

The Artist, the Witness

—An exhibition on political and social caricature

Cartoon has been used for a long time as a political weapon. Its humorous and hyperbolic approach makes it a perfect tool to deal with authorities, corruptions or other social ills. However, when you Google “political cartoons”, there are millions of images that seems to be created by one hand, with very similar styles. It seems that political cartoon has become an apparatus to fulfill some utilitarian needs. In this exhibition, I want to promote some unique voices that express artists’ personal views and feelings towards some political events or social issues. These artists create their unique voices base on their own experience and ideologies.

This exhibition has 5 sections. Each section presents works by one of the 5 artists. Jules Feiffer, Ronald Searle, John Heartfield, Gerald Scarfe, and Ralph Steadman.



Jules Feiffer

Ronald Searle

John Heartfield

Gerald Scarfe

Ralph Steadman

Section I

Jules Feiffer is an American cartoonist born in 1929. This exhibition presents Feiffer’s signature character—dancing character. It came to the public attention in 1957, and retired in 2000. Within these years, Feiffer constantly uses this character to express political criticism, urban anxiety, seasonal highs and lows.



Jules Feiffer (b. 1929)
A Dance to Summer, 1964
 Published in *The Village Voice*, June 25, 1964

This image is symbolically a criticism towards the US government, especially President Lyndon Johnson, in the year of 1964. Jules Feiffer says in one of his book that when president Johnson creates an image of social justice, by passing the voting rights Act, the War on Poverty, Medicare. He was at the same time, continuously aids more military forces and funds to the Vietnam battlefield despite all the serious moral objections. In the image, through the dance of the character, Feiffer expresses his wills of escaping from the feeling of perplex, betrayal and fear.



Jules Feiffer (b. 1929)
A Dance to Summer, 1986
 Published in *The Village Voice*

This image was done in 1981. It is a political criticism on President Reagan’s economical policy of cutting the budgets of non-military programs. In this illustration, the dancer says that Reagan and the world are going into opposite directions. But her dance can fill the large void forming in between them and make people forget about the void. Finally she appeals to the governors that do not cut their fund.

Beside the political expression, these works reveal another dimension embracing the artist’s personal feelings and real life experience. More importantly, the illustration of

this dancing character delivers movement, power and vitality. It offers the audiences another port to attach with the image.

Section II

Ronald Searle was a British artist who born in 1920, and died in 2011. He had a very unique life experience. In 1939, he abandoned his art studies and joined the army. When the Japanese invaded Singapore during the WWII, he was put in jail and spend three years in there and Malaysia. First part of the works presented is his sketches when he stayed there. These sketches record what he sees and hears during this time. He witnesses the process of prisoners being moved from one place to the other, “light-works” for sick men, dying friends, and etc. Ronald Searle’s early works during this time has a naturalistic approach.



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Thailand, 1943
Published in *Ronald Searle, War Drawings 1939-1945*



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
“Light duties”, for sick men, Changi Gaol, July 1944
Published in *Ronald Searle, War Drawings 1939-1945*



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Thai-Burma Railway, Date not known
Published in *Ronald Searle, War Drawings 1939-1945*



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Sick Prisoner, Changi Gaol, July 1944
Published in *Ronald Searle, War Drawings 1939-1945*



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Prison Headgear, 1944
Published in *Ronald Searle, War Drawings 1939-1945*

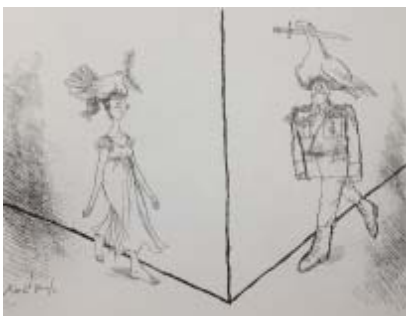


Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Casablanca, 1965
Published in *Ronald Searle in Perspective, 1938-1985*



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Malay father and child from a nearby kampong, 1944
Published in *Ronald Searle, War Drawings 1939-1945*

One of the things that audiences should be able to notice is that his style changes from naturalism to a more stylized and characteristic style. These two illustrations were done during the later year of his 3 years prison experience. They look slightly exaggerated, lively and humorous but still feel authentic. Searle's interest and respect to people from other cultures can be seen in these images.

