MEET THE CARTOONIST

Q: When did you first discover your artistic talent?

A: I suppose it was when I was in the second grade and won a prize for a clay sculpture of an English Setter. In high school I was appointed art editor of the school paper for which I also produced many cartoons.

Q: What sparked your interest in cartooning?

A: I was probably most strongly influenced by journalism; both my father and uncle were in the newspaper business in Texas. My Uncle Walter was editor of the Ft. Worth Press and through him I first encountered Walt Kelly, creator of "Pogo", who remains, I think, one of the finest cartoon artists who ever lived. I became fascinated with the idea of becoming a cartoonist though I never much pursued it. Now that I think of it, I did some editorial cartoons for the Washington and Lee University newspaper in the 50's and political cartoons for the Washington newsletter, Politics, in the 60's and early 70's. I have been doing anthropology cartoons in the privacy of my study for years. I guess I have several hundred shoved in various desk drawers.

Q: Did you pursue your interest in art in college?

A: I got into fine arts at the University of Colorado and fancied myself a painter for a while. After a couple of semesters I quit school thinking I'd get into the art world and applied for a job at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. I started out as a carpenter

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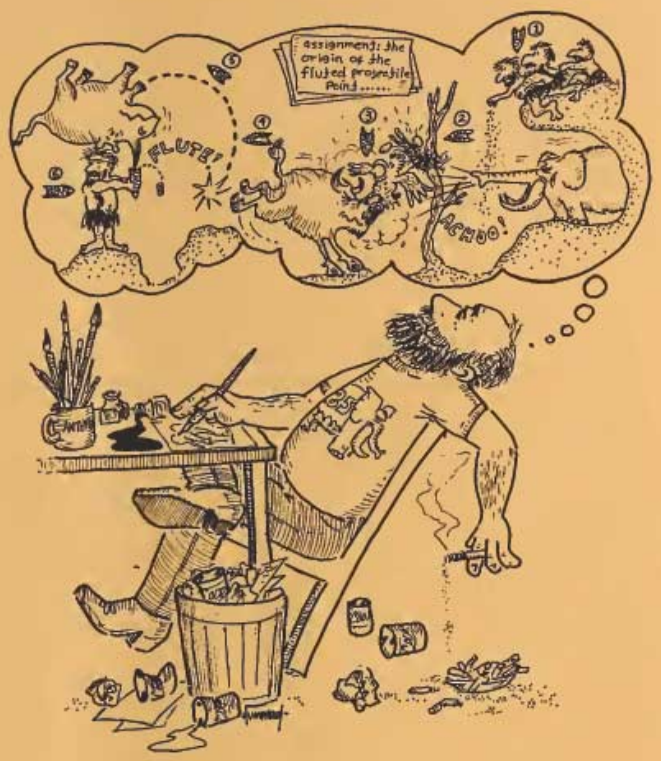

Robert L. Humphrey, Professor of Anthropology at George Washington University, was department chairman for ten years and founded and was first director of the university's Museum Studies Program. For several years Humphrey has conducted a field school in MesoAmerica, visiting 20 or 30 sites of different ages in various environmental zones looking at the relationships between environment and art, architecture, culture, and socio-political systems. Humphrey has researched and published in the areas of Arctic archeology, early man, Pre-Llano cultures of the Americas, prehistory of Washington, D.C., and the MesoAmerican ballgame. In addition to being a fellow of the Explorers Club, Humphrey, his wife Johanna, and son Rob enjoy sailing their little sloop, "Golondrina." (Editor Ann Kaupp recently interviewed him for Anthro.Notes.)

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and ended up a conservator. It was a fascinating experience. In those days it was a smaller institution and New York seemed smaller too. The museum brought me in contact with many artists including Franz Klein, Jackson Pollock, and Marcel Duchamp. I met Duchamp when he came in one day to fix a hole that I made with a Yankee screwdriver in his "Nude Descending a Staircase." I later returned to the University of Colorado to major in art history thinking it would be a good idea to have a college degree, even as a potential painter. However, my courses didn't satisfactorily address all the questions I was trying to answer about creativity, the role art plays in society, and the artist as a social critic.

Q: How did you happen to switch to anthropology as a career goal?

A: I don't know if I should tell you this, but a painter friend of mine and I were sitting in my little studio apartment in Washington. Both of us had spent the day painting and drinking beer, and we had run out of beer and paint. We didn't have any money except for a jar of pennies I had saved. With this jar we went to what was then the Lehigh Bar on M Street. We sat at a booth and ordered a couple of beers from an unsavory waitress who usually worked there. She would, for example, put peeled hard-boiled eggs in her pocket, and when she brought them to you they were covered with lint. When she gave us the bill I got my pennies out, and she said,"The hell with you guys, I'm not counting those pennies." We were really at a loss. A fellow at the bar turned around and said, "I'll buy those boys a beer." He turned out to be Don Hartle, anthropology professor at American University. We spent the evening drinking beer and talking about anthropology, and I got to thinking that perhaps anthropology might give me the answers I was seeking. Under Hartle's influence I enrolled in more and more anthropology courses, and I ended up being his teaching assistant. Although I graduated magna cum laude in Art History, I made the decision to attend graduate school at the University of New Mexico, since I missed the Southwest. It was there that I became more and more interested in archeology.

