BEIRUT: The late Mahmoud Kahil was best known for his satirical drawings, but according to his daughter Dana Trometer, he never considered himself merely an artist. “My dad always called himself a journalist; he never called himself a cartoonist. He thought a cartoon could say more than an entire article,” she told The Daily Star.

Kahil will be honored Thursday with the launch of a coffee table book including some 350 of his original drawings that take aim at Arab and international politics, as well as prizes in his name recognizing young Arab talent in the fields of comics, cartoons and illustration.

The awards are sponsored by the American University of Beirut, where Kahil studied, and will include a substantial financial reward.

Kahil was born in Mina, Tripoli, in 1936 and attended the Evangelical School there before enrolling in the AUB.

After graduation, Kahil began working for a number of Arabic and English language newspapers, including The Daily Star.

After the start of the Civil War, when many journalists and activists were targeted for their political stances, Kahil moved to London, where he would go on to help found the pan-Arab daily, Asharq al-Awsat. He continued to work for the paper as a designer and cartoonist, publishing thousands of satirical pieces over a career that spanned some five decades.

Kahil passed away on Feb. 11, 2003, and was survived by his daughter, son and wife.

Kahil was dedicated to pointing out corruption, hypocrisy and oppression where he saw it, and pulled no punches, attacking every major Arab political leader, Trometer said.

“The cause that was most important for my dad was the Palestinian cause and, freedom of expression, and these are the biggest sections in the book,” which is divided into six thematic chapters, she said. “Political cartoons were a weapon ... He knew that his art would be jeopardized if he stayed as a political cartoonist in Lebanon.”

Thursday’s event to celebrate the book, “According to Kahil,” will be held at the Audi Villa in Ashrafieh; 26 drawings will be exhibited and films will be shown of Kahil at work in the ‘50s and ’60s.

The Mahmoud Kahil Foundation, in association with the Mu’taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative at the AUB, will also announce the first annual Mahmoud Kahil Award.
Winners will be chosen from five categories including political satire, graphic novel, comic strip, graphic design and children’s illustration, and will receive cash prizes.

“We want to honor him ... to put my dad to rest and in a way to revive him for the younger generation and for the older generation,” Trometer said.