



ACADÉMIE
DES BEAUX-ARTS
INSTITUT DE FRANCE

THE NINTH ART

LA BANDE DESSINÉE
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LA LETTRE DE L'ACADÉMIE
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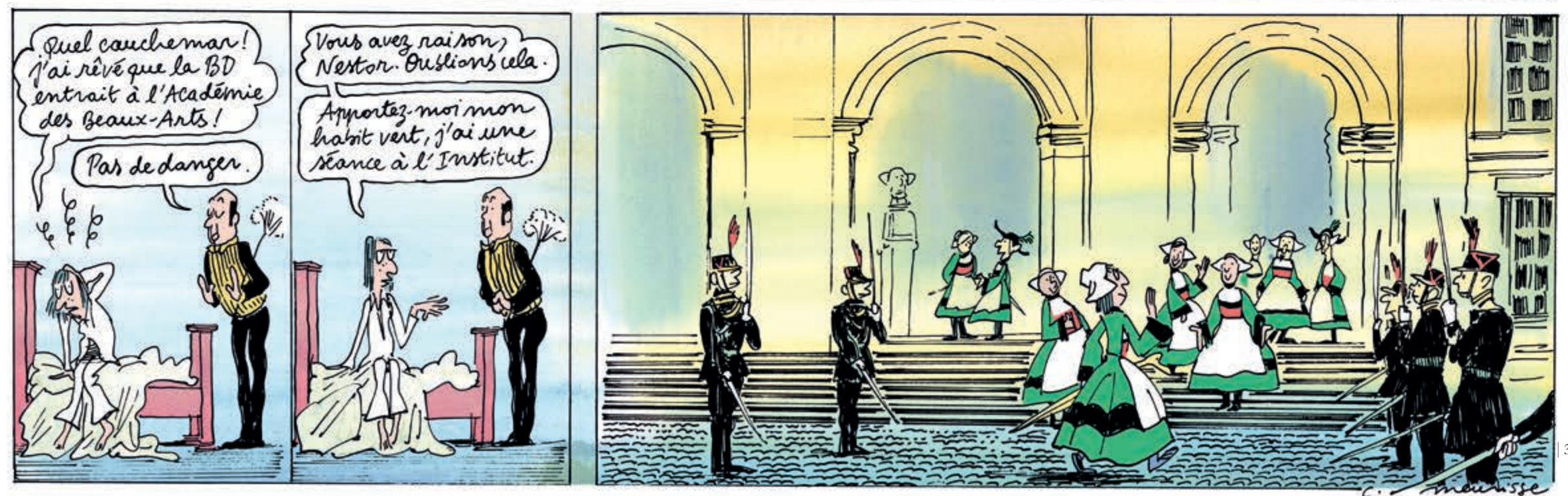
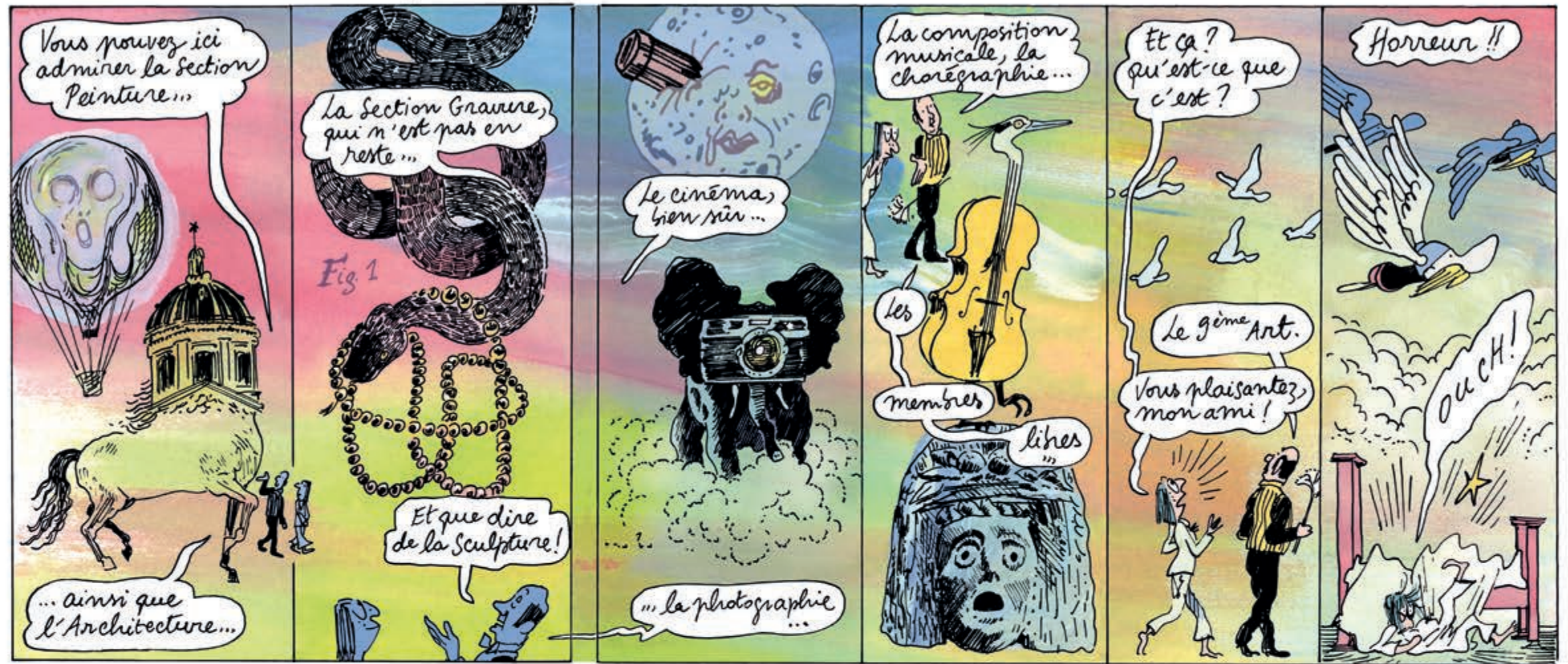
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Pavillon Comtesse de Caen – Palais de l'Institut de France

« ITINÉRANCE 2021 »

AN EXHIBITION OF ARTISTS FROM CASA DE VELÁZQUEZ – ACADEMIE DE FRANCE IN MADRID

The group exhibition “Itinérance 2021”, which showcases works from the 2019-2020 year of resident artists from the Académie de France in Madrid – the artistic section of the Casa de Velázquez – was presented by the Académie des Beaux-Arts from 12 February to 21 March at the Institut de France’s Pavillon Comtesse de Caen.

The exhibition “Itinérance 2021” was diverse by definition, bringing together a wide range of disciplines, from painting to video art, to drawing, architecture, and film. It included works by eleven artists who were members of the Académie de France in Madrid in 2019-2020, and two artists who were awarded grants from the city of Valencia and from Zaragoza’s *Diputación Provincial*, respectively.

This exhibition reflected a year of residency marked by the pandemic and as such afforded an opportunity to appreciate the extent to which artists are the world’s pulse. Confined to their studios, far from home, the members of the Académie de France in Madrid were observers of an exceptionally troubled time. Immersed in this situation, they used it to explore with intensity the fragility of bodies or of territories, the limits of representation, of intimacy and more, with recourse to fiction on some occasions and to artifice on others. Thus, the works of the artists in the 2019-2020 year offer a glimpse of the creative energy that has inhabited the Casa de Velázquez for a whole year. The fact of exhibiting them together in the same place – the Palais de l’Institut de France’s

Pavillon Comtesse de Caen – shines a light on the diversity of practices as well as the points of synergy that emerged among residents.

For the “Itinérance 2021” exhibition, the time in Paris was both an occasion for the public to discover contemporary creation in residence, and a living testimony to the historical ties between the Académie des Beaux-Arts and the Casa de Velázquez.

The Académie des Beaux-Arts has been a tutelary body to the Académie de France in Madrid for more than a century. It plays an important role in supporting resident artists, especially through its participation in selecting prospective residents and monitoring projects throughout the year.

Artists exhibited: **Thomas Andrea Barbey, Pierre Bellot, Marine De Contes, Hugo Deverchère, Clément Fourment, Sara Kamalvand, Leticia Martínez Pérez, Benjamin Mouly, Francisco Rodríguez Teare, Guillaume Valenti, Keke Vilabelda, Justin Weiler and Katarzyna Wiesiolek** ■

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Top: Marine de Contes, *La disparition*, 2020, colour print on cotton paper, 70 x 110 cm.

Above: Thomas Andrea Barbey, *Intérieur, Décembre*, 2020, acrylic on paper, 70 x 100 cm.

Right: Katarzyna Wiesiolek, *Août II*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 70 x 100cm.