Q: Where did your interest in archeology lead you?

A: After a couple of field sessions in Southwest archeology, I reckoned I had had enough of pot sherds and became interested in early man. I was at work on my Masters thesis on pre-projectile point cultures in New Mexico, which were rather controversial at that time. Jack Campbell, the new department chairman, gave me the idea of not only going straight for my doctorate, but also of looking for evidence of early man outside of New Mexico in northern Alaska where no surveys had previously been done. In 1965 I took off with a field assistant and two Eskimos from the Arctic Research Lab at Pt. Barrow and surveyed the Utukok River Valley [in the northwest corner of Alaska], where a geologist had found a fluted point. We found about 25 archeological sites and turned up a lot of material that looked like European Upper Paleolithic along with sites containing later Eskimo artifacts. The next summer, with Dennis Stanford as my field assistant, we found fluted points which looked like Llano complex further south, and that formed the basis of my doctoral dissertation. I continue to believe that Clovis did not develop and originate in the

interior of North America, but that it came in as a discrete culture at some point around 15,000 B.C. and diffused south from there.

Q: Does your interest in early man explain your frequent depiction of cavemen in your cartoons for Anthro.Notes?

A: I suppose it came naturally with the field. I started drawing cavemen years ago when I was teaching an introductory course in anthropology. These absurd statements in the introductory texts sprang out at me, and I could immediately see a picture in my mind. The caveman, of course, is me. What would I do in that circumstance? How do you flute a projectile point--using a rhinoceros horn connected to a rhinoceros seemed like a perfectly plausible idea to me. How do human beings get the ideas to do some of the things they do? It was thinking about that in the introductory course that began getting me off on that track.

Q: Do you think about your Anthro.Notes readers' reaction to your work?

A: Yes, I think about it. I have tried to come up with something that would be humorous without being intentionally controversial or offensive, and almost inevitably I offend somebody. The whole basis of satire is exaggerating some distinctive characteristic that the owner would just as soon forget. I think I would be drawing different things if I were submitting them to the New Yorker, for instance, because there would be a little more latitude. One of the things I think is a problem with the field of anthropology is that we often take ourselves too seriously. I do like to poke fun at anthropologists, obviously, and Lord knows we need some fun poked at us. When we lose our sense of humor I think we lose our complete perspective on any culture we are looking at, and we begin to believe we are near the TRUTH and that begins to approach something like paranoia to me.

Q: Has anyone else influenced your work or your interest in cartoons besides Walt Kelly?

A: Oh yes ... Ronald Searle,Robert Osborne, Al Capp ... dozens of others. Virgil Partch pen name VIP, creator of "Big George," was an important early influence. Trudeau's ("Doonesbury") ideas are extraordinary, but I am not crazy about his drawings. I am an assiduous reader of cartoon books. I have subscribed to the New Yorker for years, and I suppose I have a complete set of Kelly's books. I like Larson very much, have one hanging on my wall--wish I had done it. I met Gary Larson three years ago, and he gave me great encouragement. He told me about going down to the San Francisco Chronicle one day with six drawings, and they immediately bought them and he was on his way. It wasn't the 20 years of grinding away that you often hear from people such as George Booth, who is another favorite of mine. I think cartooning is the thing I enjoy most in life right now.

Q: Do you think there is room for more artistic expression in the field of anthropology?

A: Anthropology has provided an enormous wealth of subject matter for cartoons. I don't understand why there are not more novels, plays, etc. This is one reason why Colin Turnbull, who has introduced drama to the field, and I have become such close friends. I'd like

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to see anthropologists become more creative, to use the stuff of the discipline in new ways. Cartoons are a very immediate way of influencing people's ideas. If we can publish a book with some good credible information and illustrate it with cartoons, it might be a real boon. For some reason, the idea of popularizing the field has always been frightening to anthropologists. It is a shame because it's such an interesting field and enables you to encompass anything--be it psychology, medicine, bones and stones, or art.

Q: Has anthropology answered your questions concerning art?

A: Anthropology has expanded my perception about art and has enabled me to begin, at least, to ask the right questions, but I am not sure if I am going to find the answers any time soon. I hope not! I don't think anthropologists have yet explored creativity in art in the depth it deserves. Present studies are so specific and narrow, and yet here is a society that is producing art all around us all the time. Why do we call it art? What is art? Why this impulse to do art anyway?