

Max Mayer

Mr. Greco

English 3

30 April 2019

## Not Just a Funny Face

### Dedication:

For Kyle, who inspired me to draw caricatures.

### Acknowledgments:

I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Parkinson, my Design teacher, and Mr. Greco, my English teacher, for helping me write and illustrate this documentary and my first book. I would also like to thank my parents for giving me useful suggestions and driving me to interviews. Lastly, I want to thank Kyle Ames, Anna Finley and Amyah Baker, for allowing me to interview them and for sharing their insightful experiences and stories about caricatures.

### Preface:

*Not Just a Funny Face* will give you an insight into the world of an experienced caricature artist, and show how caricatures are much more than just funny faces. There are many in depth concepts and techniques used to draw caricatures. Caricature artists also develop a variety of skills that are not just all about drawing. There are many different forms of caricatures and each artist applies different approaches and targets different

audiences within their art. This book will focus mostly on retail caricatures. However, most concepts discussed in this book can be applied to any form of caricatures, including cartoons and political comics.

## Introduction

It is the 4th of July at Great America, an amusement park in California, on one of the busiest days of the season. Screams of terror and excitement fly past you, and the air is filled with sugary churros and cheap pizza. A large clump of people crowds around one of the easels, captivated by the fast strokes of ink and technical application of color. Delighted kids with Dippin' Dots stare at the cartoon faces, while couples debate whether they want a caricature. Behind the easel is Kyle Ames, a man with 10 years of experience in drawing caricatures. People are staring, impressed by the sheer amount of skill Ames has, and how fast and accurately he can depict people's faces in a minimal amount of marker strokes. These caricatures have the uncanny ability to make people look more like themselves than they do in real life.

Even though Ames claims he was not a child prodigy, he started drawing consistently when he was just seven years old. He started working as a caricature artist when he was sixteen at Kaman's Art Shoppes in the amusement park, Great America. Little did Ames know back in high school that the art form of drawing caricatures would become one of the biggest influences in his life.

## Caricature Vision

It is important to understand what a caricature is and where the art form comes from in order to comprehend how artists like Ames can draw full-color faces in under five minutes. A caricature is a drawing or painting of a real person that exaggerates certain features but still retains their likeness. This means that even after all the exaggerations, you can still determine who is being drawn. In fact, the ultimate goal is to make a drawing that resembles a person better than a portrait photo can. This is done by simplifying the face into more basic shapes and exaggerating the most defining features.

The art of caricature can be traced back all the way to the mid-16th century. Annibale Carracci and his brother Agostine, artists that taught at the Bologna Academy, are credited for the invention of caricature. “The word caricature comes from the Italian words *carico* and *caricare*, meaning 'to load' or to 'exaggerate'” (“Caricature Art Satirical Drawings”). In their breaks from teaching, the brothers would sketch portraits of people that were supposed to mock the artistic practices they taught. It was abnormal for artists to draw what is not there; normally, artists aimed to represent exactly what can be seen, whereas the Carracci brothers constructed portraits using exaggeration. The art form developed even further when political satire and cartoons became more popular. The first political cartoon was created in 1754 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (*The First Political Cartoons*). Now the more modern use of caricatures come from street vendors, amusement parks, fairs, and even weddings, for their humorous results. However, all of these forms of caricature follow the same principles of exaggeration.

In order to exaggerate effectively, it is useful to think of the most standard female and male faces. A caricature artist will choose features that resist these standard models.

For example, they might notice that their client has a lower jaw than the average face. They could then exaggerate this feature by drawing a caricature of the person with an even lower jaw. Eventually, artists will develop the observation skills to notice what differs from the norm. Ames suggests to choose the first few features that stand out: “if you look at someone and then you close your eyes or look away and just picture what their face looks like, you will only grab on to a couple of things. Those few features you remember are the best features to exaggerate.”

It is also important to differentiate exaggeration from distortion. A distorted caricature won't retain any likeness because it won't resemble the client. Tom Richmond, author of *The Mad Art of Caricature!: a Serious Guide to Drawing Funny Faces*, says, “Taking a feature and making it bigger or smaller without a reason isn't exaggeration – it's distortion”(10). This means if the client has a big nose, don't make it smaller. This does not only apply to the size of features, but it also refers to the distance between features and angles of features. There must always be something you observed and a reason to exaggerate in order to produce a successful caricature.

Another useful technique Richmond uses is the law of constant mass. A typical beginner caricature artist will end up making everything bigger. Richmond proposes the idea of thinking of the head as a 3D model in clay. The goal is to convert the clay model into a caricature sculpture, however, the only clay available is from the original model. This means in order to make something bigger the artist must take clay elsewhere from the face, and in order to make something smaller, the artist must remove clay and place it somewhere else (Richmond 39). This technique shows us how all the features of the head

are related. This includes head shape, head size, facial features, etc. Whenever a feature is exaggerated it has a domino effect on another feature; it is only until there is a balance between all the facial elements that the artist will have the perfect caricature.

