

10-11-2012

What can found art teach us about comics?

Frank Bramlett

University of Nebraska at Omaha, fbramlett@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/englishfacpub>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bramlett, Frank, "What can found art teach us about comics?" (2012). *English Faculty Publications*. 22.
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/englishfacpub/22>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.



What can found art teach us about comics?

When I first learned about found poetry, I was taught that we could encounter poetry anywhere we went. Any text could be considered poetry even if it weren't meant to be seen as such. Later on, I learned that found poetry is also poetry that is cobbled together from other kinds of texts. There is even poetry constructed out of the speech (http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/low_concept/2003/04/the_poetry_of_dh_rumsfel) of Donald Rumsfeld, former U.S. Secretary of Defense.

Likewise, everyday objects that weren't meant to be art can be transformed into art, one very famous example being a urinal 'made into' a fountain (<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>).

Now that I'm living in Sweden, I see lots of textually-based objects around me that I don't understand, especially newspapers, magazines, various informational signs, and advertisements. This mostly has to do with the fact that I simply don't have the linguistic resources to make sense of them. This limitation, though, has become a tool that I use for other purposes. For me, if I can't focus on the content and successfully figure it out, then it's easier to focus on the form. In this case, I've been seeing elements of comics where I don't think I necessarily noticed them before. This is especially true for advertisements. That is to say, I have noticed elements of comics used in advertisements, and I've noticed that advertisements take on a 'flavor' of comics as a result.

Ads as single-panel comics.

The first advertisement below is a single-panel comic without question. In some sense, it's an 'action comic' because of the speed lines and the steam coming out of the cups, among other reasons. Interestingly, there are other advertisements behind the one we see, strategically angled so that the viewer sees the corners of the ad and knows that there may be other, similar ads like this one to come.



<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/dscn2055-goteborg.jpg>

Blend of non-comics conventions with comics conventions.

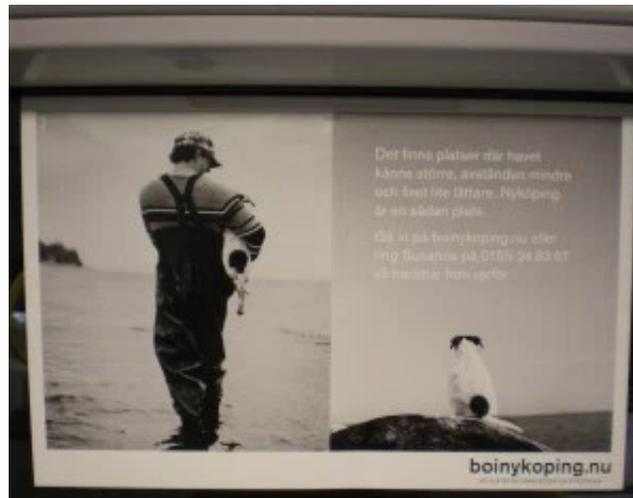
Whatever this next ad is for, it is designed to be read as a traditional text, left-to-right as Swedish is read, and starting at the top reading down the page. However, the interaction here between the verbal and visual elements prevents this from being a traditional written text. Further, there are comics-specific elements here, including the speech balloons. [Careful readers may spot a word – många – in the image that looks like ‘manga.’ However, the diacritic above the first ‘a’ indicates that this is the Swedish word meaning ‘many,’ not the Japanese word meaning ‘comic.’]



<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/dscn2083-ostermalm-el-kretsen-22.jpg>

Ads with images arranged sequentially.

While there are precious few indications of comics in this ad, I think we can safely mention two. The first is the panel division. The panel on the left is a dog and a human, and the panel on the right is the dog sitting alone on a rock. The other indication that this might be a found comic is that it most resembles photo comics.



<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/dscn2087-tbana-ad.jpg>

Comics scholars often debate the history of comics: what makes a protocomic, what makes a 'modern' comic. When did comic art 'really' start? My question in this post is about ubiquity: are comics and especially comics conventions so commonplace now that their impact is felt even in places and times where the primary effort is meant to convey something besides comics?

Do **found comics** qualify as a 'legitimate' (!?) genre, arising out of occasional and/or accidental use comics conventions? If so, where do you see found comics?

About these ads (<https://wordpress.com/about-these-ads/>)

Posted by [Frank Bramlett](#) on [October 11, 2012](#) in [Advertisements](#), [Comics History](#), [conventions](#), [found art](#), [Uncategorized](#).

[2 Comments](#)



About Frank Bramlett

Until June 2014, I am a visiting lecturer in the English Department at Stockholm University, where I offer seminars in Sociolinguistics; Language and Gender; and Language and Comics; among others. For Fall 2014, I will return to the English Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

[View all posts by Frank Bramlett »](#)