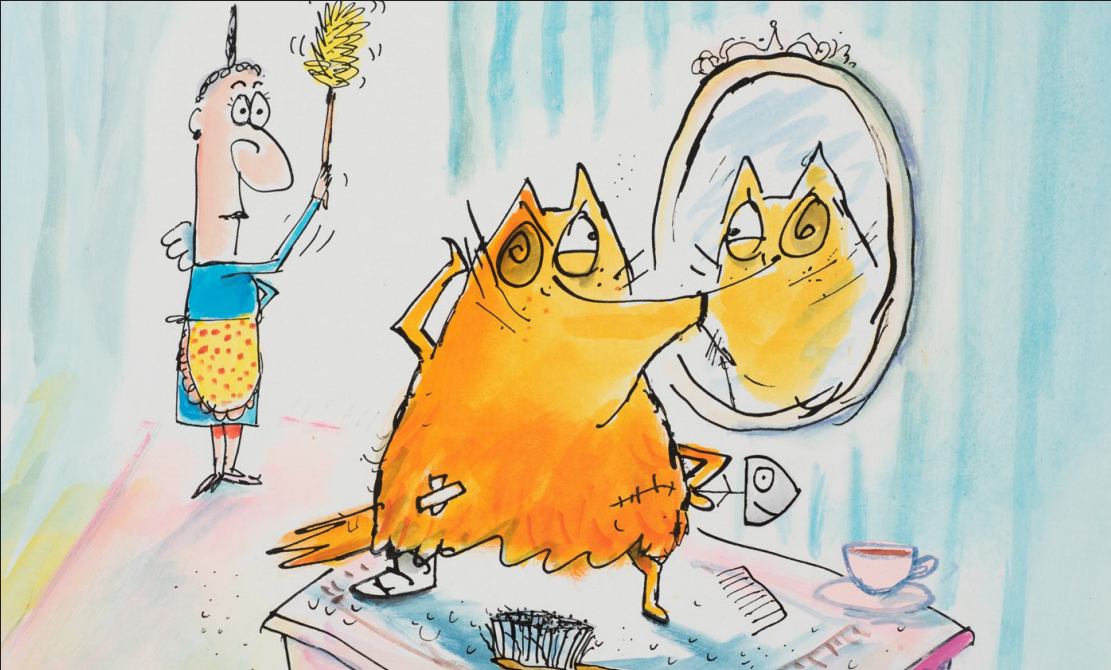


Leigh HOBBS: Cast of Characters





On Leigh Hobbs and Old Tom

With one eye a wild expression of greed and cheek and the other a spiral, mining the subconscious, Leigh Hobbs' Old Tom has the genius of complete identification. This mad, bad and mighty unclean cat is the manifestation of the pure child in us all – irrepressibly self-interested, brilliantly naughty and totally lovable.

What is so wonderful about the Old Tom books is that, from the first page, Hobbs leaps into the story like a kid jumping into a puddle. And, as Old Tom feigns sickness and watches his owner (Angela) "dust and wipe and brush and sweep all by herself", or leads her through a merry dance as he rampages through the neighbourhood, do we feel sorry for Angela? Not a bit.

Old Tom is a big resounding "yes" for children who live in a world of "nos". In all these hilarious adventures... Hobbs is right on the beating heart of what it is to be a child.

Hobbs never fobs off children with lame facsimiles of feelings and emotions. With his ears pricked up for the potential in every moment, in every sidelong look and manifestation in a doorway, Old Tom embodies the courage and cheek it takes to be genuinely creative. His creator obviously has both, in spades.

Meg Sorensen, Sydney Morning Herald, November 2003

The Cast: Old Tom

Old Tom was first published in 1994 by Penguin Books. I'd illustrated a number of children's books by then but didn't really relate to the stories or the characters I was illustrating, and so came up with one of my own, Old Tom.

He began developing as a character in my head in the late 80s. I had a strong impression of what his personality was like as well as his appearance. I wanted a feral, funny, naughty but not nasty character rather like a mischievous schoolboy.



I combined that with a neat, orderly, matronly woman who 'lives on her own and likes it that way'. And so we end up with a story about the love between opposites. Angela adores Old Tom in spite of her endless attempts to socialise her adopted 'son'. I developed in these books a way of using words to say one thing while the picture suggests something quite different.

