

● Miffy comes to London to celebrate her 55th birthday. *Right:* Her creator is still going strong at 83



## Dick Bruna

Meet the man behind Miffy

● She has her own museum, her own TV show, has appeared on stamps in Japan and Holland, and acted as official tourist ambassador for New York. She's been on cashmere sweaters by fashion designer Clements Ribeiro and is currently immortalised in a field in Japan, made from 40,000 tulips!

One of Holland's most famous exports, is a little white rabbit.

Miffy was created by Dick Bruna to amuse his son during a rainy seaside holiday some 55 years ago. An illustrator and designer, Bruna was born in Utrecht where he still works today. As his stories about Miffy became more popular, he left his job in publishing and became a full time children's book creator. Turning 83 this month, he continues to work every day on new stories and Miffy merchandise.

Over 80 million books sold around the world in 50 languages confirm the children's character and icon of simple design as a global phenomenon. Hugely popular in Japan, where Miffy receives a level of love usually reserved for the more kitsch Hello Kitty brand, Bruna's unintentional merchandise empire is worth US \$300m a year, which includes themed hotel

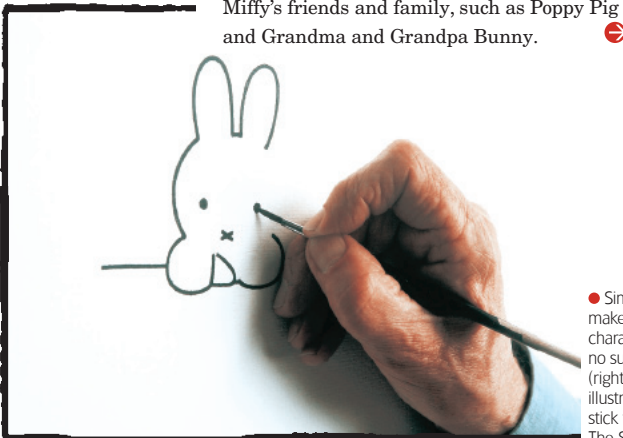


"Chatting to laid-back creator Dick Bruna brought back memories of sitting on my grandfather's knee having Miffy stories read to me; I dug out my old children's books the moment I got home!"  
WIZZ writer Georgina Wilson-Powell

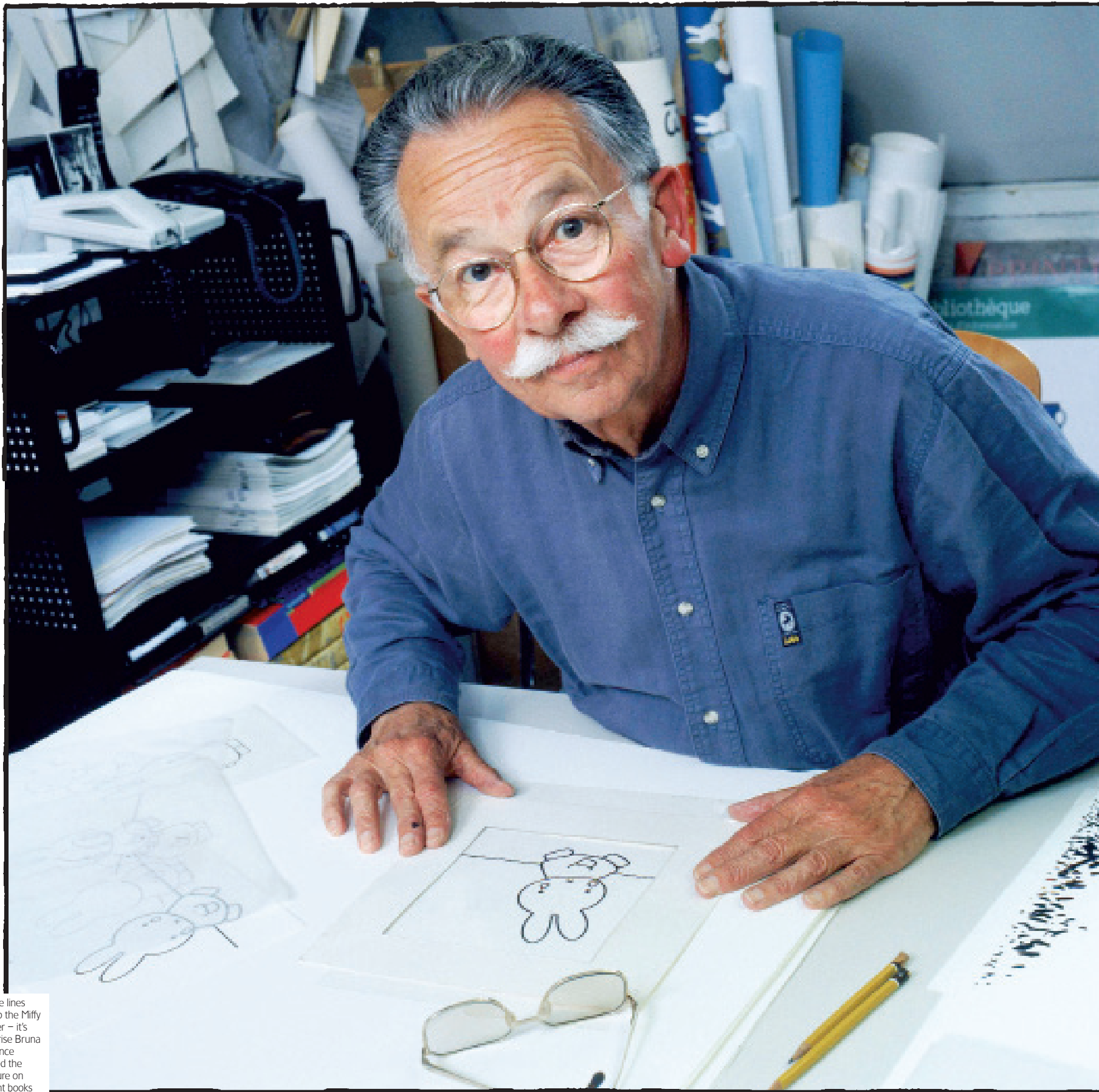
rooms in Hong Kong, suitcases, bicycle helmets and kids' rattles.

