

‘The future of cartooning is in danger’ Award-winning political cartoonist Tjeerd Royaards

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The Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations in Geneva drew attention to human rights and humanitarian issues in an artistic way with ‘4 Corners of Expression’. At the United Nations, live on stage, 4 human rights were expressed through 4 art forms: singing, drawing, vlogging and dancing. Political cartoonist Tjeerd Royaards represents freedom of expression and tolerance through drawing.



Tjeerd Royaards is an award-winning Dutch political cartoonist. With a university degree in political science, he has chosen to operate on the ‘frontline’ of freedom of expression and works as a cartoonist since 2005. He makes a weekly editorial cartoon for acclaimed Dutch national newspaper NRC and his work has appeared in various Dutch and international media including the BBC, CNN, the Guardian and Der Spiegel. Tjeerd is editor-in-chief of Cartoon Movement, a global platform for editorial cartoons.

A political cartoon is my personal perspective of the world on a piece of paper

‘Social satire as a counterbalance to power. Mocking those in power is a way to keep them in check. If you disagree with me, all the better. We can then argue and have a debate.’

‘The purpose is not to convince you. My purpose is to make you think about social and political issues.’

Self-portrait Tjeerd Royaards



A good cartoon makes someone angry, upset or laugh

‘If I make a strong visual about the inequality and the injustice that we face today, it is painful. Painful because there is a cause for that inequality and injustice. I always try to include the underlying cause in the drawing. Often, the person with the authority to rectify the situation, or the one that has most to gain from the status quo. And that’s exactly why people in power don’t like what we do. As a result, the Cartoon Movement, a platform of international editorial cartoonists, is blocked in Russia, China, Iran and Turkey. We have the power to make people angry and engage with simple lines on paper. It’s very effective. Strong symbols and a sharp sense of humour tend to work best.’

‘With the Cartoon Movement we promote editorial cartooning as an essential part of journalism.’

More than enough inspiration

‘The downside of my profession is that my income is generated by things that go wrong in this world. I remember times before 2016 when I would be at my drawing desk wondering what to draw. Nothing struck me. I haven’t had that for one single moment since 2016: now we have Trump, Brexit, Bolsonaro, Erdogan. More than enough inspiration, more than enough motivation.’

Privileged to work in the Netherlands

'I'm certainly privileged to work as a cartoonist based in the Netherlands. This year the Netherlands ranked number 4 on the worldwide press freedom list. We've been hovering in the top 5 for as long as I can remember. But many colleagues work in countries where they face daily political censorship. And the situation is getting worse. With the rapidly changing political landscape, it becomes more difficult for them to predict if today's rules are applicable tomorrow.'

'Many colleagues work in countries where they face daily political censorship.'



'So yes, I am privileged. But the Netherlands aren't perfect either. Also here, people feel the need to react strongly. Social media attacks can hit us all. It's a threatening situation, that a drawing could go viral in a negative way. The question we artists ask ourselves is: how should we respond? Keep silent? React?'

Political cartooning is more urgent than ever

'The future of cartooning is in danger. Out of fear of having a too controversial opinion, newspapers like the NY Times have decided to stop publishing cartoons. Financially the situation is becoming more difficult too. There are no more staff positions for cartoonists and freelance tariffs have hit the lowest level. As a result there is hardly a new generation of cartoonists. This is why we started the Cartoon Movement, to promote editorial cartooning as an essential part of journalism. Political cartooning is more urgent than ever.'

By Mandy Kleeweijn



In 5 steps - the making of the cartoon 'The Public Debate'

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