

*The*  
*Society of*  
*Illustrators*

**2017**

*Hall of Fame*  
*Award Ceremony*  
*& Dinner*



## Anita Kunz

(B.1956)



There's some monkey business going on. In her personal work, Anita Kunz reimagines Old Master paintings, appropriating the cliché nudes, unseating men with women sitters, and not infrequently adding a monkey or two. The simians pinch nipples, draw blood, dance, haunt, cling, replace human babies, nurse human babies.

*I've always been intrigued with the idea that we share so much genetic material with other species, particularly monkeys. I think that I've always wondered about human behaviour and whether or not ancient impulses are in fact what to blame for our basic natures, particularly having to do with violence, warfare, love and mating etc. I really think I've used monkeys as metaphors for our own behaviour.* – Anita Kunz, 2017

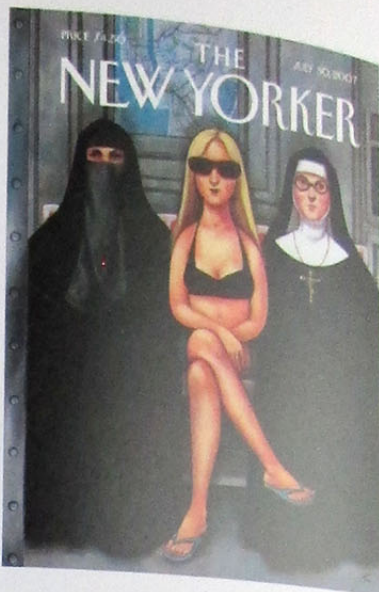
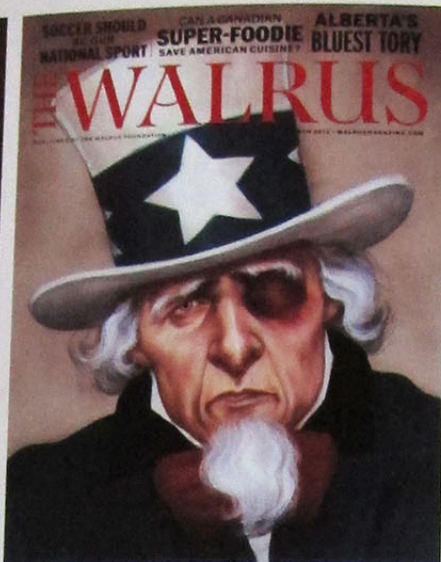
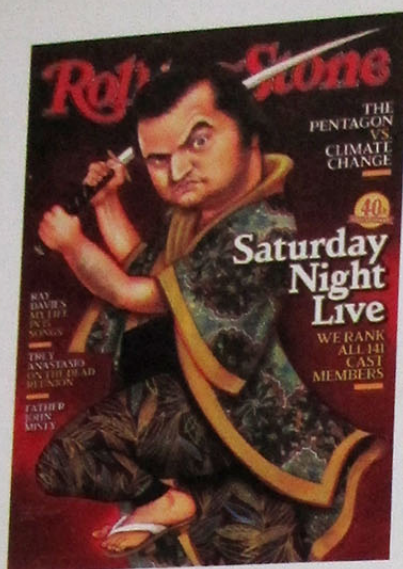
In art history, the monkey is also a traditional symbol standing in for the artist, who apes life on canvas. Monkey business underpins Kunz's editorial illustrations as well: Darwin clings to a tree-trunk; so does the rock band The Monkees (of course). But her foolery is more sophisticated than that. As illustrator—a role in which the artist acts as a medium, channeling society's every twitch—Kunz monkeys with meaning: on the cover of *The Progressive*, for instance, a Democrat senator in the guise of St. George attacks a money-scaled hydra.

The granddaughter of German immigrants, Kunz was born in Toronto in 1956, and raised in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. Her upbringing was traditional and conservative, with an emphasis on discipline and being “nice.” She rebelled.

As monkeys are like artists, so Canadians are uncanny doubles of Americans: almost, but not quite, the same; aping their neighbors to the south but criticizing them too. “We Canadians are so inundated with American culture and politics that to comment visually on various American themes is not merely easy, it is vital and facilitated by the fact that I’m one step removed,” she said in 2003, on the occasion of her solo exhibition at the Library of Congress’s Swann Gallery of Caricature and Cartoon. On *The Walrus* magazine (Canadian equivalent to *The New Yorker*), this Canadian literally gave a pictured Uncle Sam a black eye. Multiple times, she has both caricatured and honored presidents, senators and other deserving targets on the covers of *The New Yorker* and *TIME*. The cover of the annual juried book 200 Best Illustrators Worldwide for 2005 (she has been in every volume since its inception) bears an Orwellian likeness of George W. Bush—with two mouths.







