



MICHAEL LEUNIG

Michael Leunig was born in East Melbourne in 1945. He is a self-taught artist and his early cartoon work was published in underground magazines in the 1960's. Michael went on to become a political cartoonist for major daily newspapers producing a unique style of work that was controversial and often addressed issues that were more philosophical than political. His cartoon offerings were sometimes accompanied by his own poetic texts, and these works became the substance of the many books he created over the course of his career.

Michael's words have been set to music by a range of classical and contemporary composers, including large projects with The Australian Chamber Orchestra. His work has been widely used and adapted by theatre companies, psychologists, teachers and theologians, both in Australia and abroad, and is also commonly read at weddings, funerals and other ceremonial occasions. For his cultural contribution, Michael was made a Living National Treasure by The National Trust in 1999 and has been awarded three honorary degrees by Australian universities – indeed a strange situation for an artist with notable dissenting views and a gentle outsider perspective.

Michael's artwork has been collected by the National Gallery of Australia, The National Library of Australia, The National Gallery of Victoria and various regional galleries. He has worked with Indigenous community art centres in Cape York, Arnhem Land and central Australia.

Living in a small rural community in northern Victoria, Michael continues his newspaper cartooning, painting, printmaking and working with nature according to his lifelong love of the land and the bush.

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)