

## Groening tips sacred cows

By Ted Anthony  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Los Angeles (AP) At first glance, he's living an unexceptional Chamber of Commerce existence: league bowling on the weekends, singing in a barber-shop quartet and operating the best-known convenience store in metropolitan Springfield, USA.

But Apu Nahasapeem-apetilon has a darker side: the chutney Squishees he once tried to force upon an unsuspecting populace. His role in the off-off-off-off-Broadway production of "Streetcar!" (liberally adapted from Tennessee Williams). The flash-frozen senior citizen who once inhabited his dairy case.

You know Apu. He's a lot like you and me—his successes pinned proudly to his polyester Kwik-E Mart frock, his failures stashed furtively under the counter behind the food-service cans of Reagan-era nacho cheese.

Except Apu exists only in a cosmos of pen and ink, of bright yellows and popping eyes. He's a member of an unusual animated flock, sprung from the mind of an even more unusual genius: the man whose brain produced "The Simpsons"—and the new sci-fi cartoon "Futurama"—the man whose pointed humor has, for more than a decade, made lots of people laugh and lots of people uncomfortable.

"We don't have a particular ax to grind," he insists.

So instead, with smiles and jabs and idealism and sarcasm, Matt Groening grinds them all.

One day, somewhere in the middle of the baby boom, a young

boy in a sandbox looked around at his playmates. Suddenly, he saw their futures: lawyers, investment bankers, grown-ups in grown-up suits. And Matt Groening realized being a kid wasn't such a bad gig.

"I knew that other kids were going to get serious and go on and be professionals," says Groening (rhymes with "raining"). "I never wanted to go to an office and carry a briefcase. I said, 'That's no fun. I want to play. I want to make up stories.'"

Four decades later, at 45, he still does.

He made up "Life in Hell," a weekly comic strip that chronicles the travails of a rabbit named Binky and a nihilistic gay couple in fez hats named Akbar and Jeff. He created "The Simpsons," the delightfully astute late 20th-century family sitcom and a winner of 12 Emmys. Now he has hatched "Futurama," an equally offbeat cartoon that blends "The Simpsons" with "The Jetsons," "The Three Stooges" and a hodgepodge of sci-fi imagery.

Groening's vision, rounded out by a team of animators and writers from across the political spectrum, evokes many descriptions: absurdist theater; crackling cultural commentary; a vast collage of American pop and high culture; the rapid-fire dialogue of Marx Brothers movies and the lunacy of Warner Bros. cartoons.

Hardly Saturday-morning "Josie & the Pussycats" or "Smurfs" fare. View an episode of "The Simpsons" and watch the background. Little treats abound — rewards, Groening says, for

## Laing winners announced



COURTESY THE ART DEPARTMENT

Jessica Robertson and Josh Lynch

By Daniel Snyder  
STAFF WRITER

Last week, the winners of the 1999 Laing Award were announced by the Guilford College Art Department.

Cam Ingram took first place for sculpture, Jessica Roberts, second place for photography, and Josh Lynch came away with third place for pottery.

The Laing Award is a prize juried by the Art Department

for returning Art majors.

Participants are allowed to submit up to five pieces of work.

"This award serves as recognition for outstanding artistic work," said Adele Wayman.

The winners will divide the cash award which goes toward next year's tuition.

"It's the one prize the Art Department has to give," said Susie Clark. "It's a really big deal."

## 1999 Senior Thesis Art Exhibition



SUSAN MULLALLY CLARK

Opening Reception: Friday, May 30th  
7:00-9:00 p.m., Founders Hall

Exhibition on view: April 30th- May 9th

paying attention. Hidden in plain view are indictments of consumerism, jabs at bureaucracy and pokes at pretension. It is, quite simply, adult.

Consider these recent nuggets: an art museum named "Louvre—American Style" ("No shirt, no shoes, no Chardonnay"); an unrepentantly carnivorous steakhouse with a slab of beef called "Sir Loinalot" and a Heimlich machine in case of emergency; a sign that says, "Welcome to Atlanta — Home of Ted Turner's mood swings."

Groening and his writers (his official title is executive producer, but he retains great creative control) push to the edge of hilarity but never complete implausibility.

"A lot of television shows ... don't deal with the things people are ashamed to admit. We can do that," says Dan Castellaneta, who voices Homer Simpson and an array of other characters, including belching barfly Barney Gumble and flame-bearded, Scottish-brogued Groundskeeper Willie.

"It's the first television show that has an underground comic sensibility," Castellaneta says in a decidedly un-Homeric voice. "Very rarely do people talk about major corporations and companies taking away people's rights. In 'The Simpsons,' it just sneaks in there."

Even Groening's own network isn't safe. One episode featured Homer and Bart watching "Nonstop Fox," featuring "When Buildings Collapse" and "World's Funniest Tornadoes."

"I think what we all share is laughing at the Elmer Fudds of the world — authorities who don't like to be laughed at," Groening says of his writers.

This notion — that no cow is sacred — renders the Simpsons affectionately benign. Sure, Apu is a broad parody of an Indian convenience-store owner, but Homer is an equally broad parody of a second-rate suburban white American father. In the end, everybody's good, everybody's bad and everybody's a bit ridiculous — sort of like real life.