

With my 6-month-old boy strapped to my chest in a baby carrier, we head into something I think he'll enjoy and that I'm confident I will: the recently-opened Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum on the Ohio State University campus in Columbus.

This newly-renovated complex now allows the public to experience a vast array of original drawings and related holdings: a collection amassed over many years, but which was predominantly archived in the past as research material. The Cartoon Library & Museum is an endeavor as ambitious as it is unique, with a goal of celebrating and preserving art forms that are especially vulnerable in a declining print-based media marketplace. Of particular interest for me today, though, is a current exhibit that runs until August: *Exploring Calvin and Hobbes*, featuring works, tools, and even input from creator Bill Watterson (otherwise famously resistant to the public's desire for more product and interaction). This was a favorite comic strip in my household growing up—I can't believe it was last printed nearly 20 years ago—and now with my own Calvin-in-training, I'm looking forward to a walk down memory lane (and perhaps a glimpse of what lies ahead).

The Watterson show is terrific, as I'd hoped: a whole room devoted to early incarnations of his beloved characters, master copies of sketches and full-color Sunday strips, and a lineage of influences, like Charles Schulz (*Peanuts*), Garry Trudeau (*Dooniesbury*), and Berkeley Breathed (*Bloom County*). But my sidekick and I also find that there is much more to see and enjoy throughout the museum. The funny papers are of course well-represented, and if leg-kicks and squeals are any indication, the occupant of my Babybjorn particularly favors the more colorful, full-page Sunday comics on display from the early twentieth century. There is an array of fun relics and artifacts, as well—like the desk used by *Dick Tracy* creator Chester Gould, and a number of sculptures by multimedia artist Rube Goldberg (known for his depictions of overly-complicated and extravagant contraptions, a la the board game Mouse Trap, which his works inspired). We even find ourselves exploring comic books and graphic novels, editorial cartoons, Disney animation cells, and Japanese manga and anime.

An especially impressive aspect of this discovery is that, in its scope and sensibility, the Cartoon Library & Museum offers something of a cultural gateway. The subject matter encompasses humor, drama, politics and fantasy, all presented academically as well as accessibly (neither taking itself too seriously, nor apologizing for its artistic integrity). The range of popular amusements offers enough variety to suit just about any age, aesthetic or background—as is evidenced by the makeup of the dozens in attendance, and on one of the first nice weekend days of the year, no less. The gallery as a whole consists mainly of a few show rooms, and there is plenty to see, but the experience is by no means overwhelming. Our stay lasts about an hour, and with free admission and ample parking nearby, as well as a Tuesday-Sunday afternoon schedule and a college campus setting, the whole set-up invites you to make an enjoyable afternoon of the outing.

My colleague and I finish our day by making a stop at Diaspora—a very nice and reasonably-priced Korean restaurant just a block or so away from the museum. I can highly-recommend the bibim bahp, a traditional rice dish spelled a variety of ways on different menus, but generally served with beef and vegetables, and topped-off with an egg (it looks better than it sounds, and tastes better than it looks). I peacefully savor my food as I flip through some favorite pictures from the exhibit taken with my phone, while the little guy catches a nap. I can only imagine what he's dreaming of...

**Contracted blog post, pending publication*