Right page: views of the exhibition, Palais de l'Institut de France's Pavillon Comtesse de Caen.
Photo credit: Juliette Agnel



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PIERRE DAVID-WEILL – ACADÉMIE DES BEAUX- ARTS DRAWING PRIZE 2021

The Pierre David-Weill – Académie des Beaux-Arts Drawing Prize was created in 1971 by Académie member Pierre David-Weill, and has been actively supported for almost forty years by his son Michel David-Weill, also a member of the Académie. It encourages the practice of drawing, a fundamental part of artistic creation, among new generations of artists. Due to the health situation, the Académie has chosen to offer a digital presentation of the works awarded by the jury, instead of the initially scheduled exhibition at the Palais de Institut de France's Pavillon Comtesse de Caen, from 7 April to 2 May 2021.

This year's jury was composed of members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts' painting, sculpture and engraving sections Jean Anguera, Pierre Carron, Pierre Collin, Érik Desmazières, Philippe Garel, Catherine Meurisse, Yves Millecamps, Jean-Michel Othoniel and Brigitte Terziev.

In 2021, the Pierre David-Weill – Académie des Beaux-Arts Drawing Prizes were awarded to Clément Vuillier (first prize, €8,000), Joshua Durrant (second prize, €4,000) and Lucile Piketty (third prize, €2,000). Two of the artists, Clémence Wach and Alexandre Zhu, also received special commendation.

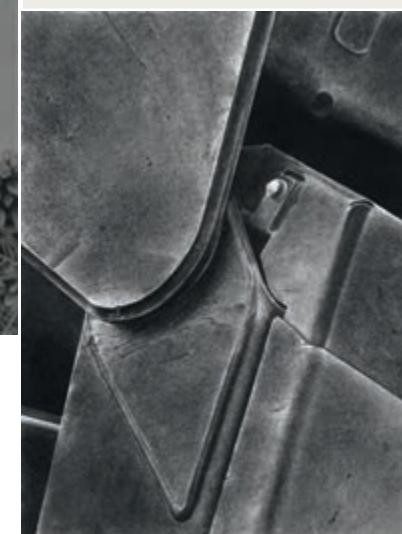
Clément Vuillier (first prize), born in 1989, is an artist specialized in drawing, a comic book and graphic novel author, and a printmaker (silkscreen and risograph). He graduated in illustration from the École Estienne in Paris and from the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg in 2012. His works are often published by the publishing house "3 fois par jour", which he co-founded with Idir Davaine and Sébastien Desplat in 2010, and he collaborates with the publishing house "2024" (see page 38), the art publisher RMN Grand Palais, and the magazines *Reliefs*, *Télérama*, and *Socialter*. He has published several books, including *Nous partîmes 500* (2014), *Le voyage céleste extatique* (2015), *Les succulentes* (2018), and *L'année de la comète* (2019).

Visual artist and musician **Joshua Durrant** (second prize) was born in 1996. He obtained the *diplôme national d'arts plastiques* in 2017 and graduated in 2019 from the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts d'Angers. For several years now, he has been combining drawing (mainly with charcoal) and musical compositions to experiment with the elaboration of a delicate imaginary universe, complete with many mental peregrinations of which he is both the orchestrator and the curious spectator. He has held numerous solo exhibitions, especially in Angers.

Lucile Piketty (third prize), born in 1990, graduated in engraving from the École Estienne and from the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris (2015). Winner of the 2016 Lacourrière printmaking prize, Lucile Piketty was a member of the Casa de Velázquez (Madrid) in 2017-2018 and then a resident at the Cité Internationale des Arts in 2019. The search for the representation of time is a constant feature of her work, as are all the themes related to it.

Clémence Wach (Commended) is a self-taught artist. She was born in 1982 and lives and works in Burgundy where she created the drawing and painting school l'Atelier du Faubourg. In her work, she uses various techniques, alone or mixed.

Alexandre Zhu (Commended) is of Chinese descent and was born in Paris in 1993. He studied at the Atelier de Sèvres, at the School of Visual Art in New York and at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris, from which he graduated in 2018. His work, which is exhibited in France, Italy, Morocco and Belgium, is essentially defined by charcoal drawing, but also extends to sculpture and photography. ■



Top left: Clément Vuillier, *Feu 12*, pen and ink on Schollerhammer Duria paper, 40 x 28.5 cm, 2017.

Top right: Joshua Durrant, *Écrans*, charcoal on paper, 65 x 50 cm, 2019.

Above: Lucile Piketty, *30 août 2020*, series of 187 drawings (Bernie), pen and ink, 18.5 x 31.5 cm, 2020.

Left: Clémence Wach, *Jungle n°5*, black stone on paper, 30 x 57.5 cm, 2018.

Opposite: Alexandre Zhu, *Leviathan X*, charcoal on paper, 40 x 30 cm, 2021



Currently running

“The Blue Hour of Peder Severin Krøyer”

Until 26 September, the Académie des Beaux-Arts' Musée Marmottan Monet is extending France's first monographic exhibition ever devoted to one of the greatest masters of Danish painting, Peder Severin Krøyer (1851-1909). A contemporary of Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), he was to the open air what Hammershøi was to interior scenes.

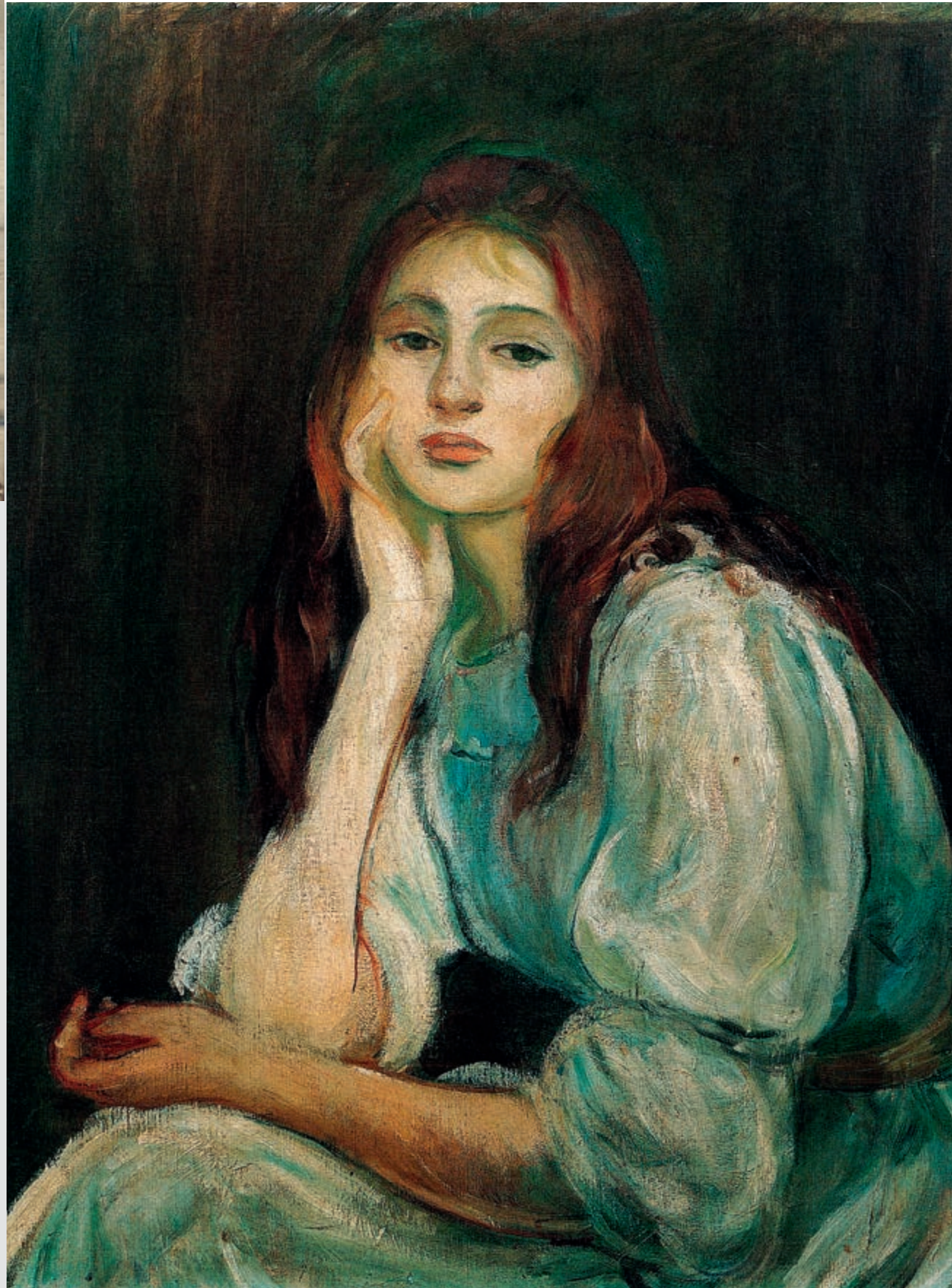
More than sixty masterpieces from the museums of Skagen, Gothenburg, Copenhagen, Alkarsum-Föhr, Lübeck, Kiel, Budapest and Paris honour this remarkable painter of the “blue hour”, the meteorological phenomenon that precedes dusk, mostly in remote parts of the northern seaboard. ■

General Curator: Marianne Mathieu

Curators: Dominique Lobstein, Mette Harbo Lehman, Skagen Kunstmuseer

marmottan.fr | until 26 September 2021

Top: *Little girl standing on Skagen's southern Beach*, 1884, oil paint on panel, 31.5 x 20.4 cm. Skagen, Skagens Kunstmuseer. © Skagen Kunstmuseer



Marmottan Monet Museum

« JULIE MANET: THE IMPRESSIONIST MEMORY »

From 19 October 2021 to 20 March 2022, the Musée Marmottan Monet will present “*Julie Manet, la mémoire impressioniste*”, the first exhibition ever devoted to Berthe Morisot's only daughter and Édouard Manet's niece, Julie Manet.

