

Cartoons and photographs have a mission in common. Each takes familiar elements and helps the viewer see them with fresh eyes.

Nothing particularly funny about Michelangelo's David, for instance. But draw Simon Leis arresting David for parading around Cincinnati naked and you have a new perspective on your city.

Nothing remarkable about photographing a man's two legs. But if one leg is white and one is black, now we have something to think about. The muddy Ohio River is ubiquitous in our local landscape. Why then is it so remarkable to see it pulverize into a powdery sky at dawn, reflect the downtown skyline in nighttime neon, or playfully escort a family aboard the Anderson Ferry? Listen up, people! - a nervous Abe Lincoln is about to deliver his address before a laid back Juneteenth crowd.

Familiar elements, fresh eyes.

The thing that's exciting about Cincinnati Snaps is that it signals the arrival of a whole new batch of fresh eyes looking at Cincinnati. And fresh eyes are exactly what we've been needing. We're a city struggling to wrest our way out of some calcified ideas about who we are and what we're capable of, a rich and textured city, to be sure, but in need of reinvention and reimagining.

And that takes fresh eyes. Fresh eyes that see the humor in a jumble of tawdry motel signs outside the American Sign Museum, the irony in the conflicting ethics of billboards, and the streetsmart beauty in urban alleyways and boarded-up pop art buildings. To borrow the words of a poet, there's something happening here - what it is ain't exactly clear.

One thing is clear. Wherever our beloved town is headed, it will take fresh eyes to get us there.

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Jim Borgman, 2008

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