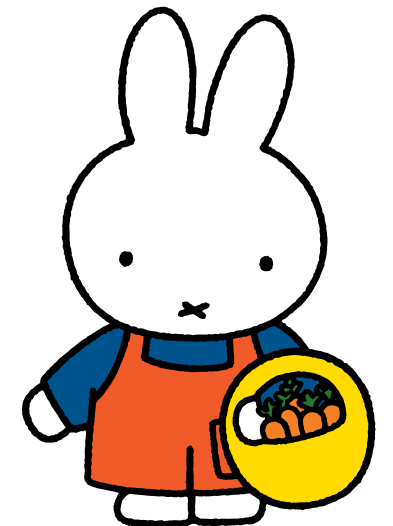




FOR OTTO

and the love of the imagination



miffy & friends

Dick Bruna
Brian Robinson
Carla McRae
Nadia Hernández
Nell
Sadie Chandler
Stephen Bird
Vipoo Srivilasa

FRONT COVER
Dick BRUNA
miffy, 2008

PREVIOUS
Dick BRUNA
miffy's garden, 2004

BACK COVER
Dick BRUNA
miffy dances, 2002

Foreword

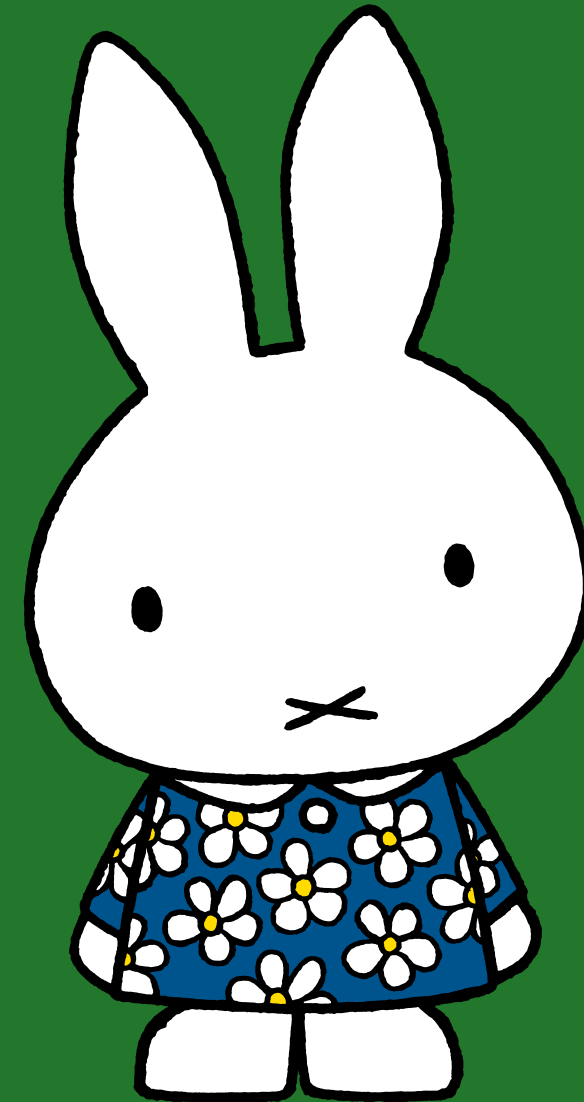
In a year where separation has been a reality for so many, I am delighted that QUT is presenting the exhibition *miffy & friends*, poignantly positioned as a celebration of people coming together after long absences. Gaining access to Dick Bruna's works from the artist's estate, Mercis bv, is a wonderful achievement for QUT Art Museum. This is the first time the artist's work will be shown in a major exhibition in Australia. The exhibition brings this collection together with works by contemporary Australian artists who have been inspired by Bruna's distinctive style.

QUT is renowned for its teaching and research across disciplines in visual arts, design, communication, creative writing as well as education and early childhood studies. It facilitates collaboration and provides highly sophisticated experimental zones for artists, designers, technologists and entrepreneurs to collaborate, learn and innovate. It seems a natural fit that QUT Art Museum would be the site to bring Bruna's work across graphic design and literature and to pair it with visual art.

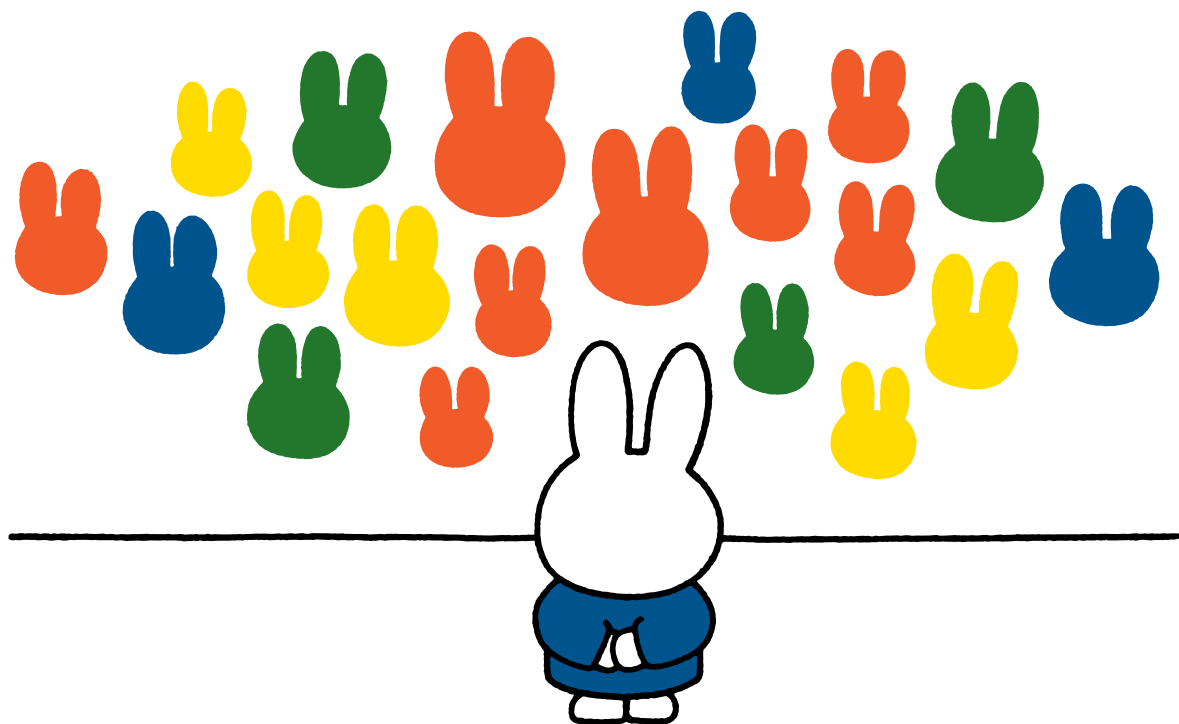
This exhibition, aimed at art enthusiasts of any age, as well as fans of Miffy, offers engagement opportunities for a range of community groups, as well as guests who are unable to visit us in person. As with our research and teaching, we strive to advance diversity and extend access for our engagement activities with online tours of our exhibitions and descriptive tours for vision impaired visitors. Augmented Reality activities have been included with input from students in our School of Design.

We are grateful to the Dutch Embassy for their support of this publication and exhibition as well as to our tour partners who will exhibit the show and have contributed to the thought leadership of its development. A visit to *miffy & friends* is sure to be an experience worth repeating during its four-month installation at QUT Art Museum. I encourage you to spend time exploring our beautiful campus, and to engage with us online.

Professor Margaret Sheil Ao
Vice-Chancellor and President, QUT



Dick BRUNA
miffy's birthday 1970



Dick BRUNA
miffy at the gallery 1990
silkscreen design

Message from the Ambassador

I like that one, cried Miffy,
It's colourful and bright.
Are those shapes cut with scissors?
I think I could be right.

—*miffy at the gallery*

dát vind ik mooi, riep nijntje uit
dat met die kleuren daar
het lijkt wel of het is geknipt
met een gewone schaar

—*nijntje in het museum*

Hundreds of times have I read these lines to my children. They are the opening strophes of *miffy at the gallery*. I can recite the book by heart. This is just one Dutch parent talking about the importance of nijntje, or Miffy for English readers, in Dutch society.

Nijntje came into our lives 65 years ago, when her creator Dick Bruna introduced her to the world. She stole our hearts, never to leave again. Her life and adventures were disclosed over the years across 32 books that in due course were translated in over 50 languages. With more than 85 million books being sold throughout the world, tens of millions of children have become friends with nijntje.

No doubt this exhibition in Brisbane will appeal to children as well as to adults, for whom nijntje has become a symbol of nostalgia.

However, there is more to nijntje than good memories. Dick Bruna not only created a beloved character, but he also created an inspiring, clear and simple icon of children's literature. This exhibition shows the influence of nijntje on the work of seven contemporary Australian artists.

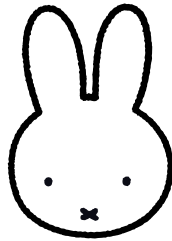
The Netherlands Embassy in Australia is delighted to support the first exhibition about nijntje in Australia, and I am convinced that *miffy & friends* will inspire children and adults, artists and designers on its Australian journey.

Marion Derckx

Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Australia

Introducing *miffy* & friends

Let us imagine the meeting of a few simple lines and curves: a large white circle with two black dots and below that, two small black lines crossed at an angle. Rising up from this circle are two somewhat jaunty arched ellipses. What do you see?



If you look closely at the image, of Miffy as we have come to know her, you can discern the stop and start of an unsteady hand; this is not a drawing generated by mechanical means but one borne from human imagination and created by an artist's hand. Like all art, it relies on a commitment from the viewer—a balance of external recognition and internal processes—to confer it with meaning. We see Miffy in our mind's eye—the imagination. We draw in the details, attribute emotions, feelings, nuances and character. For decades now, this modest line drawing has come to represent so much more than the sum of its parts: it has become a type of pictogram with a shared understanding. Miffy, with her cool nonchalance, allows the viewer to project meaning on the image, whether it be cuteness, kindness, joy, harmony, empathy or goodness. The image means so much to so many and Miffy embraces it all.

The beguiling character of Miffy, or *nijntje* (pronounced nein-chye, meaning little bunny), first emerged in 1955 in a night time story told by a father to his young son while on holidays in the small Dutch seaside village of Egmond aan Zee. Miffy grew out of love: a father's love of his son, a love of the imagination and most importantly, a love of art. Some 65 years after she appeared, this enduring affection persists—Miffy is, simply, loved. Around the world, she has captured the affection of generations of children and adults alike, a fondness that extends well beyond her life as a character in a bedtime story or in the dozens of children's books that have been published in the last six decades. She has bounded from the pages to become an icon, found everywhere from the nursery to the walls of some of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions.¹ Her influence is not always evident—she has something of the subtlety of a bunny's touch, as her presence seeps into the most unlikely of places.

Miffy's cult-like status in Japan—as seen on the streets of Harajuku, and in the eponymous chain of 'Miffy Style' boutiques or in the Miffy-esque aesthetics found in manga, anime and kawaii culture—leads many to incorrectly assume her origins. And one can certainly see similarities in another of Japan's biggest popular

cultural icons, Hello Kitty. In 1976, Sanrio, the design company that holds rights over Hello Kitty, introduced her friend Cathy, a rabbit clothed in a purple dress with a matching bow around one ear. She holds a striking resemblance to Miffy, although the purple dress hints at Cathy's distinct birthright.² In 2010, Mercis bv (which holds the rights to Miffy) won a court case against Sanrio, forcing them to discontinue the manufacture of Cathy rabbit, although it subsequently appealed. Eventually, the parties settled out of court, with both making a large donation to the victims of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. In the same year, Miffy was drawn with two single teardrops on her face as a gift to the children of Japan: a heartfelt acknowledgment from her maker of the sadness the natural disaster had brought to them.

While Miffy has a universal appeal, she is the product of a particular environment—a set of confluences and circumstances—and the imagination of an individual. Her pedigree lies firmly in the European avant-garde and the formal visual language of modernism and its reimagining of representation and space. She grew from a desire to honour colour and form over perspective, a wish to acknowledge the value of the inner child, and an eagerness to engage across media, disciplines and processes.

Miffy's creator, Hendrik (Dick) Magdalenus Bruna, was born in the Dutch city of Utrecht on 23 August 1927, the year of the rabbit in the Chinese horoscope. Art, books, music and animals—especially rabbits—were constants in his life. An image of Bruna at 13 months old in his grandparents' garden with their giant rabbit can lead

one to muse over the power of childhood experience in forging adult identity or, equally, of the role of fate. His great-grandfather founded A.W. Bruna Publishers in 1868, and as the eldest son of two boys, Bruna was expected to take up the reins of the business when he came of age. However, Bruna always knew he wanted to be an artist.

