The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
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Brooker, Joanne

Occupation Caricaturist, Cartoonist, Illustrator, Journalist

Summary

Joanne Brooker is an internationally successful caricaturist who worked on the Brisbane *Courier Mail* for ten years. She has won several media awards, while employed by News Limited, but also subsequently as a freelance artist.

Details

Thanks to the internet, Joanne Brooker's art is known all over the world. It's quite possible that she is better known abroad than at home! She has been asked to exhibit in Barcelona, Scotland, France, China, Bolivia and Columbia, and has left her mark throughout southeast Asia, India, Turkey and Iran, traveling solo to that country during the Danish cartoon protests in order to explore the power of the political cartoon in contemporary cultural contexts. She currently (2008) lives in Dubai and runs classes for aspiring cartoonists and caricaturists.

Prior to enjoying this international reputation, she established one in Australia for her editorial artwork. Under the name, Applegate, Joanne created editorial illustration for News Ltd newspapers for ten years. During this time, she won several awards, including Best Artist at the Queensland Media Awards and Best Artist, Best Caricaturist and Best Realistic Illustration at the Stanley awards for Media. She continued to win media awards after she went freelance in 2001. Not bad for a mother of two who came late to the art game!

Brooker started traveling at a young age. Born in Toronto, Canada, to an accountant mother and a father who was an industrial scientist ('not creative types at all') she was raised in Auckland, New Zealand, but established her professional reputation in Australia. She came to newspapers via a strange pathway, although perhaps the general contours of it were not that unfamiliar to editorial artists. Living in Brisbane and after raising her two daughters 'long enough that they could get their own lunches and get themselves to school,' she decided to try to make a living, not pin money, out of art. She worked in advertising and discovered how much she hated it. She then moved on to designing T-Shirts for Expo 88 in Brisbane, and later specialized in Croc and Dingo T- Shirts, which were very big sellers in the 1980s. From crocs and dingoes she then went to the print media. She wangled her way into the Brisbane Courier-Mail by presenting them with a series of naked footballer caricatures, all tactfully covered with large footballs. "Balls got me in,' she says, 'balls kept me there.'

She worked at the Courier Mail for ten years, with her work syndicated throughout the News Ltd network. Newspaper work was fun for most of the time – the challenge and drama associated with daily deadlines established a creative environment that was exhilarating and stressful. 'On any day I might jump from a full page colour spread to a series of gags. I never knew what might be happening next,' she said. 'I especially liked doing court drawings. I loved seeing my work in print and knowing that hundreds of people were enjoying it over coffee. The fact that it ended up under puppies or in parrot cages was the sobering part, however. Tomorrow was always another day!' The work was particular satisfying when working with a journalist or editor who 'appreciates what I can do for them.' Fortunately, she did have a number of colleagues at the time who did, and a fellow artist, Tony Champ, to inspire her. After ten years, however, she felt the need to get away from the 'fluoro lights and computer screens' and extend herself beyond the boundaries that irreverent editorial illustrators such as herself found themselves increasingly knocking up against in the Australian mainstream media.

Newspaper work had been rewarding and her contributions received a good degree of public recognition. She made a deliberate push to win awards when she was working for News Ltd because she was told by someone whose opinion she respected that she would not be taken as seriously as the male artists until she won the same awards that the men won. However, the awards that she is most proud of are the ones she won AFTER leaving the newspaper in 2001, because she felt that these were won solely on her own merits.

As an editorial illustrator, Brooker was required to be a Cartoonist, Illustrator, Artist, Caricaturist. Her favourite style, and the one she has focused on since going freelance, is caricature. In China, for instance, she worked as a Caricature Entertainer, someone who draws fast on the spot caricatures of people. In China she was required to create one caricature per four minutes, six hours a day, six days a week. 'This trained me well to continue this work as part of my business," she says. "Luckily I really enjoy it.' She also enjoys drawing celebrities but she says that 'for real power I love to draw politicians, because it gives me the opportunity to put forward my opinions. This is why so many countries are afraid of the caricaturist in print, we can say far more with a pen than they can with words.

The power of the illustrator's pen was laid bare for her in the wake of the Danish Cartoon Controversy of 20005, when a furore was created after a Danish cartoonist depicted the prophet Mohammed in a way that caused concern amongst the international Muslim community. Brooker had been invited to Iran to exhibit her artwork and the controversy arose coincidentally. 'I decided that I wasn't happy with the bias reporting within Australia of the situation,' she said, 'and decided to find out for myself. If a cartoon can represent the imbalance of understanding between cultures and religions then cartooning must have a greater power than it is credited with.'

Events

1990 -
Career in journalism active

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html

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