As the legatee of Julie Manet through her children, and custodian of the world's main collection of Berthe Morisot's work and of the family's collections, the Musée Marmottan Monet, property of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, wishes to shed light on Julie Manet's role in the arts.

This event will highlight three aspects of her life. The first section will focus on her youth and present her family and friends. The next section will highlight the collection work of Julie Manet and her husband Ernest Rouart. In addition to the pieces inherited from Berthe Morisot, the works acquired by the couple will also be exhibited: Hubert Robert, Corot, Degas and large panels of Monet's *Water Lilies* that she was one of the few collectors to have acquired before Michel Monet's death in 1966. The last section will be dedicated to the numerous gifts, bequests and donations Julie Manet and her loved ones made to French museums, and more generally to the family's promotion efforts to put forward the works of Berthe Morisot and Édouard Manet. Their contribution to the national heritage will thus emerge as a very real concern of the first impressionist woman's descendants. ■

Curator: Marianne Mathieu

marmottan.fr | from 19 October 2021 to 20 March 2022

Opposite: Berthe Morisot, *Julie daydreaming*, 1894, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm. Private collection © Rights reserved



Pavillon Comtesse de Caen | Palais de l'Institut de France

« LURÇAT INTIME »

Works on paper from the Fondation Jean and Simone Lurçat – Académie des Beaux-Arts

Until 15 August 2021, the Académie des Beaux-Arts is presenting an exhibition of drawings by former member of the Académie, the late Jean Lurçat (1882-1966), at the Pavillon Comtesse de Caen. The drawings are from the artist's personal collection kept at the Maison-atelier Lurçat, which his widow, Simone Lurçat, bequeathed to the Académie in 2009.

In his scenography, Jean-Michel Wilmotte, member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts' Architecture section and director of the Maison-atelier Lurçat, highlights graphic works selected by the exhibition's curators, Martine Mathias and Xavier Hermel. They are, respectively, chief curator of heritage and a member of the scientific committee of the Fondation Jean and Simone Lurçat-Académie des Beaux-Arts, and its administrator. For Lurçat, drawing was consubstantial to painting and to all the artistic disciplines he practised with equal talent. He mastered all techniques to avoid being dominated by them, as he put it. A drypoint engraver, lithographer, ceramist, and book illustrator, he also worked on tapestries in the post-war years, as a designer and renovator.

His natural inventiveness served a poetic and romantic universe, reflected in the hundred works presented among the thousand that are kept at his *Maison-atelier* (workshop-house). He used many techniques – pencil, ink and wash, watercolour, and gouache –, all of which testify to a unique partiality for graphics and colour. This passion shows in his sketches as well as the sheets he had meditated on and completed, some of which are fanciful while



Left page: *Intérieur*, 1920, watercolour on paper, 61.5 x 43 cm.

Above: *Personnage oriental*, 1925, pencil, watercolour and gouache on paper, 50 x 32 cm.

Opposite: *Odaliques*, 1925, ink and Indian ink wash on paper, 22 x 28.5 cm.

Fondation Jean and Simone Lurçat – Académie des Beaux-Arts



others are premonitions of and testimonies to the traumas of the war which he later focused on in dreamlike scenes close to surrealism. His many journeys around the Mediterranean and in China afforded him the opportunity to be a witness through drawing and a virtuosic motion-inducing line. In other parts of his oeuvre, the imagination participates in the elaboration of a fantasized world, particularly with the creation of an entire bestiary that features in his tapestries.

Rather than following chronology, Jean-Michel Wilmotte has designed a journey that will enchant and surprise visitors by presenting points of stylistic and thematic correspondence. This gives a clearer vision of the artist's work. Thus confronted with the artist's creative intimacy, visitors can appreciate the strength of a gesture that expresses a thought, and the effectiveness of a sometimes intuitive, phantasmagorical inspiration, seen in his threatening insects, for instance. Lurçat was a permanent reinventor of things; poetry inhabited his narrative verve. The confident language of the line prevails in an oeuvre that fully expresses the dynamics of form in the most diverse subjects. ■

Lydia Harambourg, correspondent of the Académie des Beaux-Arts (Painting section)

academiedesbeauxarts.fr | fondation-lurcat.fr
until 15 August 2021
free entrance | 27 quai de Conti, Paris VI

Top: *La Transfiguration d'Ocello*, 1919, gouache on paper, 56 x 70 cm.
Fondation Jean and Simone Lurçat – Académie des Beaux-Arts

Jean-Michel Wilmotte elected Director of the Maison-atelier Lurçat

During its plenary session of Wednesday 6 January 2021, the Académie des Beaux-Arts elected member of the Architecture section, Jean-Michel Wilmotte, as director of the Maison-atelier Lurçat (Fondation Jean et Simone Lurçat) for a five-year mandate.

Architect, urban planner and designer Jean-Michel Wilmotte founded the architecture agency Wilmotte & Associés in 1975. Combined with his design studio Wilmotte & Industries, in France and abroad, the agency now hires 250 architects, urban planners, designers, museographers and interior architects of 31 nationalities.

Wilmotte & Associés enjoys a world-class reputation in the field of museography. It has garnered recognition for its expertise and its ability to organize a museum itinerary, to manage connections between rooms, and to draw visitors from point A to point B according to multiple elements of perception: the relationship of one work to another, the layout in a display window, a convergence line, views, indoor/outdoor permeability, and so forth.

The greatest museums have placed their trust in Wilmotte & Associés, including the Department of Primitive Arts at the Louvre in Paris (Pavillon de Sessions), the Qatar Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris for the new design of its Impressionists rooms, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

In 2019, Wilmotte & Associés carried out a major renovation of the Salle Comtesse de Caen's layout and scenography, pro bono, as it did the scenography of the exhibition "Lurçat intime" and, before it, that of the exhibition "Lurçat, au seul bruit du soleil", presented at the Mobilier national, Galerie des Gobelins, in 2016. ■

Photo credit: Juliette Agnel

Opening of Claude Monet's House and Gardens in Giverny

Since 19 May, the property of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Giverny has once again been welcoming visitors who have the pleasure of discovering Claude Monet's house, collections and sumptuous gardens.

In 1883, Claude Monet settled in Giverny, a small village in the Eure. The master of Impressionism was seduced by the site's poetry and acquired a beautiful house surrounded by a park that he made into a sort of "painting executed on nature itself". In front of the house and the new studios he had built – and, most notably among them, the large workshop in which he painted the *Water Lilies* – he created the "Clos Normand", with its rectilinear layout and aerial vaults of plants surrounding sumptuous bushes and flowerbeds. The place was a source of inspiration for him until his very last days. Further down, formed by a deviation of the Epte River, was the Water Garden with its famous Japanese Bridge and its weeping willows, wisteria, azaleas, and pond, a *tableau vivant* which would inspire the pictorial universe of the *Water Lilies*.

In 1966, in keeping with the will of the painter's second son Michel Monet, the house, its collections and its gardens became the property of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, which undertook major restoration work thanks to French and American patrons. Officially inaugurated in 1980, the Giverny estate opened Monet's familiar world to the public: his collection of Japanese prints, his furniture, his workshops, and above all the gardens and surrounding countryside that inspired the famous "*séries*".

In 2016, the Académie des Beaux-Arts acquired 70 hectares of land in the communes of Giverny, Port-Villez and Vernon. Exercising the moral rights vested in it by the will of the last heir of the master of Impressionism, the Académie is thus ensuring the preservation of the landscapes known, loved, roamed, and often painted by Claude Monet. ■

Photo: Claude Monet's House and Gardens – Giverny. All rights reserved

fondation-monet.com | until 1 November 2021

The Fondation des Amis de l'Opéra Royal de Versailles – Académie des Beaux-Arts

The Association des Amis de l'Opéra Royal de Versailles (ADOR – the Friends of the Royal Opera of Versailles) and the Académie des Beaux-Arts have joined forces to create the Fondation des Amis de l'Opéra Royal de Versailles – Académie des Beaux-Arts.

