



# DRAWN AND QUARTERED

A little blood always gets spilled when political cartoonists skewer public figures.

Here, *New York Times* senior art director Steven Heller tells us what makes caricature flourish,

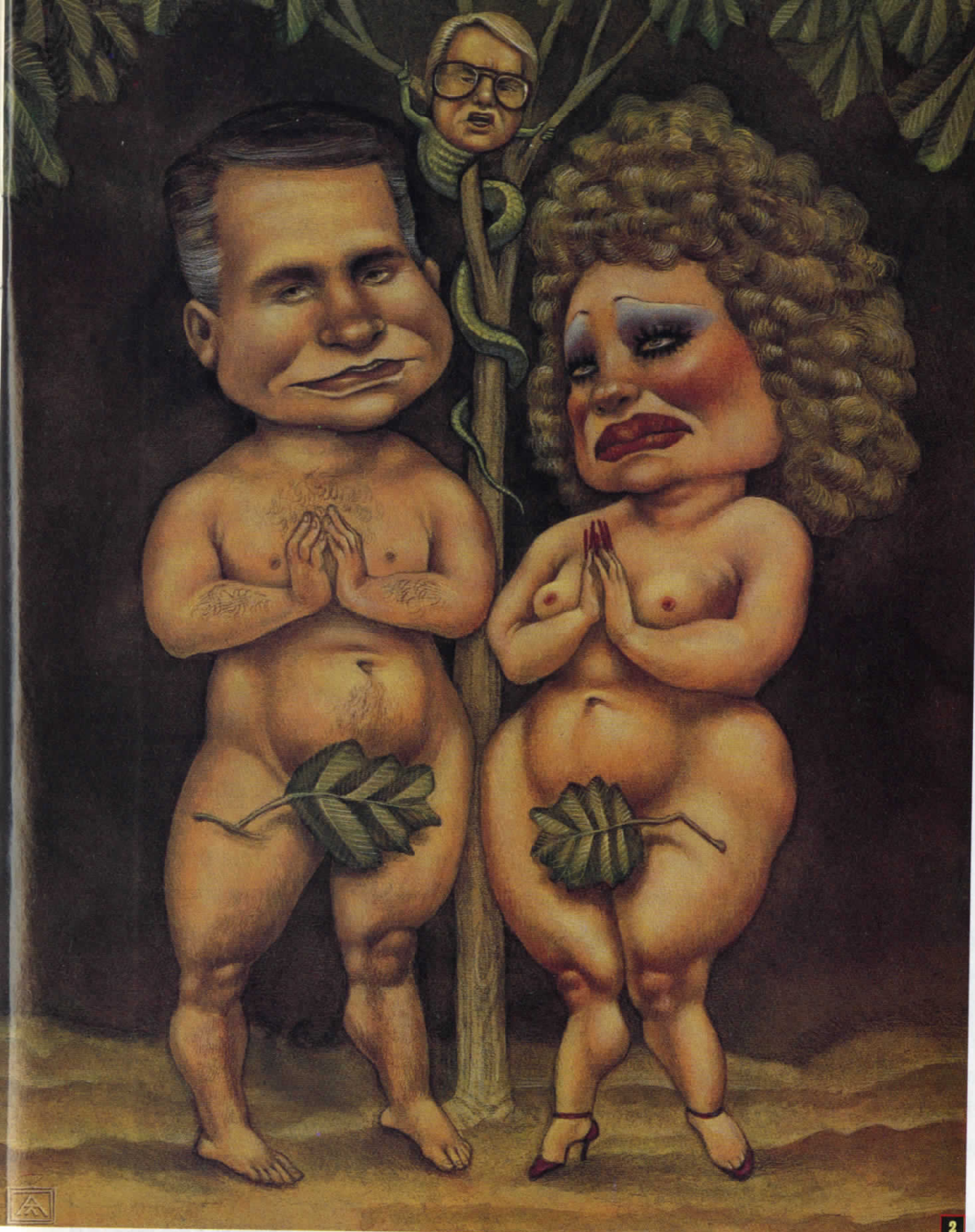
picks his 20 favorite examples of recent years, and reveals the stories behind the art.

THE POLITICAL MOMENT NEEDS TO BE RIGHT FOR POLITICAL CARICATURE to thrive. Whether it's the corruption of Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall or the turmoil of the Great Depression and the World Wars, social upheaval has always provided the ink for the political cartoonist's pen.

