

February 11, 2010



Shepard Fairey's Supply and Demand breaks crate at the CAC | Scott Beseler

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## Cincinnati Illustrated

BY: RICK BIRD, 2/2/2010



If every picture tells a story, there are certainly plenty to be told among Cincinnati's illustrators and graphic artists. It is considered a first-rate artistic community, but not one always celebrated in town outside its own circles. A few examples of what could be a list of dozens:

Cincinnati native [Darcy Vorhees](#), now with a West Chester-based design company, worked in New York City for ten years on more than 100 episodes of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles doing storyboarding, animation choreography and illustration.

[Christina Wald](#), a University of Cincinnati grad, is an illustrator and industrial designer who has worked on children's books, toys and educational materials. She will add to an impressive resume with the release

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next month of *The Little Red Bat*, a children's book she illustrated.

[Michael Jackaman](#), a native of Columbia, has settled here launching a satirical comic strip dealing with stereotypes Latinos face in the workplace. He has become a sought after graphic artist for those marketing to the Latino community.

[Ryan Ostrander](#), known for his dead-on caricatures, does illustrations and graphic design work, after winning every major Ohio journalism design award during his tenure at the Cincinnati Post. He was named "Best Graphic Artist" three times by the Society of Professional Journalists.



And there is [C.F. Payne](#), Cincinnati's superstar in the illustrator world commissioned to paint countless celebrities. The Wyoming native's vivid, elegant work has graced dozens of publications including *Time*, *Rolling Stone*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Readers Digest*. He did the Time inaugural cover painting of Barack Obama and has illustrated over ten children's books, including those authored by actors John Lithgow and Steve Martin.

The list could go on. Another national star is Cincinnati resident and Kentucky native [Loren Long](#), one of the most famous children's book illustrators in the country, with a dozen *New York Times* bestsellers featuring his work, including Madonna's children's book. Cincinnati resident [Dave Beck](#) is nationally known as a unique conceptual artist, whose work has been used by dozens of Fortune 500 companies and high-profile publications. He has expanded his work to include a wide range of genre illustration covering adventure, science fiction, fantasy, horror, and comic books.



Even decades ago the area produced a legend - Wyoming native [Robert McGinnis](#) - inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Society of Illustrators for hundreds of romance novel covers and numerous movie posters (*Breakfast at Tiffanys*, *Thunderball*) McGinnis, 84, now lives in Connecticut.

For many years readers were treated to perhaps the best one - two punch in the country among daily newspaper political cartoonists, with Pulitzer Prize winner [Jim Borgman](#) at the Enquirer and [Jeff Stahler](#) at the Post.

What these illustrators have in common is they choose to call Cincinnati home in a field where digital technology would permit them to live almost anywhere. Cost of living is, of course, mentioned the most as a reason, but there are other intangibles.

Payne lived in Chicago and Dallas before moving back to his hometown in 1987. "My family and my wife's family were here," he says. "We wanted to raise our children in this area."

"I just feel like Cincinnati is more family-oriented. People are a lot more open. I really missed that in New York" says Vorhees, who is working on another animation project with a TMNT producer. "There are very talented people here. It kind of surprised me when I moved back."

"It's not as important as it once was to be in New York at the center of publishing. Even the publishers are all over the place," says Wald. "With the Internet you can be anywhere. This is a very supportive community. My friends who have moved away say there is nothing like that where they are."

Indeed, the Cincinnati illustrator community may be one of the most close-knit artistic niches in town. Illustrators and graphic artists gather for weekly lunches to share their work. It may be the only local professional artistic group with its own [blog](#). A dozen local illustrators are collaborating to release a comic book anthology in April showcasing their work called, *A 12-Way With Cheese*.



While most observers agree the illustrator talent in Greater Cincinnati is exceptional, no one's quite sure what's in the Ohio River water that produces world-class illustrators.

"I don't know what it is. We do have more great illustrators in town than you would think should be found in a city of this size," says Ostrander, who helped launch the local blog. "The influence of C.F. Payne probably encouraged a lot of younger people."

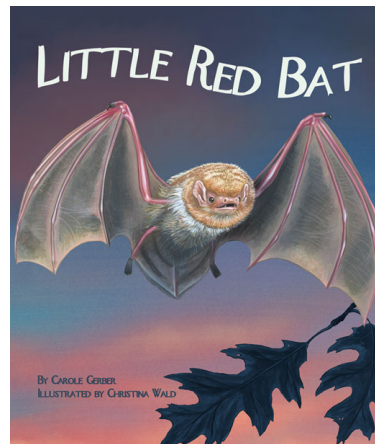
Wald notes Kenner Toys and Gibson Greeting Cards employed top-notch artists, and many stayed in town when those companies cut back or eliminated operations here, like Long, who had been at Gibson.

Payne may indeed take some personal credit for fostering the local illustrator community. He helped establish the weekly lunches that he still occasionally attends. And, he points out, don't discount the quality of art education in the region.

"There are good colleges and universities in the area" says Payne, a Miami grad. "You have the [Art Academy](#), UC produces good graphic design folks, as does Miami University. There is the [Columbus College of Art and Design](#) (where Payne teaches)."

And transplants to town have been able to find a niche here.

Graphic designer and Columbian native Michael Jackaman moved here with his Cincinnati-born wife. He draws a Web cartoon [strip](#) about Latinos in the workplace written by Lorena Mora-Mowry, who publishes a Web [site](#) about Latina issues out of her Cincinnati home. The two are trying to get the strip syndicated.



Jackaman's colorful work has also been used by the local [Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#) and in other Latino marketing materials. But, like the characters in his cartoon strip, Jackaman is hoping not to get stereotyped.

"Being a Latino doesn't mean I only work for Latino organizations," he says. "We are trying to get clients that need material for the general market, as well as be involved with the Hispanic market. Yes, I have a niche, but I hope it's not the only one."

In fact, Payne wishes local businesses would pay more attention to the Cincinnati-based artists.

"What's a little disappointing is you have an amazing group of talent that everybody else around the country seems to want to use, but I don't see a lot of it used by the Cincinnati market. I still open up *Cincinnati Magazine* and see an illustrator from San Francisco, New York or Atlanta."

For his part, Payne enjoys doing Cincinnati projects. His recent labor of love is "Redsland Forever," a limited edition print with illustrations of 14 players covering 140 years of Reds history. The project benefits the [Reds Community Fund](#).

As he puts it, "It's my field of dreams. I am a huge baseball nut."



Photography by [Scott Beseler](#)  
 Michael Jackaman and Lorena Mora-Mowry  
 Obama vs McCain provided by Ryan Ostrander  
 Christina Wald  
 Ryan Ostrander  
 Little Red Bat, provided by Christina Wald  
 Latino Conversation, provided by Michael Jackaman and Lorena Mora-Mowry

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