At 16, he wrote and illustrated his first book, *Japie*, which he dedicated to his mother. Soon after, his father allowed him to undertake internships at Plon Publishers in Paris and W.H. Smith in London in the hope that he would learn the ropes of the publishing industry.³ Paris fueled Bruna's enthusiasm for contemporary art and he immersed himself in the galleries, seeing for the first time the work of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Fernand Léger, while pursuing his own drawing and painting at every opportunity. Upon his return to the Netherlands in 1951, he enrolled in the Rijksakademie, where he began formal studies in art and design. However, after only six months, boredom compelled Bruna to begin work designing book covers for the family business.

Rather than stunting his artistic aspirations, Bruna used his position at the publishing house to explore and meld his art interests, giving rise to a highly original aesthetic vernacular that informed his practice for more than 50 years. With the launch of the popular and widely read paperbacks *Zwarte Beertjes* (*Little black bears*) in 1955, Bruna's book designs developed into an original and idiosyncratic style based on an economy of form and a limited palette. Bruna read every manuscript before beginning each one's design,

¹ Miffy's first solo exhibition was held in 1991 at the Pompidou Centre in Paris and a major exhibition celebrating her 60th birthday was held at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in 2015. The following year, Dick Bruna House (est. 2006) reopened as Miffy Museum in Utrecht, Netherlands.

² Dick Bruna never used purple, as 'he felt it wasn't a real colour'; see 'Special Colours', Miffy (website), www.miffy.com/special-colours.

³ See Bruce Ingman and Ramona Reihill, *Dick Bruna* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2020), 15.



ABOVE
Bruna, 13 months old, at his grandparents house in Bosch en Duin. © Mercis bv

OVER
Dick Bruna, at Myer in Perth, with young readers, 1980. Image courtesy Bauer Media Pty Limited / *The Australian Women's Weekly*

which employed the most basic of methods and materials—paper and paste. Like Matisse with his cut-outs, Bruna ripped, tore and cut coloured paper to his fancy, allowing himself freedom to experiment with positive and negative space through the interplay of colour and shape.⁴ Bruna considered this period as a graphic designer as being his ‘art school’.⁵

Bruna also created posters for the *Little black bears* book range. His technique was to draw shapes with pencil, and fill the design with poster paint. He would then go over the outline with a brush and black paint, an effect reminiscent of the thick black lines of Léger. He later adapted this technique to his drawings for Miffy, albeit slightly modified. He drew the initial image on translucent paper, refined it as required which could result in numerous drawings being cast aside and rejected. He then transferred it to watercolour paper by tracing over the lines to make indentations, and again, he would methodically draw over the indentation with black paint and a brush. Although colour was the last element Bruna considered, it was of utmost importance as were the four colours of his signature palette—red, yellow, blue and green. Once the colours had been selected, Bruna then cut out the swatch of paper and glued the shapes to transparent paper. This measured process provided space for the haiku-like rhythms of text

to emerge.⁶ He would generate these on his beloved typewriter, always four lines to a page and 12 pages per book. Bruna followed this model for more than half a century, retiring in 2011 after having published 32 Miffy titles.⁷

Although the Bruna publishing company had never been in the business of children’s books, Dick persuaded his father to take the risk and in 1955 *nijntje* (or *miffy*) was published, followed soon after by *nijntje in de dierentuin* (*miffy at the zoo*). Bruna was a vanguard in so many ways. Children’s books were not big business in postwar Europe, nor was it the norm for fathers to read to their children, let alone to invent the characters in the stories. It wasn’t until the 1960s that there was a growing market for Bruna’s books in the Netherlands, and then further afield, with translations in Japanese and French. To date, Bruna has released over 85 million copies of his book in 50 different languages.⁸

While Miffy has been a constant for generations of children growing up in Australia since the books were released in 1973, our unique history and vexed relationship with the rabbit makes it difficult to imagine her conception here.⁹ Although rabbits arrived on the First Fleet, it wasn’t until a Victorian farmer, Thomas Austin, imported a variety of breeds in 1859 that they become a significant pest, causing devastation to native species and the natural balance of Australia’s ecosystem. Various measures have been introduced to curb their impact, one being the construction of rabbit-proof fences, the largest spanning 3256km

across Western Australia. Even today, it is illegal to keep rabbits in the state of Queensland.

In Australia there is a distinctive tradition of figurative illustration in children’s books, from 20th-century classics such as *Snugglypot and Cuddlepup* (1918), *The magic pudding* (1918), and *Blinky Bill* (1933) to more recent popular books such as *Possum magic* (1983) and *Diary of a wombat* (2002). All these characters are based on native animals and reference a typically antipodean childhood. This desire for realism may be partly due to the history of popular botanical and scientific illustrations introduced to Australia by botanist Sir Joseph Banks.

While there is a rich and unique tradition of oral storytelling and the totemic valorisation of animals in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures, it has largely gone unrecognised in children’s literature and illustration. In 1972, Quandamooka writer Oodgeroo Noonuccal (also known as Kath Walker) wrote her first children’s book *Stradbroke Dreaming*, which has seen many editions illustrated by various Indigenous artists. In 1975 Dick Roughsey released the *Rainbow Serpent*, a visually stark departure from the aesthetics that dominated children’s illustration at the time. Indigenous writers and artists continue to provide young readers with a distinctive, and particularly Australian style. Much like Miffy was borne of the European avant-garde, contemporary Australian Indigenous illustration is the result of a complex set of circumstances, unique to place.

⁴ Matisse was Bruna’s greatest influence, and this admiration persisted throughout his life and work. In 1997, he paid homage to the modernist master along with other artists, including Alexander Calder and Piet Mondrian, in his book *miffy at the gallery*. On one of the last pages, Miffy exclaims, ‘the colours are so clear’ as she admires a cluster of bunny ears cut and arranged as if a reimagining of Matisse’s *The sheaf* 1953. On the final page, Miffy states ‘do you know what I really want? To be an artist too!’ Bruna published his first children’s book, *de appel* (*the apple*), the same year that Matisse created *The sheaf*.

⁵ Ingman and Reihill, *Dick Bruna*, 38.

⁶ Lisa Allardice, ‘Bunny love’, *The Guardian*, 15 February 2006 www.theguardian.com/books/2006/feb/15/booksforchildrenandteenagers.lisaallardice.

⁷ Ingman and Reihill, *Dick Bruna*, 102.

⁸ ‘His books’, Miffy (website) www.miffy.com/his-books.

⁹ Bruna made his first visit to Australia to promote the release of Miffy to the Australian market, followed by trips in 1980, 1997, and 2000.



Miffy's sway isn't always outwardly apparent in Australia, yet this little white bunny is undoubtedly as etched into our collective cultural memory here as it is elsewhere. She permeates popular culture and her presence can be found across genres. For example, a 1990s hit song by Australian band Regurgitator, *Miffy's Simplicity*, is a love song written by lead singer Quan Yeomans for his then girlfriend. The song's lyrics and film clip perfectly encapsulate the unique *schattigheid* (cuteness) which so many associate with the essence of Miffy.¹⁰

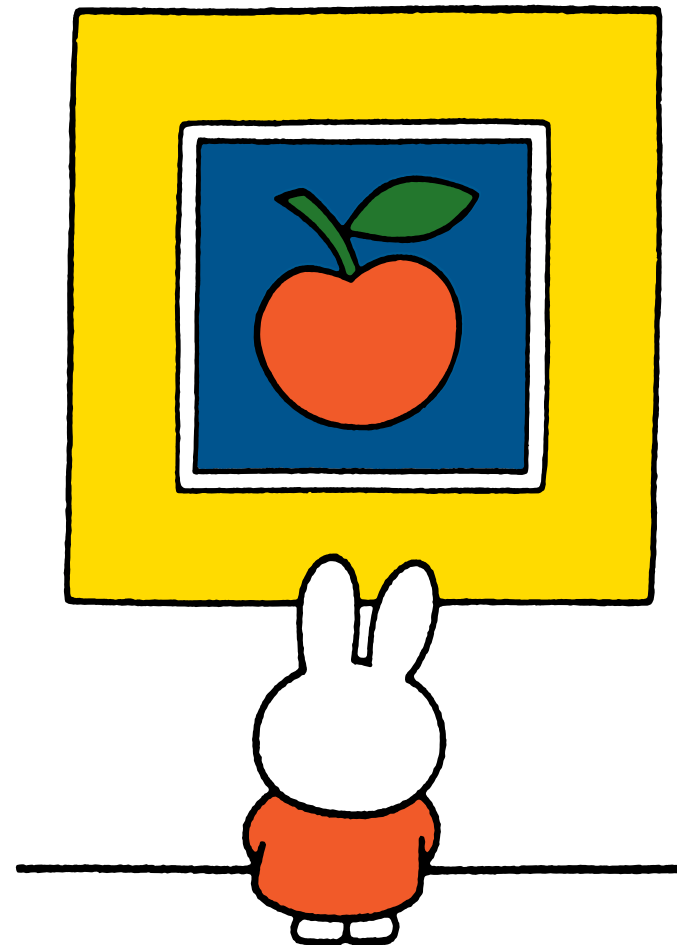
Since her introduction to Australia nearly 50 years ago, Miffy has been present in the imaginations of generations through her books, merchandise, fashion collaborations, and to this day, daily screenings of Miffy animations on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. As any fan will attest, Miffy remains with children into adulthood—there are no biases towards

age. Miffy turned 65 this year and she has found an unlikely place in our hearts. She engenders a sense of *gezelligheid*, a Dutch term that isn't easily translated nor does it have any direct equivalent in English. It roughly means a feeling of belonging, familiarity and togetherness, something of the frivolity of coming together with family, friends and loved ones.

miffy & friends is the first major exhibition of Bruna's work in Australia and it places his oeuvre alongside seven Australian artists—Brian Robinson, Carla McRae, Nadia Hernández, Nell, Sadie Chandler, Stephen Bird and Vipoo Srivilasa. It teases out Miffy's legacy within 20th-century modernism and in doing so brings to light connections and confluences with the practice of Australian artists.

Brian Robinson's work exemplifies both his awareness of art and its histories, and the knowledges specific to his cultural heritage as an Indigenous person from the Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait). Drawing is fundamental to Robinson's practice, whether working in printmaking or sculpture, and his unique aesthetic transverse two worlds: the popular and the sacred. The characters in his work have been described as being 'co-opted into the spirit world of the Islander imagination'.¹¹

In his large-scale linocut *Miffy and friends: The usual suspects* 2020, the artist draws upon pop culture and childhood pursuits such as watching Saturday morning cartoons and, more recently, introducing Miffy to his children through storytime. Robinson employs the rich heritage of relief carving in Torres Strait Island culture to create contemporary mashups or puzzles



Dick BRUNA
miffy at the gallery 1997

¹⁰ Regurgitator, 'Miffy's Simplicity', YouTube video, 1:33, posted by Warner Music, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOBcnYrMjJl.

¹¹ Russell Milledge, *Brian Robinson: Men and gods* (Cairns: KickArts Contemporary Arts, 2012), 66.

and he has a deep sense of reverence for Dutch artist M.C. Escher's elaborate graphical puzzles. In *The usual suspects*, he reinterprets popular depictions of *The last supper* but places Miffy as the central figure of a garden party, sharing a picnic lunch with the 12 apostles. These include several Disney characters, such as Stitch, Thumper, and the White Rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*. Warner Bros. mainstays Bugs Bunny and Wile E. Coyote make an appearance, as well as Pokémon's Pikachu and Universal Pictures' E.B. from *Hop*, but it's Miffy who stands at the centre. The reference to Christian imagery highlights the artist's Roman Catholic upbringing. Robinson uses the positive and negative spaces to advantage, utilising enduring designs from the Torres Strait Islands to create the illusion of movement in the work, sweeping dramatically from left to upper-right.