The aim of this foundation is to "support, as a priority, projects presented at the Opéra Royal de Versailles (including the Opéra Royal, the Chapelle Royal and other areas of the Château de Versailles and of its estate) and elsewhere throughout France. It may also support educational and/or teaching projects linked to the projects presented at the Opéra Royal de Versailles, as well as award grants and prizes to artists (opera soloists or instrumentalists, vocal ensembles, orchestras, etc.) and more generally support all events and operations linked to the artistic, cultural and heritage activities of the Opéra Royal de Versailles". The foundation is endowed with 850,000 euros thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Aline Foriel-Destezet. Its founders' committee currently includes Ms Patricia Seigle and Armelle Gauffenic, Mrs and Mr Alain Pouyat, and Mssrs Jean-Claude Broguet, Hugo Brugière, Charles Vignes, Stephan Chenderoff, Serge Erceau, Olivier Raoux, Christian Peronne and Roni Michaly (Société Financière Galilée). To fulfil its missions, the foundation is able to appeal to the public's generosity and solicit tax deductible bequeathals and donations.

The agreement to create this new foundation hosted at the Académie des Beaux-Arts was signed on 10 March 2021 at the Palais de l'Institut de France in the presence of Catherine Pégard, President of the Établissement public du château, du musée et du domaine national de Versailles, and Laurent Brunner, Director of Château de Versailles Spectacles. ■

Photo: The Founders' Committee of the Fondation Amis de l'Opéra Royal de Versailles. © CVS / Pascal Le Mée

THE NINTH ART

COMIC BOOKS AT THE ACADÉMIE

The Ninth Art has officially entered the Académie des Beaux-Arts since the election of Catherine Meurisse. This gives the *Lettre* a superb theme for a dossier. This summer, as “BD 20 21” reaches its end, we are delighted to present the Year of the Comic. From the first comic strips to the contemporary forms of graphic novels, the field is much richer than meets the eye. This is why we focus on parts of it only, within the bounds of specific aspects of French-language comics, and from a historical perspective going back to the origins. We hope that this will nevertheless be enough to make you want to delve deeper into the art form, according to your interests and preferences.



INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF AN ART THAT DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A NAME

By **PASCAL ORY**, of the Académie Française, historian, comic book critic, co-editor of *L'Art de la bande dessinée* (Éditions Citadelles et Mazenod, 2012)

At the end of the day, we do have to face the facts: it is impossible to write a history of "comics". For the most recent period one can write the history of the 9th art, and this is done on a big scale. The term was coined in 1964, following the example of Ricciotto Canudo coining "7th art" half a century earlier. This model, moreover, makes sense: counter-intuitively, but very understandably for whosoever is interested in national cultures, most of the modern "philias" were successively born in France, and not in the United States, in a vast movement to legitimize cultures that were born illegitimate to the old system of fine arts: *cinéphilie* in the 1920s, *jazzophilie* in the 1930s, and *bédéphilie*, the love of comics, in the 1960s.

It so happens that the cultural traditions of this country have been more systematic and have gone further than those of any other country, first in building what might be called the "artist's religion" – from the Enlightenment onwards – and then in legitimizing minor cultures, from Romanticism onwards. Thus, the Symbolist avant-garde, at the end of the 19th century, and the Surrealist avant-garde in the inter-war period, sought to magnify popular imagery, dime novels, circus acts and dark humour. Those were the steps in which the first generation of comics artists followed, inventing the notion of the "Golden Age", or the "Clear Line" school, for example, along with historians and critics, semiologists and sociologists, all outdoing one another in scholarly jousts and school quarrels. Towards the end of the 20th century, as discussions on the invention of the cinema were being stirred up again (Edison vs. the Lumière brothers, a debate that is foundational in every way), a similar debate arose regarding comics. From it emerged the fact that they had not been invented in the United States by Outcalt or Dirks but in Switzerland, more than half a century earlier, by Rodolphe Töpffer.

That being so, where is the problem? Would this mean that, before the current era of the 9th art, there was a less noble era in which comics referred to a pre-artistic form? Well, not really. We now know through scholarly research – for the most meticulous erudition nowadays is often to be found in the deepest

layers of mass culture – that surprisingly enough the French term for comics, "*bande dessinée*", did not come into regular use until the early 1950s. To the best of current knowledge, it appeared, and then only as a *hapax legomenon*, on 1 June 1938, in the national daily newspaper *Le Populaire*. It would then take another decade – until November 1949, to be precise – for it to reappear, this time in a regional daily newspaper, *La Nouvelle république du Centre-Ouest*. In other words, the legitimization process was all the more radical as, a dozen years before it even began (with the *Club des bandes dessinées*, founded in 1962 by Francis Lacassin, Alain Resnais and Chris Marker), what was going to enter the canon was still so low in the artistic hierarchy that there was no term for it. This had not been the case for photography, cinematography, jazz, and so forth. This art form literally had no name, whether noble or not. Understandably so, for half a century ago, those who are now known as comics artists were still just failed artists, working for "illustrated" magazines and drawing "little Mickeys". It is hard to imagine more impediments: they were draughtsmen rather than painters, illustrators of texts which they had not always authored, creators of pieces destined for "mechanical reproduction" rather than unique objects – and of figurations when abstraction triumphed – addressing a "young" or "working class" audience, and so on and so forth.

This founding paradox should be our starting point if we are to better understand this exemplary adventure: first, the fervour shown by the early cartoon lovers when they used the Lascaux cave and the Bayeux Tapestry or the stained-glass windows of cathedrals to trace the family tree of this invented art; and then



Left page: Winsor McCay, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, page four of the *New York Herald*, 8 January 1909. Old Paper Studios / Alamy

Top: Richard Felton Outcalt, detail from the *Yellow Kid and his new phonograph* plate published in the *New York Journal* on 25 October 1896, considered to be the origin of the use of "speech bubbles" in comics.

the difficulty that persists to this day in the task of defining this art according to formal criteria: graphic expression literature, narrative figuration, figurative narration, sequential art, fun art? At this stage, let us just consider this turning point as the paradoxical sign of a dual modernity: the cinematograph was invented in 1895 and switched to sound in the late 1920s – in the “Golden Age” of comics – at the exact same time as these stories told in pictures spread in the now massively literate societies where the popular press and novels thrived, as an “audio-visual” form before the term was even coined. The reason for their success is surely to be found there.

This may satisfy those who seek explanatory factors for everything. But is it so important? Let's face it, in history there are no causes, only effects. A technological change, an economic crisis, a political revolution make sense only if their effects on society come into consideration with some degree of hindsight. As with the cinema and with jazz, what is interesting about this vast undertaking to make stories in images respectable is above all its knock-on effect on the society of artists itself. It did not lower the bar for artists but, on the contrary, contributed to a continuous rise in authors' graphic and literary emulation. They are now faced with a dual set of standards: those which a valued heritage sets, and those that come from the aesthetic confrontation with peers. This showed around the year 2000, for example, in the success of the Association's group, a typical example of a “school” taking up the discourses and practices of the literary or graphic avant-gardes – in other words, of the modernist tradition.

Let us add another reading to this specifically cultural dimension, a specifically national one. There is a reason why all the examples cited here were written in French. By structuring *bédéphillie*, the culture of comics, French culture was also able to assert itself as an international reference and, in turn, spread artistic recognition of its objects to lands that had previously been alien to this approach, such as Germany, Spain or the United Kingdom. In the aftermath of the Second World War, American hegemony was expected to impose its standards on most of the planet, and Japanese “manga” is, paradoxically, the best proof of this, as a synthesis of American comics and of national graphic traditions. French culture's ability to resist this hegemony can be explained by the combination of two mechanisms. The first – and most decisive – was cultural protectionism, mainly through the 1949 law on “publications intended for youths”. It was a moralizing law, and thereby secured the support of right-wing and left-wing bluenoses alike. It hindered the import of American productions, which were more open than European productions to the diversity of audiences. It therefore protected a French-speaking market on



which the “Belgian school” could impose itself for a generation, using an effective combination of modern forms with conservative contents. It was within this protected market that, from the mid-1960s onwards, a new generation of authors took off. They were more radical than their predecessors, both graphically and in terms of scriptwriting. Around 1970, the periodical *Pilote* and others like it facilitated a transition from Belgium to France and, a few years later, the “graphic novel”, or “roman graphique”, was born simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, freed from the constraints of the album. This was a decisive step towards making comics respectable. In the United States, graphic novels were to find a place on the shelves of bookshops, which until then had totally excluded comics – sold at newsstands –, while French-speaking bookshops had been quick to integrate the Belgian school's “albums”.

It was at this decisive time that two institutions were established in the French cultural landscape, both located in the town of Angoulême. From 1974 onwards, the annual Festival – which, much like Cannes, became an international reference – and, some ten years later, the Cité pérenne, which materialized the great novelty of the 1980s: the 9th art had entered the remarkable circle of cultural policies, at national and local level.

