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By Emma Taggart on November 16, 2021 Caricature of John Ruskin by Adriano Cecioni for Vanity Fair, February 17, 1872. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons, Public domain) If you’ve ever been on a family vacation, you’ve likely come across caricature artists on beach sidewalks, fairs, or tourist spots. Today’s caricature artists are known for illustrating comical, exaggerated portraits of their subjects. However, you might be surprised to hear that the silly art style was once a highly-regarded art form that originated in the 16th century. Did you know that Leonardo Da Vinci drew caricatures? During the European Renaissance, successful artists were expected to capture their subjects as realistically as possible, however, many creatives held a space in their sketchbooks for caricature art. Da Vinci was fascinated by the human form and the oddities of human faces. His series of “grotesque heads” from the 1490s sought to poke fun at his subjects by representing them as extreme versions of themselves. Before long, the caricature style of drawing was popular around the world, and became a way for artists to ridicule public figures and politicians. Read on to discover the history of caricature art, and get to know some of the most famous caricature artists from the 20th century. What is a Caricature? “Five grotesque heads, and three heads of men in profile,” by Leonardo da Vinci, c.1510–20. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons, Public domain) The word caricature comes from the Italian words carico and caricare, meaning “to load” or to “exaggerate.” Caricature is the art of capturing a likeness of someone, through a method other than pure representational portrait, and usually with an aspect of humor. The artist’s goal is to emphasize specific features that make a person unique. The History of Caricature Art Caricatures by Annibale Carracci, circa 1595. (Photo: WikimediaCommons, public domain) For hundreds of years, artists strived to create art that was representational and full of lifelike details. However, some of the first artists known to deviate from that ideal were Italian brothers Annibale and Agostino Carracci, who during the 1590s, would draw exaggerated portrait sketches for fun. They mocked theories taught to them at Carracci Academy in Bologna, and even left descriptions in their sketchbooks that confirmed this. Caricature remained mostly an Italian art form for the next hundred years, but the trend began to catch on in other parts of Europe by the 1800s. In 19th century France, Charles Philipon, owner of the magazine La Caricature, often depicted King Louis-Philippe with a pear-shaped face. This was offensive to the royal, since it was intended as a French sexual pun. The motif became the universal symbol for the king’s regime, ultimately encouraging the public to see Louis-Philippe in a satirical light. As a result of Philipon's caricatures, a French law was passed concerning the freedom of press, and a ban of political caricature came into effect. Honore Daumier was another French caricature artist who illustrated for La Caricature. He was also famous for his cutting political cartoons that criticized King Louis Philippe, and his art even led to him spending six months in jail. Caricatures of King Louis-Philippe by Charles Philipon, 1831. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons, Public domain) In the U.S., Thomas Nast was the most influential American political cartoonist during the mid-to-late 1800s. With his caricatures, he helped to bring down the Boss Tweed ring and New York’s corrupt Tammany Hall. The artist is also responsible for the jolly image of Santa Claus we know today. During the Industrial Revolution, the invention of the railway meant that newspapers and magazines were widely distributed, and more people were exposed to the art of the caricature. Then after the First World War, the genre began rivaling photographs in newspapers all over the U.S. A new era of 20th-century caricature artists boomed. They showed how caricatures could not only be amusing, but also act as visual commentaries on society and politics. Famous 20th Century Caricaturists Sir Max Beerbohm Caricature of the controversy between Winston Churchill and H. G. Wells, by Sir Max Beerbohm, 1920.Dialogue reads:Churchill: “You were only 14 days in Russia!”Wells: “Your mother's an American!”(Photo: Wikimedia Commons, Public domain) British artist Sir Max Beerbohm created drawings that mostly dealt with late Victorian and Edwardian political, literary, and theatrical personalities. His caricatures were usually rendered in pen or pencil with subtle watercolor tinting. Hundreds of illustrations were published in popular magazines at the time, including Vanity Fair and Strand Magazine. He was recognized by The Times in 1913 as “the greatest of English comic artists.” David Levine View this post on Instagram A post shared by Robert Ogilvie (@rsogilvie) American caricaturist David Levine was famous for his pen-and-ink caricatures of famous writers and politicians. His drawings were published in Time magazine, Playboy magazine, and The New York Times. Additionally, he drew more than 3,800 pen-and-ink caricatures for The New York Review of Books. Levine loved exploring human flaws through his art. He once said, “I love my species.” Mort Drucker View this post on Instagram A post shared by Weirdo Art (@weirdo_artt) As a caricaturist for MAD magazine for over five decades, Mort Drucker was most famous for his satirical caricatures of film stars and TV actors. He also contributed covers and editorial illustrations to Time magazine and won a number of awards from the National Cartoonist Society. “I've discovered through years of working at capturing a humorous likeness that it’s not about the features themselves as much as the space between the features,” said Drucker. “We all have two eyes, a nose, a mouth, hair, and jawlines, but yet we all look different. What makes that so is the space between them.” Gerald Anthony Scarfe English cartoonist and illustrator Gerald Anthony Scarfe created caricatures for The New Yorker, The Sunday Times, Punch Magazine, and many more publications. He also created graphics for Pink Floyd, particularly on their 1979 album The Wall, and was the production designer on the Disney animated feature, Hercules. In 2003, Scarfe collaborated with the National Portrait Gallery and BBC Four to make caricatures of a number of famous Britons. In his distinct style, he depicted Henry VIII; Winston Churchill; Queen Elizabeth I; Pete Best; Richard Branson; Adam Smith; William Blake; The Beatles; Agatha Christie; and Diana, Princess of Wales. Each illustration brilliantly highlights each person’s heroic (or villainous) attributes. Al Hirschfeld Albert Hirschfeld was an American caricaturist best known for his black-and-white portraits of celebrities and Broadway stars. Using a crow quill, he rendered