The second half of the 20th century started slow. With the notable exception of Robert Osborn's unforgiving portraits in *The New Republic* and Herblock's stinging commentaries in the *Washington Post*, political caricature was pretty lackluster during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. It wasn't until Lyndon Johnson expanded the Vietnam War that a new sense of indignation emerged and a new generation of independent visual commentators revived the moribund medium. The leaders of this generation—David Levine, Edward Sorel, and

Robert Grossman—first apprenticed in small satiric journals such as *Monocle*, which prepared them for their later success in *The New York Review of Books*, *New York*, *Esquire*, and such '60s-era magazines as *Ramparts* and *Evergreen Review*. Along with Jules Feiffer (who is not strictly a caricaturist, but uses caricature in his comic strips for the *Village Voice*) and *Esquire* cover art director George Lois, these distinctly individual artists sparked a renaissance of political satire that had far-reaching effects. From England, Ralph Steadman and Gerald Scarfe further honed a visual language that supplemented other protest media. Together, all of these artists created the most vital period of caricature of the 20th century.

During the late '60s and early '70s, the critical mass of Vietnam, Richard Nixon, and Watergate (as well as youth culture, feminism,



**ROBERT RISKO, "HIDDEN HOOVER" ▲**

Vanity Fair commissioned this for an article that basically described the private life of J. Edgar Hoover, who used to dress in drag sometimes, and who was gay and kept a lot of dirt on other people in his files. I read the article and I just sort of put a little simple, chic dress on him with a boa. With that face! That turtle face. A cross-dressing magazine for transvestites loved it, so they reprinted it in black and white.

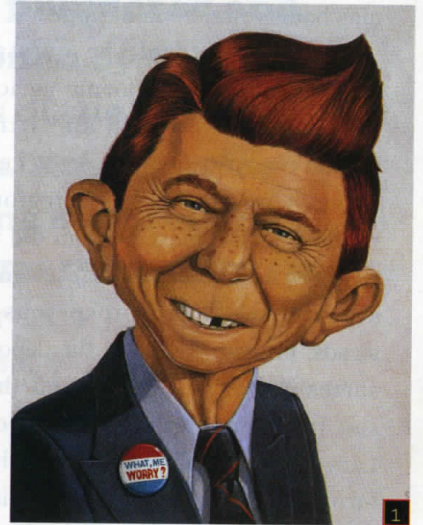
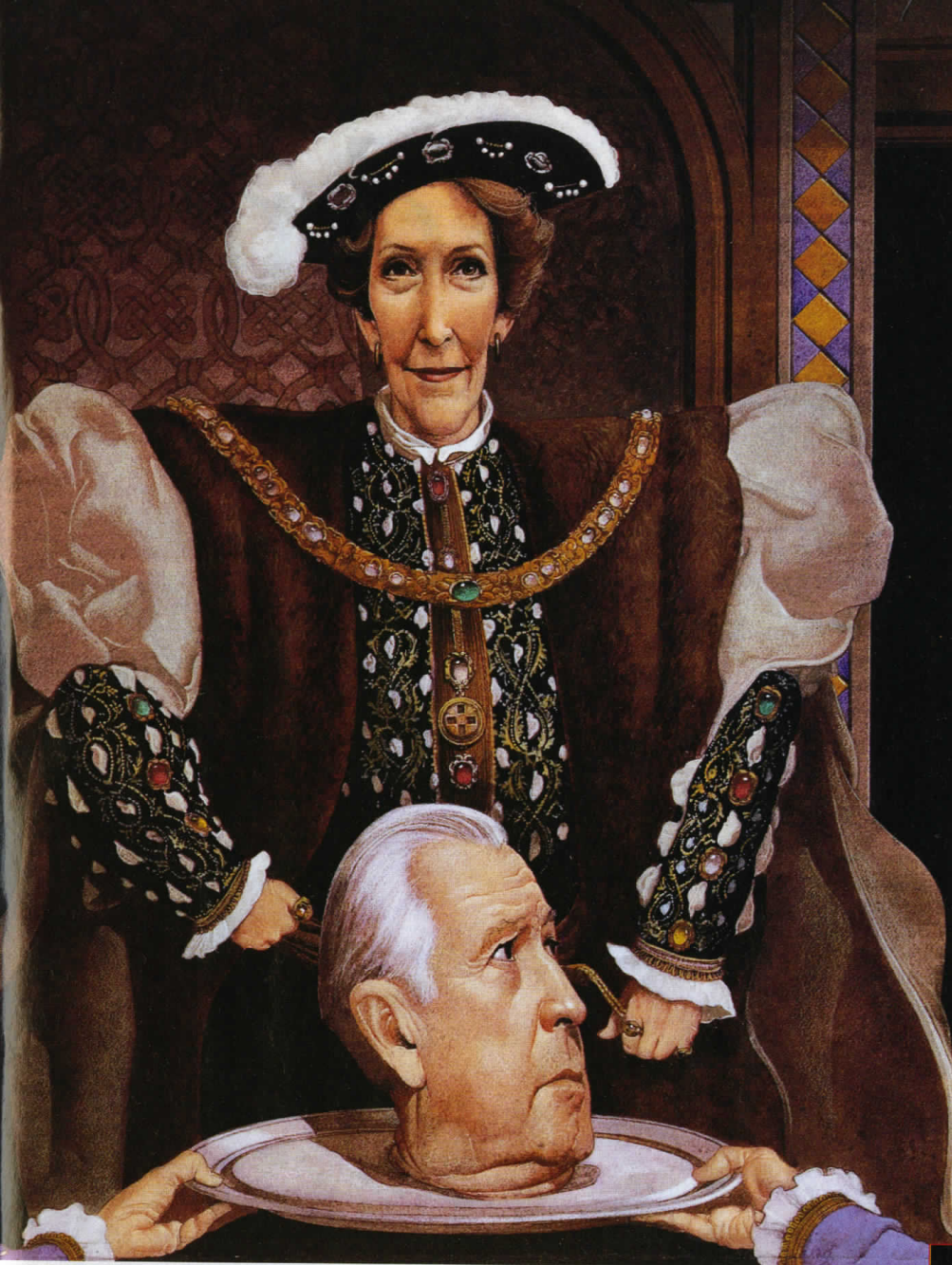
Facing page: 1. Hanoch Piven, Jesse Jackson. This page: 2. Anita Kunz, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker in the Garden of Eden (with Jimmy Swaggart); 3. Robert Risko, Hidden Hoover; 4. "Spitting Image" (London), Mrs. Thatcher Carving Up Britain; 5. David Levine, Kissinger Screwing the World.