Top: Hergé (1907-1983), plate from *Tintin en Amérique*, 1931-1932, published in the pages of *Le Petit Vingtième*, a supplement to the newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle* © Éd. Casterman

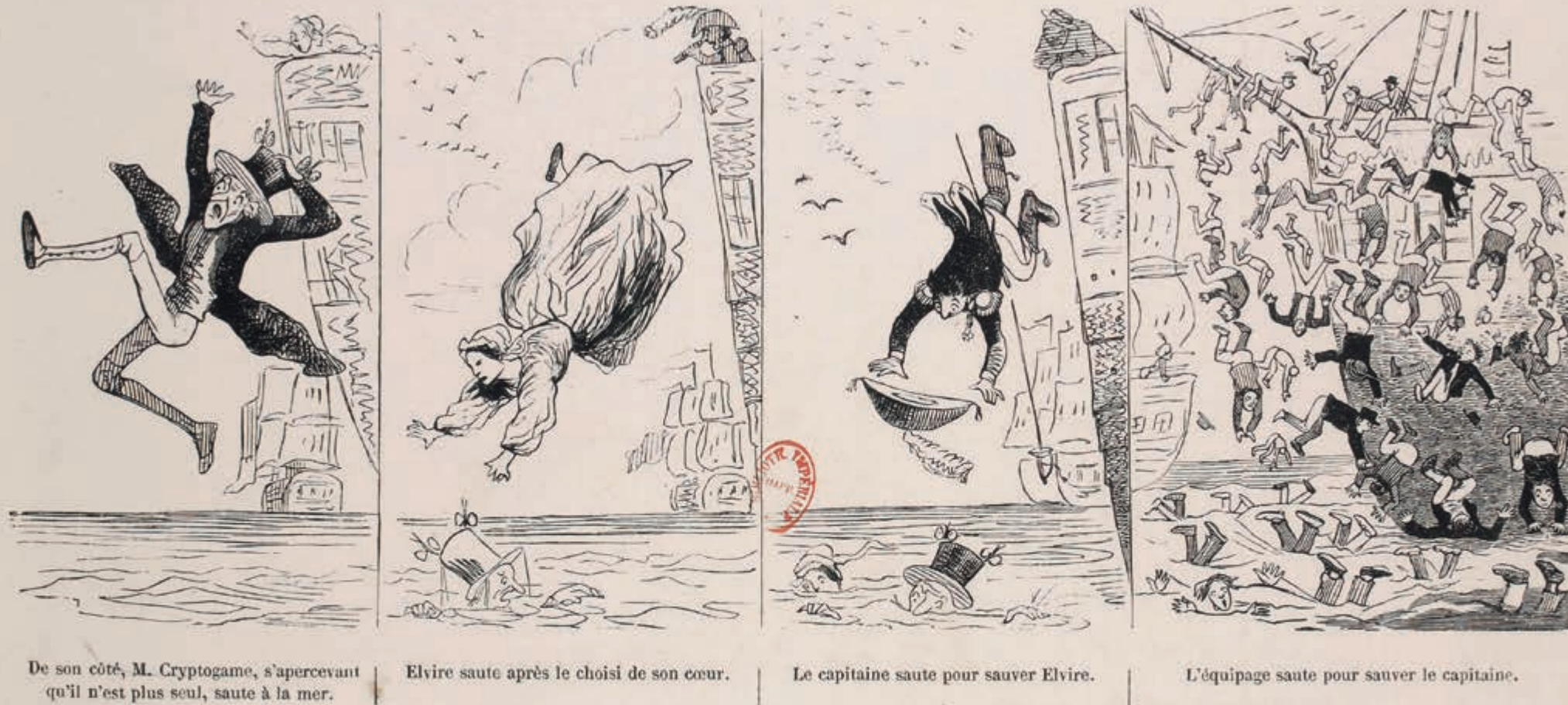
Right page: Moebius (a.k.a Jean Giraud, 1938-2012), from the series *Arzach*, published in issue 1 of the magazine *Métal Hurlant*, 1974 © Les Humanoïdes Associés



In the late 20th century, with the momentum from this virtuous circle of recognition, French-language comics entered a world that had been foreign to them until then: the art market, where dynamism from the Belgian and French “civil societies” merges, as is evidenced by the accelerated development of specialized galleries and the growing place of comics-related objects in auctions.

The ultimate meaning of this success story reaches beyond national borders. Like any other prevailing situation – and proving those who see hegemony only as domination wrong –, the French reference has led not towards closure but rather towards an opening to the outside world. As in many other artistic fields, there are many cartoonists of immigrant origin here (there is now, for example, an Indochinese school of French-language comics). More subtly still, it is through their contribution to France that certain great names in foreign comics have found their road to Damascus, as did Hugo Pratt, whose rise as an artist started when he entered the French cultural space. As in the field of gastronomic culture, where the emergence of great Spanish, English or American chefs was based on the French model of the artist-chef and signature cuisine, a French model of the comic artist is now spreading throughout the world, invested with the

same characteristics – and dare we say, the same privileges – as the artist of the modern tradition. The more comic artists are discussed, the more celebrated, inspired and inspiring they are. Young graduates can now leave art school dreaming of becoming Moebius or Catherine Meurisse. The art without a name has been adopted by the family of fine arts, and Catherine Meurisse has been elected to the Académie. ■



A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMIC LITERATURE

By **THIERRY GROENSTEEN**, historian and comics theorist, editor of the *Bouquin de la bande dessinée, dictionnaire esthétique et thématique* (Éd. Robert Laffont 2021)

When an eye disease prevented Geneva's Rodolphe Töpffer from becoming a painter, he embarked on a threefold career as an educator, a writer and a cartoonist. He is credited not only with the publication of the first comic books, in the 1830s and '40s (*Histoire de M. Jabot*, *Les Amours de M. Vieux Bois*, *Le Docteur Festus*, etc.), but also with a series of texts in which he developed theories about his "invention". Töpffer saw comics as a new form of literature which, despite being of a "mixed nature", "speaks directly to the eyes". He argued that it would develop, and likely "give rise to books, dramas, poems..."

This prediction did not come true immediately, although from the 19th century onwards, parodies of literary works (Cham), picaresque travelogues (Töpffer, Petit, Liquier, Christophe), and even political pamphlets (Doré, Nadar) were found in comic form in a small body of works.

During the Belle Époque, along with an increase in the number of cartoonists trying their hand at what was still far from being called the "ninth art", printed outlets also multiplied. Popular prints, illustrated publications for young people and families, literary, artistic or satirical reviews (*La Caricature*, *Le Rire*, *Le Courrier*

Français, *Le Pêle-Mêle*, etc.) and supplements to the daily press found their place alongside albums.

After the First World War, comic stories increasingly took the form of serials published in magazines. A handful of recurring heroes born at the beginning of the century (Bécassine, Les Pieds Nickelés, L'Espiègle Lili) were gradually joined by many others, whose adventures were reprinted in albums once they reached a certain level of popularity. Alain Saint-Ogan's *Zig et Puce* was just ahead of Hergé's *Tintin*. This is how series became the norm and how comics entered an era that could be described as industrial. Adult audiences were left aside, and production was directed almost exclusively towards young people, to the point that some came to consider the whole genre as intrinsically childish. Yet educators were very hostile to a language that seemed to place text in a subordinate position in relation to images.

The illustrated press became international with the launch of the *Journal de Mickey* in 1934, as French children discovered all the great American comic characters, from Tarzan to Flash Gordon and Popeye.

After 1945, a period defined by great press ventures began,

Left: Cham (a.k.a. Amédée de Noé, 1818-1879), excerpt from *Histoire de M. Cryptogame*, 1861, a version of the original manuscript by Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846) featured in the newspaper *L'Illustration*. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Below: Alain Saint-Ogan (1895-1974), *Zig et Puce au XXI^e siècle*, 1935 © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, cabinet des Estampes



embodied by quality weekly publications such as *Tintin* and *Spirou* in Belgium, and *Vaillant*, followed by *Pilote* in France. However, the general public and the working classes preferred the "small formats", also known as illustrated "dime novels" (*illustrés de gare*), or the strips featured in the daily press (*France-Soir*, *L'Humanité*).

Adult readership was gradually reconquered from the mid-1960s onwards at the initiative of militant "bédéphile" circles, just as the debate for comics' cultural legitimization began. During the following decade, titles such as *L'Écho des Savanes*, *Métal Hurlant* and (*À Suivre*) embodied the maturation of a genre that was manifesting new ambitions and freeing itself from all the rules that had previously encumbered it. The French scene experienced a golden age, thanks to extraordinary creators like Goscinny and Uderzo, Moebius, Druillet, Reiser, Gotlib, Forest, Tardi, Bilal and many others. Claire Bretécher was one of the very few women to make her mark in an almost exclusively male profession. Comics scriptwriters, hitherto considered simply as assistants and often uncredited suppliers of ideas, finally attained the status of co-author, on an equal footing with the illustrator.