his drawings in black ink. His swift, sure lines inspired countless artists, illustrators, and cartoonists that came after him. He Contributed to The New York Times for seven decades, and his caricatures were also published in The New Yorker, Collier’s, The American Mercury, TV Guide, Playbill, New York Magazine, and Rolling Stone. His unique portrait illustrations were even used in the original movie posters for Charlie Chaplin’s films, as well as The Wizard of Oz (1939). Related Articles: Custom Caricature Drawings Make the Perfect Gift for Any Occasion Illustrator Recreates Celebrities in 9 Different Cartoon Styles People Around the World Ask This Artist to Reimagine Them as Cartoons Adorable Service Dog Patiently Poses for a Caricature at Disneyland Like My Modern Met on Facebook Get Our Weekly Newsletter A caricature is defined as a portrait that exaggerates the essence of a person to create an easily identifiable visual likeness. The question is, why do we quickly recognize a well-drawn caricature of a famous person, even though it is clearly not accurate? In short, because visual perception is much greater than the sensory information we take in through the eyes. Sensation versus Perception It all starts with the fact that sensation—what we sense—is not the same as perception. Sensation refers to the input of raw sensory data from the external world into your processing system. Perception organizes sensory information into a mental impression or a percept—in an effort to make it meaningful. Perception And Meaning We need sensory information organized to help us analyze, recognize and identify things in the external world. Perception is the glue that holds together everything you are sensing. And perceptions are based on previous experience, our stored knowledge and what we expect to see. That explains why the act of seeing is a subjective experience based on more than the characteristics of the object we are viewing. Exaggerating Helps Recognition In order to recognize a famous person in a caricature, we must match the information in the percept (our mental impression) to our memory’s stored representation of the person. Interestingly, we usually recognize a well-drawn caricature more rapidly than a realistic drawing for several reasons. First, we store the visual attributes of a face in memory, possibly as an image or as a group of rules. Seeing the exaggerated features in a caricature seems to closely match what we have stored in memory, probably because the distinguishing features are what makes the face unique. When what we perceive matches our memory store, we recognize the caricature. Second, our perceptions are influenced by context and expectations. Upon looking at a cartoon face with exaggerated features, we identify the genre as a “caricature.” We then expect to see the person’s prominent features distorted. These expectations provide additional clues to help recognize the person. Take away points: If you are planning on drawing caricatures, don’t hesitate to over-exaggerate. Also, consider using a caricature if you want viewers to quickly recognize a person in your design. Art Credits: Will Smith by Matt from caricatureking.com; Colbert by Tim Sheppard, Last Word On; Lincoln by Pearson Scott Foresman. Reference: Philip G. Zimbardo and Richard J. Gerrig. Perception (Chapter 7) in The Motion Aftereffect. 1998. The MIT Press. A caricature is an artistic representation that exaggerates and distorts certain physical, expressive, or behavioral features of a person or subject. Its primary goal is to create a recognizable yet deliberately altered image that evokes an emotional reaction—whether surprise, amusement, or critical reflection. Unlike a traditional portrait, which aims to faithfully reproduce a person’s appearance, a caricature emphasizes distinctive traits such as a prominent nose, unique eyes, or personality quirks to depict the subject in an ironic or satirical way. Caricatures can be created for humorous purposes or to convey social, political, or cultural messages. They often appear in newspapers, satirical magazines, public events, or as entertainment at fairs and festivals. Their effectiveness lies in distilling an individual’s personality or attitude into a few lines, often expressing much more than a realistic portrait could. Caricature by James Gillray. Source: Wikipedia The roots of caricature reach far back into ancient times, long before it became the modern art form we recognize today. In Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome, there are examples of images that deliberately distorted human features for humorous or symbolic purposes. For example, some ceramics and frescoes depict figures with exaggerated traits to highlight their roles or actions. During the Middle Ages, grotesque and caricatured representations appeared in illuminated manuscripts and sacred art, often with moral or educational intentions. These distorted images served to highlight vices, sins, or negative behaviors, using striking visuals to communicate quickly and powerfully. During the Renaissance, art focused on the detailed study of human anatomy and proportions. However, there was also a growing interest in expressive deformities. A key example is Leonardo da Vinci’s “Grotesque Heads,” where the artist explored the expressive possibilities of the human face by drawing distorted, caricatured, and highly expressive faces. These studies anticipated the birth of caricature as an autonomous art form, combining technical skill and irony to create images capable of expressing not only physical appearance but also the psychology and character of individuals. In the 18th century, caricature took on a more defined and recognizable form, becoming a fundamental tool for political and social satire. In England, artists such as James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson produced sharp caricatures that commented on political events, scandals, and public figures, often provoking strong reactions and controversies. In Italy and other countries, caricature played a significant role in social and political critique. Through cartoons and drawings, artists denounced corruption, injustices, and hypocrisies, helping to spread ideas and stimulate public debate. Caricature by James Gillray. Source: Wikipedia In the 20th century, with the rise of mass media, caricature spread even further, adopting diverse and experimental forms. Visual satire appeared in newspapers, animated cartoons, advertising campaigns, and even contemporary art. Today, thanks to digital technologies, caricature is more accessible and versatile than ever. Software and apps allow anyone to create digital caricatures in minutes, while professional artists continue to use this art form to comment on society, politics, and culture in innovative ways. Creating a traditional caricature requires keen observation and skilled handwork. The artist often begins with a pencil or charcoal sketch, defining the main