



Drawing on experiences: Karrie Fransman

Henry James Foy talks to the up-and-coming cartoonist about her comic life

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I first met Karrie Fransman outside a burlesque club in London's Shoreditch, where I thought she looked ghastly and hideously overdressed. She, of course, was right – my jeans and stripes were never going to go down well with the North London trendy set.

Karrie, a 28 year old part-time creative advertising exec and part-time cartoonist, is wonderfully charming. Having traded the high-flying life of models and target audiences for colouring pencils, she is happy and relaxed.

She speaks at 20mph, “to save batteries,” and as I realise within minutes of enjoying her overexcitable presence, exists in something of her own world – a world that provides continual inspiration for her cartoons, which have been published in the Guardian’s G2 supplement, and now The Times’s similar Times2.

Karrie’s Guardian strips, which chronicled actual events in her life, referenced everything from religious tension in her childhood home, to the pretentious North London arts scene that she found herself in after moving away from her Edinburgh home.

“The Guardian stuff was very autobiographical. I found it quite exposing. Some people were like ‘put me in put me in’. Some people were in it quite a lot like my sister and my mum. It’s even weird seeing me in it, but I’m comfortable taking the piss out of myself.”

“I don’t paint myself in a very flattering light. With other people you’re much more aware that you have to respect how they want to be perceived.”



In my favourite of Karrie's G2 strips, Karrie and her sister board an airport buggy to speed up their transfer, before watching her father, I assume, strolls past on foot.

It is classic Karrie. Self-referential, and bizarre, but nonetheless strangely hilarious. Defining her style as "scribbley", Karrie's strips retain a 'back-of-the-napkin' feel. You can almost imagine her jotting one down as a particularly embarrassing childhood memory comes to mind.

Her Times cartoons, which will appear every Monday for 20 weeks, follow a story that's partly true, and partly Karrie-fiction.

"It's about a girl who loses her boyfriend at this crazy party and tries to find out what happens to him – it's a bit of a psychological murder mystery – she meets all these strange characters along the way, there's loads of hints and clues as to what happens."

While Karrie seems pretty sure about the plot, I'm still a little confused.

"It's a cross between a murder mystery and... I'm not going to say David Lynch... I just hope it goes down well."

Karrie drew the G2's backpage cartoon every Friday for several months before finding herself replaced by veteran male cartoonist Steve Bell, due to what see calls, in typical Karrie fashion, "the darstardly recession".

Bell, who now draws the G2's strip every day of the week, has worked as a cartoonist for the newspaper since 1981, and represents the other, more established side of the comic strip industry.

"The female element is interesting, there aren't a lot of women cartoonists, but the numbers are increasing," Karrie ponders: "Persepolis was directed by a woman, and Posy Simmonds, who's in her sixties now, she's a British comic artist who has done really well. Still, when I go comic conventions it's 90% men."

Karrie's move into cartoons, from her well-paid and highly-sought-after advertising job was a brave decision, but a rewarding one.

"I'm working part time, so while before I was working in advertising and every evening and weekend I was doing comics, now I've managed to go part time."

"I'm happy, I'm on half a salary now – so poor but happy. I've got half the week just sitting in my room and drawing. I'm getting arthritis in my arm, I don't want to stop it's really good fun. I recommend it," she giggles.

Karrie's website, on which she publishes all her work, welcomes adult visitors, one would assume, with a childlike introduction.

The dark side, however, is not lost, as she refers in a lighthearted manner to 'psychopaths in ballet'

slippers' and 'intimate relations with duvets', before breezily remarking that most accounts are 'autobiographical, believe it or not!'

'I'm not in it for the money you see. Just the fame and glory,' her website admits, introducing her 'hidden stash of free comic stories'. Karrie's personal touches are liberally splashed all over the colourful and hand-drawn portal.

A couple of national contracts are certainly promising, and Karrie's happy-go-lucky outlook to her new-found profession – if she would allow me that – masks a definite desire to make her mark.

"I think it's a good time for me to start out because I'm still breaking my teeth, and you don't expect everything immediately, I've given myself a wee while to earn a living from it."

"I quite like being a struggling artist. Having taken a paycut to do more comics, I've got to say I'm more happy. I'm not doing comics because it's a means to an end, so I can go on holiday. That's my message to York students," Karrie signs off coquettishly.

www.karriefransman.com



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