Miffy has come to encapsulate the innocence of childhood, and Melbourne-based artist Carla McRae has made a number of children's books, murals and large public artworks. As with Bruna, everything McRae does is considered and engages with the joy of life. She explains,

Bruna inspires me in the way he used simple graphic elements to convey narratives and emotions with depth and clarity. He felt it was important to leave lots of room for the viewer to fill in the blanks with their imagination, and I think this makes his artwork very generous and powerful despite its minimalist style.¹²

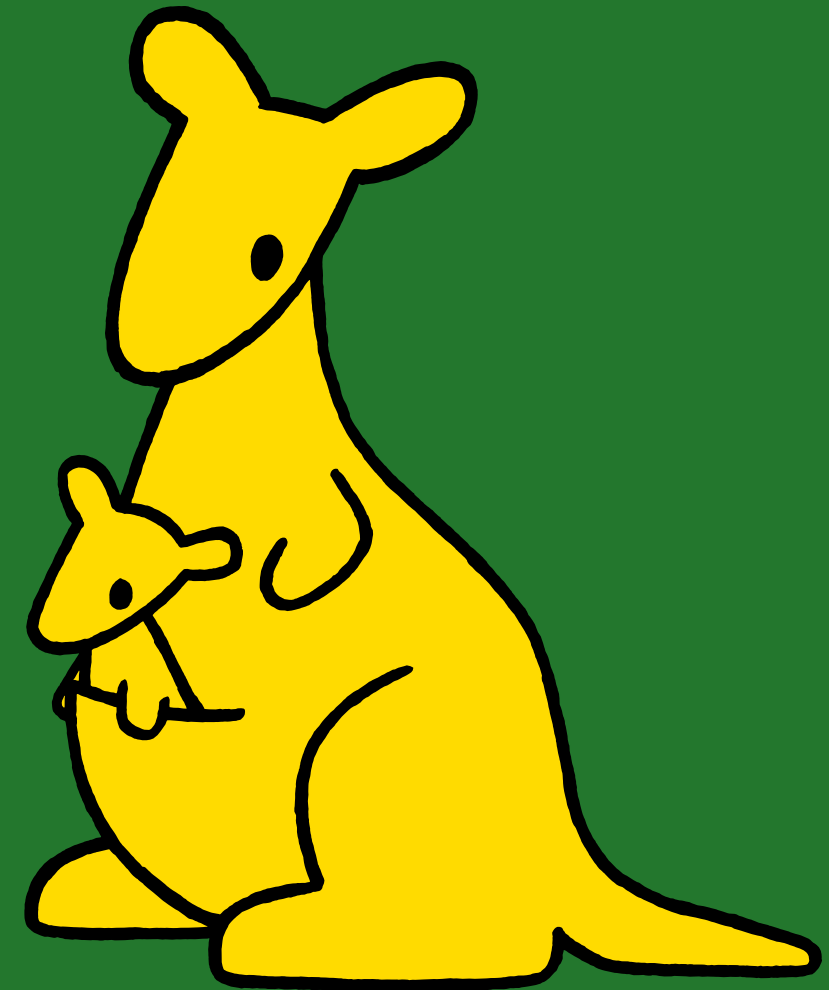
In her work *Dick Bruna's shelf* 2020, McRae has created a homage to Bruna's studio by creating a shelf populated by the objects she saw at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht. In co-opting the visual principles of De Stijl, which was an art for the people, McRae reinstates the potential of art to impact across all cultures and classes. She has lovingly recrafted in wood and clay the objects from his shelves—scissors, paper, pens and pencils, and typewriter, which are the tools of his trade. McRae draws attention to what may be seen as mundane objects, heightening them to the realm of a monument, an altar of devotion for both herself and the artist to his trade. You can imagine the music flowing through the speakers of the 1980s stereo, or the clinking of pencils against a ceramic coffee mug that he neatly stored them in.

Like Bruna, consistency of purpose and continuity of approach are key to Nell's practice. She crosses a range of media and however provisional her objects may seem, they hold a considered place within her overall practice. Her works are a riposte to life and personal experience. Her influences are varied and diverse—she is a practicing Buddhist, and she claims Bruna to be her greatest influence.¹³ Nell states, 'I have a thing for bunnies'.¹⁴ While her practice has never been considered in proximity to Bruna, once we are armed with this knowledge it is hard to look beyond her signature use of primary colours and reductionist shapes. There is a tenderness that becomes apparent in the installation of works which are interspersed with objects from Nell's childhood. The impact is something

¹² Carla McRae, personal communication with the author, 13 October 2020.

¹³ Nell, personal communication with the author, 31 March 2020.

¹⁴ Joel Meares, 'Kylie Kwong and Nell: Swapping your way to a great art collection', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 2015 www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/kylie-kwong-and-nell-swapping-your-way-to-a-great-art-collection-20150310-13x30f.html.



Dick BRUNA
miffy at the zoo 1963

of a shrine to Bruna. There are subtle influences apparent in the faces of the violins in *if you could hear the sound of my violin you would know how I feel* 2015 or one of Nell’s earliest works—*farm-yard friend* 1994 and her artist books. The simplicity of the hop-scotch painting *1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, nell* 2010 set in dialogue with a foxed and mottled copy of Bruna’s book *I can count* 1974 from her childhood provides a new perspective on her source material for this major work. The sentimentality is intensified with the inclusion of a terry-towelling Miffy toy that her grandmother made from a face-washer. Nell’s signature smiley faces are found in many of the works, including the tulip painting *Hi! How you doin’?* 2000 which was painted in direct response to visiting an exhibition in Utrecht for Miffy’s 45th birthday.

A deep sense of nostalgia is shared in the paintings of Melbourne artist Sadie Chandler, who was born the decade before Bruna’s books became widely available in Australia. Chandler draws some of her aesthetic influences from her childhood, particularly from her mother, a designer for one of Australian’s leading toy manufacturers of the 1950s and ’60s, Joy Toys. Chandler uses heavy line and flat areas of colour and her work is often described as cartoon-like, as it moves in and out of figuration and abstraction. *House bound* 2020 presents a series of typical European row houses devoid of any ornate details or specific architectural reference. There are no doors and no indication of occupancy. The pared-back minimalism is reinforced by the black rectangle windows, and rather than them offering a frame in which to view the characters within, they become a void.

As with Bruna’s practice, the seriality of works such as *Field* 2004–20 hides the labour-intensive nature

of the work. Each of the centres of the 96 flowers is a painted yellow canvas, encased in Perspex petals. Flowers or *bloemen* are embedded in Dutch culture and we need only recall their prevalence in the still-life painting and tulip mania of the 17th-century. In 1970 Bruna introduced Miffy in her new blue birthday dress, adorned with daisy-like flowers, not unlike the blooms found in Chandler’s *Field*. Throughout Miffy’s adventures, flowers represent an optimism and celebration, and floral motifs abound in the work of the Australian artists.

As a Thai-born, Melbourne-based artist, Vipoo Srivilasa blends cultural references through a careful choice of iconography and media and his works are a trophy to what it means to live in the contemporary globalised world. Srivilasa’s works slip in and out of meaning depending upon context. In *Chloris I* 2019, he employs blue and white glazes that draw upon the rich tradition known specifically in Thailand as *laicram*. The figure recalls the Thai custom of Nang Kwak statues associated with good fortune, much like Japanese lucky cats. A deity-like form sits on a waterlily and is lavishly adorned with flowers, and a kangaroo headdress—the entire sculpture resting on a base of sculpted Miffy silhouettes. The rabbit motif recurs consistently in Srivilasa’s works, which reflect an interest in environmental concerns, especially the catastrophic effects that the rabbit and introduced plant species have on the Australian landscape and native flora. Srivilasa’s rabbits are at once beautiful and seductive, yet hide deeper cautionary associations.

Srivilasa’s *Tulip vase* 2020 draws upon the longstanding tradition of the spouted vase (*vazen met tuiten*). These vases feature individual spouts for each bloom and

were popular for displaying highly coveted tulips. They were often decorated in elaborate Chinese-inspired designs, with popular phoenix and dragon motifs or in shapes mimicking the pagoda. There’s a hint of juvenilia in its wobbly structure and anthropomorphic caricature, yet the lustrous metallic glaze suggests the lavish history of the vases as symbols of power and wealth.

Likewise, Stephen Bird draws upon a variety of cultural associations and histories—merging traditional ceramic techniques with his own contemporary twists. Born in Stoke-on-Trent, a renowned pottery centre for English tableware, Bird’s ceramics equally incorporate painting and sculpture, and he has approached his new series of seven plates as an installation, with each element bringing balance and context to the other. Together, they are a type of puzzle and interestingly, Bird has drawn upon the popular Miffy game produced for decades by German toy company Ravensburger as source material. Colour is fundamental in this series, and he flits between traditional blue and white ceramic histories and bright, at times, garish colours. Bird’s practice is not about exploring complementary or harmonious colours but rather their visual interplay. In this respect, he shares some conceptual underpinnings with Bruna’s practice. Textual elements bring another layer of association to his work. Bird explains, ‘I wanted to make something joyous but also capture some of the anxiety which has simmered under the surface.’¹⁵ With ‘2020’ emblazoned across these plates, the works become commemorative, which is in keeping with the large commercial ceramic traditions of Royal Doulton and the like. While this year marks the 65th birthday

of Miffy, one cannot neglect that this will be one to remember for other not-so-celebratory reasons.

Language, form and materiality go hand in hand in the work of Nadia Hernández, who also draws upon text to elicit emotion, as well as familial connection, memory and protest. In her paper constructions—a type of post-Cubist mini-monument—she reflects upon her experiences growing up in Venezuela until the age of seven. The works are a bricolage, bringing together real and imagined dreams; from her grandmother’s rose garden to her grandfather’s activist poetry, she attempts to bring sense to her own memories and the devastation that her home country has experienced under the leadership of Hugo Chávez.

Hernández’s works all have a lyrical quality to them—objects dance across the plane, intersecting here, deviating there. The artist uses simple shapes to create these compositions, yet you can recognise figurative elements—musical notes, eyes, arrows, a school bus, a rooster. While the artist’s style can be related to the legacies of Léger, Picasso, and Matisse, it also relates to Venezuelan abstractionists such as Oswaldo Vigas and street poster traditions across the globe. Most of her work also relates to her family life and to the environment she grew up in. *Arco iris de colores alegram la lejandad* (*A rainbow of colours brighten the distance*) 2018 speaks of colour spectrums that are visible in the night sky, instilling a sense of hope reflected in the kite-like nature of the form. *Aquí también soñaba* (*Here I also dreamt*) 2020 references her childhood home, which is now vacant and locked up due to the ongoing political unrest. Her grandparents’ home was where she spent time in the

¹⁵ Stephen Bird, personal communication with the author, 27 September 2020.



Dick BRUNA
Black Bear 1968
poster design

rose garden, around bunny rabbits—thinking of new worlds and optimistically dreaming up characters, animals and friends, much like the young Bruna.

Many 20th-century avant-garde artists saw their practice as a fiery conduit for change—as a means of revolution. While equally idealistic, Miffy's impact is from within—as a catalyst for the imagination. In her simple and harmonious lines, we can appreciate the virtues of kindness, empathy, joy and happiness. As Matisse once said,

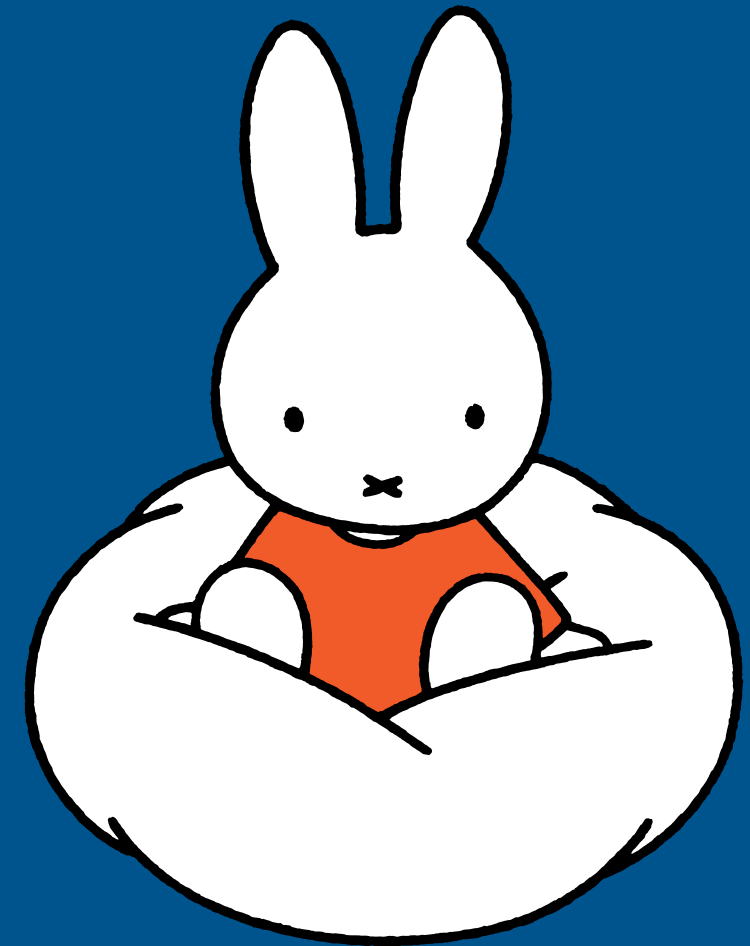
What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art that could be for every metal worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue.¹⁶

As we introduce *miffy & friends* to Australian audiences, we acknowledge the difficulties 2020 has brought to so many and we hope this enchanting little white bunny will remind us of the value of our imagination and the capacity of art to influence one's emotion and in turn, our external world.