With these basic techniques of exaggeration and understanding of concepts such as the law of constant mass, artists will start to notice the different facial features and facial structures people have. Ames explains he has developed “caricature vision.” When Ames looks at people, he can imagine the caricature he would draw, especially if they have prominent features. Oddly enough, Ames now has the issue of not being able to turn his “caricature vision” off! He sees caricatures everywhere.

Caricature artists use a variety of different materials to produce caricatures. There is no one specific material, but artists generally use graphite, airbrush, watercolor, or even digital devices. Some of the most popular materials for retail caricatures include marker and colored pencil – specifically, a black Chartpak marker with a cone tip and Prismacolor color sticks. Ames explains that the Chartpak marker allows the artist to put a lot of information down on the page. This is because these markers allow for a variation of thick and thin lines. The variation in line weight can be achieved also with brush pens or calligraphy. When using color sticks, artists frequently use foam pads under their drawings. The foam pads allow for a smooth gradient of color and help prevent harsh lines.

### Caricatures as Currency

Like Luke Skywalker, Ames traveled away from home in order to develop his skills; a marker was his lightsaber. Bored of the college atmosphere and looking for a new

experience in 2015, Ames reached a crazy moment in his life. With very little money and little planning, Ames decided to hit the road and first traveled down to Southern California. In the following eight months Ames visited neighboring states: Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. Ames did all this traveling by hitchhiking, using cheap public transportation or riding Greyhound buses for long distances. Most of the time Ames needed to couch-surf at a strangers' places. The best part of traveling was being in a new environment and meeting new people. Ames' got to meet and become friends with the creator of the cartoon show *Fairly Odd Parents*, Butch Hartman.

In some scenarios, Ames used his drawing abilities to help him travel. When Ames was in Salt Lake City, he needed a ride to Colorado. He posted an ad on Craigslist that said he would draw a caricature of anyone that would give him a ride. A truck driver that drove a route from Salt Lake City to Colorado saw Ames' ad. Ames used his Ipad to make a caricature of the truck driver and his wife and kids, and they gave him a free ride in return. Ames used this strategy several other times, drawing his way from Colorado to New Mexico. Caricatures became a form of currency for him.

Ames wanted to tests his art skills in extreme circumstances, in order to see how far caricatures could really take him. This journey allowed Ames to gain much needed experience and forced him to push his abilities. "At that point in my life, I needed to know if I could take it," Ames recalls.

More Than a Drawing

While drawing is one of the most important aspects of caricatures, the job also teaches other skills. These skills include communication skills, management skills and dealing with pressure. When Ames returned from his travels, he went back to Great America in the winter of 2016. While practicing his craft during his travels, he gained the knowledge and experience to become a supervisor for Kaman's Art Shoppes. This means he managed newer caricature artists and taught new applicants, giving tips about everything from drawing to sale tactics and talking to customers. Two new applicants Ames has mentored are high school students and artists, Amyah Baker and Anna Finley. Both Baker and Finley heard about caricatures at job fairs at their schools. Finley enjoyed drawing in her free time and took art classes. Baker worked on cartoons and animations in her free time. Both decided caricatures would be a fitting job due to their art backgrounds. They were surprised to learn much more than just art skills. Finley explains that caricature artists are constantly negotiating price points with clients or convincing potential customers to buy a caricature.

Along with communication skills, the ability to read a client's body language is another important part of caricatures. There is always the potential that the client won't enjoy the drawing. Benjamin Frisch, the author of "The Delicate Art of the Amusement Park Caricature", explains the struggles of difficult clients. Some people aren't comfortable with their body image or facial features. And having a particular feature blown out of normal proportion on their face can shock them. It is important to talk to clients and pick up on the client's feelings. Common body language trends to watch for are when clients look at their phone cameras in order to see how they look like before they are drawn or clients that are

constantly fixing their hair. These clients may be less comfortable with their body image. In this case it might be smarter for the artists to craft a caricature less extreme and focus more on likeness. Baker explains how she loves to have a conversation with her clients. She is also open to following requests, for people that specifically want something shown or not shown in their caricature. By being open and communicating, caricature artists increase the probability they create the ideal caricature depending on each person.

Even when interpreting body language and following requests, due to the nature of caricatures and exaggeration, there will eventually be somebody that will see the drawing and not want it. "When it happens for the first time it can be very self-deprecating and there will always be a part of you in the following drawings that will doubt your abilities as an artist" (Ames). Even so, it is a valuable experience to feel rejection. After artists have a piece rejected, they eventually learn to pick themselves up and improve from their mistakes. Ames explains, "After the first couple of times rejection happens, you figure out that you're still in one piece and it doesn't really affect you so much."

Dealing with the pressure of rejection and the expectations of others is something caricature artists will learn. Finley explains how she had to learn to deal with the expectations of many clients thinking that caricature artists are professionals. It surprises many clients that in reality, a large majority of caricature artists are high school students. In fact, Lela Nargi, author of *15 Secrets of Caricatures*, explains how there are very few art schools that teach cartooning or caricatures. Most training comes from hands-on experience. Eventually beginner artists become comfortable with their art and stop getting overwhelmed by client expectations. They learn to focus on one drawing at a time.



