

CARTOONING



POLLY KEENER

Foreword by Jim Davis

Cartooning

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All the incredible, fascinating work that went into this book is dedicated to:

My husband, Bob Keener, and children, Ted and Whitney,—who ate on trays for years while the pages of this book took over the dining room table

My parents—without whom I don't know where I'd be

My sister—who provided the really choice artistic and humorous times in my childhood, when she painted her room black (Mom was not amused), painted an Adam and Eve scene in the shower (Dad was not amused), painted rodent tracks all over the basement (I was always amused)

My cartooning students and cartooning friends everywhere—who have taught me so much and who love their work.

Foreword

Being a successful cartoonist, believe it or not, takes a certain lack of dedication. Most cartoonists I know would as soon be on a golf course as at the drawing board. If a cartoonist gets too close to the art of cartooning, he or she will lose touch with the common everyday things that give us fodder for the strip. After all, all we're doing is simply holding a mirror to life and showing it back with a humorous twist. More often than not, when a person laughs at a comic strip, it's not because it's funny, but because they're saying, "Isn't that true." A successful cartoonist has the ability to look at life through the eyes of a child looking at a situation most people walk by and take for granted each day. I try to keep my humor good and fluffy as a result, in that we are responsible for balancing the scales in a small way against the very real and sometimes depressing realities of the world. If I say anything with the strip, it is that life is not so bad and we should learn to laugh at ourselves.

Jim Davis

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Introduction

“I love my work—I’ve been retired all my life!”—a typical hearty remark by many cartoonists, and one that might be yours. Distilled from extensive research and more than 1,200 pages of special interviews with three dozen professional cartoonists—just for readers of this book—*Cartooning* is crammed with nuggets of the very best advice for you, from those who *know* about cartooning, selling work, getting syndicated, being successful . . . and about just having fun creating cartoons.

In these pages, you will find numerous tidbits not readily available elsewhere: helpful counsel from cartoon editors, a trip to the spotty past of cartoon history, and visions of cartooning’s future, including the new and fascinating field of “computertoons.” Additionally, you will discover a compendium of possible sales areas for *your* cartoons, plus names, addresses, and facts for further cartoon information; a roster of museums and libraries with rare cartoon collections to explore; and a bouquet of recent art tools for artists with handicaps.

Special presents for you are comprehensive chapters on caricature and political cartooning, from top caricaturists and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonists, and a super section on that vital and elusive ingredient of cartooning—getting ideas. As Albert Einstein is reputed to have said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

Hints from the pros on techniques, and suggestions for dramatizing pictures of any kind are of use to novice and experienced cartoonist alike. An unusual, helpful compilation lists types and sources of cartoon humor to inspire you.

Enjoy the cartoons, as they are for entertainment as well as for instruction. Test yourself with the exercises at the end of each chapter. Then feel free to award yourself the “Cartoonist’s License” at the end of the book.

There is a place for everyone in cartooning—as spectator or producer. Some people decide as children to be cartoonists—their “talent” is the result of early encouragement, training in observation and use of art tools, and the desire to entertain themselves or others. Although these folks have head starts, adults can choose to become cartoonists, too, and can discover and encourage cartooning skills in themselves. Art “talent” and training help, but it is unremitting determination, plain and simple, that leads in the long run to success.

Cartooning has no minimum age, no retirement age. You can be any shape, size, sex, color, or religion. Distinguished cartoonists have created their careers by blending vocation with avocation, but they’ll tell you all about that themselves, throughout the book.

Part time or full time, you can cartoon. Joy and potential profit await you in the world of cartooning, but first, read this book, chuckle at the humor, absorb the advice—then get your pencil and draw.

Cartooning

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1

Some cartooning history



Figure 1-1
Lyre soundbox shell plaque from king's
grave in Ur
c. 2600 B.C.
(The University Museum, University of
Pennsylvania.)

Figure 1-2
Animals Taking the Role of Humans
Egyptian papyrus roll of the Dead
c. 1000 B.C.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the
British Museum.)



You might call the history of cartooning “an open book”—with most of the pages missing.

Although more recent history pounces on cartooning with a passion, earlier records of cartoons wallow in graffiti, voids, possible additions, dubious achievements, and rare masterpieces.

First dilemma: the word “cartoon.” Today, what we call “cartoons” are funny, sketchy pictures that move, tell stories, and make jokes. However, rummaging through art history, we discover in some of the earliest art humorous pictures that were *not* called “cartoons,” and somewhat later, beginning in the Middle Ages, pictures *called* “cartoons” that were *not* humorous.

Ancient artists had discovered, by 15,000 B.C., the wonderful “shorthand” a picture is for recording events. In civilizations without written languages, storytelling and pictorial images played especially important roles.

Greeks Bearing Grylli

Animals displaying human actions became a definite facet of antique humorous art. Greco-Roman (that is, influenced by both Greek and Roman) “glyptic” art refers to engravings, in low relief, or **intaglio**, on fine stones. Glyptic art featured to comic purpose grotesque combinations of animals, or human/animal bodies, called **grylli**. Note the earlier sly gryllus scorpion/man and grylli bull/men on the harp soundbox from Ur, in Figure 1-1.