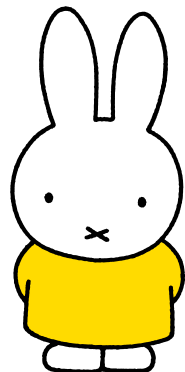
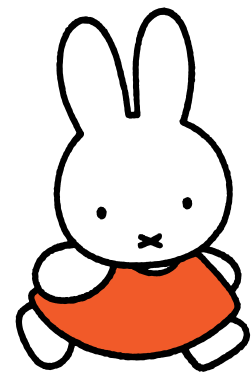
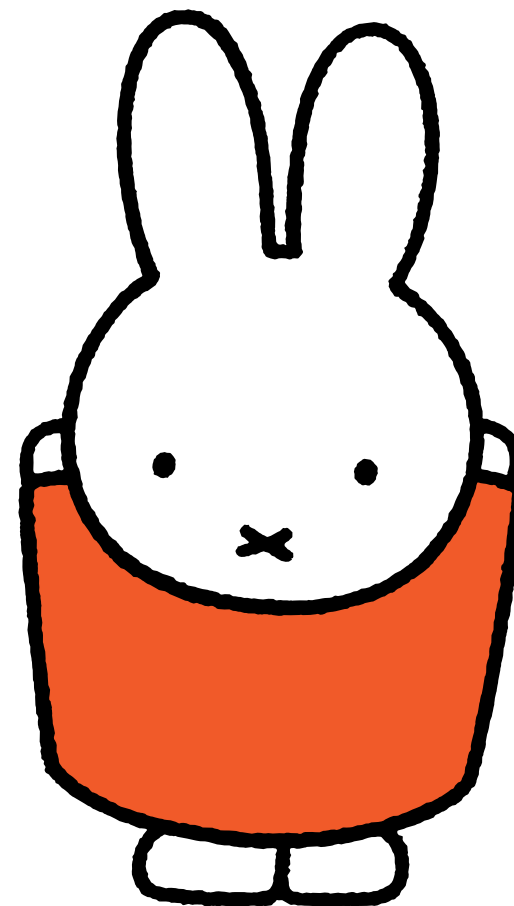
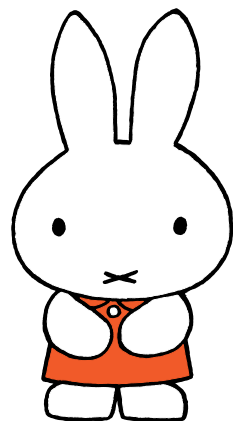
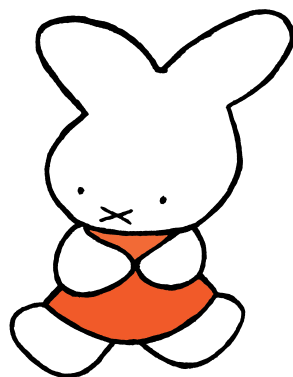
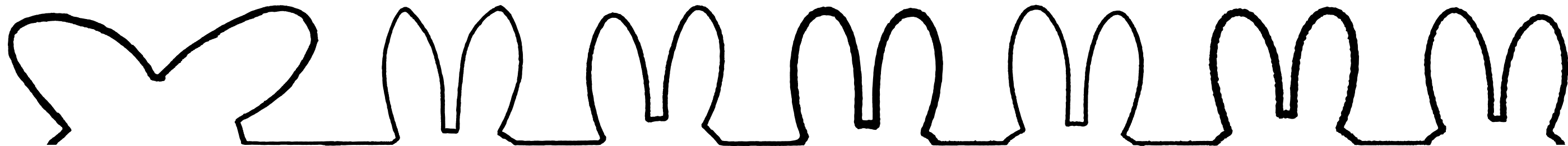
Vanessa Van Ooyen
Gallery Director, QUT Art Museum

¹⁶ Alex Coles, *DesignArt: On art's romance with design* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 19.

miffy

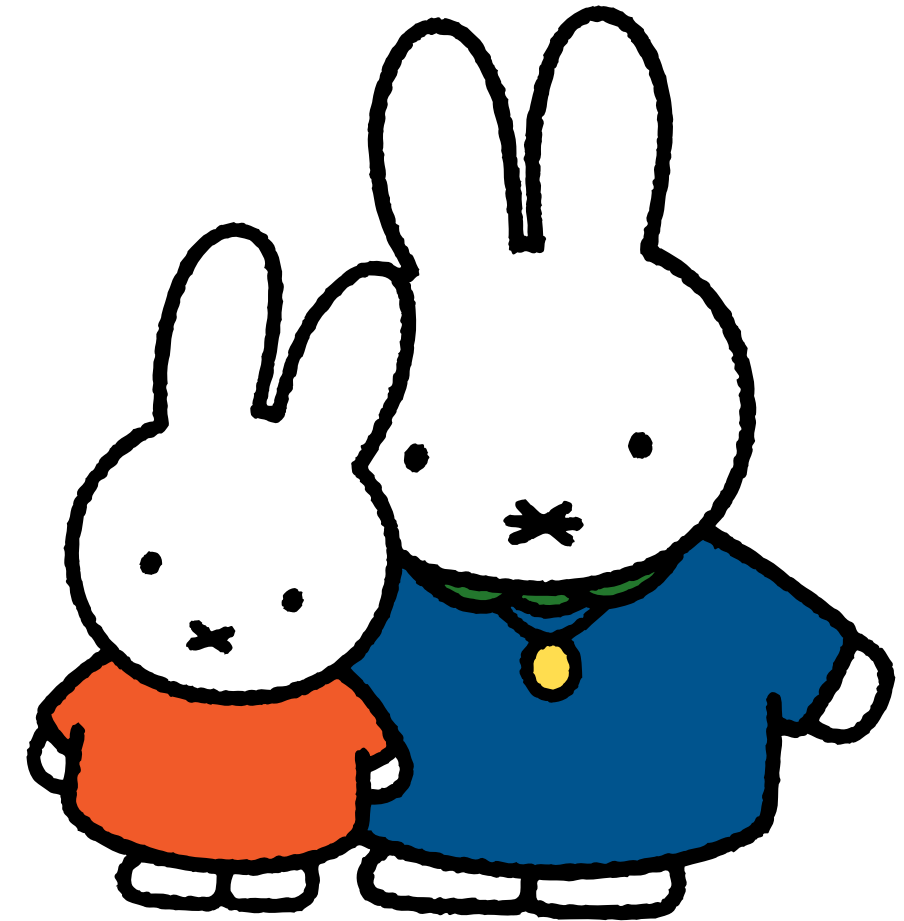


Dick BRUNA
miffy's dream 1979



TOP
Timeline. Over the years, the shape and
look of Miffy has changed – 1955, 1963,
1979, 1988, 1995, 2001, 2003.

LEFT Clockwise from top left:
1955, 1963, 2003, 1988, 1995

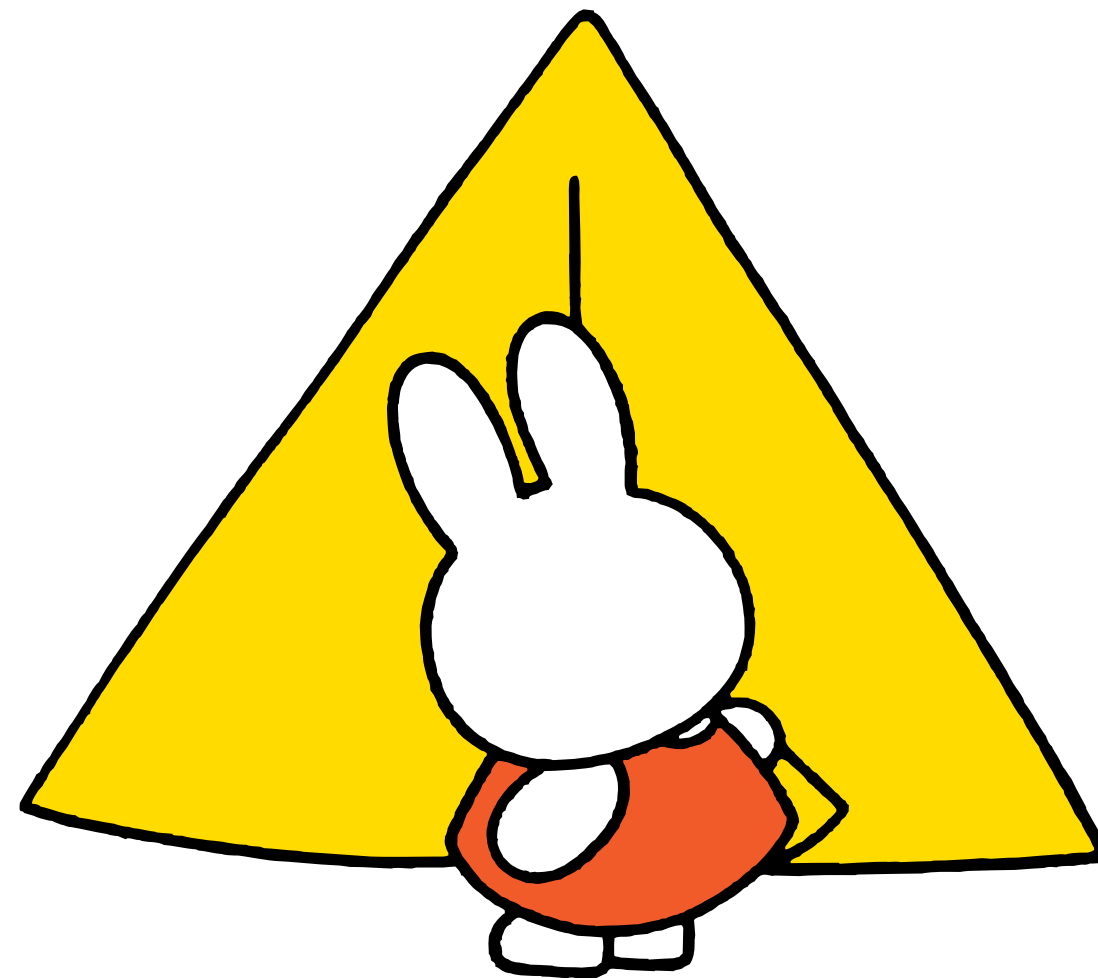


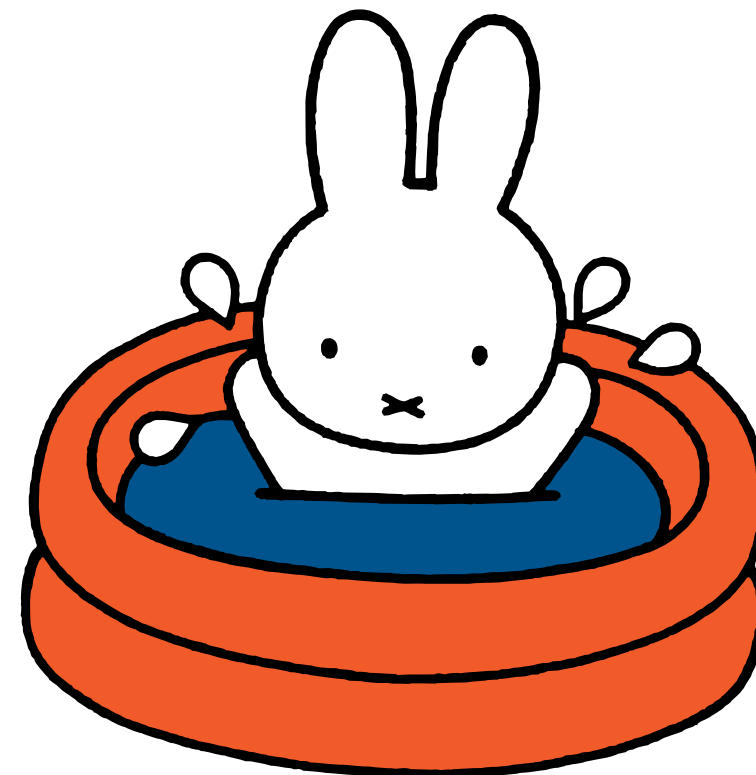
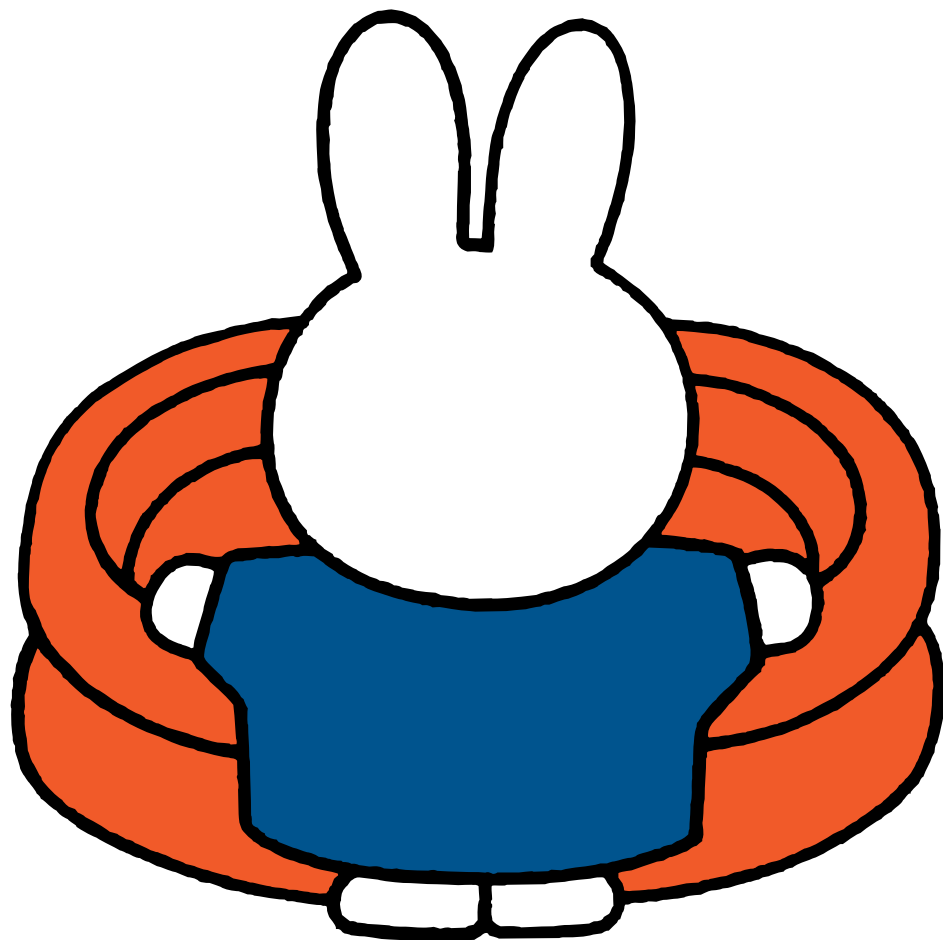


