

# DEREK BAUER

(b. 1955 – d. 2001)

Derek Bauer was born and schooled in East London, South Africa. His interest in cartooning developed while still at school when he drew caricatures of his teachers to entertain his fellow classmates. He went on to study Graphic Design at the East London Technicon. After graduating he worked as a layout artist and renderer and eventually became a junior Art Director at De Villiers and Schonfeld (known today as Y&R). Seven years into this career, he became disillusioned with the world of advertising and briefly entertained the idea of becoming a carpenter.

In 1985 Bauer approached the newly founded alternative newspaper, the *Weekly Mail*, with a portfolio of drawings; this bold initiative secured him his first professional job as a cartoonist. The *Weekly Mail* was founded by a group of journalists after the closure of two leading newspapers, the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express*. In the foreword to Bauer's book, *SA Flambé and Other Recipes for Disaster*, Anton Harber, the editor of *Weekly Mail* at the time, writes that "when he strolled into the *Weekly Mail* offices in 1985 a few months after the newspaper's launch, it took only a glance through this armful of drawings to see how extraordinary his talent was. There are not many people who can make editors worry about defamation in a caricature. Bauer has done this to us often in the four years he had supplied us with weekly cartoons."

Bauer's cartoons were featured on the leader page of the newspaper under the heading of *Derek Bauer's World*, a smart and necessary move on the part of the editors to avoid any association with the views and opinions expressed by the artist. This 'uncensored' platform fuelled Bauer's charged imagination and creativity. His biting satire spared no-one, especially then South African President PW Botha, his cabinet ministers, members of the opposition, national and international sporting and

religious figures. Bauer blotched and splattered them all, equally. As Harber notes, "Bauer is indiscriminating. He will be tasteless, cruel, rude and obnoxious to Leftwingers, Rightwingers, Middle-of-the-Roaders and probably even Mother Teresa." To Bauer his world was simply a reflection of what he called "a beautiful truth in anarchy".

His cartoons are drawn with care and insight, balancing that blotchy aesthetic with wickedly irreverent content, deliberately creating a sense of unease. His aesthetic style is greatly inspired by the Welsh artist and cartoonist, Ralph Steadman, but in terms of personality Bauer probably identified more with Steadman's occasional and hard-living collaborator, Hunter S Thompson.

His family and friends described him as a very big man - fearless, loud, a larger than life character with an insatiable thirst and hunger and in the mid to late 1980's, inseparable from his fax machine. His studio was a drawing board and a light box in a small apartment in the centre of Cape Town. The radio was always on, and most often tuned to magazine programmes broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). It would appear that Bauer's greatest concern was not any fear of intimidation about his work; on the contrary, it seems he battled a deep insecurity about his bad spelling. According to his friend, Bruce Gordon, "Derek was always worried about his spelling, we never spoke about his work or his ideas, but he often inquired about the spelling of a particular word."

His cartoons have appeared in the *Weekly Mail*, *The Argus*, *New York News Day*, *South*, *Upfront*, *Frontline*, *Financial Mail*, *Business Day*, *Finance Week*, *The Star*, *Laughing Stock*, *Management*, *AD Magazine* and *The Executive*.

Derek died in a motor vehicle accident on 16 December 2001.