Alongside the large “historical” companies (Dargaud, Dupuis, and Casterman), new publishing houses were created, such as those founded by Grenoble’s Jacques Glénat and Paris’ Guy Delcourt. While up until then, albums had been printed in no more than a few hundred copies a year, their sales began to grow exponentially. While press titles declined or disappeared, the 1980s saw books become the reference medium. Yet it was under the impetus of alternative publishers of the following generation (L’Association, Cornélius, Les Requins marteaux, etc.) that comics, which already benefited from a fairly dense network of specialized bookshops, set out to conquer regular bookshops. They succeeded in imposing themselves there, using the concept of the *graphic novel* as a strategic weapon.

The triumph of Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, published in four volumes between 2000 and 2003 by L’Association, captures this moment in the evolution of comics. It gave considerable visibility to independent publishing, the driving force behind the renewal of creation. This work, signed by a woman of Iranian origin, articulated the author’s personal story and History “with a capital H”, in what is both a testimony and an intimate tale. Comics had unquestionably entered a new era.

The terms that best summarize the various processes that have shaped the contemporary scene are surely de-ghettoization,



diversification, internationalization, feminization and artification. Let us briefly go over them one by one.

De-ghettoization: comics are no longer confined to specialized publishing, as most publishing companies – starting with Gallimard and Actes Sud – have opened dedicated collections. Monsieur Toussaint Louverture and Allary éditions have recently had huge success with Emil Ferris’ *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* and Riad Sattouf’s *The Arab of the Future*.

Diversification: Töpffer’s prediction is now fully realized, for there are comics in all styles and formats, on all subjects and for all audiences. Essays, autobiographies, reports and popularized science are all included, as are humour and the traditional forms of escapist literature. XXI and *La Revue dessinée*, the collections “Petite Bédéthèque des savoirs” (Lombard) and “Sociorama” (Casterman) were important milestones in comics’ expansion into non-fiction.



Internationalization: France is the country that translates the largest number of foreign comics, with Japanese *manga* alone accounting for around 30% of the market in terms of number of titles.

Feminization: while women accounted for an estimated at 5-6% of comics authors two decades ago, that figure has risen to almost 30%. Publishing houses are also employing more and more women editors. In specialized training, girls have become the majority.

And **Artification.** The sociologist Nathalie Heinich has applied this neologism to comics to speak of their accession to the status of an art. Comics are increasingly seen as a “format” of contemporary art, much like performance, video or installation art are. Some authors now have dual careers, as authors of books and creators of *gallery comics* or large format works (paintings, silkscreens) intended for the art market (in France: Bilal, Gerner, Blanquet, Loustal, Killoffer, Hyman, and de Crécy, in particular). They are encouraged by gallery owners (formerly Christian Desbois, now Anne Barrault or Huberty & Breynne), fairs (Drawing Now) and print publishers (MEL Publishers). Catherine Meurisse’s election to the Painting section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts is an unprecedented consecration of a master of the ninth art. Along with children’s books and “self-help” books, comics are one of the few sectors that is steadily growing, allowing the publishing world to save face in a time when reading is on the decline. Comics have probably never been read as much as they are today, but the supply has increased even faster than the demand, so that part of the sector’s good economic health is an optical illusion: many books do not find a readership, and many authors are struggling to make a living from their work. The search for new economic equations allowing for a better distribution of the wealth produced has become an issue of primary importance in a creative field where all other indicators are green. ■



Top: Edgar P. Jacobs (1904-1987), *Blake and Mortimer, The Yellow Mark*, 1954 © Blake and Mortimer Publishing

Left: Enki Bilal, excerpt from *La Femme Piège*, 1986, second part of the *Nikopol* trilogy. © Éd. Dargaud

Above: cover of the first issue of *Métal Hurlant*, 1974, by Moebius (1938-2012). © Les Humanoïdes Associés

Right page, top: image from the film *Persepolis*, based on the comic book of the same name by Marjane Satrapi, 2000. © Éd. L’Association

Below: Claire Brétécher, from *Docteur Ventouse, Bobologie*, 1985. Published by the author

On the scale of the arts, comics occupy step number nine, that is understood. However, despite flattering print runs, a semblance of stardom, a simulacrum of thought and a façade of respectability, this practice remains somewhat undefined, poorly understood. As a literature that can be seen and an image that can be read, comics mix the literary and the graphical in a system of exchange from which both seem to emerge blunted, lessened. From this stems the persistent idea that the genre is doomed to be forever adulterated. Since 1987 (the year I drew my first published short story), most of my time has been spent delving into this narrow field of human activity, posted on the front line, contemplating this “anxious object”, as Harold Rosenberg put it, which “does not know whether it is a masterpiece or junk”; and I must admit that, to my mind, the uncertain nature of comics is precisely what makes them so valuable. It is of utmost importance to me. I am neither a writer nor a visual artist. This indecision seems wonderfully fertile to me: it is the surest way to travel off the beaten track. I am not irresistibly attracted to society, and my work is not intended to allow me to prevail over it. From the very start, my temperament has kept me away from recurring heroes and series that have to be fed regularly and that guarantee success in return. I have no taste for domination and, in the hullabaloo, I am careful not to dip my pen in demagoguery. I have no strategy and the goals to be reached seem nebulous to me. I have sometimes felt like a tree that has grown crooked and have naturally accommodated this feeling.

I was commissioned to write these lines, asking me to talk more specifically about drawing. This is a delicate exercise because, for those who practice it, what constitutes drawing above all is precisely its imperviousness to any attempt at articulating it. And this resistance makes the act of drawing precious. It is important to preserve the unexplained, the unspoken, because the temptation to define and to name narrows the scope of what the artist is trying to say. Drawing does not need words. Yet if I try here to zero in on my practice of drawing comics,



what I notice is that, buck as I may, it is functional. This mode of drawing is under lock and key, enclosed in boxes, domesticated, subject to strict rules from which it is impossible to escape lest it become unintelligible. For a character to be recognizable from one image to the next, for example – and this is true of hundreds of vignettes – I have to apply a strict grammar that limits any kind of momentum. Here, there is little room for sudden inspiration; aesthetic flights of fancy are to be avoided. Thus, the corseted way of drawing that comics require can be perceived as unsatisfactory; I would even say “unartistic”.

Yet this is precisely where my work begins, surrounded by formal constraints. The peculiar art of comics lies in taking on this grammar, assimilating it and transforming it. It is in this constraining context that I watch for the unknown, hope for a surprise and prepare for a liberating volte-face. A year ago, I put away my brush, which I had been overusing for far too long. I was disgusted by a drawing fattened in comfort and had come to consider my visual writing as a pathetic series of quips. It was time to start afresh. I needed a blank slate. The pen, which I had left aside for twenty-five years, has replaced the brush. It's a demanding, stubborn instrument that gives me a hard time but also great satisfaction, providing me with the illusion of being reborn. Drawing is my voice. I fight to keep it moving,

THE UNARTISTIC

By **BLUTCH**, comic book author, Grand Prix de la Ville d'Angoulême 2009



arises: how is it that a girl born in 2014 is moved by stories drawn in the middle of the previous century? When almost all the graphic production of the time is out of date – who still discovers Saint-Ogan, Marijac, Jijé, Cuvelier? – comic books also wane and only a few of them withstand multiple readings. Older albums are often unacceptable to anyone who was not enchanted to discover them in their prime. Yet Tintin remains so immaculate that a child of today can believe in a world where gentlemen have hats, planes have propellers and telephones have wires. Tintin is in the present tense. There is a great mystery there that I try to penetrate from time to time, to no avail. Hergé's work still exerts a power that defies my understanding, and any attempt at explaining it remains incomplete. Could it be that this man, from the very beginning of the genre, defined the intangible principles that govern comics? Did he single-handedly define their outline and determine their very essence? And from then on, should we admit that, perhaps, no one will be able to do better than this simultaneously restrained and flexible, constrained and lively line? That no one will be able to achieve such harmony between the written and the drawn? Following in Matisse's footsteps, I sometimes see Hergé as my personal Giotto. This is how, long after their death, great authors offer us enigmas and even challenge us. ■

unstable, lively, as close as possible to the subject. It is through it that I interpret the score. I am careful now to enter the book to be made without knowing exactly what I will find on my way, faithfully following the precepts of Saint Miles Davis: “He's got to have something that challenges his imagination, far above what he thinks he's going to play [...]. That's what I tell all my musicians; I tell them be ready to play what you know and play above what you know. Anything might happen above what you've been used to playing” (quoted in Leonard Feather, *Down Beat*, June 1968). So, adventure is part of the game and, therefore, disappointment is too. I'm not looking for approval or votes, I am the sole judge at my desk, and often, far too often, my attempts lead to a dead end. I've lost count of the prodigious undertakings that I've cut short because I realized, along the way, that I was on the wrong track. I console myself by sometimes rereading this note that Matisse sent to Bonnard on Tuesday, 7 May, 1946: “Giotto is the peak of my aspirations. But the journey towards something which, in our time, would constitute the equivalent is too long for one life. However, the steps are interesting. Good time and good work”.

