



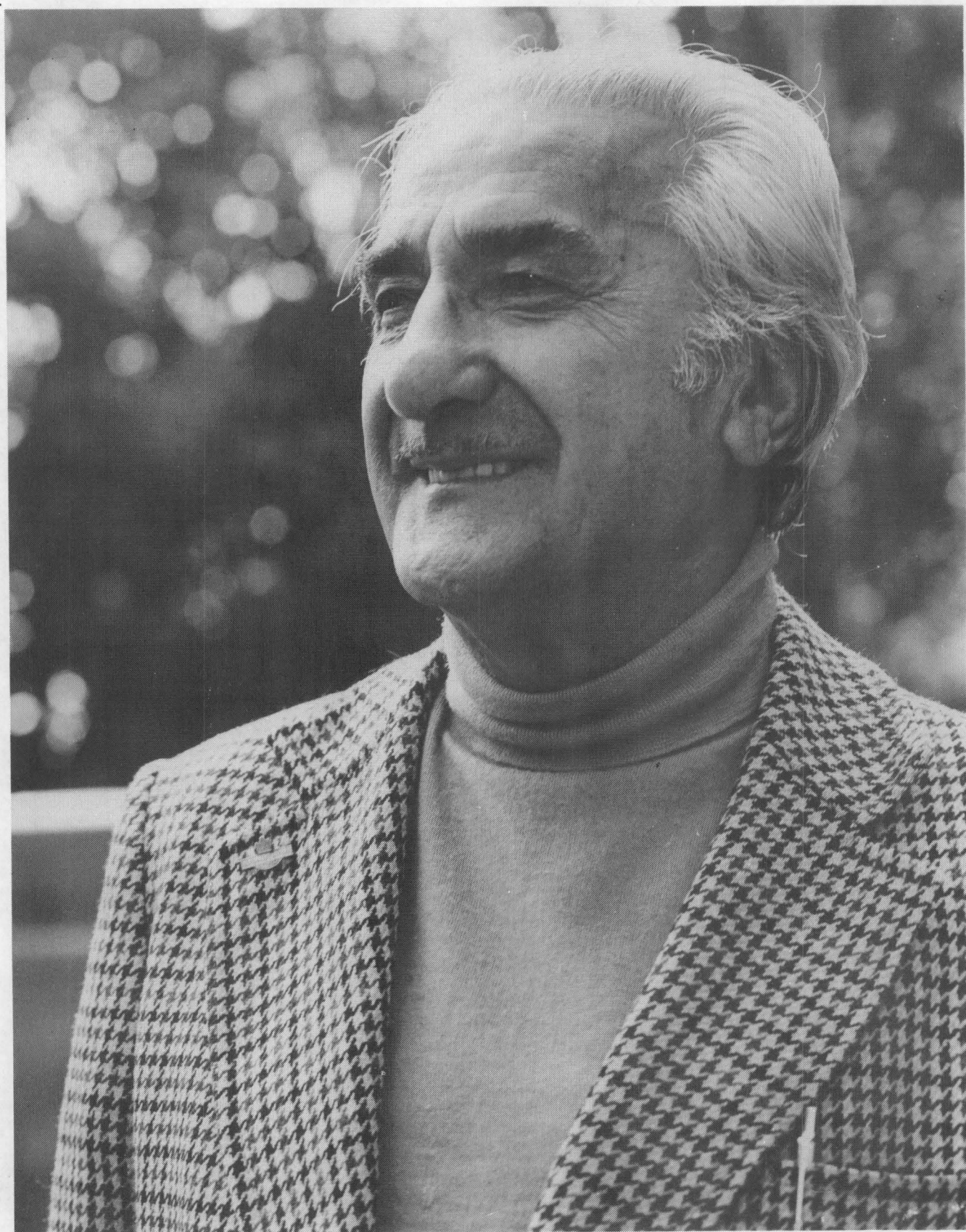
# **NOEL COOK**

**VETERAN COMIC ILLUSTRATOR**

**AN 'INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD' EXHIBITION**

**AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY**

**MAY 5 — JUNE 17, 1979**



## NOEL COOK

### BIOGRAPHY

Noel Cook, born in Foxton in 1896, has been taken for a Latin. Sometimes it has been useful - at other times he has had to go as far as to take an oath that his mother was of English parentage. She was born in Melbourne and his father, William Thompson Te Rauparaha Cook, was of English and Maori extraction. His grandfather, Thomas Uppadine Cook, is recognised as founder and 'father' of Foxton, Manawatu. Noel's father, a compositor-journalist, originally in Foxton and later in Masterton, established the Taumarunui Press. He disposed of this during the Great War when he acquired the 'Rodney & Oatamatea Times' in Warkworth, which is still published by his descendants. In his youth, Noel has a plentiful supply of paper with which to indulge his drawing proclivities.

