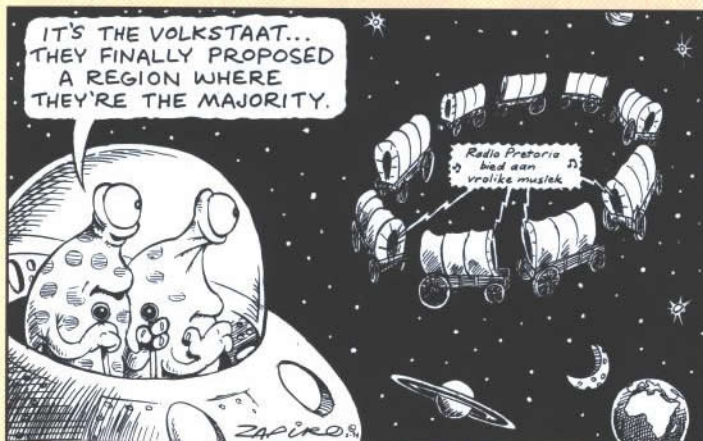
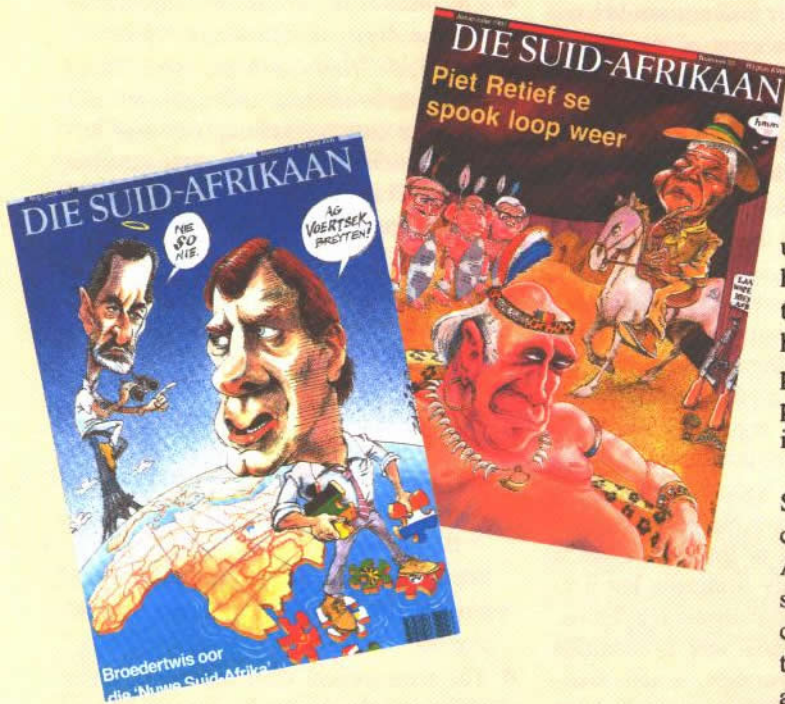


Jonathan Shapiro is

Shapiro



JONATHAN SHAPIRO's attitude towards cartooning and politics has undergone a change despite his unwavering support for the liberation movement. He has moved from an overt political standpoint to his present position of critical ideologue.

Born a Scorpio in 1958, Shapiro became interested in cartooning from an early age. As a child, he responded strongly to cartoons and comics, and his art turned in that direction. Despite this attraction, he never pursued art during his formal education, something he now regrets. After "losing my way in architecture", he dropped out in his fourth year at UCT and briefly tried his hand at graphic design. Within half a year he was forced to give up. Using a retrospectively awarded architecture degree, he battled against the army who were refusing him deferment. Running short of money, he eventually relinquished and

joined the ranks. But he got into trouble for refusing to carry a weapon and because he continued with art and poster work for the United Democratic Front (UDF) and End Conscription Campaign (ECC).

Leaving the military, Shapiro decided to brave freelancing and continue with his political work for community and social organisations. "There was a culmination at the end of 1986 with the publication of the UDF calendar." With a sudden increase in publicity coupled with a number of his works being exhibited Shapiro once again found himself under the scrutiny of the security police. He went into hiding for a brief period before being presented with the opportunity of taking up the post of editorial cartoonist for *South*, as well as working for *Die Suid Afrikaan*, (now the *DSA*), *Grassroots* and the ECC's *Out Of Step* magazine.

In mid 1988 Shapiro was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study at New York's School of Art. As he was about to leave, the

"I don't feel as much of an activist as I used to. I see myself as more of a commentator, a watchdog...people are looking for something a little quirky and light-hearted. I now feel I have the leeway to lighten up a bit."



