopped internet memes of Antonio Guillem's "Distracted Boyfriend" image (**Fig. 33**), the photoshopped collages of Dan Cretu, Shusaku Takaoka, Ditto Von Tease, José Manuel Ballester, or Ertan Atay (**Figs. 34–46**), or the humorous #artathome pandemic pastiches (**Figs. 57–59**, and **62–68**), we smile first and think later.



A few comments as we come to the end of this "Mocking Modernism" section of this "Amusing Art" essay of our "Part II. Art in American Cartoons and Comic Strips":

- As I hope the discussion in this section has demonstrated, American cartoonists and comic-strip artists have been less concerned with expressing outright hostility towards modern art than they have been challenged by it to explore new ways of creating visual humor.
- There is a remarkable degree of conservative continuity in American cartoons and comic strips about art. Not only do their parodies and pastiches of paintings and sculptures employ a limited set of stereotypes of a limited set of artworks in the Western canon, but the types of jokes used to make fun of these works are also limited. A more general conservatism in mainstream American art-related cartoons and comic strips can also be seen in the avoidance of culturally sensitive topics, such as racism and, especially, sexually explicit content.
- American humorous cartoons and comic strips are also, like American culture in general, remarkably insular. Cartoonists and comic-strip artists assume that their viewers have little background knowledge about cultural and artistic developments in the rest of the world. Similarly, these cartoonists and comic-strip artists themselves show little awareness of comics art outside of the United States. One the other hand, they seem to be very aware of what their fellow American cartoonists are creating, often to the point where one suspects them of plagiarism. American humorous cartoons and comic strips are replete with "intertextual" metafictional allusions to each other's work (cf. Figs. 257–277, and 290–292) and frequently make fun of the cartooning craft itself (cf. Figs. 283–289). Professional syndicated cartoonists in America are a tight-knit community. Many of them belong to the National Cartoonist Society—the professional organization whose members, in a secret ballot at a black-tie dinner held annually since 1946, select the Reuben award for the Outstanding Cartoonist of the Year; the list of past Reuben award recipients reads like a

who's-who of American cartoonists and comic-strip artists, including many of the comics artists represented in these essays: Hank Ketcham, Frank King, Ernie Bushmiller, Mort Walker, Charles Schultz, Dik Browne, Jeff MacNelly, Bil Keane, Lynn Johnson, Bill Watterson, Jim Davis, Gary Larson, Mike Peters, Garry Trudeau, Scott Adams, Will Eisner, Patrick McDonnell, Jerry Scott, Pat Brady, Bill Amend, Dave Coverly, Dan Piraro, Richard Thompson, Brian Crane, Wiley Miller, Roz Chast, and Stephan Pastis.

And now, as we conclude these Part II essays, we return to Charlie Brown's question with which we began: "But is it art?"



**Fig. 740**. Silly art critics (from Figs. 116–117, 136, 157, 184, 193, 402, 696–697, and 719).

There are really two questions here, both of which relate to the supposed "high art"/"low art" division between the fine arts and comics art.

When humorous cartoonists and comic-strip artists turn their attention to the fine art we have put up on pedestals—both figuratively and literally—in the great museums of the Western world, they treat it as a "zone of resistance," something to be overcome in making a statement about comics art. By poking fun at professional artists, at chin-tugging art critics (**Fig. 740**), and at famous artworks and the museums in which they are displayed, the comics artist is attacking the haughty, elitist attitude that "low-brow" comics have no place in our temples of "high" art.

At the same time, the creators of traditional, mass-produced, humorous cartoons and comic strips have to contend with a division within the comics community itself. There is now a general consensus that the graphic novel and underground "auteurist comics" should legitimately be considered as art forms in their own right, ones that exploit the unique visual/narrative potentials of the medium. But what about the simple gag cartoon or the four-panel humorous comic strip? "But is it art?"

Certainly, the visual sophistication evident in the works of early American comicstrip artists like Winsor McCay, Lyonel Feininger, or George Herriman would argue for their comics to be considered art. But what about more recent humorous cartoons and comic strips, in which the quality of drawing rarely rises above a "my-child-of-six-coulddo-that" level?

One of the stated goals of the National Cartoonist Society is "to stimulate and encourage interest in and acceptance of the art of cartooning..." But this raises the question of whether there is an "art of cartooning" that is distinct from comics art.

To address this, we might look to poetry, an art form that encompasses both the grand epic and the short sonata or haiku. As the American poet Richard Wilbur stated: "The use of strict poetic forms, traditional or invented, is like the use of framing and composition in painting: both serve to limit the work of art, and to declare its artificiality: they say, 'This is not the world, but a pattern imposed upon the world or found in it.'" In its artificiality, the highly restricted haiku poetic form is very much like the humorous art-related cartoons and comic strips we are examining in these essays. Just as the three-phrase haiku depends on a "cutting" (*kiru*) that emphasizes the juxtaposition of two ideas or images, so too does the humorous cartoon or comic strip depend on the creative establishment and release of an unexpected incongruity.

In other words, there is an art to telling a joke.

So, is it—the humorous cartoon or comic strip—art? I would answer that it is the amalgamation of two arts, the employment of the visual/narrative comics art to serve the art of making us smile.

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- **Fig. 1241.** Selection of cartoon cavewomen with bone hair ornaments (from Figs. 1067, 1080, 1096, 1097, 1099, 1101, 1105, 1207, and 1224).
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- Fig. 1494. Jason Adam Katzenstein, The New Yorker, 16 Aug., 2015.
- Fig. 1495. Kaamran Hafeez, The New Yorker, 26 Oct., 2015.
- Fig. 1496. Danny Shanahan, The New Yorker, 2 Nov., 2015.
- Fig. 1497. Seth Fleishman, The New Yorker, 22 Aug., 2016.
- Fig. 1498. Pat Byrnes, The New Yorker, 24 March, 2017.
- Fig. 1499. Jason Adam Katzenstein, The New Yorker, 18 Feb., 2020.

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

- Fig. 1554. Dean Young and John Marshall, Blondie. 12 Aug., 2012.
- Fig. 1555. Hilary B. Price, Rhymes with Orange, 9 April, 2017.
- Fig. 1556. Mike Peters, Mother Goose & Grimm, 12 Nov., 2014.
- Fig. 1557. Scott Hilburn, The Argyle Sweater, 1 Nov., 2014.
- Fig. 1558. Scott Hilburn, The Argyle Sweater, 3 Dec., 2014.
- Fig. 1559. Scott Hilburn, The Argyle Sweater, 19 July, 2016.
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- Fig. 1567. Dan Piraro, Bizarro, 5 June, 2011.
- Fig. 1568. Dan Piraro, Bizarro, 30 April, 2009.
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- Fig. 1577. Aztec Sun Stone, ca. 1502–1521 A.D. National Anthropology Museum, Mexico City.
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