He was articled to a Taumarunui firm of architects and engineers and later worked as a clerk for the local borough council. He was next appointed Assistant Town Clerk in Tauranga from where, having boosted his age considerably, he enlisted and went overseas with the 15th Reinforcements. He won the welter weight boxing championship of his brigade before being severely wounded in the thigh and through both legs at the Battle of the Messines in 1917.

On his return to New Zealand, through the Rehabilitation Department, he was able to obtain a cadetship on the New Zealand Herald and Weekly News as an artist. Two years later he shipped to Australia and freelanced as a 'black & white' artist with the then such notable papers as Smith's Weekly, the Sydney Bulletin and a host of others.

Circa 1923, he originated a strip cartoon for the Sunday Times (then owned by Hugh D. McIntosh, later knighted) called PETER AND ALL THE OTHER ROVING FOLK. This attracted the attention of the Sydney Sunday Sun, who gave him a half-page in full colour called PETER, who was depicted having fantastic adventures on Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Venus and other planets and asteroids.

This series attracted much favourable attention and through the auspices of Pat Sullivan, an Australian artist resident in New York and creator of Felix the Cat, Noel was offered a handsome salary (for those days, fantastic) by the Bell Syndicate to draw PETER in New York. Happy and prosperous in Sydney, he declined the offer. Not long afterwards in New York, commenced a whole spate of strip cartoonery: Buck Rogers, Speed Gordon, Superman, Captain Marvel, etc. At that time Noel also indulged in the higher aesthetics of water colour and oil painting. He produced 150 cartoon books for various publishers and then accepted an appointment with the new Australian Women's Weekly and the Sydney Sunday & Daily Telegraph owned by Sir Frank Packer.

During World War II he served with the Camouflage Unit on the New Guinea theatre.

Going to London after the war, he freelanced in Fleet Street for different publications and then became an Art Editor with Amalgamated Press where he originated strip cartoons and also freelanced for many magazines, illustrations, joke blocks, westerns and covers in full colour.

On retirement, he was commissioned by the BBC to do posters for serious and comic programmes. This allowed him time to paint. He held a first show of twenty-four paintings on the mezzanine floor of New Zealand House in Haymarket, London. After a second successful exhibition at the Mannheim Gallery in the King's Road, Chelsea, he was asked to exhibit at the Royal Commonwealth Society in Northumberland Avenue near Charing Cross, this group show was opened by the Queen Mother. His next exhibition was at the Upper Street Gallery, Islington, London. Then followed a group showing at the Royal Overseas League, held in the Qantas Gallery, Piccadilly. Subsequently he was given a one-man exhibition under the auspices of Qantas Airways at their Piccadilly Gallery. This was in 1970.

He left London in 1973 and, after a short stay in Toronto, he spent six months in San Francisco and returned to Sydney where he had an exhibition at the New Zealand Tourist Bureau, Pitt Street, Sydney. He then exhibited at the Thorburn Gallery 86 paintings of a 'polynesian theme' which sold well and, finally, an exhibition at the Ormsby Workshop Gallery in Woolloomooloo, Sydney. He returned to London in 1976 for a short stay to visit his son Peter domiciled there and returned to Australia and finally to New Zealand in late 1977- and still working on new paintings.

## NOEL COOK

### INTRODUCTION

This exhibition of Noel Cook's graphic work has been organised to coincide with the May school holidays in the International Year of the Child.

While few young children today will know of Noel Cook's space fiction strips, many will no doubt recognise in them the roots of the modern space comic. They will also see how the strip artist composes his pages, the scale he works in, the materials he employs (gouache, ink, and occasionally oils) and the way he makes corrections and adjustments.

Noel Cook is now eighty-two. He grew up as the balloon age was coming to an end. In science fiction America still lagged behind Europe and in particular, England. The stories of the French writer Jules Verne and the English writers, H. G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle were major formative influences on the young Noel. He was also an avid reader of such British magazines as 'The Strand', 'Pall Mall' and 'Windsor' which published the best popular science fiction of the day.

The atomic age was looming. By 1912 the nuclear physicist, Ernest Rutherford, another New Zealander, had proposed a radical model of the atom which, supported by experimental evidence, suddenly made interplanetary travel seem feasible. His imagination fired, Noel subsequently concocted such fantasies as Galactic Miracle, Cosmic Calamity, Planet of Power, Lost in Space, Space Cadet and, most important of all, the 'Peter' strips.

'Peter' was notable for being the earliest of space comics. Unfortunately the originals of these earlier strips have been lost - on two separate occasions house fires have ravaged Noel's archives of original art work. The Peter strips are instead represented in this exhibition by colour printing proofs - as are several other strips for which the original art work is no longer extant. Some really large works are also represented in published form, e.g. Cavalcade of Communications which was originally painted in oils eighteen feet long by ten feet high. The original of this is now displayed inside the harbour-side pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

While Noel's powers of innovation, imagination and drawing skill are, arguably, best realised in his science fiction strips, his work ranges over a variety of subjects. The selection of this exhibition has been made with this in mind.