Miffy's worldwide and timeless appeal lies in her simple form. "What matters is reducing everything to its essence, so that no line is redundant. That is the strength of simplicity: the art of omission" says Bruna.

With 30 books about Miffy's adventures under his belt, each image is pared back to the smallest number of lines and features that Bruna feels necessary to convey her situations. In total he has produced over 120 books, which also relate the adventures of Miffy's friends and family, such as Poppy Pig and Grandma and Grandpa Bunny. ➔



● Simple lines make up the Miffy character – it's no surprise Bruna (right) once illustrated the stick figure on The Saint books



“These simple shapes and empty space leave room for children’s imaginations”



→ “I’m a perfectionist and therefore always strive to make each drawing better than the last one,” he states.

Every image Bruna produces is hand drawn using watercolours, perhaps up to a hundred times before he is completely happy with it, then coloured in using the same block palette he started with 55 years ago.

“These simple shapes and empty space leave room for children’s imaginations,” he says. “I always imagine there is a small child sitting watching me, checking that my work is appropriate for them.”

Before Miffy was born, Bruna had worked in his family’s publishing house illustrating book jackets and posters. In the early 1960s he designed covers for Leslie Charteris’ The Saint character and George Simenon’s Maigret books. His eye-catching, modish style has been commissioned by Amnesty International, World Aids Day and UNICEF.

Surprisingly his world has changed relatively little over the years. Bruna still leaves his wife a drawing every day before



● Left: Miffy has the key to a successful comic strip

Right: Even the street signs get in on the success

cycling to his studio to work on new Miffy adventures every morning, and spends time every afternoon replying by hand to children’s letters. He’s often waylaid by Japanese tourists at his favourite en-route café, but he takes it all in his stride. “I have quite an exhausting day but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Bruna’s quest for apparent effortlessness in his style has been influenced by Matisse and Léger. As Holland’s most successful living and working artist, a museum in Utrecht was opened in 2006 dedicated to his work and to Miffy’s exciting life. Dick Bruna House, opposite the Centraal Museum, takes

visitors through Bruna’s journey as an artist and also displays his other, equally iconic, non-rabbit based work.

At 55 years old, just like her older creator, Miffy shows no sign of slowing down. This is one rabbit with plenty of children left to entertain; a multi-generational icon whose stories and books have been passed down since the 1950s and, in contrast to a more advanced world, her lack of complication is her lifeline. Bruna describes his hand-drawn style as her “heartbeat” and with a character this healthy, Miffy might just live forever. ●

[www.miffy.com](http://www.miffy.com),  
[www.dickbrunahuis.com](http://www.dickbrunahuis.com)