PREVIOUS
Dick BRUNA
miffy dances 2002

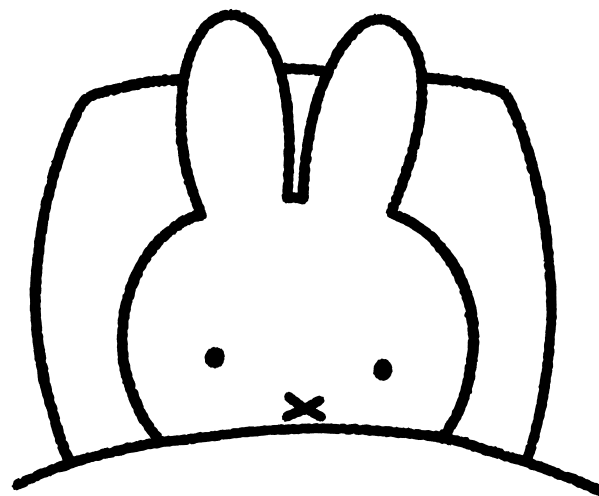
ABOVE
Dick BRUNA
miffy's dream 1979

RIGHT
Dick BRUNA
miffy in the tent 1995

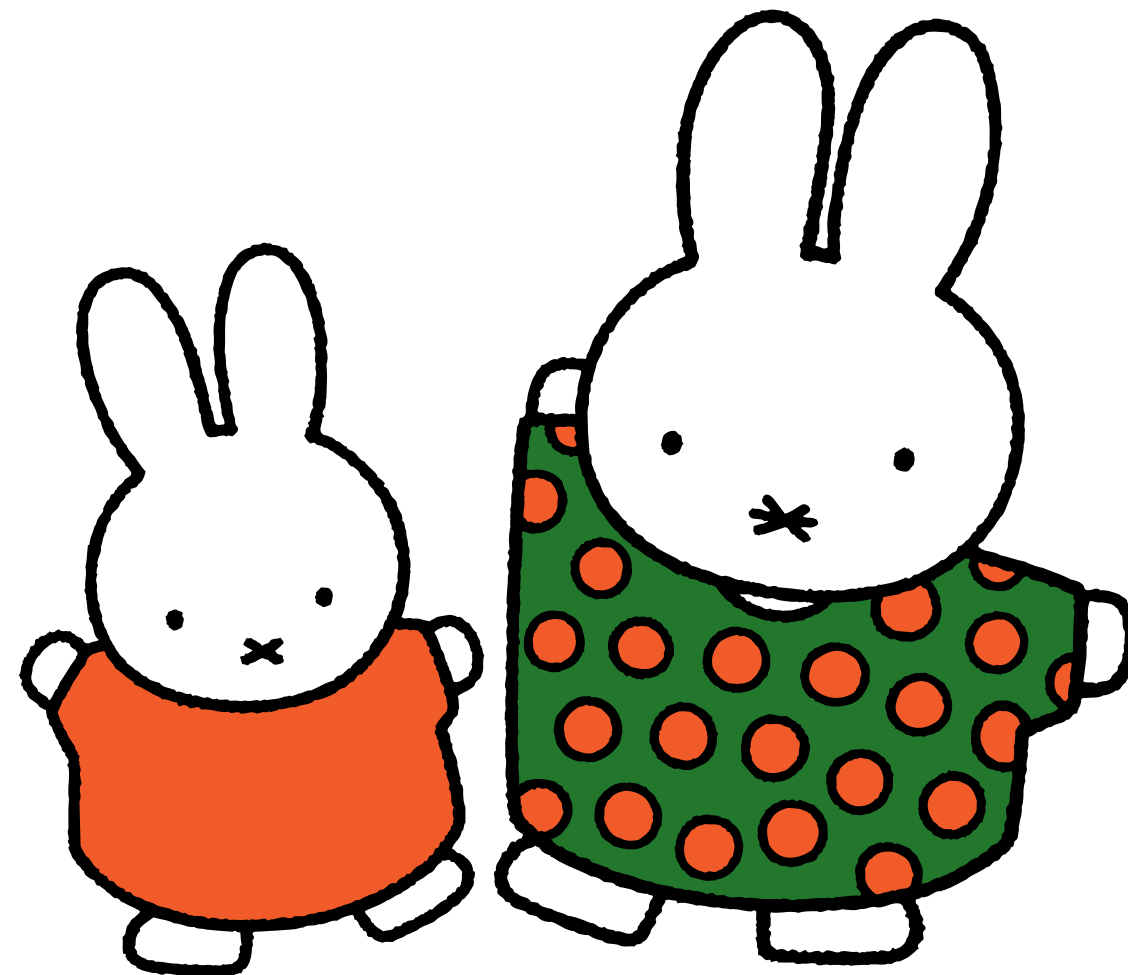




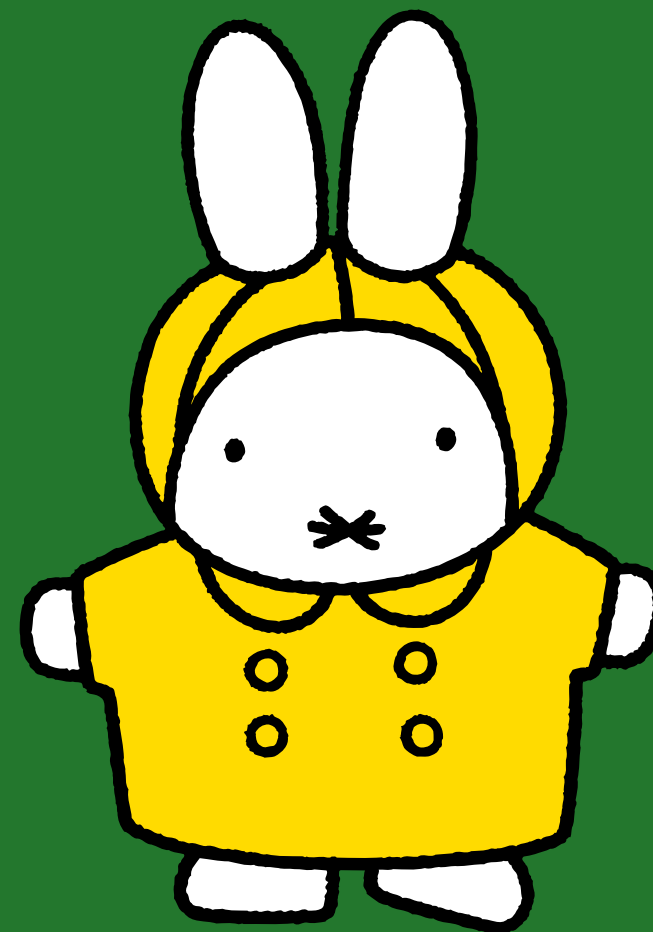
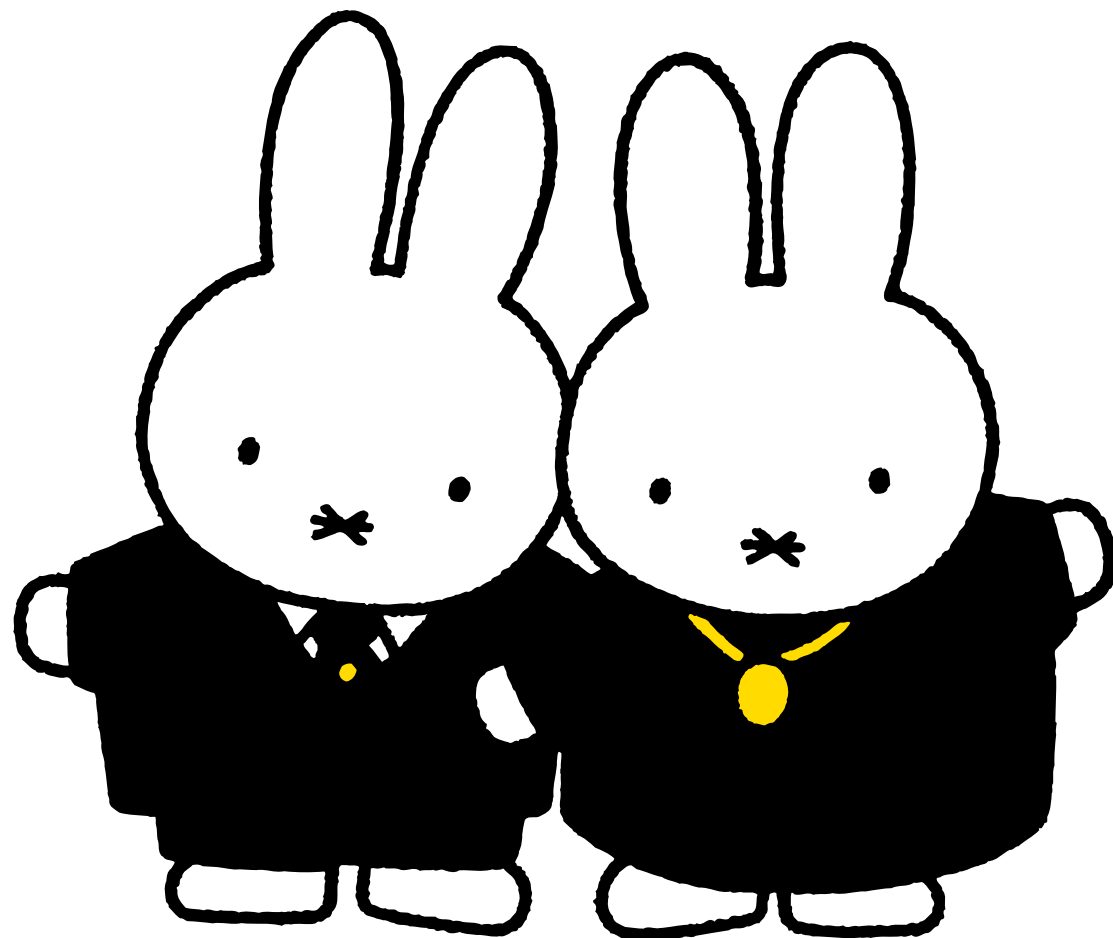
LEFT AND ABOVE
Dick BRUNA
miffy in the tent 1995