**DAVID LEVINE, "KISSINGER SCREWING THE WORLD" ▶**

Kissinger had just been reassigned to head a commission on Central and South America. I said to myself, "My God, we can't get rid of this man. He is screwing up the world." That was the idea, and then it visualized. After it appeared in *The Nation*, the editor Victor Navasky called me up to the office. There was a group of about six or seven interns who wanted to know why the "world" had to be a woman. And I said that this was the way most of the world made love and the way to get the audience to think of the word "screwing." It was that simple: getting people to recognize Kissinger screwing the world.





**DAVID LEVINE, "REAGAN AND NANCY ON HORSEBACK"** ◀

What I was saying in the drawing: two assholes riding off into the sunset.

**ROBERT GROSSMAN, "RONALD RODENT"** ▶

Reagan seemed to me to have the cuteness of Mickey and he managed to maintain it the whole time he was in public view. I think it was the secret of his success: that he managed to embody a certain "lovable" quality. Later, I did a sculpture of him in chopped liver for a reception that was given for him at a synagogue in New York. They told me it had to be X-rayed to make sure it didn't contain a bomb. Did he taste it? He probably had his tasters taste it.

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# THE REAGAN REVIVAL

With the coming of Ronald Reagan, it was morning again for political cartoonists. His presidency sparked a renaissance of caricature and gave artists their best subject since Richard Nixon.

This page: 13. Philip Burke, The Presidents (Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush); 14. Sue Coe, Reagan as Bat; 15. Philip Burke, Ronald and Nancy Reagan. Facing page: 16. C.F. Payne, Nancy Reagan as Henry VIII (with former chief of staff Donald Regan); 17. "Spitting Image" (London), Ron and Nancy Reagan; 18. Steve Pietzsch, Ronald Reagan as Alfred E. Neuman; 19. David Levine, Reagan and Nancy on Horseback; 20. Robert Grossman, Ronald Rodent.



## PHILIP BURKE, "THE PRESIDENTS" ▲

This was commissioned by Garry Trudeau, who wanted something to hang in his studio. It's a large painting—6 feet high, 9 feet wide. He wanted a mural of the last five presidents including Bush. He left it up to me how to do it.

This was around the time of the Gulf War, and what I was trying to show was Reagan kind of pushing Carter out of the way and giving the thumbs-up to Bush. Actually, in my original sketch, which I showed to Garry, Bush was wiping his hand on his lapel and it was full of blood. So he was trying to wipe the blood from his hand. But, Garry didn't want it to be that overt.





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Facing page: 6. Sue Coe, The Bush Years: Supreme Cruelty; 7. Steven Brodner, Brent Scowcroft (Ford's and Bush's national security adviser); 8. Philip Burke, Ross Perot: Boy Scout Billionaire. This page: 9. Robbie Conal, Newtwit (photo by Alan Shaffer); 10. Edward Sorel, Kissing Triumphant; 11. Stephen Kroninger, Uncle George Wants You; 12. Edward Sorel, Fritz Lang and Joseph Goebbels.



