

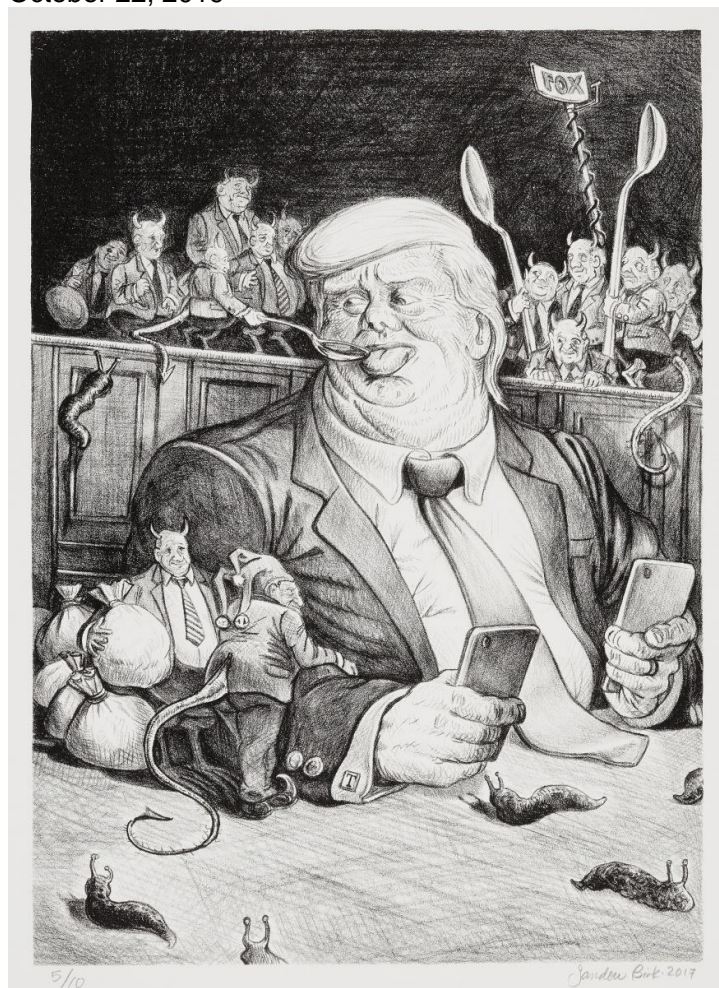
Sandow Birk

**AGO**

# Seriously funny

From Biblical horsemen to Donald Trump: a new AGO installation looks at political satire and its favourite subjects from 1800 to today.

October 22, 2019



Sadow Birk. *The Horrible & Terrible Deeds & Words of the Very Renowned Trumpagruel*, 2017. lithograph on paper, Sheet (each): 38 x 27.9 cm. Purchased as a gift of the Trier-Fodor Fund, 2018. Art Gallery of Ontario 2018/11.1-.11. © Sadow Birk

For centuries, satire and parody have been effective tools used by artists to critique political leaders and hold them to public account. Humour allows artists to wrap the raw truth in a package of lightness and relatability, communicating important messages through their art. You can see interesting examples of this technique in our new exhibition [Crossing the Line: Political Satire from 1800 to Today](#) – on view now through February 23, 2020 on Level 1 in the John & Nancy Mulvihill Gallery (Gallery 127).

In 1976, the AGO received a gift from the Trier-Fodor Foundation of more than 1,100 works by illustrator Walter Trier (1890–1951). This gift also included funds to support the AGO's future purchases of satirical and illustrative art. A recent acquisition, and the centrepiece of *Crossing the Line*, is the [Sadow Birk](#) series of lithographs, *The Horrible & Terrible Deeds & Words of the Very Renowned Trumpagruel* (image above).

Based on wood-engravings by Gustave Doré (1832–1883) for the book [The Adventures of Gargantua and Pantagruel](#) by François Rabelais (1494–1553), Birk creates elaborate black and white caricatures to offer a scathing portrayal of the current American president, Donald Trump. The president is shown as an oblivious giant glued to his cellphone, as Birk pokes fun at Trump's approach to critical issues like climate change and foreign policy.



James Gillray. *Presages of the Millenium*, 1795. etching and aquatint with watercolour on paper, 32.6 x 37.6 cm. Gift of the Trier-Fodor Foundation, 1985. © Art Gallery of Ontario 85/56

Though still relevant in this time of modern democracy (in many forms – think Stephen Colbert and Samantha Bee), political satire may have served a more important purpose in past centuries, when people had far fewer platforms to voice their opinions. James Gillray, famed caricaturist in late 18th century Britain, created iconic etchings that boldly critiqued the conduct of the royal family and leading politicians. *Presages of the Millenium* (pictured above) is a warning of apocalypse, inspired by the Bible's Four Horsemen. Commenting on British debates that occurred after the French revolution, Gillray illustrates Prime Minister William Pitt



mounting a horse and trampling rival politicians who opposed a war with France.

*Crossing the Line: Political Satire from 1800 to Today* also features the important work of Walter Trier (1890–1951), Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827), Honore Daumier (1808–1879), Duncan Ian Macpherson (1924–1993), Phil Mallette (b.1955) and Brian Gable (b.1949) – giving viewers more than enough biting satire to have you thinking critically while laughing out loud.

*Crossing the Line: Political Satire from 1800 to Today* is currently on view until February 23, 2020 on Level 1 in the John & Nancy Mulvihill Gallery (Gallery 127).

Admission to the AGO Collection and all special exhibitions is always free for AGO Members, AGO Annual Pass holders and visitors 25 and under. For more information, please visit the [website](#).