features of the subject and identifying key elements to exaggerate. The ability to capture the most significant details—such as the shape of the nose, the width of the mouth, or the tilt of the eyes—is essential. The caricature may then be outlined with ink, pastels, or watercolors to add nuances, colors, and contrasts that make the image lively and impactful. This stage requires care to maintain legibility and recognizability. Caricature by Thomas Rowlandson. Source: Picryl With technological advancement, caricatures are frequently created or refined using graphic software like Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, or digital drawing programs such as Procreate. These tools allow artists to work with layers, colors, and special effects quickly and precisely. Additionally, numerous apps and online platforms enable users to create caricatures from simple photos. These automatic tools employ artificial intelligence algorithms and filters to transform faces into caricatures, often delivering fun and immediate results. Detailed observation: Analyze the subject’s distinctive features. Creative exaggeration: Amplify certain details to achieve a comic or critical effect. Balance between distortion and recognition: Keep the subject easily identifiable. Personal style: Develop a unique visual language that may be softer, stylized, or sharper, conveying more than just an image. Caricature by Thomas Rowlandson. Source: Picryl Caricature today has many applications, demonstrating its versatility and communicative value: Political and social satire: As a tool to criticize, denounce, and comment on public events and behaviors with irony and provocation. Entertainment: Many artists create live caricatures at events, fairs, or parties to amuse and engage audiences. Marketing and advertising: Caricatures are used in creative campaigns to humanize brands and foster emotional connections with customers. Contemporary art: Some artists use caricature to explore social, cultural, or personal themes, blending irony with reflection. The web is a true treasure trove for those looking for custom caricatures or wanting to explore the work of specialized illustrators. Here are some reliable platforms where you can find them: Fiverr – A global marketplace where hundreds of illustrators offer digital and traditional caricatures at competitive prices. Etsy – Ideal for purchasing personalized caricatures, often hand-drawn or digitally styled, perfect also as gifts. Upwork – A platform for professional freelancers where you can hire illustrators for custom projects. Instagram – Great for discovering emerging artists: search hashtags like #caricatureartist or #digitalcaricature to see real examples and contact creators directly. Behance – An online portfolio platform for creatives and illustrators where you can browse different styles and contact professionals. Redbubble – An art print marketplace where some artists sell ready-made caricatures or offer custom commissions. Society6 – Similar to Redbubble, it allows you to purchase artworks, including caricatures, printed on various media. Many illustrators also offer personalized services on their own websites, so a simple Google search with terms like “freelance digital caricature artist” can help you discover additional independent talent. When choosing an online caricature artist, remember to: Review portfolios to understand their style. Read client feedback and ratings. Compare prices, delivery times, and terms to avoid surprises. Caricature by Honoré Daumier. Source: Wikipedia The history of caricature is rich with talented artists who have defined the genre with their unique style and ability to capture the essence of their subjects. Some of the most renowned worldwide include: Honoré Daumier (1808–1879, France): Considered one of the fathers of modern political caricature, famous for his sharp social satires in the 19th century. James Gillray (1756–1815, United Kingdom): A master of English political satire, known for his vivid and biting caricatures in the 18th century. Al Hirschfeld (1903–2003, United States): Famous for his caricatures of theater and film celebrities, recognizable for his fluid and dynamic line work. David Levine (1926–2009, United States): Illustrator and caricaturist noted for his portraits published in “The New York Review of Books”. Ranan Lurie (1932–2022, Israel/USA): Renowned political caricaturist and multiple international award winner. Achille Beltrame (1871–1945, Italy): One of Italy’s most important illustrators and caricaturists, famous for his covers and caricatures published in “La Domenica del Corriere”. Caricature by Honoré Daumier. Source: Wikipedia Caricature is far more than just a humorous or grotesque drawing: it is a complex and fascinating art form that combines technical skill, psychological insight, and critical spirit. Its long history, from antiquity to modern digital tools, proves its ability to adapt and remain relevant. Knowing the history, techniques, and many uses of caricature allows one to appreciate not only its aesthetic value but also its significant role in communication, satire, and entertainment. If you are interested in learning how to create caricatures or diving deeper into this exciting artistic world, you can explore tutorials, courses, and specialized tools or turn to professionals who have made it their art. A caricature is defined as a portrait that exaggerates the essence of a person to create an easily identifiable visual likeness. The question is, why do we quickly recognize a well-drawn caricature of a famous person, even though it is clearly not accurate? In short, because visual perception is much greater than the sensory information we take in through the eyes. Sensation versus Perception It all starts with the fact that sensation—what we sense—is not the same as perception. Sensation refers to the input of raw sensory data from the external world into your processing system. Perception organizes sensory information into a mental impression or a percept—in an effort to make it meaningful. Perception And Meaning We need sensory information organized to help us analyze, recognize and identify things in the external world. Perception is the glue that holds together everything you are sensing. And perceptions are based on previous experience, our stored knowledge and what we expect to see. That explains why the act of seeing is a subjective experience based on more than the characteristics of the object we are viewing. Exaggerating Helps Recognition In order to recognize a famous person in a caricature, we must match the information in the percept (our mental impression) to our memory’s stored representation of the person. Interestingly, we usually recognize a well-drawn caricature more rapidly than a realistic drawing for several reasons. First, we store the visual attributes of a face in memory, possibly as an image or as a group of rules. Seeing the exaggerated features in a caricature seems to closely match what we have stored in memory, probably because the distinguishing features are what makes the face unique. When what we perceive matches our memory store, we recognize the caricature. Second, our perceptions are influenced by context and expectations. Upon looking at a cartoon face with exaggerated features, we identify the genre as a “caricature.” We then expect to see the person’s prominent features distorted. These expectations provide additional clues to help recognize the person. Take away points: If you are planning on drawing caricatures, don’t hesitate to over-exaggerate. Also, consider using a caricature if you want viewers to quickly recognize a person in your design. Art Credits: Will Smith by Matt from caricatureking.com; Colbert by Tim Sheppard, Last Word On; Lincoln by Pearson Scott Foresman. Reference: Philip G. Zimbardo and Richard J. Gerrig. Perception (Chapter 7) in The Motion Aftereffect. 