

Rolling Into War, Rolling Into Art

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In the late 1930s, Europe teetered on the verge of what would soon become The 1939-1945 War, or to Americans, the Second World War. Out in Hungary, one newspaper editor was frustrated. He wasted far too much time filling up fountain pens and cleaning up smudged pages. He was annoyed that the sharp tip of his fountain pen often tore the paper.

Mr. László Bíró had noticed that inks used in newspaper printing dried quickly, leaving the paper dry and smudge free. He decided to create a pen using the same type of ink.

Since, when tried, this viscous ink would not flow into a regular fountain pen nib, Bíró, with the help of his brother György, a chemist, began to work on designing new types of pens.

Mr. Bíró fitted this pen with a tiny ball in its tip that was free to turn in a socket. As the pen moved along the paper, the ball rotated, picking up ink from the ink cartridge and leaving it on the paper.

On 15 June 1938, Mr. Bíró filed a British patent.

Although the pen may be mightier than the sword, when this Jewish-Hungarian journalist László Bíró invented the ballpoint pen in the 1930s, clichéd sayings were probably the last thing on his mind.

It was in 1938 that The Wall Street Journal summed up Mr. Bíró's invention: "a simple but remarkable invention came into a world about to be convulsed by death and destruction."

In hindsight, The Journal got it dead right; literally so.

Three months after the patent filing, on 29 September 1938, Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich, this time accompanied by French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier. The next day, Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier signed the Munich Pact, endorsing Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland.

All that occurred, by the way, without even consulting with the Czechoslovak government.

When Chamberlain returned to London with the friendship treaty (sic) in hand, he infamously announced from 10 Downing Street, "My good friends, this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street, peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time."

The very next day, on 1 October, Hitler's army entered the Sudetenland. It was greeted by pro-Nazi Sudeten separatist leader Konrad Henlein, whose SS-trained militia had staged one provocation after another against the Edvard Beneš government for the past year. President Beneš resigned.

Within days, Czechoslovakia no longer existed. Salami-like, it had been sliced up amongst Germany, Hungary, and Poland.

In 1941 the Bíró brothers and a friend, Juan Jorge Meyne, fled Nazi Germany's onslaughts and moved to Argentina. On 10 June, they filed another patent and formed Bíró Pens of Argentina. The pen was sold in Argentina under the Birome brand (portmanteau of Bíró and Meyne), which is how ballpoint pens are still known in that country.

László was known in Argentina as Ladislao José Bíró. His new design was licensed by the British, who produced ballpoint pens for Royal Air Force (RAF) aircrew as the Biro. The RAF were delighted that this worked far better than fountain pens at high altitude; decreased atmospheric pressure made fountain pens prone to leaking ink.

Much of this has always struck me as a rather hollow homage to such a clever pair of minds. Why?

Although the basic design of the ballpoint pen persists to this day, Mr. Bíró's financial stake did not last nearly so long. In the years that followed, the inventor slowly lost shares in his company. The inventive brothers never saw a penny from their invention.

At one point B r  had to choose between keeping his remaining shares or selling them to help his family flee to Argentina. Understandably, he had no regrets about bartering to save lives.

Yet today, in any office in Britain, one never hears anyone ask for what Americans call a "ball point"; rather, the "Biro" remains the name.

As you are about to see, today's Biro has indeed come into its own. Every once in a while someone's gift of his or her art seizes your psyche and demands both one's attention and respect.

Now that's how to doodle: The incredible pictures that look like photographs drawn with a ballpoint pen

If you think these incredible images are photos, think again. They are in fact probably the world's most intricate doodles.

It may be hard to believe but the pictures below are created using standard ballpoint pens bought from places like Staples, eBay, Amazon and, the artist says, any good office supply store.

They're drawn by Portugal-based attorney Samuel Silva, who describes his art as a hobby. However, this is no ordinary hobby – sometimes he works on a piece for up to 50 hours.

Like a photo: Portugal-based attorney Samuel Silva, 29, describes his art as a hobby.