In the early hours of the morning, on the worn sofa in the office, my seven-year-old daughter is reading *King Ottokar's Sceptre*. She is captivated by the adventures of Tintin. The question

Visuals: Blutch

Top: *Sans titre, Fécamp, Printemps 2020*, pen, coloured markers and ink on paper, 13 x 11 cm.

Left: *Sans titre, Fécamp, Printemps 2020*, pen and ink on paper, 25 x 28 cm.

Centre: *Sans titre, Fécamp, Printemps 2020*, pen and ink on paper, 19.5 x 22.5 cm.

THE ART OF THE ELLIPSIS

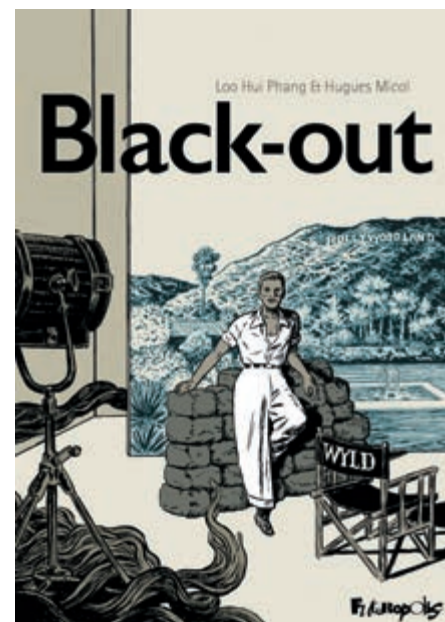
Nadine Eghels interviews **LOO HUI PHANG**, writer, scriptwriter and director, 2020 awardee of the Prix René Goscinny (Éd. Futuropolis) for *Black-Out*, with drawings by Hugues Micol

Nadine Eghels: What is your background, how did you get into comics?

Loo Hui Phang: By chance. I studied Modern Literature and Cinema. I had read Serge Toubiana and Antoine de Baecque's biography of François Truffaut, which led me to branch out into the seventh art. Suzanne Schiffman, Truffaut's scriptwriter and first assistant, agreed to teach me how to write a film script. She generously and informally explained the basics to me. She was self-taught; she'd learned everything on the job. This has stayed with me and I've also acquired everything through practice and experimentation. Later, I met a group of authors, those who formed *Nouvelle Bande Dessinée* (Jochen Gerner, David B, Dupuy-Berberian, Blutch, and so on), whom became my friends. One of them, Jean-Pierre Duffour, asked me to write children's books with him, which were published by Casterman and then Hachette. I stepped into the world of publishing with *La minute de bonheur*, my first comic book (*Patte de mouche* collection at L'Association). Then I wanted to do something more ambitious and I had in mind a graphic novel. For this story, I was looking for an artist with a very clean line. I found him in Belgium: Cédric Manche, from the collective *L'Employé du Moi*. Together, we signed with a Swiss publisher, Atrabile, and created *Panorama*, which came out in 2004. From then on, each project led to the next and I focused solely on writing, until I returned to film when I met producers who had read *Panorama* and wanted to adapt it. They felt that the book's world was so singular that I was the only one for the task. So I directed the medium-length feature *Panorama* (59 minutes), which was co-produced and broadcast by Arte. I loved the teamwork on the ground and the discomfort of shooting. I've constantly sought to renew this collective experience ever since, not only in cinema but also in live shows and performances.

N.E.: As far as comics are concerned, are they now your main occupation, or just one of the paths that you follow? How do you experience this transversality?

L.H.P.: In recent years, live performance has become a bigger part of my work. In 2012, I published a graphic novel with Futuropolis,



Couverture et planches de *Black-Out*, 2021, roman graphique de Loo Hui Phang dessiné par Hugues Micol. Véritable relecture du mythe du cinéma américain par le prisme des minorités, *Black-out* donne à voir la dimension politique et sociale des productions hollywoodiennes. © Éd. Futuropolis

Les enfants pâles, with Philippe Dupuy. A director suggested I do a stage adaptation for the *Compagnie Sans souci*. I discovered another form of writing. I used the stage work as material and entirely rewrote the story during rehearsals. It was a rather hybrid form, with actors, musicians, and puppets on stage. The composer created the music during the rehearsals as well. We tested the result on the stage, tried again, repeated, and so on. It was as if several of us were sculpting the same piece of matter. Moreover, working like this desacralized writing: we removed text in certain places, added some in others, we adapted, we wrote lines tailored for actors, taking into account their physical presence, their diction... It's a collective work in which we have to listen to each other and find balance between our voices, which is extremely stimulating. I then collaborated with another director, Jean-François Auguste. Our play, *Tendres fragments de Cornelia Sno*, has been performed more than 150 times, in several national theatres and as far away as Taiwan, and is still touring to this day.



N.E.: Is the relationship to image present in your writing from the start?

L.H.P.: Yes, I am very visual and I am particularly interested in photography, which is both the memory of an instant and a work on time that has passed. As Roland Barthes describes in *La chambre claire*, photographs give an account of a time that is already dead and yet visually persists. What exactly do we see? The emotion of the environment of this image. And I think that the same applies to writing. It's a photograph of an emotion, of an energy, at a given moment.

N.E.: How do you go on to write novels, without any images?

L.H.P.: That's something else! In 2019, Actes Sud published my first novel, *L'imprudence*. It's a story I've been carrying around with me for twenty years, inspired by a personal event: the death of my grandmother in Laos and my mourning journey. It's a re-creation, with fictional characters. What I wanted to capture

in writing was the strangeness of a feeling: that of losing someone who was 10,000 km away from me, and was both essential to me and almost a stranger. In my conscious memory, I have known my grandmother for twelve days all in all. But these twelve days have extraordinary resonance. Moreover, she was very present in the family mythology. She was a powerful character. Going back to the house where she had lived, where I'd lived for the first year of my life, was overwhelming. It was so intimate that I couldn't share it with anyone else. I was the only one who could tell this story, so the form of a novel was the obvious choice.

N.E.: Did the practice of drawing comics nevertheless influence your writing in this novel?

L.H.P.: I was able to write this novel twenty years after the events because I had accumulated all these writing experiences. I had to go through several comics and experiences of cinema and stage work to make my writing more flexible. In screenwriting, the most

synthetic form is required. There, I learned to condense, to make characters exist with only a few lines.

N.E.: As a graphic novelist does...

L.H.P.: ... yes, comics are the art of the ellipsis. We don't tell the whole story and it's up to the reader to imagine what happens between the boxes. The ellipsis is one of the elements I use most in my writing in general: I cut out as much as possible. I want to write close to the bone, that's what motivates me: to express as much as I can in as few words as possible. Jean Gruault, one of François Truffaut's scriptwriters, quoted Orson Welles working on the script for *The Magnificent Ambersons*: "you have to fit a gallon of liquid into a quart bottle". That is exactly what I am trying to do. My novel writing has benefited from this experience of ellipsis, of the unspoken: I tell only half the story and leave the rest to the reader. It's a way of involving them emotionally, of making them *feel* what is not said but only suggested.

N.E.: Comics are also about drawing. Are you familiar with its techniques, was it complicated for you to tame them?

L.H.P.: As a child, my first wish was to be a designer, specifically a fashion designer. I used to draw a lot, but my parents didn't want me to go to art school because they thought I would never find a job. I focused on writing and have always stuck with it. Nowadays I hardly draw at all, but it seems to me that I approach scenarios like a cartoonist would. I think in pictures. I know how to look at drawings.

N.E.: Are you the one who cuts the story, who defines the frame; does that, in a way, bring you back to cinema?

L.H.P.: I learned a lot about it in my film theory courses on image semantics and shot value. But I don't cut out my scripts, because that would be restricting the artist. Staging and cutting are comics artists' DNA, their breath. I give them indications regarding frames because they influence the way the text will be read: a word said on a close-up shot does not have the same emotional impact as in a wide shot or off-screen. When I write, I have my film in my head with the music, the scents, the camera movements... I tell the artist about it so that they can visualise it. Sometimes I even give them a soundtrack. But if they want to transcribe a sequence in a different way from the one described in the script, with a different staging, they're free as long as they elicit the same emotion.



N.E.: When you see the drawings, how do you react if they don't correspond to the film you have in your mind, for example with regard to the characters' appearance?

L.H.P.: I choose my artists, I know who I'm going to work with, so I also write according to their type of drawing. There are drawings that are more or less talkative, more or less realistic, they express very different things and give off singular energies. I take graphic style into account when writing my story. I choose artists whose drawings correspond to the effect I want to create with each story. I adapt, it's customized every time!

N.E.: How do you go about creating the characters?

L.H.P.: We "cast" them beforehand. I describe their physical features, the artist suggests silhouettes and faces and we reach agreements. This was especially important for *The Smell of Starving Boys*, a western I wrote for Frederik Peeters. There's a love story between the hero and an androgynous character. This physical ambiguity questions the nature of the relationship. We had to succeed in balancing the desire. This tension between them was finicky to set up because the whole story rested on it. We spent weeks establishing the characters' physiognomy, and Frederik was able to start drawing only once we'd found it.