Humor of this type was less prevalent in ancient Egypt, but satirical papyrus rolls and caricatures such as Figure 1-2’s charming animal caricatures, from a 1,000 B.C. Egyptian scroll, did exist.

Pictorial parody and caricature were relished by the Greeks, Romans, and Assyrians, appearing in paper, stone, and in the case of the Romans, on erotic pottery. Curious burlesque paintings and mosaics—flashes of everyday situa-



Figure 1–3
Performing Bear
 Early twelfth century
 Manuscript o.4.7, f.75
 Trinity College, Cambridge
 (Reproduced by courtesy of the Master and
 Fellows at Trinity College, Cambridge.)

tions with bits of humor, such as people having portraits done, a student being punished by a teacher, and so on—turned up on the walls of Herculaneum and Pompeii, cities buried and preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Purposely funny pictures were often ithyphallic graffiti. Of course, they *are* 1,900 years old now and captioned in Latin, which gives them a sort of cachet.

Art in the Middle Ages: Scrolls and Drolleries

In the Middle Ages, a passion for cathedral building led to vast quantities of sculptural adornment, much of it in a comic, grotesque style, reflecting a strange combination of the remnants of paganism blended with Christian ideas. Windows, signboards, choir stalls, door frames—just about everything—received decoration. Some were horrifying, others amusing. Many sprouted weird animal forms, gargoyles, or cavorting beasts. These were to instruct the illiterate faithful of the day. Multitudes of weird creatures and people with exaggerated features frolicked in the large initials and margins of manuscript prayer books, hymnbooks and the privately produced books of hours. These whimsical beasts and people we call **drolleries** (a term in use by A.D. 1584, but spelled several ways) for their droll, or quaintly humorous, actions.

Interestingly, even built-in **captions**, as in comic strips of today, crop up in early art. For example, the dutiful trained bear says “A” when its trainer says “ABC” in the twelfth-century manuscript decoration of Figure 1–3.

Ageless Animals

Far Eastern cultures, too, have long been rich in satirical graphic traditions. Fanciful figures bounded through delightful old Japanese humorous storytelling scrolls. These scrolls, “E-makimono,” were derived from Chinese landscape scrolls of the Middle Ages, but the Japanese were far more interested in genre subjects, in scenes of daily life, and in depicting humor in their art. Japanese scrolls unfolded in a continuous action wherein the artist could alter the rhythm to fit the story mood. Scroll artists made the viewer see a scene from any angle, switched backgrounds, and pruned their work of unessential details. The appeal of these scrolls, with their wildly funny expressions, dashing action, and moving scenes on the rollable scroll, compares to the charm of modern animated cartoons.

Particularly entertaining are the Kozan-ji Temple (Kyoto) Japanese animal scrolls attributed to priest and artist Toba (or Joba) Sojo (1052–1140, or possibly late twelfth century). The scrolls show animals wearing human clothes and using human actions. These characters have roots in Far Eastern animal fables and predate Western manuscript drolleries. Some scenes are surprisingly irreligious—frogs disguised as Buddha, a priest shown as a monkey who worships him, et cetera. The priest who drew these with such verve made his own funny, arcane visual jokes about priests and rituals. The drawings are executed with a spriteliness that tickles our funnybones 800 years later.

Renaissance and More: “Cartoons” as Art

The word “cartoon” evidenced itself during the Renaissance (1400s, 1500s). A derivative of the Italian *cartone*, for heavy paper or board, the name reflected the medium on which the works were drawn. Functionally, cartoons in this original sense were full-sized drawings on paper, the original sketches or patterns for large frescoes, oil paintings, tapestry, glass, mosaic work, and



Figure 1-4

LEONARDO DA VINCI
Study of Grotesque Heads
 c. 1510 A.D.
 Windsor Castle

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statuary. Some cartoons, such as seven by Raphael done for the Vatican tapestries and a large collection by da Vinci, are extraordinary and valuable works in their own right. (See Figure 1-4.)

Eighteenth-Century England: An Age of Caricature

With the dawn of the eighteenth century in England, the “age of caricature” arrived—as they say in the comics, WHAM!—in full force. It flourished with the “South Sea Bubble scandal,” an affair of stock speculation and government debt. It vibrated with funny, satirical prints published to amuse the public. These prints poked fun at everything, especially social issues, manners, fads, and, costing a shilling or less, made good parlor entertainment—along the lines of present-day evening newspaper comics. Those who were too poor to buy could still see the prints in London print shop windows, or rent them overnight.

Prints with humorous portraits were called **caricatures**; those without portraits were also called **hieroglyphs** and sometimes were printed on the backs of fans. The term caricature, from the Italian *caricatura* meaning “portrait ridicule” or “ridiculous portrait” descended from the verb *caricare* meaning “to load, to exaggerate, to overburden,” and was in general use in English by the late eighteenth century.