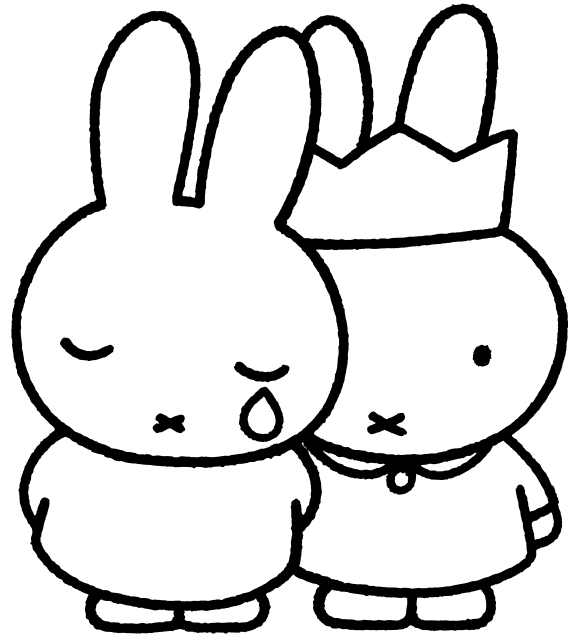


ABOVE
Dick BRUNA
queen miffy 2007



RIGHT AND OVERLEAF
Dick BRUNA
miffy dances 2002

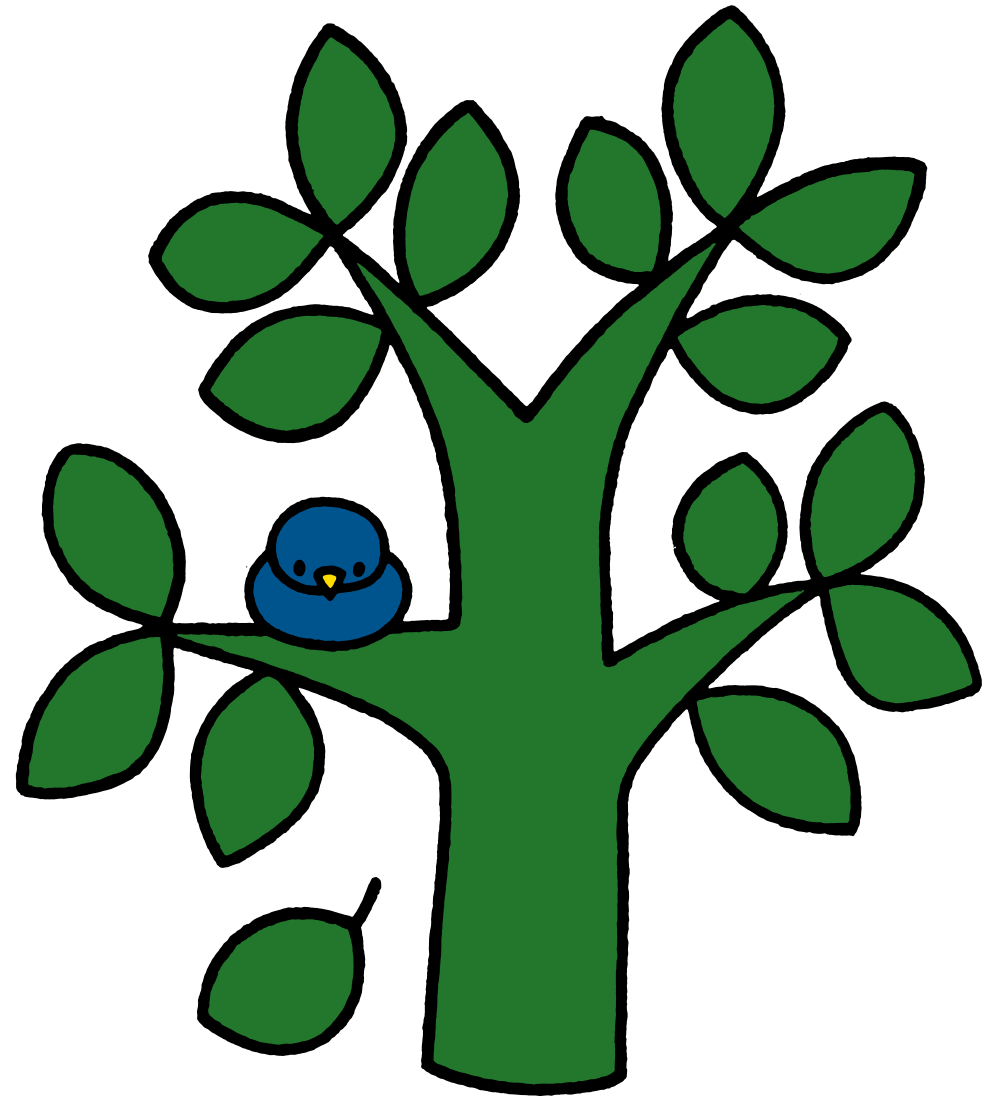


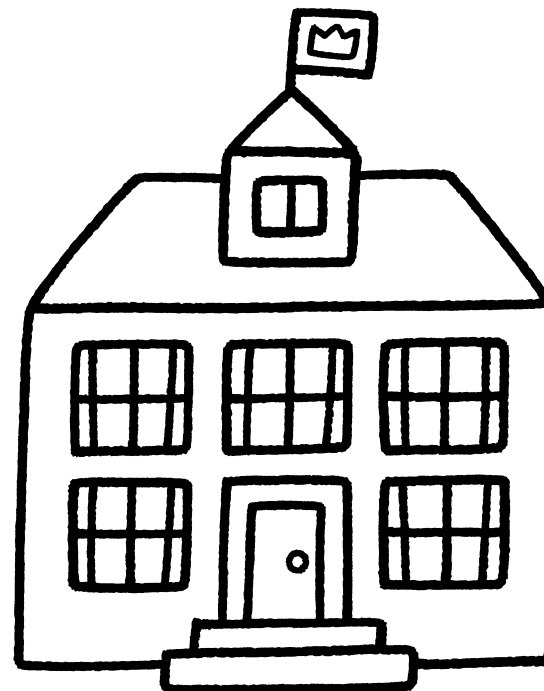
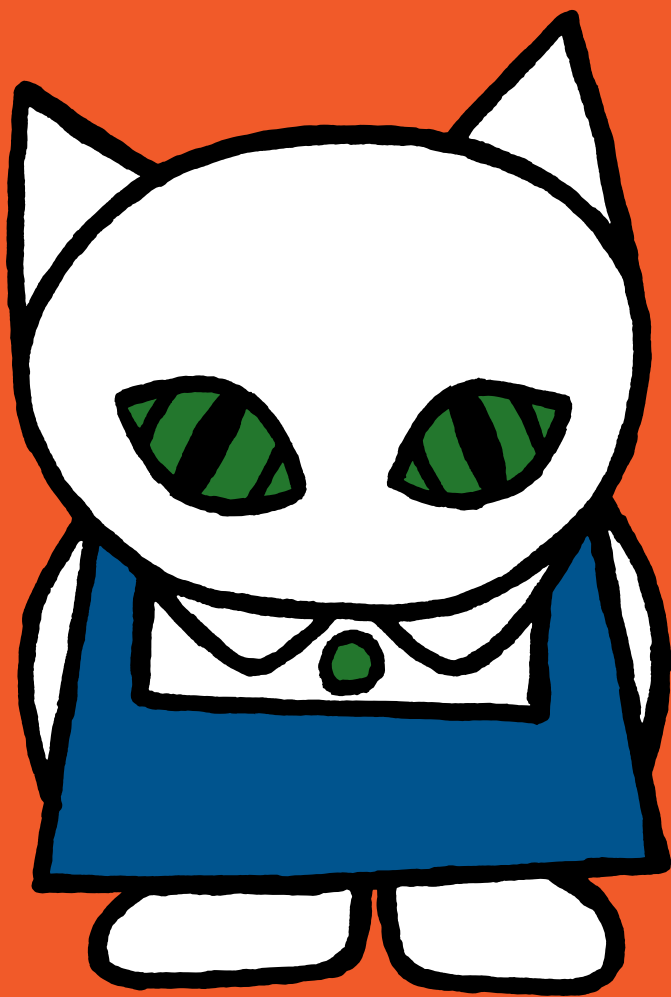


PREVIOUS
Dick BRUNA
miffy dances 2002

ABOVE
Dick BRUNA
queen miffy 2007

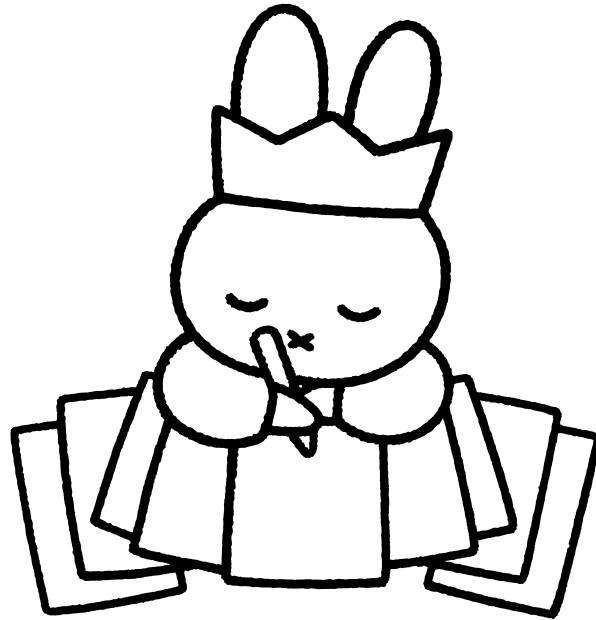
RIGHT
Dick BRUNA
bird in a tree 2010
silkscreen design