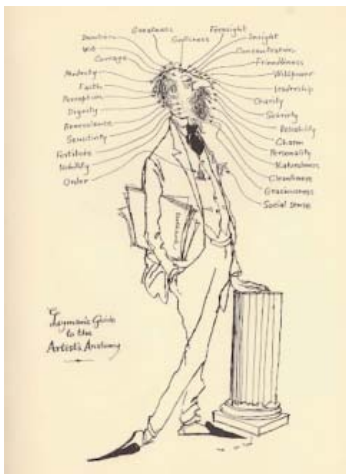


Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Summit meeting

Published in *Ronald Searle in Le Monde*, 2002



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Untitled, Date Unknown



Ronald Searle (1920-2011)
Artist's Anatomy, 1958
Published in *Holiday* magazine, April 1958

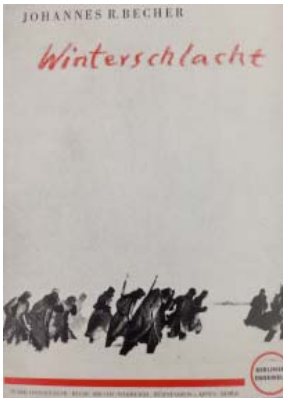
It feels like all the tensions and powers are turning inward. His later works become more introversive and solitary. He made tremendous caricatures on political and social issues with most of them radical, violent and metaphorical. Many of the characters in his work look like himself. His work was profoundly influenced by his experiences during the war. As he often explained, his experience of the “horror, the misery, the blackness” of a Japanese prisoner of war camp had “changed the attitude to all things, including humor.”

Section III

Different from many political cartoonist, John Heartfield used another media— photomontage to compose images. His images are mainly anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist statements. His images are straightforward and powerful with message delivery as the primary goal. He usually manipulated figures in different sizes, which is appropriate to deliver his anti-Nazi ideology.



John Heartfield (1891-1968)
"A tool in the hand of God? A toy in the hand of Thyssen!"
Published in *AIZ*, September 1933



John Heartfield (1891-1968)
Poster for Johannes R. Becher's play *Winterschlacht*,
Berliner Ensemble, 1955



John Heartfield (1891-1968)

Hitler is telling us fairy-tales. Poor Mike the German shouts until everyone is convinced: " Help! I'm surrounded!"

Published in *AIZ*, March 1936

Even though his photomontages are really wild, he had great technical precision and a keen eye to details. He acted more as an originator of ideas, or director which makes his voice unique.

Section IV



Gerald Scarfe (born 1936)

Untitled, date unknown



Gerald Scarfe (born 1936)

Opening title for *Yes, Minister*

1980-1984



Gerald Scarfe (born 1936)
Opening title for *Yes, Minister*
1980-1984

Gerald Scarfe is an English cartoonist and illustrator made the opening title for a British TV commercial, *Yes Minister*. For centuries political satirists have played a role in helping ensure that British governments are held to account for their policies and actions. They help sustain public interest and engagement in those policies and actions. They both add to each other a new dimension.

The image on the left is one of his sketches. It seems to be a mislaid of Picasso's *Guernica* rendered in his own bizarre style. This referencing to masterpieces, and his use of traditional techniques makes the image thoughtful.

Section V



Ralph Steadman (born 1936)
Cover for *Fear and loathing in Las Vegas: a savage journey to the heart of the American dream*, 1972

Ralph Steadman is a British cartoonist born in 1936. This image is his best-known work corporate with the writer Hunter Thompson. It is called fear and loathing in Las Vegas: a savage journey to the heart of the American dream.



Ralph Steadman (born 1936)
Chicago '68, 1968

This illustration is named Chicago '68, depicting that the 1968 riots in Chicago has a close link to the Occupy movement in the USA. It depicts a scene that protestors are being beaten up by the police.



Ralph Steadman (born 1936)
Untitled, date unknown

His illustration looks chaotic and violent. People are seen as monsters. His use of energetic line, ink splatters, mix of free hand and geometric shapes give the illustrations a sense of madness.

Conclusion

Political cartoonists are at the same time witnesses to history. They should not become purely institutional apparatus, someone that always been told to draw something or expressing other people's ideas without understanding. I think artists are historians when they treat their subject with an authentic attitude. I hope that this exhibition presents some aspects of the vitality of cartoon that promotes the uniqueness within pool of political and social caricature. Meanwhile, I hope that this exhibition can educate audience to perceive cartoon and caricature with more seriousness.

BILIOGRPHY

Searle, Ronald. *Ronald Searle in Le Monde*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002. Print.

Searle, Ronald. *Ronald Searle in Perspective*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1984. Print.

Feiffer, Jules, and Steven Heller. *Jules Feiffer's America: From Eisenhower to Reagan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982. Print.

Willett, John. *Heartfield versus Hitler*. Paris: Éditions Hazan, 1997. Print.

"Censorship and Kurt Vonnegut." *RALPH STEADMAN Dot COM*. Web. 05 May 2012.
<<http://ralphsteadman.com/>>.