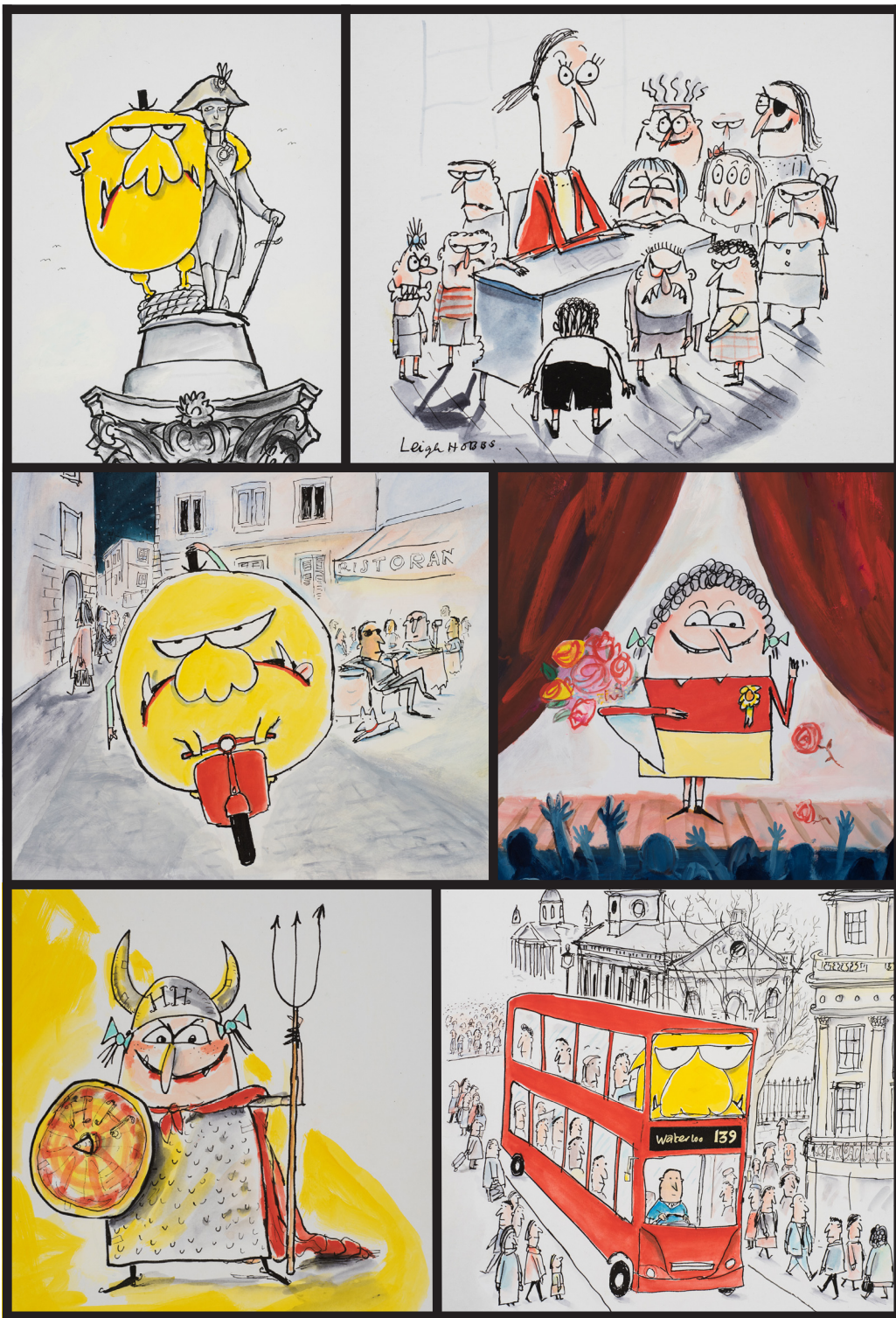
My books are primarily character studies and I have an intuitive feeling for each character. With each book the reader and I get to know them more.

Humour is a constant through my stories. I don't consciously set out to make them funny but somehow the characters demand it through the situations they find themselves in.

The best thing about being an author/illustrator is creating and sustaining a personal 'world' for my own characters to inhabit and develop in. One which I hope my readers can share and enjoy.