ABOVE
Dick BRUNA
queen miffy 2007

LEFT
Dick BRUNA
kitty nell 1959



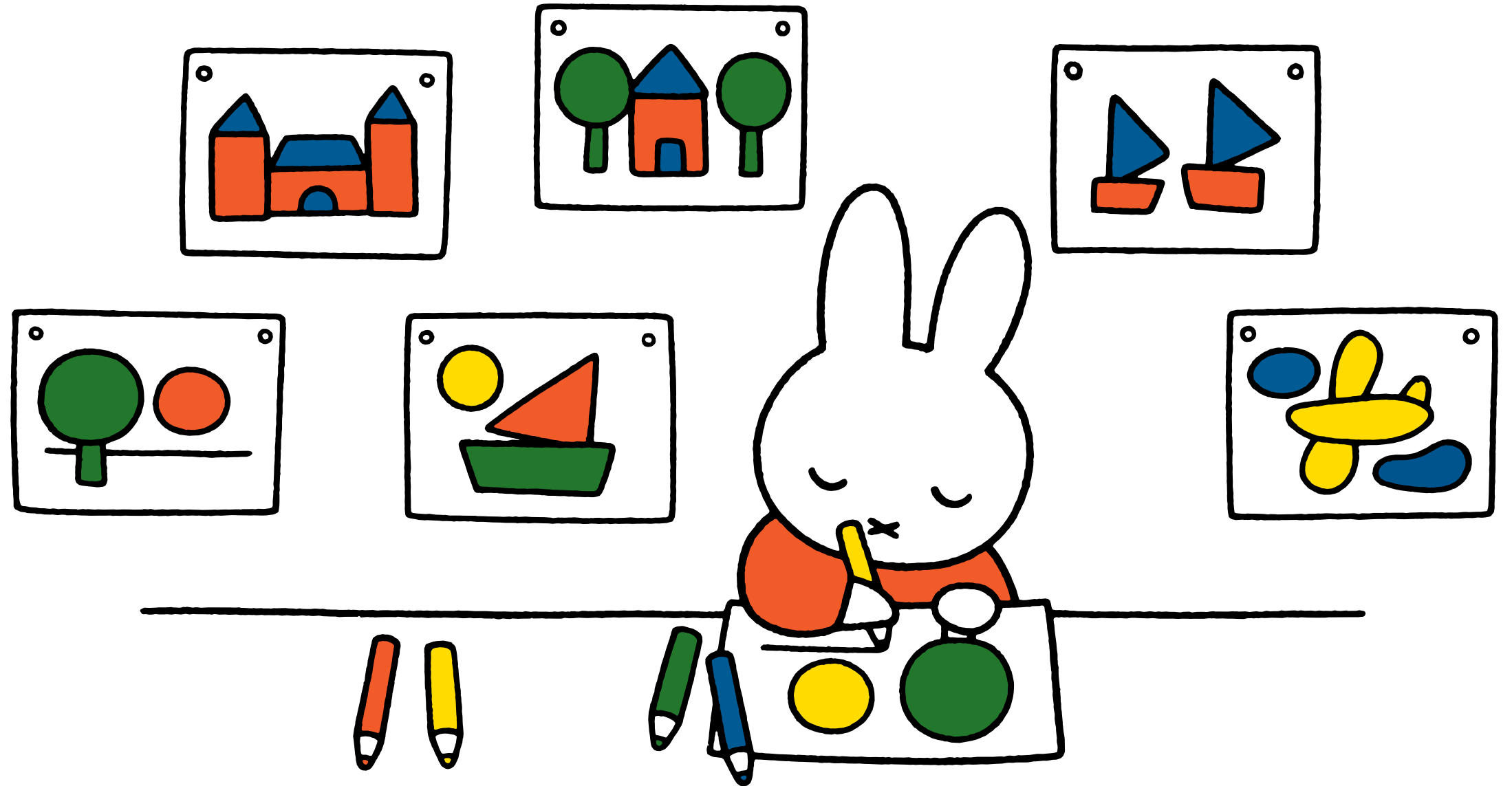
ABOVE
Dick BRUNA
queen miffy 2007

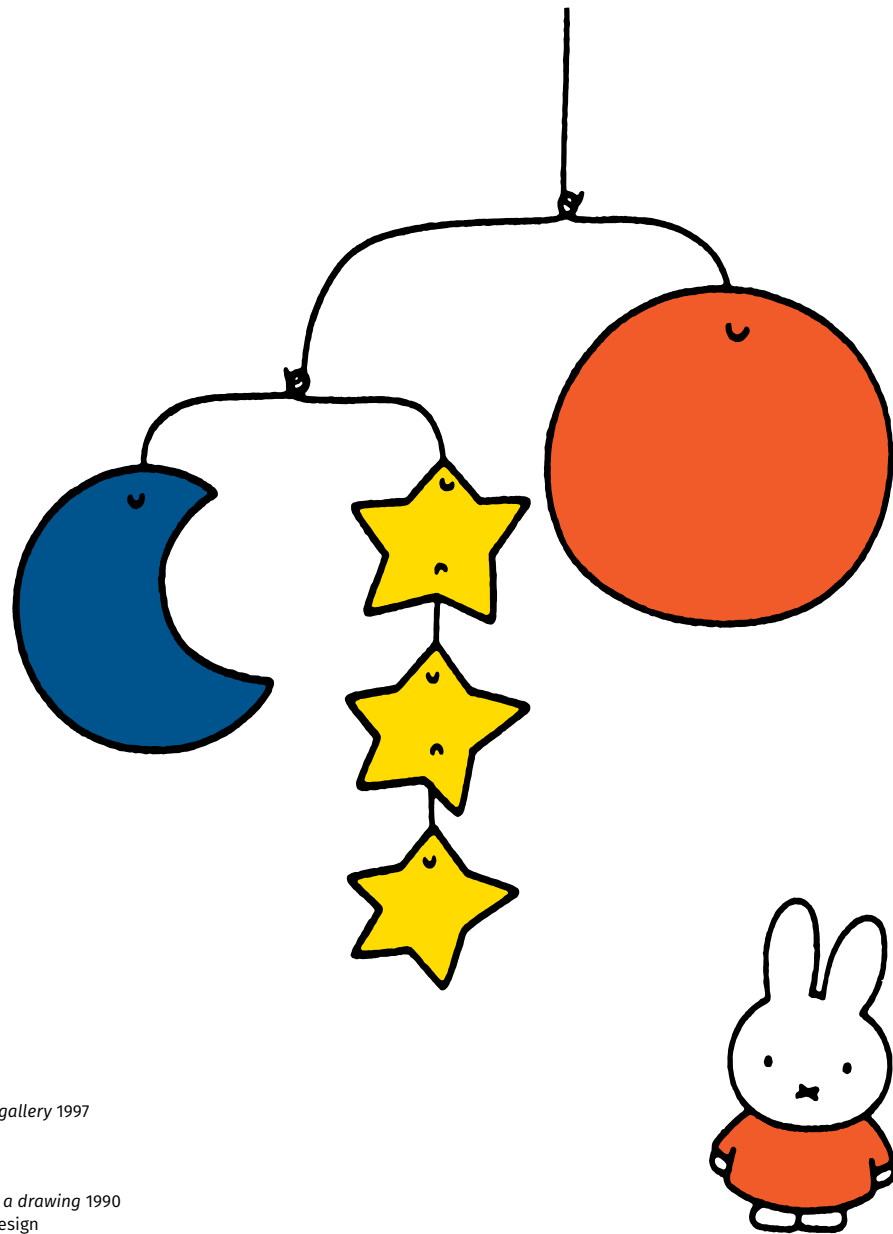
RIGHT
Dick BRUNA
the bassist 2001
silkscreen design

OVER
Dick BRUNA
the orchestra 1984









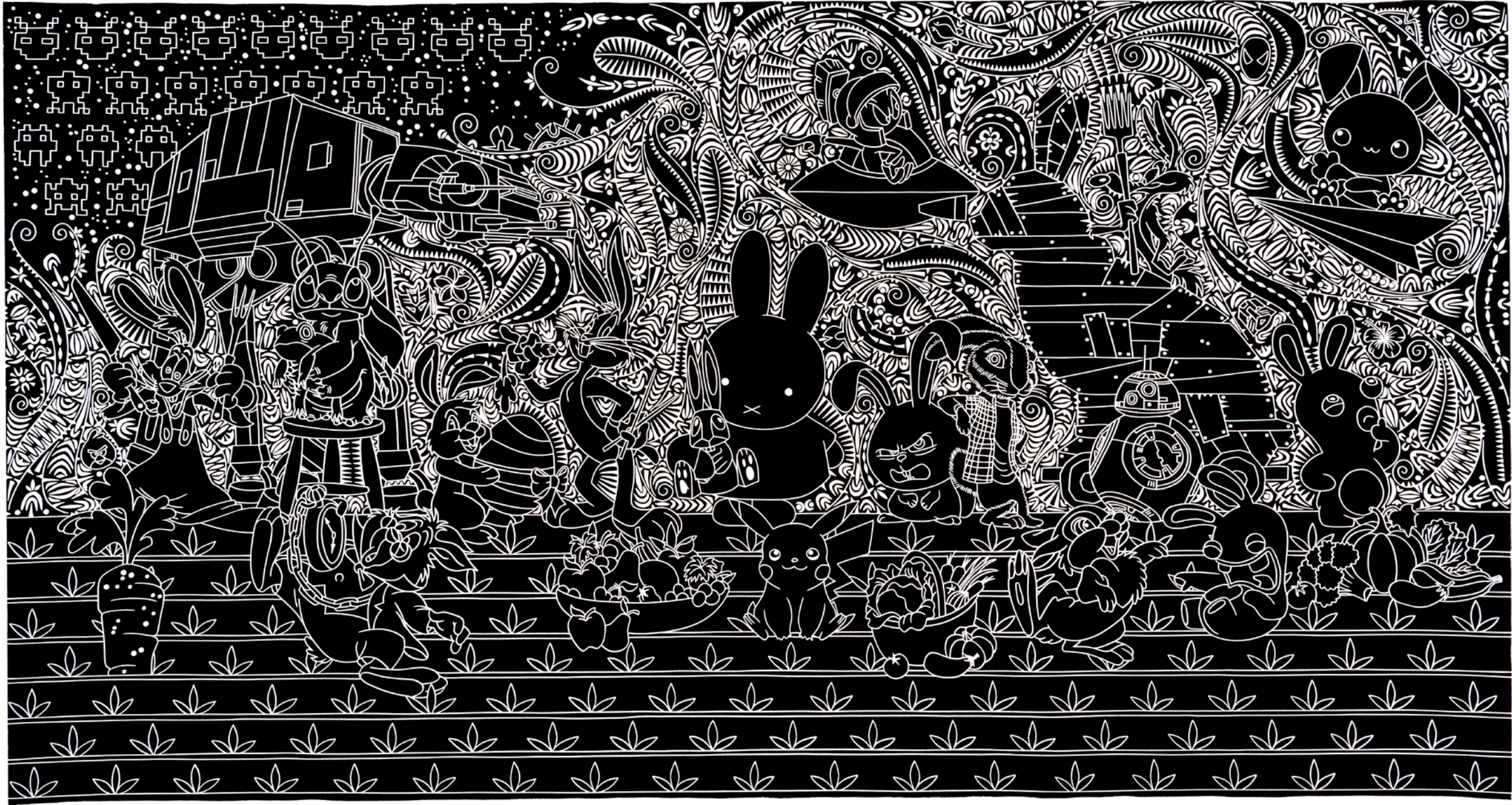
Dick BRUNA
miffy at the gallery 1997

PREVIOUS
Dick BRUNA
miffy makes a drawing 1990
silkscreen design

& friends

brian robinson





PREVIOUS
 Brian ROBINSON
Miffy Aingu Uthuy Mabaig 2020
 palight plastic, enamel spray paint,
 plastic toys, wooden flowers

LEFT
 Brian ROBINSON
Miffy and friends: the usual suspects 2020
 linocut printed in black ink from one block

Courtesy the artist and Mossenson
 Galleries, Perth





PREVIOUS

Carla MCRAE

Dick Bruna's shelf 2020

Victorian ash, plywood, acrylic paint, synthetic polymer filler, polymer clay, plastic tube, cardboard tube

RIGHT

Carla MCRAE

Dick Bruna's shelf (detail) 2020
plywood, acrylic
paint, synthetic polymer filler,
polymer clay, plastic tube,
cardboard tube

Courtesy the artist

nadia hernández





PREVIOUS
Nadia HERNÁNDEZ
Igual eso se evapora (Either way it evaporates) 2020
paper, oil, flashe, acrylic on
Stonehenge paper

LEFT
Nadia HERNÁNDEZ
Aquí también soñaba (Here I also dreamt) 2020
paper, oil, flashe, acrylic on
Stonehenge paper

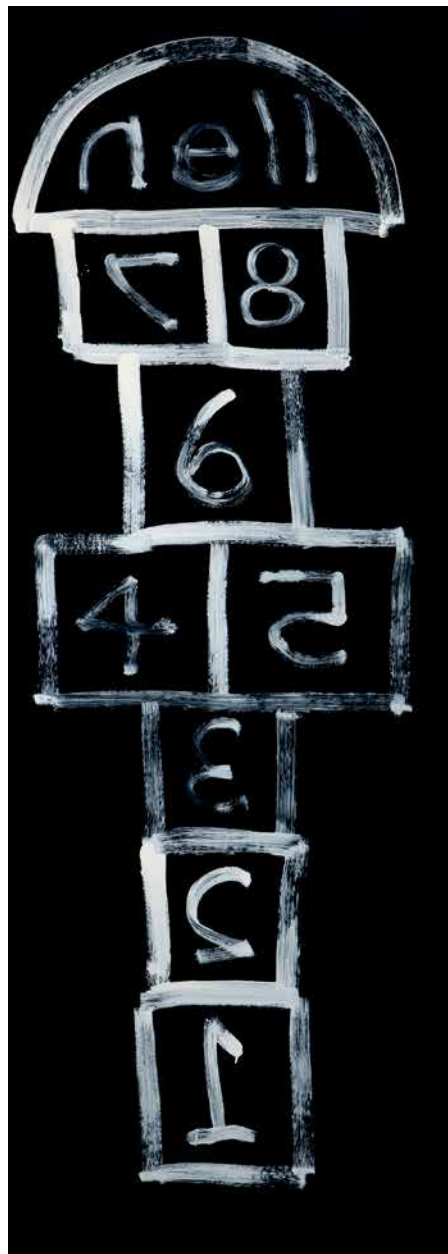
ABOVE
Nadia HERNÁNDEZ
Arco iris de colores alegan la lejandad (A rainbow of colours brighten the distances) 2018
various textiles, grommets, thread, rope

Courtesy the artist

nell



NELL
*if you could hear the sound of my violin
you would know how I feel* 2015
wood
Courtesy the artist and STATION
Melbourne/Sydney



LEFT
NELL
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, *nell* 2010
enamel on New Zealand kiln dried pine
Courtesy the artist and STATION Melbourne/
Sydney

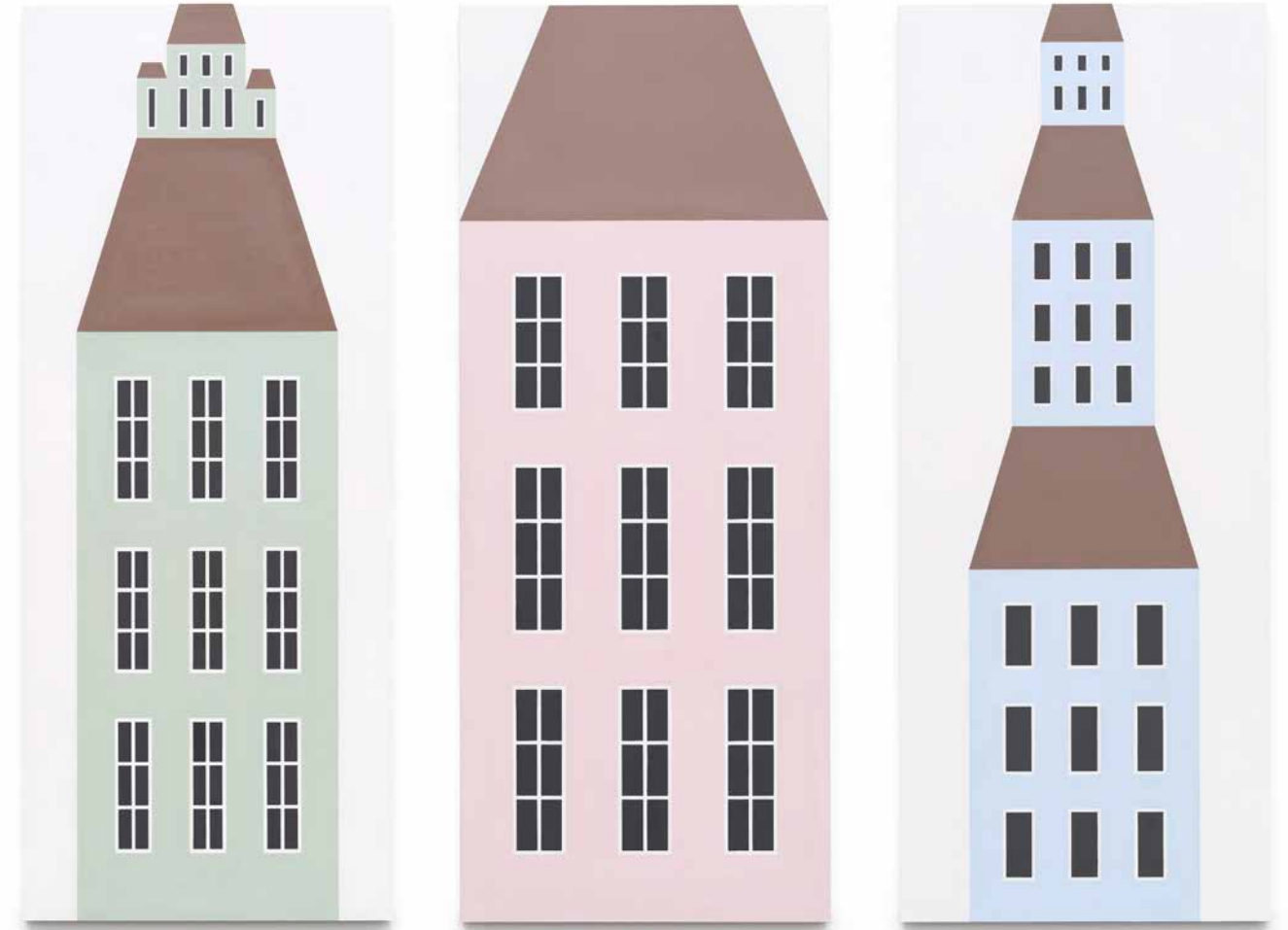
ABOVE
NELL
Hi! How you doin'? 2019
acrylic on canvas
Courtesy the artist and STATION Melbourne/
Sydney