1998. The MIT Press. The whole tenor of pictorial comedy was shifted by World War I and by the boom times thereafter. Some previously forbidden subjects became admissible. Political caricature during and after the war was excessively partisan, while the cartoons about the war itself tended to alleviate the pain of the struggle. Bruce Bairnsfather’s Old Bill and his colleagues in Britain got through it by joking. After it was over, the public for comic publications was greatly enlarged; while the newly rich were standard butts for cartoonists catering to all classes, they were themselves buying comic weeklies. In the United States the usually monthly comic magazines of universities and colleges had a sudden flowering, to such an extent that an anthology for their cartoons called College Humor was published for several years in the 1920s and ’30s. The tendency of previously serious weeklies to use small cartoons here and there or to insert a funny page somewhere created not only new markets for cartoonists but also a temporary decline in the purely humorous magazines, and Punch, Life, and Judge had difficulty surviving the Depression of the 1930s. The title of Puck had already passed to a newspaper chain which used it for a Sunday supplement, and the title of Life eventually passed to a periodical of different character. Simplicissimus never quite rose between wars to its pre-1914 stature; the effort which went into Dada and Surrealist publications in Germany and France in the ’20s, when art itself became an object of social satire, meant a loss to other comic publications. Meanwhile, the public in general gradually became aware of modern art, and its presumed incomprehensibility became almost as routine a subject by 1940 as mothers-in-law or freshly painted park benches. In the United States an older generation of humorists somewhat of the upper-class Punch style lingered briefly after World War I. Of such were Oliver Herford, whose Alphabet of Celebrities and other comic verses with pictures were published as small books; Peter Newell, whose highly original Slant Book, Hole Book, etc., had a sharp eye to late prewar costume, and Gelett Burgess, whose Goops for children were spaghetti-like little figures whose behaviour illustrated a moral. But to these was now added a new generation of sophisticated but slightly flashier performers, many of them with theatrical connections, many at first employed by the fashion magazine Vanity Fair and later by The New Yorker (beginning in 1925); Ralph Barton, who did superb roués; Rea Irvin of the thin trembly line, poached eyes, and almost oriental splendour; John Held, Jr., whose angular young women helped define the Jazz Age; Gluyas Williams and Ellison Hoover, who satirized business, industrial labour, and other subjects not well known to the Punch tradition; and Alfred Frueh, whose caricatures of theatre people recalled Toulouse-Lautrec. The Depression of the 1930s brought forward a few artists with a genius for social protest, few of whom had any real sense of comedy because tragedy was not to them, as it had been to Daumier, the other side of the same coin. In the United States the Communist Daily Worker had the services of William Gropper, a distinguished lithographer and editorial cartoonist who was sometimes able to capture something of the humorous tone of the prewar Masses. And it gradually became known that in the Soviet Union a comic magazine called Krokodil was allowed to gibe at the ways of its brothers and even occasionally of its masters. The two most interesting features of cartoon and caricature in the first half of the 20th century were the rise of the one-line joke and of the pictorial joke without words, and the enormous diversity of styles of drawing. The New Yorker was probably the inventor or reinventor of the one-line joke and certainly its chief fomenter. Five-decker dialogues with headings were swept away even from Punch, and there was a greater unity of words with picture, paralleling the tendency toward tabloid newspapers with large photographic halftones and very pithy text. The joke without words, often in two or more frames, was the extreme of economy of language. One result of this change was that the comedy-of-manners cartoon must convey its comment entirely through costume, setting, and (to a lesser extent) situation, and the emphasis thus tended to fall more on comic situation than on plays on words, class differences, or marked action. The New Yorker and magazines whose cartoons had been influenced by it aimed at a sophisticated audience. The New Yorker itself, while enjoying in its maturity a position equivalent to that of Punch in the 1880s, aimed its advertising and much of its writing at upper-income classes, but its cartoons were aimed at the classes described as highbrow and upper-middle-brow. Such features of the old-fashioned British-style upper class as servants were always treated by New Yorker cartoonists (notably Mary Petty) as necessarily comic fossils of an old order and hence in, rather than out of, that old upper class. Whole new areas of social-comedy subject matter arose in this magazine: the life of the Jewish community, the fauna of bars, the managerial class and its flavour, the lighter side of the well-kept woman, commercialized sports, the imagined life of colonies or races of antisocial beings, and what might be termed the comedy of the upwardly mobile. The diversity of styles of drawing reflected the influence of Postimpressionist art quite as much as did the use of modern art as a subject for jokes. The great draftsmen who were on the edges of Impressionism (such as Toulouse-Lautrec) had much influence on caricature and cartoon; while the same photomechanical reproduction that advanced the latter communicated modern painting to a vast public. The loose, almost deliberately ugly method of the Expressionists got into some of the single-cartoon commentators to such an extent that their shorthand was sometimes difficult for those who did not read them daily. The