Leigh Hobbs





Mr Chicken

Mr Chicken first appears in *Hooray for Horrible Harriet*:

Tired of being friendless, Horrible Harriet can wait no longer, so up in her room in the roof she 'makes a friend' - literally, using a secret recipe combined with what looks like a frozen chicken. After a puff of smoke Mr Chicken appears. At first it looks like Horrible Harriet has made a friend at last. It also looks like Leigh Hobbs has created his strangest character yet. Before long Mr Chicken has worn out his welcome with Horrible Harriet and proceeded out into the wider world to have adventures of his own in three picture books.

Mr Chicken Goes to Paris, followed by *Mr Chicken Lands on London* and *Mr Chicken Arriva A Roma...* and soon, Mr Chicken will be travelling around Australia.

Hobbs says: "Kids really like Mr Chicken, I think because he's an affront to the adult world. My mother's reaction confirmed this idea. When she saw him for the first time she said: 'Oh no, you've gone too far this time. You've never known when to stop.' I suspected then that with Mr Chicken I was on a winner."

Mr Chicken Lands on London is in fact a love story about a place. London is Mr Chicken's favourite city in all the world. It also happens to be Leigh Hobbs' too:

"I'd always wanted to do something about London. Having one of my characters act out one of my visits within the covers of a picture book seemed like the perfect vehicle to express my fascination and fondness for it."

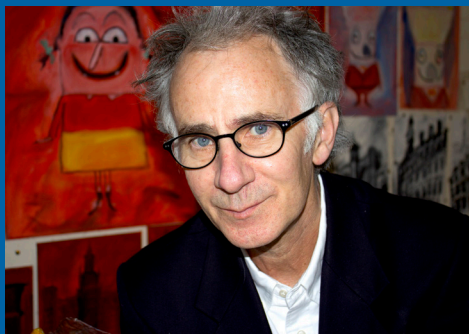
Mike Shuttleworth

Horrible Harriet

I think the kids who like my stories are primarily engaged by the characters as well as the humour. I suspect that they sense a good heartedness within the story as far as how the characters relate to each other and the world in general. I like to think that I do this in a genuine, uncorny way. Even Horrible Harriet is a ridiculous attention seeker rather than being particularly horrible. She is like the school freak. Horrible Harriet is different, very different, hence the Horrible nickname. One of the worst things for a child is to feel different, excluded and apart from the group and this seems to be Horrible Harriet's fate.

Leigh Hobbs

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12pm – 5pm Saturday



Photograph: Sergio Fontana.

Leigh Hobbs is an artist and author who works across a wide range of mediums. He is perhaps best known in Australia and in the UK however, for the children's books he has written and illustrated featuring his characters Old Tom, Fiona the Pig, Horrible Harriet, Mr Badger, the Freaks in 4F and Mr Chicken.

Old Tom was adapted into an animated TV series and Horrible Harriet appeared on stage earlier this year at the Sydney Opera House.

Mr Chicken Goes to Paris was shortlisted for the Prime Ministers Literary awards in 2010 and is a very popular title on sale in the Louvre Museum Bookshop in Paris. Leigh is the current Australian Children's Laureate 2016 – 2017.

Leigh Hobbs: Cast of Characters 9 August - 10 September

All artwork courtesy of the artist

Mr Chicken atop Nelson's Column from 'Mr Chicken Lands on London'

2014
ink and gouache on paper
30 x 22 cm

Finished artwork for 'Old Tom's Big Book of Beauty'

2007
ink and gouache on paper
35 x 30 cm

Finished artwork for 'Old Tom's Big Book of Beauty'

2007
ink and gouache on paper
35 x 29.5 cm

Mr Chicken at the Vatican, double-page spread for 'Mr Chicken Arriva a Roma'

2016
mixed media
63.5 x 30 cm

Illustration for 4F for FREAKS - Miss Corkers Revenge

2013
ink and gouache on paper
24 x 21 cm

Mr Chicken Arriva a Roma

2016
ink and gouache on paper
42 x 32cm

Cover Art for 'Hooray for Horrible Harriet'

2004
ink and gouache on paper
41.5 x 33 cm

Cover Art for 'Horrible Harriet's Inheritance'

2012
ink and gouache on paper
38.5 x 29.5 cm

Mr Chicken on Bus Outside St Martins from 'Mr Chicken Lands on London'

2014
ink and gouache on paper
32 x 30.5 cm

Photographic reproductions by Ian Hill