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**EDWARD SOREL, "FRITZ LANG AND JOSEPH GOEBBELS"**

This was part of a series called "First Encounters" that my wife and I did. They were in The Atlantic Monthly every other month, I suppose as a break from the very serious articles. She wrote and I illustrated, and it later became a book about various first encounters between people. In this particular incident, Joseph Goebbels, who had recently taken over as Nazi propaganda minister, had summoned Fritz Lang and asked him to take over the entire German film industry. Lang pointed out that there was Jewish ancestry on his mother's side, and Goebbels said they could overlook that. Of course, Lang took the next train out of Germany.

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**UNCLE GEORGE WANTS YOU**

to **forget**  
 FAILING **BANKS,**  
**Education,**  
**Drugs,** **aids,**  
**poor health care,**  
**UNEMPLOYMENT,** **Crime,**  
**Racism,**  
**Corruption...**  
**AND HAVE A GOOD WAR**





**SUE COE, "THE BUSH YEARS: SUPREME CRUELTY"**

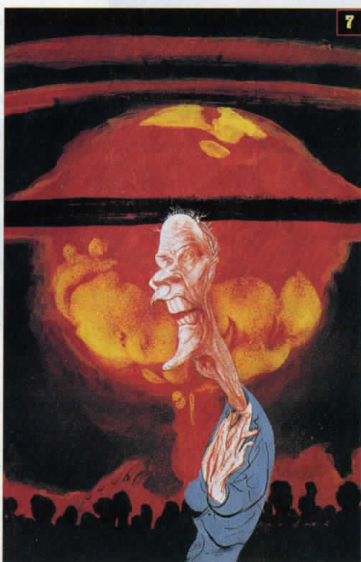
*This was part of a series for Rolling Stone magazine. These days, I'm attempting to do a deeper analysis of why we're in this situation, as opposed to just reacting to the latest onslaught of the right. What surprises me about doing political caricatures is that it enhances the ego of the person, the politician one's depicting. It doesn't really harm them. They are immune to any sort of caricature. Any attention in the media—positive or negative—is just attention for them.*

and civil rights) gave artists a limitless number of issues and individuals to attack. There was not only Nixon, but Kissinger, Ehrlichman, Haldeman, et al. One prolific cartoonist described his work as shooting fish in a barrel.

But then came Nixon's downfall. His resignation in 1974 resulted in a serious drought in political cartooning and caricature that lasted into the early '80s. Without Tricky Dick to kick around anymore, accomplished cartoonists and caricaturists lost the best satiric target since Honoré Daumier lampooned the pear-shaped King Louis Philippe in the 1830s.

The presidential blips of Gerald Ford (Nixon's pardon aside) and Jimmy Carter (his private lusts aside) offered little in the way of visual inspiration. The resulting caricatures were comic, not poignant, and few were memorable. Even the early Reagan years did not prompt caricaturists into action right away.

As the ill effects of the Reagan presidency trickled down, however, the masters of political iconography persevered. When the Teflon wore off, Reagan stood revealed as a fine, upstanding caricature, his painted pompadour, craggy face, and stiff demeanor too enticing to ignore. And Nancy (the original Cruella De Vil) provided comic inspiration not found in the demure Pat Nixon. While he was no Nixon, Reagan spawned a minirenaissance, bringing forward yet another generation of caricaturists. Publications that had all but rejected political caricature during the



intervening years began relying on satire once again. Philip Burke developed an expressionistic painting style in which the brush stroke, not any particular editorial idea or conceit, exposed his target's character. Steven Brodner perfected a method, focusing on physical traits, that tore the facade off his subjects. And Sue Coe, whose visual essays often appeared in *Mother Jones*, used social realism and shocking grotesquerie to transform her bêtes noires into frightening monsters.

As Reaganism segued into Bushism, political caricature continued its rebirth. Theatrical and social caricature were on the upswing, too, and while these forms serve no cautionary or curative role, their widespread popularity and pertinence encouraged artists to readdress caricature as a viable

graphic form. With politics in its current state, the more caricature the better—if only for a good laugh to deflate the buffoons. □

Steven Heller's books include *The Savage Mirror: The Art of Contemporary Caricature* (Watson Gupstill); *Man Bites Man: Two Decades of Drawings and Cartoons* by 22 Comic and Satiric Artists (A&W Publishers); *The Art of Satire* (Horizon Press); and *Art Against War* (Abbeville Press).

See **Hot!media** (page 75).