meandering willful line of the 20th-century Swiss painter Paul Klee certainly influenced Saul Steinberg; the Cubists’ studies in African sculpture were echoed in cartoons by Miguel Covarrubias and Partch; the “classical” period of Pablo Picasso in Richard Taylor and others; the curving economical line of Henri Matisse (oddly enough) in Richard Decker. Occasionally, cartoonists parodied one another: Oliver Herford once presented Gibson girls as paper dolls without expression; Al Capp in the comic strip “Li’l Abner” parodied “Dick Tracy” and “Mary Worth.” Mad magazine parodied everybody: style, subject, everything from politics to pornography. The comic strip having taken over the comic presentation of events almost completely, especially since the rise of the one-line joke or picture caption, the modern cartoon became one largely of situation or of predicament that was stated without a solution’s being worked out or suggested. The mother of a sideshow circus family, confronted with more than she can manage, simply says that after all she has only three hands; a young girl is in ecstasies over a sunset, while behind her a bearded artist-stereotype says, “Too much purple.” Meanwhile, the longer sort of comic anecdote retreated to a purely oral–aural life or to the bound volume of jokes, where it sometimes had a vignette-like illustration. The cartoon of situation was certainly not new, but it predominated in the first half of the 20th century. A Daumier lithograph showing a very fat woman in a crinoline climbing into an omnibus bore no dialogue, but simply the caption, “A mere nothing, and the bus is full.” This was a cartoon of predicament. There has tended to be a cluster of these situation subjects: the desert island no larger than a hearthrug, the man who meets a woman walking and (in a scalloped balloon) imagines her naked, the flying carpet with novel chauffeur or passenger, the picture gallery with mutual reaction between work of art and viewer, the psychoanalyst’s couch, the big-game hunter’s trophy room. If the situation was clear, not even one line of joke was required. Such cartoons had a sort of family connection with the earliest caricatures, but they were not merely antiportraits of types, they were portraits with accessories that created the predicament. So were the tiny single woodcut figures that were inserted as pictorial puns into the text pages of Punch in the 1840s. But the latter-day predicament may be highly complicated; in the hands of such a cartoonist as George Price, whose split pen line built up tattered edifices of dowdiness, or Emett, whose fantastic locomotives and wispy codgers were half infernal and half heavenly, the comedy came from an accumulation of frustrating but ludicrous detail. Frustration, that renowned companion of modern life, was dissolved by laughter. Even the presumably invincible American businessman was often represented in cartoons in frustrating situations, often briskly indicated by the graphic lines on the charts in his office (Whitney Darrow excelled in this genre). André François, who worked for both French and British papers, was a master of the rapidly sketched situation; so was “Anton” of Punch (a man and a woman jointly using the name), who kept up the tradition of satire through clothes, being particularly good at pseudo-Edwardian nattiness. Herb Stansbury’s “Smart Chart,” a one-frame comic for the financial page, satirized stock market graphs. In the drawings of the Romanian-born Saul Steinberg there was almost a parody of the cartoon of situation, for his lines doubled back on themselves and bit their own tails: the hand was indicated as drawing the portrait of which it was a part, or the frustrating details positively engulfed the subject (a wicker chair taken over entirely by its curlicues; tattooing extended beyond the tattooed man; the woman with a lozenge-shaped face, on her lap a baby whose lozenge-shaped face is one-quarter of the larger lozenge). Yet there were also extraordinarily simple performances; the unassuming little people of Jean Effel (François Lejeune) moved gently through the trials of Adam and Eve; Jacques Faizant’s bad children produced hilarious effects by conveying their concentration in a few lines; Otto Soglow’s stenographic vocabulary of forms for human bodies (perhaps slightly indebted to Burgess’ Goops) was so graphic that it could be used in minuscule dimensions with perfect legibility. On the other hand, Peter Arno’s large-scale and heavy outlines, despite simple straightforward design, made his beaky and bosomy figures almost jump off the page (for many years one of his near-bawdy cartoons almost invariably occupied a position in The New Yorker on the full page immediately after “The Talk of the Town,” which suggested that the political cartoon of Punch was being ridiculed). Ronald Searle, after a long British career of making spiky and raffish pseudo-Edwardians and fiendish schoolgirls, had a success as an artist for American advertising. A pair of delightful opposite numbers were W. Heath Robinson and the slightly later Rube Goldberg, who on both sides of the Atlantic created wild half-anthropomorphic parodies of intricate machinery. During World War II, Bill Mauldin’s disenchanted soldiers were proper descendants of Bairnsfather’s. Winslow Ames Contents: The term caricature (pronounced keh-ruh-kuh-chur in US English) means overexaggerating or oversimplifying certain characteristics when creating a character description. It’s a commonly used device in art and literature. Have you seen street artists drawing funny cartoon-like pictures of people? Any striking feature, such as a big nose or small chin, is highlighted to create an over-exaggerated portrait. The person is still recognizable but they are made funny by the changes. There is a long history of caricature in art being used for humorous effect or to make a political point. In literature, caricatures are made by exaggerating personality and behavior, as well as physical appearance. They are created for a humorous or grotesque effect, or to make a subtle point about politics or human behavior. When used to highlight human shortcomings, caricatures are a form of satire. The English word caricature originates in the Italian word caricare, which means to load, to charge and became commonly used in the 18th century. Caricatures in art became popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. They were used by European aristocracy as a way of ridiculing politicians, but there is evidence of them right the way back to early cave paintings. Caricature is a noun. If you create a caricature, you are a caricaturist. If you make a caricature of someone, use the verbs caricaturing and caricatured to describe the process of creating it. For example: Noun: My novel contains a caricature. Noun: I am a caricaturist. Present tense verb: I am caricaturing the girl to highlight how naïve she is. Past tense verb: I caricatured the father in my story. You