Silva has drawn images of wildlife, recreated masterpieces like Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring and copied iconic photos so accurately they're almost indistinguishable from the original.

For his Redhead Girl, based on a photograph by Russian photographer Kristina Taraina, the 29-year-old used six different colored ballpoint pens which took some 30 hours to finish.

To create such vibrant colours, Silva "cross hatches" in layers to give off the illusion of additional hues and depth.

For Silva, ballpoint pens are just one of the many mediums he is attempting to master. However, he writes on his DeviantArt page: "I'm just a lawyer, art is just a hobby for me, although it takes from five to 50 hours to finish each drawing."

Silva, who started sketching when he was two, said: "I started developing my own style of ballpoint pen drawing back when I was in school, in simple classroom sketches in the back of my exercise books.

Speaking about his picture of a Sumatran tiger, which took around 20 hours to finish, Silva said: "This one is wild, that's why I love it."

After finishing this work, Silva said: "Eight hours to finish. Just another quick doodle. Or call it a study or sketch. My first eagle head ever."

On this piece, Silva said: "Originally I intended to spend 100 hours with this, and still I never spent so many hours with any drawing, in the end impatience won and I'll not work on this one anymore."

"I never imagined there were so many brilliantly masterful ballpoint artists out there. Ballpoint pen is not my only medium, it's just the one I'm currently trying to master.

"At this point in my life I'm proficient with chalk, pencil, color pencil, pastels, oils and acrylics. Maybe one day I'll create an account just to share those.

"I'm just glad to be here, I want to learn a lot, see a lot, and enjoy to its fullest what other fellow artists have to share.

Silva said the original size of this drawing of a cat's face is about the same as two credit cards.

The painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is one of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer's masterworks, but Silva copied it using ballpoint.

This was Silva's first ever picture of a jaguar. It took him 15 hours to complete.

'It takes me forever to do my works. The only thing that makes me keep going is my love for what I do and the ambition to go further and further.

'Ballpoint pens are as underestimated as they are a powerful medium.'

Speaking about his picture of a Sumatran tiger, which took around 20 hours to finish, Silva said: 'I always wanted to draw a tiger, I love felines and decided to draw my first tiger ever, I hope you like it.

'This one is wild, that's why I love it. Big felines are not meant for zoos.'

It staggers me that Sr. Silva is a mere 29 years of age. His career is just beginning. Our futures are brightened by his talent.

For those who are interested in endings, Mr. B'iro's remains are buried in London's Hampstead Cemetery along with what even he might consider a most unlikely coterie.

Also there are Joseph Lister, or, 1st Baron Lister OM, FRS, PC, the British surgeon who pioneered antiseptic surgery; the music hall star Marie Lloyd; and Grand Duke Michael Michaelovich of Russia, the uncle to Nicholas II, the last Czar of Russia.

Mr. B'iro would know that Queen Victoria's daughter, Alice, was the mother of Alexandra, wife of Czar Nicolas II.

Although Nicholas II himself was not a descendant of Queen Victoria, nonetheless, both of them (Nicholas II and Queen Victoria) were several generations descended from King George II of England.

Additionally, George V of England and Czar Nicholas II of Russia were first cousins through their mothers. George's mother, Alexandra of Denmark, and Nicholas's mother, Dagmar of Denmark, were sisters.

Queen Elizabeth II's husband, Prince Philip, is a direct descendant of the Romanovs. Indeed, it was his DNA which was used to identify all Romanov family remains.

After this genetic testing, those remains were finally interred at St. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Saint Petersburg on 17 July 1998, eighty years after they were murdered by the Bolsheviks.

Whatever would L'aszl' B'iro, a Hungarian Jew, think of all of this?

Given what I know of the Hungarians over some 48 years, as a newspaperman, the first thing he'd do would be to write the story. Thereafter, he'd shrug, laugh and offer endless glasses of a fine P'alinka!

Kedves egeszsegere! To your health!

Source: Scott Brown's Cerebral Caffeine

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