



THE ART OF HUMOR

Cartoonist Nathan Archer strives to strike the right balance

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

In a burst of ebullient laughter, editorial cartoonist Nathan Archer confesses he always wanted to be Benny the Cab from “Roger Rabbit.” Today, he likens himself more to Disney’s Goofy. ■ Archer, a freelance editorial cartoonist whose work appears in the Tallahassee Democrat and on other USA TODAY NETWORK sites, does a great deal of work to balance his bright sense of humor with local and national news. One of his recent illustrations depicted Florida congressmen sweeping Hurricane Michael debris under a rug. Archer says the visual created a lot of buzz given how close it hit to home. **See CARTOON, Page 4C**



Archer

Cartoon

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"A lot of people in Panama City liked it," says Archer. "It's uncomfortable receiving praise for these things though because in a perfect world I wouldn't have to do this," as much of his content illustrates failures of government.

As Florida chair for the National Cartoonist Society, Archer is proud to be a part of history when it comes to editorial cartoons. "The Art of Florida Cartoonists," exhibited at the Panama City Center for the Arts, celebrates Florida cartoonists like Archer through July 20. The collection includes 30 pieces of original work, including Archer's 2016 "Hunt More Python," drawn in the style of the Chick-fil-A cows.

He's inspired to have his work displayed with other standout Florida cartoonists. Archer's own passion for drawing stems from his childhood art classes. His first commissions started in sixth grade when he perfected doodling the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."

"Everyone found out and wanted their own mutant turtle on their binder," chuckles Archer.

Archer graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a BFA in painting and printmaking before attending Florida State University for arts administration. As communications director for the Florida Center for Reading Research, he blends his love for combining art and education. He instructs students in making mini-comics and enjoys seeing how much they can accomplish in six panels.

Archer got his start making editorial cartoons for the Tallahassee Democrat in 2016. His day begins with scanning headlines and looking for intersections between news stories and popular culture. Rather than the back-and-forth jokes of a comic strip with several panels, Archer keeps his single pane drawings as simple as possible.

"All day long I keep an idea in the back of my head and try to work through it," says Archer. "If I could do a pantomime cartoon every time that would be amazing. A pantomime cartoon doesn't have any words in it because the visual is so good that it doesn't need any explanation."

Influenced by "polished" cartoons like "Garfield," "Beetle Bailey," and "Dagwood," Archer prefers crisp, clean lines to more jagged rough sketches. He also looks to Jeff Parker's "Dustin." It was Parker who reached out to Archer about the National Cartoonist Society, and he continues to be a mentor.

When it comes to drawing democratic donkeys and republican elephants, Archer looks back at Parker's work as an editorial cartoonist for Florida Today. For caricatures, he looks to Mort Drucker from Mad Magazine, and draws ears in the style of Morton Walker. Exaggerated facial features are sourced from Tex Avery's panting, animated wolf.

"You go through this Rolodex in your



"The Art of Florida Cartoonists," exhibited at the Panama City Center for the Arts, celebrates Florida cartoonists through July 20 and includes 30 pieces of original work. PHOTOS BY NATHAN ARCHER

If you go

What: The Art of Florida Cartoonists

When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday through July 20.

Where: Panama City Center for the Arts, 19 E 4th St, Panama City

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information, visit <https://www.pccenterforthearts.com/exhibits>.



"The Art of Florida Cartoonists," exhibited at the Panama City Center for the Arts, celebrates Florida cartoonists through July 20.

head of people's styles and how they visualize things and cherry pick," describes Archer.

When it's time to sit down and draw, Archer makes a series of thumbnail sketches to find proper composition. They become progressively larger, and after many drafts he will take a photo of the sketch to be transferred to his tablet and "inked." He has the eye of a photographer in this process, and will rotate images to look at them from every conceivable angle before deciding how to draw and frame them.

Archer says the most challenging part of the process is to communicate his ideas in a thoughtful way, and to show that the drawing is in service to the story or the joke. When commenting on news stories like the Pulse nightclub shooting, striking that balance between humor and respect is heightened.

"Finding humor in things is about turning expectations around," says Archer. "If you think something is going to go one way, you can make it funny by shifting the direction it goes in an unexpected way."

At the Panama City Exhibition, Archer is hopeful that the work of Florida cartoonists will inspire the next generation while giving people a peek behind the curtain at how the creative process culminates. The exhibit spans comic

strips, greeting card artwork, and illustrations, and will include an original "Blondie comic" and storyboards from a "Lilo and Stitch" production.

Archer says the greatest reward and relief comes when someone can chuckle at a cartoon upon seeing it. It may only take four seconds to digest what took hours to create, but he feels strongly that the impact of drawings and cartoons can be long lasting. Whether it's the daily "comics" people compose with emojis on their phones or sketches of serious political commentary he sees cartoons as a cross-cultural bridge to understanding and connection.

"There's a famous quote from Boss Tweed, a politician up in New York City," says Archer. "The editorial cartoonist at the time wouldn't stop poking fun at him, and he said the papers could print any story they wanted. He didn't care because his constituents couldn't read. But the cartoons... everyone can understand the cartoons."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).