can create a caricatures intentionally or accidentally. Used well they can make a reader laugh or consider a political opinion. Used unintentionally, they create disappointing stereotyped clichés which reveal an author’s ignorance of a group of people. There is a rich history of caricature in literature for politics and comedic effect. Some groups of people are routinely shown as caricatures, using common features the audience will immediately recognize. Caricature in Fairy Stories In tales such as those by the Brothers Grimm, stepmothers and foster mothers are commonly caricatured. They are normally presented as evil, often with magical powers, and a taste for murder. This can be seen in stories including: Cinderella: The stepmother makes Cinderella into a servant for her and her daughters Rapunzel: A sorceress forces a man to give his newborn daughter to her after he steals from her garden Hansel and Gretel: The stepmother convinces the children’s father to abandon them in the forest Snow White: A jealous new Queen orders a huntsman to kill her stepdaughter The original versions of tales used wicked mothers, but during the 1800s this suddenly changed into the character of the stepmother. No one knows for certain why this change happened but the caricature has stuck ever since. Political Caricature Caricature is commonly used to make political points. A famous example of this is Animal Farm by George Orwell. In this deceptively child-like tale, all animals are equal on a farm. However, the pigs gradually take control, impose rules, and begin to pick up the habits of humans. Orwell uses pigs as a caricature of Russian leaders to criticize their promise of communism benefiting the country. Racial Caricatures Racial caricatures are created from stereotypes formed over time. In classic literature they highlight misinformed common opinions about groups of people. Modern writers should be careful not to include these stereotypes in their work unless a political point is being made. Shylock in The Merchant of Venice, by William Shakespeare, is a Jew obsessed with money. This is built on the history of money-lending being a fairly common occupation for Jewish people. In the Middle Ages, Jews were denied the right to own land and join guilds and boasted high literacy rates. Over time, Jews became portrayed as greedy and money-obsessed. Jewish caricatures went on to be used as a propaganda device by Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Another example of racial caricature can be seen in Margaret Mitchell’s novel Gone with the Wind. In the story, black characters are shown as child-like and unable to care for themselves. This common portrayal was based on the claims made by slaveholders that Africans needed to be slaves because they couldn’t function on their own. Creating a great caricature starts with deciding why you need one in the first place. Are you highlighting a point about society, as John Kennedy Toole does in A Confederacy of Dunces? Or, are you poking fun at stereotype, like Jane Austen with Mrs Bennett in Pride and Prejudice? Knowing the purpose behind your caricature gives it a clear reason to be included. In literature, good caricatures often focus on physical description, over-exaggerating appearance. But, unlike art, literature allows you to make a caricature out of behavior and personality traits too. Caricatures are often insulting but they can also be complimentary. This flexibility allows you to build a believable character beyond a stereotype. A great caricature acts as a mirror for the reader. It makes them think deeply about the subject matter. Even if your caricature is purely for entertainment value, you can use it to criticize qualities you see in society and your own culture. A great caricature is purposeful and planned to make a point, not just a stereotyped cliché. Smarmy salesmen, mad scientists, and femme fatales are archetypal character types that have become boring to read. The character being exaggerated must be recognizable but not predictable. Unconscious caricatures are written accidentally. They reflect ignorance and can inadvertently reveal racist, sexist, or homophobic views. Some authors will pay a sensitivity reader to help them discover any accidental stereotypes. Whilst the use of sensitivity readers is sometimes controversial, many writers find it useful to hear opinions from someone within the community they are writing about. Caricatures can be seen throughout literature and remain a popular literary device with modern writers. Caricatures can be funny or insulting, subtle or obvious. Used well they add another layer of meaning into a novel, giving a different way of reading the text. Used badly they highlight the ignorance of an author, falling into stereotyped clichés that insult and offend the reader. Caricature is a device used in descriptive writing and visual arts, in which particular aspects of a subject are exaggerated, to create a silly or comic effect. In other words, it can be defined as a plastic illustration, derisive drawing, or a portrayal based on exaggeration of the natural features, which gives a humorous touch to the subject.During the 16th century, numerous painters (Holbein, Bruegel, and Bosch, for example) used particular aspects of caricature in their work. However, it did not involve anything comic until the 17th century. Later, in the 18th century, Carracci introduced caricature in a witty way in his works. Caricatures started gaining popularity in England when artists like Hogarth, Rowlandson, and Gillray followed Carracci’s footsteps. The genre slowly developed to accommodate social and political satire as well.Examples of Caricature in LiteratureSeveral authors have written about how President Obama is unpredictable. A piece of writing was published in The New York Times that shed light on this particular subject by highlighting how people have exaggerated certain aspects of the President’s personality. Following is an excerpt from the same paper by Matt Bai:“Over the course of the last several weeks, commentators have taken to portraying Mr. Obama as clinical and insufficiently emotive, which is really just another way of saying the president is not really knowable. It is a caricature his opponents can exploit in part because a lot of voters remain murky on his cultural identity.”Caricature arises from the forcing and the embellishment of the basic rule of good description, that is, the principle of the dominant impression.Example #2: Bleak House (By Charles Dickens)One of the great examples of caricature from Charles Dickens has been given below:“Mr. Chadband is a large yellow man, with a fat smile, and a general appearance of having a good deal of train oil in his system. Mrs. Chadband is a stern, severe-looking, silent woman. Mr. Chadband moves softly and cumbrously, not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright. He is very much embarrassed about the arms, as if they were inconvenient to