RIGHT TOP
NELL
Nell's grandma
Miffy toy 1970s
towelling and stuffing
Courtesy the artist

RIGHT
Dick BRUNA
Letter from Dick Bruna to Nell 1999
ink on paper
Courtesy the artist



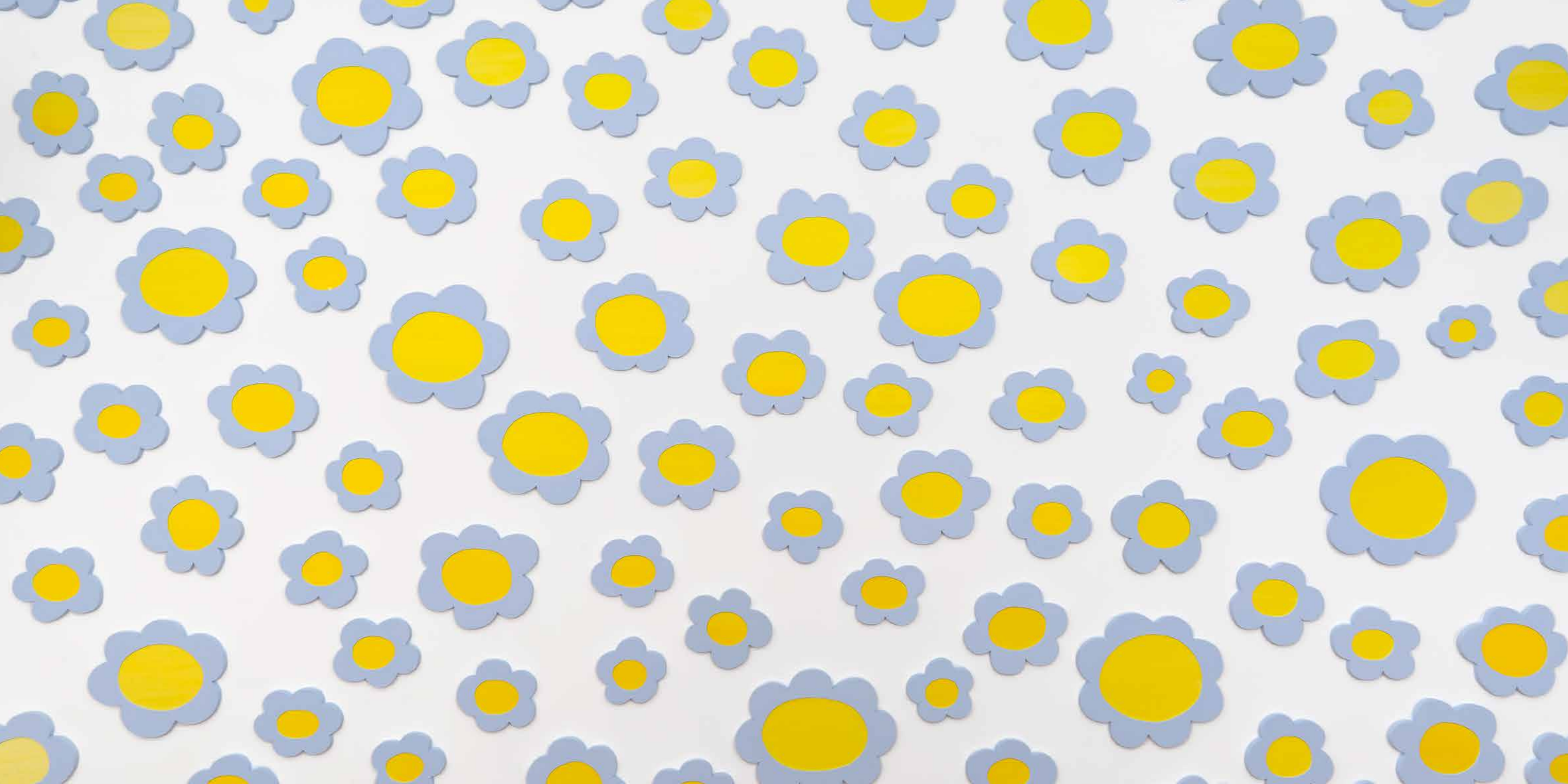
sadie chandler



ABOVE
Sadie CHANDLER
House bound 2020
acrylic on board

NEXT
Sadie CHANDLER
Field 2004–2020
acrylic on board

Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum
Gallery, Melbourne



stephen bird





PREVIOUS
Stephen BIRD
Lost balloon 2020
tin glazed earthenware with lustre

LEFT
Stephen BIRD
Up and away (detail) 2020
tin glazed earthenware with lustre

ABOVE
Stephen BIRD
Mother Earth 2020
tin glazed earthenware with lustre

Courtesy the artist

vipoo srivilasa





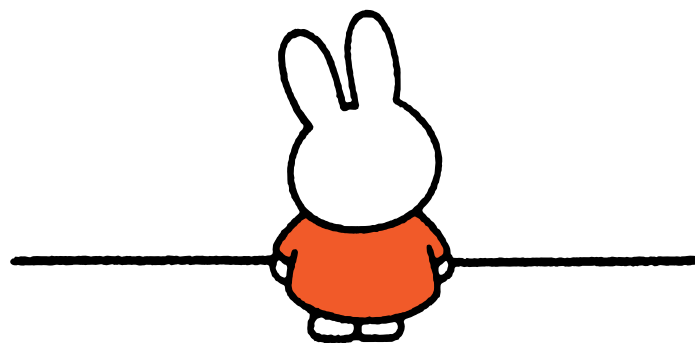
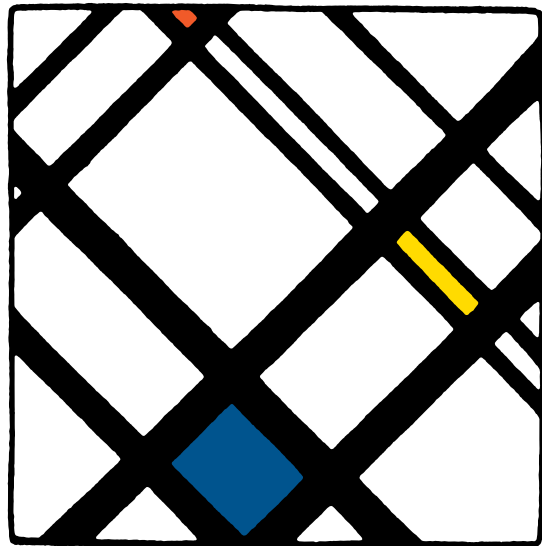
PREVIOUS
Vipoo SRIVILASA
Plantimals 2018
colour porcelain
Courtesy the artist and Edwina
Corlette Gallery, Brisbane

FAR LEFT
Vipoo SRIVILASA
Chloris I 2019
colour porcelain
Courtesy the artist and Edwina
Corlette Gallery, Brisbane

LEFT
Vipoo SRIVILASA
Hide and Seek II 2018
Porcelain and mixed media
Courtesy the artist and Olsen Gallery,
Sydney

RIGHT
Vipoo SRIVILASA
Rainbow Flower Bear I 2018
colour porcelain
Courtesy the artist and Edwina
Corlette Gallery, Brisbane





Dick BRUNA
miffy at the gallery 1997

artist biographies

Brian Robinson

b. 1973, Waiben (Thursday Island), Queensland. Lives and works in Cairns, Queensland.

Brian Robinson has forged a distinctive presence within an already remarkably talented generation of Indigenous Australian artists. His printmaking, sculpture and public art use a variety of techniques to produce bold, innovative and distinctive works. Robinson tells stories through his art, sharing traditional knowledge and customs by utilising symbols, visual motifs and iconography to pass on significant cultural memories, values and beliefs. The unique combination of Islander culture and Western imagery that fill his complex compositions is not intended as a blatant reference to colonisation, but rather an acknowledgement of the universal themes distinctive to each culture, time and place.

His work has featured in many exhibitions nationally and internationally, and his work is held in major collections, including National Gallery of Australia, the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Victoria, and the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection in Virginia, USA.

Carla McRae

b. 1991, Sunshine Coast, Queensland. Lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria.

Carla McRae works as both an artist and illustrator across multiple media, such as drawing, digital illustration, sculpture, installation, murals and publications. With her signature blend of both detail and minimalism she creates bright, colourful work with bold forms and fine lines. McRae is influenced by cartoons, popular culture and everyday observation. Thematically, her work often explores the realm of emotions, evoking hope, happiness and positivity through dynamic and playful visual narratives.

The artist completed a Bachelor of Arts (Design & Communication) at the University of the Sunshine Coast. She has exhibited her work in galleries around Australia and is represented commercially by The Jacky Winter Group.

Nadia Hernández

b. 1987, Mérida, Venezuela. Lives and works in Sydney, New South Wales.

Nadia Hernández is an artist whose practice is informed by the current political climate of her home country and diasporic experience as a Venezuelan woman living abroad. She works across different forms of media—from textiles, paper constructions, painting and music to installations, sculptures and murals. She uses objects of personal and cultural importance to highlight the notion of protest and resistance, while her materials and mediums convey a sense of unity and shared narratives. Her art is characterised by bright colours, abstract shapes and strong textual elements. The artist describes her work as connected to her home country, its traditions and her identity.

She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Fashion) from QUT, and has exhibited across Australia.

Nell

b. 1975, Maitland, New South Wales. Lives and works in Sydney, New South Wales.

Nell's expansive practice traverses painting, sculpture, music, performance, and immersive installation. To create her poetic and idiosyncratic works, Nell transforms an eclectic choice of materials, ranging from the sacred to the popular, the historic to the mundane. An ongoing interest in exploring the extremes of human existence sees Nell draw from spirituality, philosophy, rock 'n' roll, sex and mortality, often expressed through dualities and oppositions. Recognisable and highly symbolic motifs recur throughout her works, including Buddha eyes, smiley faces, open-mouthed 'oohs', ghosts, eggs, teardrops and lightning bolts.

Nell holds a Master of Visual Arts from the Sydney College of the Arts and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Over a career spanning two decades, her work has been included in over 250 exhibitions both nationally and internationally.

Sadie Chandler

b. 1963, Melbourne, Victoria. Lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria.

Sadie Chandler's work includes large paintings and wall installations that use irreverent and child-like imagery blended with references to formalism, minimalism and art history. Made with heavy outlines and elemental forms that appear humorous and decorative, these works are inspired by childhood memories of toys and cartoons. The result is maximal-minimal works that are either singularly iconic or made of a multitude of parts that cover entire walls. However, it is never really clear in Chandler's work whether these are shallow arrangements of girly trifles or a nuanced critique of art, institutions and gender codes. Her works are serious, silly, sophisticated and elegant all at the same time.

Chandler's work has been exhibited widely and is held in several major collections. She is represented by Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Stephen Bird

b. 1964, Stoke-on-Trent, England. Lives and works in Sydney, New South Wales.

Stephen Bird is renowned for his subversive take on traditional ceramics. His ceramics have the look of utilitarian objects, though they function more like sculptural works and often include text and humour. He was born in Stoke-on-Trent, the origin of English manufactured pottery, including Royal Doulton and Wedgwood. Bird originally studied painting in Scotland, and his ceramics are informed by this training. His *Industrial Sabotage* ceramics distinctively reimagine the 18th and 19th century ornamental and souvenir wares typical to his birthplace.

Bird has exhibited both nationally and internationally and his works are held in many public collections, including the National Museum of Scotland, the National Gallery of Australia, National Museums Northern Ireland, and the

Art Gallery of South Australia. Bird was the winner of the 2016 Gold Coast International Ceramic Award, and the 2011 Deakin University Contemporary Small Sculpture Award.

Vipoo Srivilasa

b. 1969, Bangkok, Thailand. Lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria.

Exploring the similarities between the cultures of his native home of Thailand and his adoptive home of Australia, Vipoo Srivilasa works predominantly in ceramics, creating contemporary porcelain sculptures, vessels and figures that transmit a universal message about cross-cultural experiences. A playful blend of historical, figurative and decorative art practices, his enigmatic creations often touch on political and social issues such as the environment, migration and experiences of minority. His work draws on the traditions of fine Asian porcelain with its use of cobalt blue and gold lustre, but each piece is unique.

He holds a Bachelor of Art (Ceramics) from Rangsit University, Bangkok, a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Ceramics) from Monash University, Melbourne, and a Master of Fine Art and Design from the University of Tasmania. Srivilasa has exhibited widely, and his work is held in national and international collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, and the Craft Council, UK.



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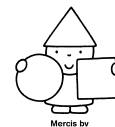
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RIGHT
Image courtesy Nell



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QUT Art Museum

