



PRINTMAKER GALLERY

MICHAEL LEUNIG

Michael Leunig was born in Melbourne in 1945.

His work was first published in the Monash University newspaper 'Lots Wife' 1965, when he was a student at Monash University.

From 1969 his work has been associated with a range of Australian and international journals and publications.

In 1969 he commenced working with the 'Age' as an illustrator and cartoonist. The Age has published his cartoons, poetry and illustrations on a weekly basis from this time.

Over the last 20 years, 16 books of poetry and drawings have been published.

He was a member of a group of artists invited to create a mural which is now located at the National Gallery of Australia.

His drawings, prints, paintings and cartoons have been exhibited at private and public galleries throughout Australia, and are in private and public collections both in Australia and overseas.

A major retrospective of his drawings and paintings was organised by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1992. The "Introspective" toured State Galleries of Australia until May 1994.

From 1998 to 2000 a comprehensive exhibition of his printmaking "The Happy Prints" toured Regional Galleries in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania and was exhibited at the National Archive of Australia in Canberra, A.C.T.

From January 2002 to June 2002 The Museum of Sydney exhibited "Leunig Animated" an exhibition of Leunig's sketches, drawings and cartoons along with the detailed animation cells made from his material.

Cartoons:

Leunig's drawings are done with a sparse, quivering line, usually in black and white with ink wash, the human characters always drawn with exaggerated features. This style served him well in his early years when he gained a loyal following for his quirky take on social issues. He also made increasingly frequent forays into a personal fantasy world of whimsy, featuring small figures with teapots balanced on their heads, grotesquely curled hair and many ducks.

In his latest cartoons, Leunig frequently satirises concepts such as Americanisation, capitalism, consumerism, corporate success and more recently warmongering, in a personal proclamation against the War on Terror. Of particular note are his recent parodies of political matters, especially those concerning former Australian Prime Minister John Howard and former American president George W. Bush. This has earned Leunig the description of "political cartoonist", though this is misleading as only some of his works are political in nature or reference.

His work has frequently explored spiritual and religious themes.

Controversial Works:

Michael Leunig speaks at a demonstration in Melbourne against Israel's military action in Gaza, 2009

In 2008, Leunig wrote that "Artists must never shrink from a confrontation with society or the state." His cartoons have occasionally been a source of controversy. Between 1995 and 2000 he drew the ire of "working mothers" by satirising the heavy reliance upon childcare services in Australian culture in several of his works.

Leunig's opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, although in line with over three-quarters of the Australian populace, drew some criticism in the press. He commented that "...if a cartoonist is representing the government line on Iraq, they're nothing better than a propagandist."

In 2006, Fairfax Media censored a cartoon in New South Wales but not in Victoria, which criticised the then-Prime Minister, John Howard.

Leunig has also stated his opposition to the Israeli government and three of his 2004 - 2006 pieces drew letters of protest nationally and internationally in relation to this. The three pieces took as their subjects: IDF bomber pilots (13 April 2004); Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's assassination order from Ariel Sharon (11 January 2006); and the renewed Gaza occupation (12 July 2006). A fourth piece was refused publication and has since been more widely criticised for potentially confounding his opposition to the policies of Israel, with an antisemitic, generalised subversion of the Jewish experience, by relying upon a reference to the Jewish Holocaust. This piece came to international attention after it won an Iranian competition conceived by the newspaper *Hamshahri* as retaliation for the Muhammad cartoons controversy. Leunig denied he had submitted the cartoon as an entry to the competition and said that the act was "malicious and horrible". He demanded the cartoons be withdrawn, which the newspaper did and also apologised to him. It later emerged that the cartoon had been submitted as a prank by a web contributor to the Australian comedic team *The Chaser*.

Leunig has partially defined his position with this statement:

"I have a Jewish friend, a Holocaust survivor, who says that she never could have lived in Israel because in her view it is a totalitarian state.... I believe that something fundamental and vital, not just to Israel but to the entire world, has been gravely mishandled by the present Israeli administration and it bothers me deeply. It is my right to express it."

-Michael Leunig 13 January 2006, *The Age*

Published Works

- *The Penguin Leunig* (1974)
- *The Second Leunig* (1979)
- *The Bedtime Leunig* (1981)
- *A Bag of Roosters* (1983)
- *Ramming the Shears* (1985)
- *The Travelling Leunig* (1990)
- *A Common Prayer* (1990)
- *The Prayer Tree* (1990)
- *Introspective* (1991)

- *A Common Philosophy* (1992)
- *Everyday Devils and Angels* (1992)
- *A Bunch of Posey* (1992)
- *You and Me* (1995)
- *Short Notes from the Long History of Happiness* (1996)
- *Why Dogs Sniff Each Other's Tails* (1998)
- *Goatperson and Other Tales* (1999)
- *Carnival of the Animals* (2000)
- *The Curly Pyjama Letters* (2001)
- *The Stick and Other Tales of our Times* (2002)
- *Poems* (2003)
- *Kicking Behinds* (2003)
- *Strange Creature* (2003)
- *Wild Figments* (2004)
- *A New Penguin Leunig* (2005)
- *Hot and Bothered* (2007)