him.”It is beautiful example of caricaturing through words. The dominating impression is made by words like “oily” and “fat,” which sound quite literal initially. However, you realize shortly that the literal oiliness is a representation of the character Chadband. Chadband has a ‘fat’ smile, and on the whole he appears to be slightly unctuous, like a phony preacher.Function of CaricatureThe caricature examples above have underscored the functions and role of caricature, and how it has evolved in modern day literature. Coming up with novel ideas to explain oneself, and the nature of the human race in general, is not something new to the world. This sort of representation has been witnessed since the time when men lived in caves.Caricature was introduced to the masses during the age of enlightenment, and it bestowed the age it belongs to, with its subtlety and critical attitude. As a branch of modernism, it played a great role in expressing facts that were suppressed because of the conformists in the society at that point in time. It was a reminder for those who believed that the sword was mightier than the pen, and it started being used as a visual expressioof conventional society.Nowadays, caricature is a highly dignified form of art that is approved of and used worldwide. Newspaper editors show great respect for the artists who create caricatures for their papers, which ofttimes publish caricatures that might even represent a conflicting ideology. Where this distinctive form of art can be used to portray important and transforming social and political ideas, it can also be provocative to certain groups. Underdeveloped countries have had a hard time warming up to this form of expression because they believe it is a creation of evil by governments. Art has the power to amuse, amaze, and sometimes, exaggerate. One such art form which seems to have mastered the art of exaggeration is the caricature. This blog post will guide you through the lively world of caricature art: its definition, history, characteristics, examples, and techniques. So let's dive right in. Shall we?What is a caricature?A caricature, by definition, is a representation, specifically a picture, description, or imitation of a person wherein the subject's most noticeable features or characteristics are exaggerated. The purpose of exaggeration is to create a comic or grotesque effect that is both amusing and insightful. This might sound complex, but it's actually quite simple once you get the hang of it.Think of a caricature as a funhouse mirror reflection of a person. It distorts specific features to make a point or just for the sheer fun of it. These distortions can range from a person's physical attributes like a prominent nose, high cheekbones, or distinctive hair to their personality traits such as a constant smile, a unique laugh, or even a particular gesture they often use. The key is to exaggerate these traits in a way that the person is still recognizable—that's what truly defines a caricature.Now, you might be wondering, "Why exaggerate?" Well, caricature art is not just about making someone look funny or grotesque. It's more than that. It's a way of highlighting the subject's distinctive features or traits, making them stand out. It's about capturing the essence of the subject in a way that's not just accurate but also entertaining and insightful. That's the beauty of caricature art—it turns the ordinary into extraordinary, the mundane into special, and the dull into amusing.And the best part? Anyone can create a caricature. All you need is a keen eye for detail, a sense of humor, and a little bit of creativity. So, are you ready to explore the fascinating world of caricatures?History of caricatureNow that we've nailed down the definition of caricature, let's take a little trip down memory lane and explore its rich history. It's interesting to note that the concept of caricature has been around for centuries, predating even the term itself!The word "caricature" finds its roots in the Italian term "caricare," which translates to "load" or "exaggerate." It emerged as an art form in Italy during the 16th century. But don't be fooled, the practice of exaggerating features for comic or grotesque effect existed long before then. There have been discoveries of caricature-like drawings on ancient Egyptian tombs and Greek pottery, showing us just how far back this art form stretches.However, the golden age of caricature came about in 18th and 19th-century Europe, specifically in England and France. During this time, caricatures often served a political purpose; they were weapons of satire and social commentary. Artists used their skills to exaggerate the traits of political figures, highlighting their follies and often ridiculing them. This was a way to provoke thought, stir up discussions, and sometimes even bring about change.Fast forward to today — caricatures have evolved and found their way into various media forms: newspapers, magazines, television, and even the digital world. From political cartoons to amusing avatars on social media platforms, the presence and influence of caricature art is undeniable.So, as you can see, the history of caricature isn't just a timeline of artistic development. It's a testament to the power of creativity and satire, and the human need to communicate, entertain, and critique through art. Now, isn't that fascinating?Characteristics of caricatureWith the definition of caricature and its history under our belt, let's dive into the distinct characteristics that make this art form stand out. What exactly sets caricatures apart from other forms of art?Firstly, the key characteristic of caricature lies in the art of exaggeration. Caricaturists zero in on the most striking features of their subjects — be it a large nose, prominent eyebrows, or a distinct hairstyle — and amplify them. This isn't to mock or belittle, but rather to create a humorous or satirical portrayal.Secondly, caricatures are not just about physical features; they extend to personality traits and characteristics too. A sly politician might be depicted with a fox-like face; a fickle celebrity might be shown as a weather vane, constantly changing directions. Clever, isn't it?Another defining feature of caricature is its purpose. While some caricatures are created purely for entertainment, many carry a deeper message or commentary. They're a medium for artists to express their perspectives on individuals, society, or current issues, often with a dash of humor and satire.Lastly, despite the exaggeration and distortion, caricatures maintain a sense of likeness to the subject. This balance between realism and exaggeration is what makes caricature a challenging and intriguing art form. It's not just about making someone look funny, it's about capturing their essence in an exaggerated yet recognizable way.Now that you're familiar with the characteristics of caricature, you'll be able to appreciate this art form on a whole new level. Next