Noel has always been a great lover of children, including the very young for whom he created his strips of the Koala Family. These alone were printed in more than two hundred books. He has also produced educational strips, represented here by the George Stevenson and Henry Hudson series of the early sixties. Noel's earliest graphic work is represented by a romantic pen and ink drawing based on The Three Musketeers executed, incidentally, at a studio in Wellesley Street, near the Auckland City Art Gallery. It was in this studio that Noel met three

other pioneers of the cartoon strip who were to become life-time friends - Robert Johnston, George Finey and Unk White.

Another early drawing in a similar style to The Three Musketeers study but by contrast unromantic is Marching On ANZAC day 1920, which recalls dead 'diggers' on the march.

Noel has always free-lanced, working from home, often late into the night under pressure of deadlines. Speed was essential - working well he could complete fifty pages per month.

It is significant that Noel did not accept the lucrative job offered him by the big American Bell Syndicate, after the success of his 'Peter' strip; also that a whole spate of science fiction comics - Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, Superman, and Captain Marvel - appeared in America soon after Noel declined the offer, in favour of remaining in Australia where he was already happy and prosperous.

While Noel has exhibited his watercolour and oil paintings of 'higher aesthetics' as he describes them, in numerous exhibitions in Australia and England, his strip work has not previously been shown before in a gallery context.

<u>NO.</u>	<u>TITLE (ALL SCRIPTS FOR DRAWINGS WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR)</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>MEDIUM</u>	<u>PUBLISHER</u>
1	Romantic drawing based on 3 Musketeers	1919	black & white*	Frank Lynch
2	Kiwi Kid	1919	black & white	N.Z. Newspapers
3	Dead Diggers (ANZAC 1920) "Marching On"	1920	black & white	N.Z. Observer
4	Peter	1924	colour overlay	Sunday Times
5	Peter	1924	colour overlay	Sunday Times
6	Peter	1925	colour overlay	Sunday Times
7	Peter	1925	colour overlay	Sunday Times
8	Peter	1926	colour overlay	Sunday Times
9	Lost in Space	1926	colour, gouache	F. Johnson
10	Allies in Space	1927	colour, gouache	F. Johnson
11	Hawke Larse	1926	colour, gouache	Felix the Cat Productions
12	Sally Sharp	1926	black & white	Felix the Cat Productions
13	Bobby & Betty	1927	colour, gouache	Daily Telegraph Hobart Mercury
14	Dick Dean	1928	black & white	Sydney Daily Telegraph
15	Script holders for Radio 2UE, Sydney	1928	silk screen	Radio 2UE, Sydney
16	Dinny Dingo, Dingo Dell, Mrs Hippo, Dinty Dingo	1927	black & white	Felix the Cat Productions
17	Kokey Koala	1927	black & white	Felix the Cat Productions
18	Kokey Koala	1927	black & white	Felix the Cat Productions

\* black & white = pen & ink

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19	Kewpie Koala	1927	wash, black & white	Bell Syndicate
20	Kewpie Crusoe	1927	wash, black & white	Bell Syndicate
21	Corky Koala	1930	black & white	Elmsdale Syndicate
22	Kewpie Koala & Whale	1930	black & white	Elmsdale Syndicate
23	Whizz the Wizard	1932	black & white	Elmsdale Syndicate
24	Doc Stork & Eggs, Dinny Dingo, Kewpie Koala, Tassie Wolf & Willie	1933	black & white	Elmsdale Syndicate
25	Cavalcade of Communications	1939	colour poster	A.W.A.
26	Planet of Fear	1942	colour, gouache	Emvee Publications
27	Peril Planet	1943	colour, gouache	F. Johnson
28	Cassidy Gold	1944	colour, gouache	Emvee Publications
29	Horror Planet	1945	colour, gouache	Offset Printing
30	Pirate Planet	1946	colour, gouache	Emvee Publications
31	The Cassidy Twins	1949	colour, gouache	Kenmure Press
32	Space Cadet	1949	colour, gouache	Felix the Cat Productions
33	Dick Turpin	1953	colour, gouache	Felix the Cat Productions
34	Galactic Miracle	1956	colour, gouache	G. Newnes Publishing Co.
35	Planet of Power	1958	colour, gouache	G. Newnes Publishing Co.
36	Cosmic Calamity	1959	colour, gouache	Miller Publications
37	Love Story	1964	colour, gouache	Children's Newspaper

<u>NO.</u>	<u>TITLE (ALL SCRIPTS FOR DRAWINGS WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR)</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>MEDIUM</u>	<u>PUBLISHER</u>
38	The White Rajah	1963	black & white	Children's Newspaper
39	King Harold	1963	black & white	Children's Newspaper
40	Tunnel Bridge or Rocket	1961	black & white	Children's Newspaper
41	Montage of Drawings "Suspence, etc"	1965	black & white	Amalgamated Press
42	Jeff Barker	1965	black & white	Toonder Publications
43	"It was a long time ago--the ship passed through our power beam.."	1966	black & white	Millar Publishers