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The Aesthetics Of Comics



Synopsis

From Gary Larson's The Far Side to George Herriman's Krazy Kat, comic strips have two obvious defining features. They are visual narratives, using both words and pictures to tell stories, and they use word balloons to represent the speech and thought of depicted characters. Art historians have studied visual artifacts from every culture; cultural historians have recently paid close attention to movies. Yet the comic strip, an art form known to everyone, has not yet been much studied by aestheticians or art historians. This is the first full-length philosophical account of the comic strip. Distinguished philosopher David Carrier looks at popular American and Japanese comic strips to identify and solve the aesthetic problems posed by comic strips and to explain the relationship of this artistic genre to other forms of visual art. He traces the use of speech and thought balloons to early Renaissance art and claims that the speech balloon defines comics as neither a purely visual nor a strictly verbal art form, but as something radically new. Comics, he claims, are essentially a composite art that, when successful, seamlessly combine verbal and visual elements. Carrier looks at the way an audience interprets comics and contrasts the interpretation of comics and other mass-culture images to that of Old Master visual art. The meaning behind the comic can be immediately grasped by the average reader, whereas a piece of museum art can only be fully interpreted by scholars familiar with the history and the background behind the painting. Finally, Carrier relates comics to art history. Ultimately, Carrier's analysis of comics shows why this popular art is worthy of philosophical study and proves that a better understanding of comics will help us better understand the history of art.

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Customer Reviews

So I picked up this book thinking it would be a dry, hoity-toity stamp of approval by an academic on the art form of comics. I was pleasantly surprised to find this an interesting, readable, and plausible series of arguments well on the side of comics, but by no means condescending. Carrier's writing becomes a little too meanderingly philosophical at times, but only for a sentence or two, which does not affect the overall tone or message of the text. Mainly, Carrier deftly navigates through fundamental issues surrounding the troublesome subject of comics, namely, things like narrative, speech balloons, and the whole comics as art debate. I found this book a tremendous, influential resource for my own work about comics history, as well as an interesting read in itself. P.S. - I don't know what that guy who wrote the review before me was smoking, but this book is less about technique than it is about real philosophical issues that affect comics' art-historical reception, etc., etc. Ta.

As an artist trying to maintain my versatility, I found this book to be extremely helpful! The author points out many of the often overlooked aspects of comic aesthetics that prove to be very valid and useful. If you are looking to improve your artistic skill, buy this book!

this is a really great book, that I am totally unqualified to review (I would have love to have left the rating blank) --- who ARE all those guys he refers to? --- but it was really interesting as an alternate view of comics that (finally!) seems to escape the eisner/mccloud cliché's... one thing that i kind of disagree maybe a little with is when he defines comics pretty narrowly and then says there hasn't been any innovation since THE YELLOW KID... well DUH there hasn't been any change in something defined so narrowly! when it changes, it (according to him) becomes something else, i.e. NOT comics, i.e. therefore comics haven't advanced, the artist has just moved on to a different form. and he talks about the thought bubble like it's freakin' amazing but he never talks about the other ways comics can show thoughts, just words in a thought bubble is what he talks about. sheez what about fantasy sequences (i.e. calvin and hobbes), or two-tone icons (chris ware), etc. anyway that's one of my worthless ideas. this book is really cool, you should read it. good rainy day fun.

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