

THE LANGUAGE OF COMICS

The View from Here



Examining the DNA of comics requires patience and determination. Cartoonists are visual linguists who use (and add to) a pictorial vocabulary that has been established through trial and error over the course of centuries. Simple abstract marks and shapes trigger memory and imagination. A loopy calligraphic squiggle propels a car. Beads of sweat, a thought balloon, and a series of wavy lines are part of an alphabet of symbols that represents ideas, objects, space, and time. The difference between a good comic and a great one is how subtly and intelligently the artist manipulates these symbols.

The work of a new generation of cartoonists, with greater sensitivity to the medium's nuances, inhabits a space existing somewhere between literature and art. Each line, mark, or swatch of color is chosen as deliberately as a poet chooses a comma or semicolon.

Whether one is trying to produce a laugh from a one-panel gag cartoon or envelop a reader in a 300-page graphic novel, the goal is the same: to build a world that can be shared, and to elicit, if even for just a fleeting moment, a connection from one person to another.

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