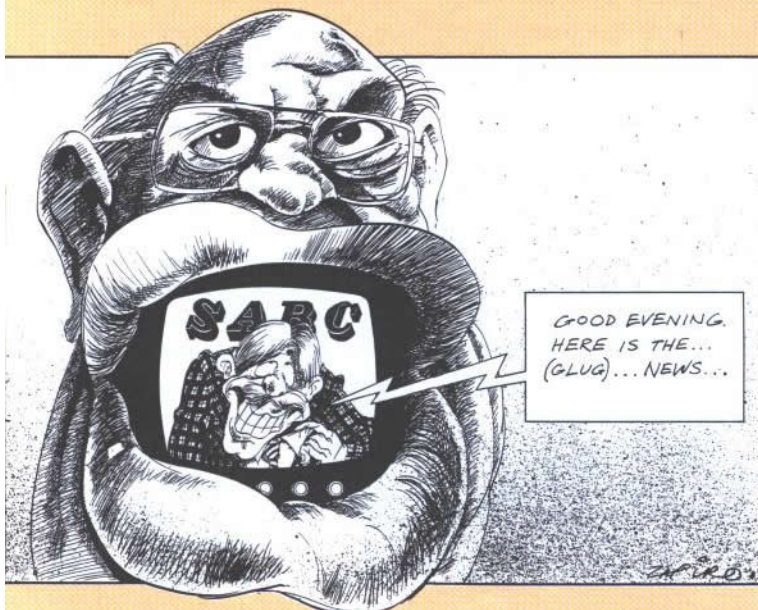
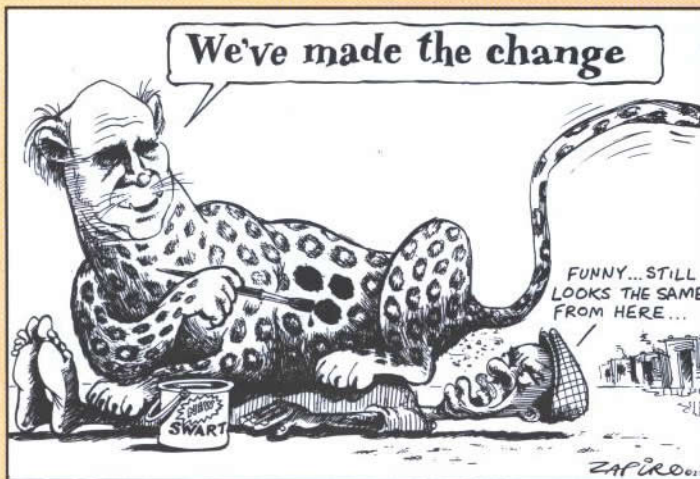
security police detained him for his alleged involvement in the Mandela 70th Birthday celebrations. They released him in time for his departure for America. There Shapiro studied under some of the greatest names in comics — Spielgelman, Eisner and Kurtzman, founder of *Mad Magazine*. Learning comic discipline and being drilled in the finer touches of storyboarding, Shapiro studied metaphor and attitude. "Just being in New York and being able to go to conventions was an incredible experience." Being a white South African, he sometimes met with disparagement, but was generally accepted by Americans once his political stance was clear.

His return to South Africa saw a dramatic shift in outlook. Expecting to work on an overtly political level, he "felt slightly different, I don't know what it was". Still involved in political organisations and carrying out art work for various groups, Shapiro saw his role change. He continued drawing the

covers for *Die Suid Afrikaan* and then formed The Story Circle with fellow artists Roger van Wyk, Lizza Littlewort and Grant Schreiber. This group produced a number of educational comics — *Roxy*, *A Trolley Full of Rights* and *Tomorrow People*. Although the team is still in operation, Shapiro has moved away from Story Circle and has taken up the slot as the cartoonist for *The Weekly Mail and Guardian*. Probably the highlight of his year was working for the voter education programme. "I did a large number of voter education posters and drawings and it was pretty exciting. One poster showing a voting station was printed in the largest run of anything I've ever done — 350 000 copies — and set a precedent for other artists' versions of the same subject. I felt happy that I had been able to help form people's ideas and communicate those ideas."

Although times have changed, Shapiro still feels very strongly about political

PEN SKETCHES



loyalties. Under apartheid, he saw himself as one of the pens of the liberation movement, as a strong ideologue. Even though his political affiliations have not changed, he does not feel that anymore. "I should be more cynical and more prepared to get down and dirty with the people within the organisation I support if I feel they are transgressing or are on dangerous ground."

Shapiro carries around a large bound book of blank paper with him and into this he writes down issues and

concepts, "or when people say something odd or important". After listening to the news, watching the television or reading the paper, he homes in on an idea and uses thumbnail sketches to try various ideas, toying with composition as well as the use of text in the cartoon. Moving on from the preliminary sketches, Shapiro zeros in on one image and moves with it from rough to a tighter rough then to a twice as large pencil final which is then inked for the final.



ZAPIRO © 2-74 with a nod to Pat O'Phelan

"We will talk to anyone who is prepared to forswear VIOLENCE."



Shapiro saw cartoons as one of the major outlets of political comment in the 1980s, when "it was so important to be able to say or show something salient in a manner that you could not be accountable for. It's a kind of covert operation, but if you make associations in cartoons that trigger that desired reaction in readers' brains without blatantly saying what is meant, then you have succeeded". Shapiro agrees that it is important for cartoons to be strong enough to generate interest and



"I should be more cynical and more prepared to get down and dirty with the people within the organisation I support if I feel they are transgressing or are on dangerous ground."

debate, because that is their function, "but now people are looking for something a little quirky and light-hearted, and I feel that I have the leeway to lighten up a bit".

Shapiro recently was appointed daily editorial cartoonist for Sowetan. He will continue to do weekly cartoons for the Weekly Mail and Guardian.

■ Ben Whitworth is a fourth year student in Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

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