Even with the struggles described above, caricaturing can be one of the most rewarding jobs, because artists put a part of themselves in the world through their art everyday. People don't remember their taxi drivers or grocery store cashiers; however, they will more likely remember their experience being drawn and admiringly hold on to their caricature. Finley explains how it can feel uncomfortable knowing someone is keeping the caricatures you have drawn, but it is also something to be proud of.

I feel really warm and fuzzy when I think about the number of people I've served, the number of drawings that I've of put out into the world, and the literal square footage of wall space that I have covered with caricatures. Statistically speaking, if you draw as many people as I have, and only 10% of them hang it up and keep it, that's still a lot of wall space that my caricatures are covering. (Ames)

Ames' favorite part about caricatures is when the drawing speaks for itself: "When people forget about continuing the sale and paying, just because they are so distracted by the drawing and are pointing at parts and laughing. It's relaxing to know they enjoyed the drawing."

#### Conclusion: Hopes and Dreams

Ames, for now, has left the retail caricature world after 10 years. Eager to start something new, Ames now teaches art lessons for children. Additionally, he hopes to grow a larger platform where he can show and sell his art. He is working on setting up numerous

social media pages, ranging from Instagram to Facebook. Ames hopes to create space for people to make art – not physical space, but creative space – and to be inspired by others' art and a desire to create more. He hopes he can do this by developing his Youtube channel where he currently uploads music, but also hopes to upload visual art. Ames adds, "I want to start expanding into doing more live streaming, which would include time-lapses of paintings and just hanging out doing tutorials."

While caricatures have now become a more secondary part of Ames' life, it was the driving force that allowed him to expand into a creative field. Caricaturing is a skill that Kyle will always have; he finds reassurance that only with a piece of paper and a marker he can make someone laugh, or get a truck driver to drive him from Colorado to Mexico. A caricature is much more than just a funny face. Caricatures allowed Ames' to travel to unimaginable places. Caricatures teach communication skills and how to handle pressure. Caricatures have inspired thousands of young artists to keep drawing. A funny face is only the beginning.

#### Author Bio:

Max Mayer is a Junior at Mountain View High School and Freestyle Academy. He spends the majority of time working with software like Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator, either drawing, editing photos, or making graphic elements. As a Sophomore, Max worked at Great America drawing caricatures. If Max is not doing something creative, he is probably playing soccer for his club team or high school team. While Max does not know exactly what he wants to study in college, whether it's Game Art, Illustration or

Graphic Design, he hopes to continue pursuing art. He dreams of working in a creative field as a professional artist.

## Works Cited

Ames, Kyle. Personal interview. 19 March. 2019.

---. Personal interview. 7 April. 2019.

Baker, Amyah. Personal interview. 7 April 2019.

Cameron, Claire. "Inside the Mind of a Caricaturist - Facts So Romantic." *Nautilus*, 29 Nov. 2015, [nautil.us/blog/inside-the-mind-of-a-caricaturist](http://nautil.us/blog/inside-the-mind-of-a-caricaturist). Accessed 21 March 2019.

"Caricature Art Satirical Drawings, Cartoons: History, Caricaturists." *Caricature Art: History, Characteristics*, [www.visual-arts-cork.com/caricature-art.htm](http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/caricature-art.htm). Accessed 25 March 2019.

"Critique in Caricature: Is Political Cartooning a Dying Art, or Is There Hope for Its Future?" *Firstpost*, 14 May 2017, [www.firstpost.com/living/critique-in-caricature-is-political-cartooning-a-dying-art-or-is-there-hope-for-its-future-3427950.html](http://www.firstpost.com/living/critique-in-caricature-is-political-cartooning-a-dying-art-or-is-there-hope-for-its-future-3427950.html). Accessed 15 March 2019.

Finley, Anna. Personal interview. 21 March 2019.

Frisch, Benjamin. "The Delicate Art of the Amusement Park Caricature." *Slate Magazine*, Slate, 21 Sept. 2017, [slate.com/business/2017/09/the-amusement-park-caricature-artist-must-balance-what-he-sees-with-what-the-customer-wishes-he-saw.html](http://slate.com/business/2017/09/the-amusement-park-caricature-artist-must-balance-what-he-sees-with-what-the-customer-wishes-he-saw.html). Accessed 15 March 2019.

Nargi, Lela. "15 Secrets of Caricature Artists." *Mental Floss*, 25 May 2018, [mentalfloss.com/article/524148/secrets-caricature-artists](http://mentalfloss.com/article/524148/secrets-caricature-artists). Accessed 15 March 2019.

Richmond, Tom. *The Mad Art of Caricature!: a Serious Guide to Drawing Funny Faces*. Deadline Demon, 2011. Accessed 15 March 2019.

"The First Political Cartoons." *Private Tutoring*, [www.varsitytutors.com/earlyamerica/firsts/first-political-cartoons](http://www.varsitytutors.com/earlyamerica/firsts/first-political-cartoons). Accessed 10 April 2019.