

Spotlight on Cartoonist

# Lillie J. Harris

From *The New Yorker* to Vermont



Lillie J. Harris didn't plan on becoming a cartoonist. Today, the artist is attending the Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction. Lillie's cartoons have been featured in prominent publications

including *The New Yorker* and DC's *Magic Bullet* as well as at the Vermont Folklife Center. Despite the growing accolades, Lillie remains a humble artist and graphic storyteller who simply enjoys creating art. "I've drawn for

most of my life, but only recently have I begun to start my career in cartooning and illustration," describing the work as "often rooted in wonder, frenetic and visceral, and purposely childlike, vibrant, playful." Lillie



Left: *Puppy Portrait*.  
 Below: *The Royals Son*.  
 Bottom: *The Eagle and the Beetle*.  
 Opposite: *March to Now*.



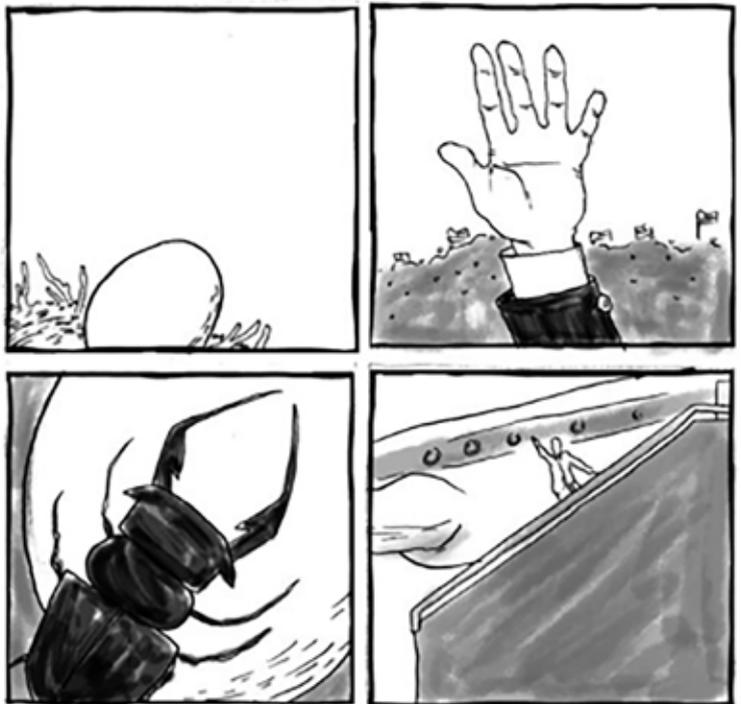
is continuously inspired by the cartoons of childhood, specifically the comedic timing in Chuck Jones's *Looney Tunes*.

The Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction is the only art school focused on teaching the medium of cartoon and graphic novel in the country. "The program definitely aided in unlocking necessary skills such as time management and book production," reflects Lillie. "I'm much more confident in my abilities now thanks to the curriculum."

#### UNPRECEDENTED?

Lillie's work was selected to be displayed with a few other artists at an upcoming exhibit at Burlington City Arts (BCA). The exhibit titled *Unprecedented?* (October 23, 2020 to January 30, 2021) "explores the psychological, social, and cultural impact of the extraordinary events of 2020 since the pandemic and intensifying demand for racial justice that has reshaped our world," says Heather Ferrell, Curator and Director of Exhibitions. Lillie hopes that the piece, titled *March to Now*, will show not just the grimness of the world right now but also remind the audience that there is still joy to be seen. *March to Now* is an illustration that shows "this very act of joy, play, and curiosity, while still staying true to the reality we're all facing," explains Lillie. "I've made it a purposeful act not to dwell on creating unnecessarily morbid pieces, at least for the time being." Lillie acknowledges that in these challenging times "I seek to depict more playfulness and joy." Before 2020, Lillie tended to "push my illustrations into more morose places but making the conscious choice to not is healing for me."

When asked if cartoons are created as a response to the current racial injustice happening in our world right now, Lillie thoughtfully states that "I don't create art solely for the sake of teaching about a specific



Below: Photo by Hard Art DC.  
Right: *Monster Parade*.



injustice or marginalization.” Instead, Lillie aims to share a narrative through storytelling and illustrations. “The storytelling aspect of cartooning is what brings me the most joy and being able to illustrate those stories always feels like the cherry on top.”

### NEW IDENTITIES AND COMMUNITIES

The Maryland native has been drawing ever since childhood but didn’t identify as a cartoonist until moving to Vermont. “Making the choice to study at the Center for Cartoon Studies in 2019 is what made the title of ‘cartoonist’ official for me.” Along the way, Lillie has been published, outlined and scripted a new project, and placed a heating pad over the drawing-hand wrist to prevent strain—a right of passage for many cartoonists. “All of those things seem to build onto the idea of ‘being a cartoonist’ for me,” Lillie adds, very humbly.

Lillie is also part of a group of artists that are often underrepresented in Vermont: the Black artist community. “The discomfort of



feeling as though you’re one of only a handful of other Black people in art space isn’t a new concept for me,” explains Lillie. “It’s always a joy to see other Black people around town, though.” One way that Lillie has connected with other Black artists is through JAG Productions, a theater company in White River Junction that focuses on works by and about Black people. “JAG Productions was the first Black artist community I found upon moving to Vermont. I really love the seclusion of Vermont (from a nature aspect) and the fact that people tend to be relatively friendly in a sincere way,” Lillie notes.

### DISPLAYING IN BURLINGTON

Lillie is thrilled to be a part of *Unprecedented?* at the BCA and is eager to be showcased in more Vermont venues. The BCA expects this will happen for the artist. “In *March to Now*, Lillie Harris creates a work that captures the confusion, anxiety, comfort, and uncertainty felt by so many children and families during the pandemic,” says Curator and Director of Exhibitions Ferrell. “Enlarged to an immense scale for *Unprecedented?*, Lillie’s contrast of vibrant colors with bold contour lines embody the tension and implicit narratives of this surreal moment in history.” Due to the

"March to Now is an illustration that shows this very act of joy, play, and curiosity, while still staying true to the reality we're all facing. It's my hope to blend the two adverse emotions of childlike wonder and apprehension together. Before 2020 I tended to want to push my illustrations into some morose places (I still do, at times). Making the conscious choice to depict playfulness and joy at this time is more rewarding for me, and healing, too."

—Lillie Harris

pandemic, Lillie's parents will not be able to celebrate in person, but they are cheering Lillie on from afar, as they have been along the way. "My dear friends graciously gave their physical copies of *The New Yorker* to my parents so they could hold the issue with my comic in their hands," Lillie says with a smile. "It was a very proud moment for my family."

*Unprecedented?* will be displayed October 23, 2020 to January 30, 2021 at Burlington City Arts. To view more of Lillie's work, visit [lilliejharris.com](http://lilliejharris.com) or the comic distributor, RadiatorComics.com.

### Burlington City Arts

135 Church Street  
Burlington, VT  
(802) 865-7166  
[www.burlingtoncityarts.org](http://www.burlingtoncityarts.org)

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