time you see a caricature, take a moment to appreciate the artist's skill in exaggeration, their clever portrayal of personality traits, and the underlying messages their work might be conveying. Sounds like an interesting new way to look at art, doesn't it?How to draw a caricatureNow that we know what a caricature is and what makes it unique, you might be itching to pick up a pencil and give it a try. Don't worry, we got you covered! Here are some simple steps that will guide you on how to draw a caricature:Step 1: Observe the SubjectBefore you even touch your pencil, take some time to closely observe your subject. Look for their distinct features and characteristics. Is it a wide smile? High cheekbones? Or perhaps, a unique hairstyle? Remember, the definition of caricature revolves around exaggeration, so choose the features you think are worth highlighting.Step 2: Start with a Rough SketchStart lightly sketching the basic shapes that form your subject’s face. Don’t worry about the details yet, just focus on getting the proportions right. This step lays the foundation for your caricature.Step 3: Exaggerate the FeaturesNow comes the fun part — exaggeration. Amplify the features you picked out in step one. Make that wide smile wider, those high cheekbones higher. The key here is balance: you want your caricature to be funny and exaggerated, but still recognizable.Step 4: Add Details and PersonalityOnce you're happy with the basic shape and exaggeration, it's time to add details. This could be the texture of the hair, the lines around the eyes, or the dimples in the cheeks. Also, think about the subject's personality. Can you add something to the caricature that shows who they are or what they do? Step 5: Refine and ColorFinally, refine your sketch, clean up the lines, and add some color if you wish. Coloring can bring your caricature to life and make it even more engaging.Drawing a caricature might seem intimidating at first, but remember, practice makes perfect. So, grab that pencil, let your creativity flow, and most importantly, have fun!Examples of CaricatureNow that we've got a basic understanding of how to draw a caricature, let's explore some well-known examples. These examples should help you grasp the definition of caricature even better. They'll also serve as a great source of inspiration for your own caricature creations!1. Political CaricaturesPolitical caricatures are perhaps the most recognized form of this art. They portray politicians with exaggerated features, often in humorous or satirical situations. For instance, the caricatures of former U.S. President Richard Nixon with his distinct nose and jowls are iconic.2. Celebrity CaricaturesCelebrity caricatures are another popular genre, often seen in entertainment magazines or TV shows. They amplify features that are well-known to fans. Think about caricatures of Mick Jagger with his prominent lips, or Lady Gaga with her flamboyant outfits.3. Self-CaricaturesAn interesting twist on caricature is when artists draw themselves. These self-caricatures offer a peek into how artists see their own distinctive features. A famous example is the self-caricature of Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, showcasing his abstract style.4. Editorial CartoonsEditorial cartoons often use caricature to make a point about current events or social issues. For example, political cartoonist Thomas Nast's caricatures in the 19th century played a key role in shaping public opinion.These examples show the wide range of possibilities when it comes to caricature. Whether it's poking fun at politics, capturing celebrity quirks or making a social comment, caricature is a potent form of artistic expression.Caricature TechniquesNow that you've seen some examples, you might be wondering how to create your own caricatures. Here are some techniques that can help you get started. Remember, the definition of caricature lies in exaggeration and humor, so don't be afraid to push boundaries!1. ObservationThis is where it all starts. Pay close attention to the person you are about to draw. What features stand out? Are the eyes unusually large? Does the person have a unique hairstyle? Observation is key to capturing those distinctive traits.2. ExaggerationOnce you've identified the unique features, it's time to exaggerate them. If the person has a large nose, make it even larger in your caricature. Exaggeration brings out the essence of the person, making the caricature instantly recognizable.3. SimplificationWhile caricature is about exaggeration, it's also about simplification. You don't need to draw every detail. Instead, focus on the key features and keep the rest simple. This helps to highlight what's unique about the person.4. HumorA key element of caricature is humor. Whether it's a funny situation or a humorous twist on the person's features, try to inject some fun into your drawing. Who said art can't make you laugh?These are just a few techniques to get you started. With practice, you'll develop your own style and approach to caricature. Remember, the most important thing is to have fun with it!Caricature in Different Art FormsNow, let's expand our understanding of the definition of caricature beyond pencil and paper. You see, caricature isn't limited to drawings or cartoons; it plays a significant role in various art forms. Here are a few examples:1. Sculpture: Not confined to two dimensions, caricature also thrives in the world of sculpture. Artists mold clay or chisel stone to exaggerate features, creating a 3D caricature that is both humorous and highly detailed.2. Animation: Animation breathes life into caricatures. Characters in animated movies and cartoons often have exaggerated features or mannerisms. Think of the Genie in Aladdin with his oversized hands and expressive face; that's caricature at its finest.3. Theatre: Caricature also steps onto the stage in theatrical performances. Actors exaggerate their gestures, voices, and expressions to create a caricature of their character, making the performance more engaging and memorable.4. Literature: Yes, even words can create caricatures! Authors often exaggerate characters' traits in their writing to highlight their quirks or flaws. This technique helps readers visualize the characters and adds humor to the story.So, whether it's a clay sculpture, an animated character, a theatrical performance, or a literary figure, the definition of caricature applies across various art fields. It's all about capturing the essence of a character through exaggeration and humor!If you enjoyed learning about caricatures and want to take your illustration skills to the next level, check out the workshop 'How to Bring Your Illustrations to Life' by Carolina Vázquez. In this workshop, you will learn techniques and tips that will help you create more dynamic and engaging illustrations, enhancing your caricature skills in the process. Don't miss out on this opportunity to expand your artistic abilities!