Young Anita's first mentor was her uncle, Robert Kunz, a commercial artist who also illustrated a weekly Toronto newspaper column for kids. His motto was "art for education." She says, "Uncle Robert taught me that an artist's work could actually play a meaningful role in society and in culture, whether as education or journalism. That focus in me came very early on." For her, making meaningful images is an artist's responsibility.

After taking classes at nearby Sheridan College where the renowned Frank Neufeld led illustration, Kunz transferred to Toronto's Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), where she took classes with Canadian greats Will Davies, Gerry Sevier and Doug Johnson. She graduated in 1978.

At OCAD Kunz also encountered visiting American illustrators such as Brad Holland and Bernie Fuchs. Because of them, Kunz participated in the Illustrators Workshop, an intensive summer course established by Fuchs and others. She recalls, "I went to the Workshop twice, and my teachers were Mark English, Bernie Fuchs, Alan E. Cober (loved him!), Bob Peak, Fred Otnes and Bob Heindel. It was eye opening, and great to witness these amazing artists and see their studios, particularly for someone like me from a small town. I saw their amazing lifestyles and fancy houses and cars and thought 'Ya! I want to do that!' Hahaha!—Reality was quite different." Yet some thirty years later, in 2003, Steven Heller would include her in the highly selective book *100 Illustrators*. That same year she also received Canada's highest civilian award, Officer of the Order of Canada; followed by the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

Such a future was unimaginable in 1980. Although her first magazine cover was published in 1979, young Kunz mainly gained experience through mundane jobs such as illustrating cat and dog food ads. In 1981 Kunz lived in London, drawn there by British luminaries Ralph Steadman, Sue Coe, Robert Mason, Janet Woolley and Russell Mills, who were known for gritty and politically-charged imagery. Returning to Canada she found there was not enough local work to live on, so she began soliciting assignments in New York. Marshall Arisman armed her with a list of art directors and wrote an article about her in *Communication Arts*.

Early clients were *Mother Jones*, *Saturday Night* and the eccentric *Regardie's* magazine. She also did around 50 book covers, and occasional advertising. Supportive art directors included Canadians Louis Fishauf and Fred Woodward. Although she never thought of portraiture as a specialty, it was confirmed as her *métier* when, between 1988 and 1990, Woodward gave her a steady monthly assignment with *Rolling Stone* to provide humorous portraits for its "History of Rock & Roll" endpaper. These frequently punned on some aspect of the subject's name or persona: the first, depicting Chuck Berry, shows the '50s rocker eyeballing a line of toddling ducks—purportedly the inspiration for his famous "duck walk" stage act.



Kunz's celebrity parodies ape their subjects with cheek, as do her satires of politicians. "Humor is great for telling stories and making difficult things palatable," Kunz explains. On *The New Yorker* cover, George W. Bush blithely gallops along on horseback—wearing the blinders meant for the horse. North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un is an ominously somber, plump baby, playing by himself in a corner with toy missiles, tanks and soldiers. She's had her share of condemnation, lawsuits and stalking because of her visual banter.

*Nobody was original who didn't take risks... [but] art has power—let's make sure we use it wisely.* — Anita Kunz, ICON9, Austin, 2016

Irony, comedy and wit also characterize her commentaries on diverse subjects from human cloning to global warming. In one, several spotted, phallic mushrooms illustrate an article on sexually transmitted disease. The unfunny has its place too: on another *New Yorker* cover a soldier calls home at Christmas, his too-many days away from family scored—the way prisoners mark time—in the shape of a Christmas tree on the barracks wall behind him.

Kunz found much leeway to illustrate controversial subjects in the earlier part of her career. It was in the aftermath of 9/11, when she attests that the editorial climate became more conservative and prohibitive, that she resolved to do more self-directed artwork (about one third of her time, alongside teaching and illustrating). This allowed her to work at a larger scale, to make social and political commentary at will, and to focus on subjects she finds emotionally moving—animal rights, social justice, and gender among them. It is in series such as *Precious Creatures* and *Redux* that we find explorations of archetypal women, often quoting art history to reclaim a feminist space; to explore the purported human/animal divide; and to question standards of beauty. It is here that the pranking primates have proliferated. One simian "other" holds hands with a human in friendship as her equal. Such jesting monkeys could not signify more seriously.

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Art History and Criticism