N.E.: How do you feel when you see the drawings?

L.H.P.: I have my own film in my mind, but I also want to be betrayed, to discover something I didn't expect, because it means that the artist has really appropriated the text and projected their own visions onto it. When they've done something else with it, gone further than I expected, I'm never disappointed. I choose artists with unique worlds and strong personalities because I know

they'll exceed my expectations and surprise me. Respect my text and extend it at the same time. And it's wonderful because I can see myself in it, and I find something more. The confrontation between their drawing and my text creates a third entity, a third author in fact, which is a mixture of the two of us.

N.E.: What are your next projects? Comic book, novel, theatre?

L.H.P.: Everything! I'm writing my second novel, my next comic book, and I have a show, *Jellyfish*, which is ready to go and will be touring as soon as theatres open to the public. It's a play, in collaboration with Jean-François Auguste once again, with an original score composed by Joseph d'Anvers. And then I'm preparing another hybrid show, between cinema, drawing and live music. I continue to walk several paths, alternating solitary creation and collective endeavours. I need to do different things every time because I'm afraid of getting bored... I like discomfort, what scares me is comfort! ■



Above: show based on Kat Onoma's concept album *Billy The Kid* (1992, Dernière Bande), live music by Rodolphe Burger and Julien Perraudau, scenario and films by Loo Hui Phang, live drawing by Fanny Michaëlis and Philippe Dupuy. Pulp Festival de La Ferme du Buisson (Noisiel) - Cité de la Musique et de la Danse de Strasbourg (Musica festival)

Opposite: *Trois ombres*, play adapted from Cyril Pedrosa's graphic novel (2007) by Loo Hui Phang, directed by Mikaël Serre. Produced by La Ferme du Buisson - scène nationale de Marne-la-Vallée

Above: excerpt from *Nuages et Pluie*, story by Loo Hui Phang, drawing by Philippe Dupuy. © Éd. Futuropolis

ESCAPING BOXES

Nadine Eghels interviews **GABRIELLE PIQUET**, author, Prix de l'audace at the 2021 Angoulême Festival for *La Mécanique du Sage* (Éd. Atrabile)

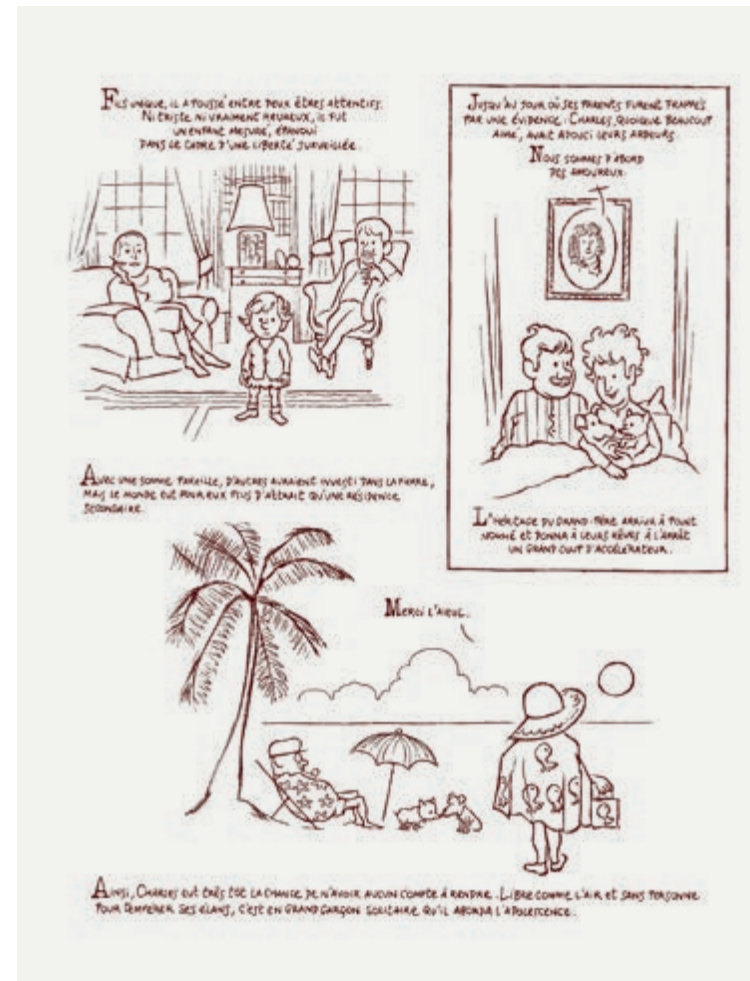
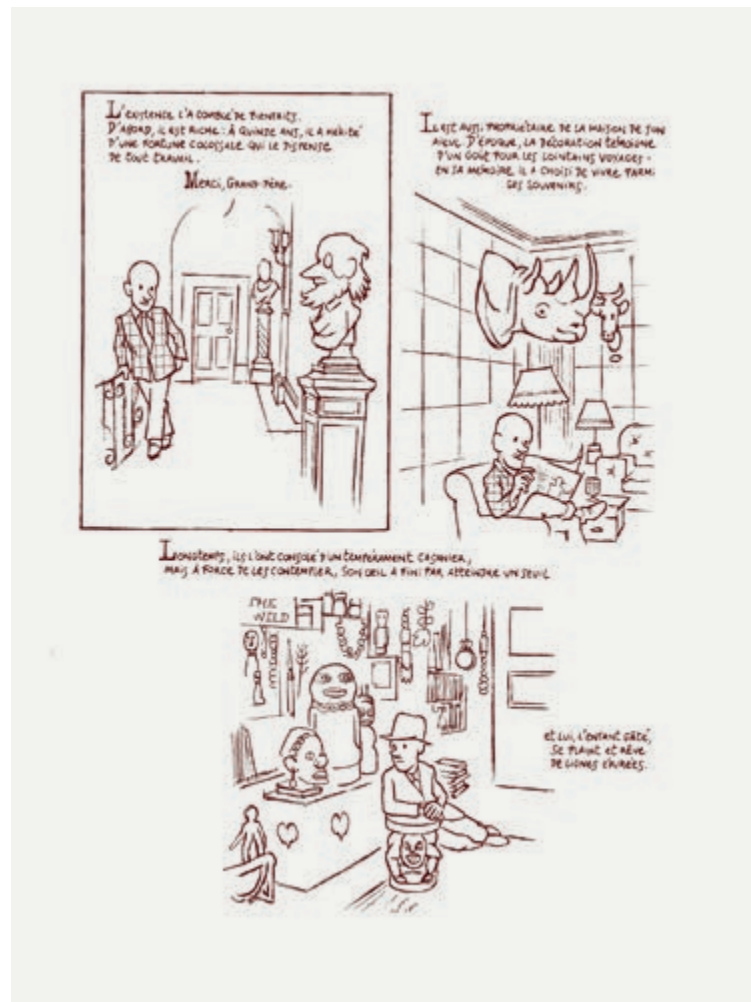


Nadine Eghels: How did comics come into your life? From there, what is your path?

Gabrielle Piquet: I first discovered comics by reading Peyo and Franquin, and then Claire Bretécher's albums. As a child, I used to draw a lot, and I also remember spending a lot of time copying illustrations from various newspapers. Drawing was a bit of a secret garden for me. It took me years to accept the idea of making it my job. I think I was a bit scared to expose my work to the gaze of others: I was afraid that it would slow down my impetus, and that criticism – which is inevitable – and rote – which is also inevitable and comes with any job – would spoil something that was intimate to me. I think this is why I started off by studying law and political science. It was a kind of a long path of... avoidance! At the same time, I was still drawing, and soon after I enrolled at the École Supérieure de l'Image d'Angoulême in the communication and comics section where I obtained my DNAP (*Diplôme National d'Arts Plastiques*) in 2006. When I graduated, I sent a portfolio of drawings and short stories to various publishers. Sébastien Gnaedig, an editor at Futuropolis, encouraged me. I presented him with a project to adapt Tonino Benacquista's short stories, which I was working on at the time. He accepted it, and my first book, *Trois fois un*, was published in 2007.

N.E.: Why did you choose this means of expression?

G.P.: I drew and I wrote... There was something "logical" about choosing comics. Yet, it may seem paradoxical, it didn't seem obvious to me at the time. I liked the freedom in press cartoons, Sempé's full pages, Reiser's incisive and ever so accurate line, and I also liked that their drawings were not contained, "imprisoned" in boxes. Something about comics as I was discovering them was "too much" for me: the drawing, the colour, the narrator, the speech bubbles... I couldn't find my way around, I was suffocating.



I tried, but soon got bored; I couldn't tell a story in this way, my line became rigid...

Then I discovered *Les Mémoires de Monsieur Coupandouille, roman animé* (1931), by Marcel Arnac, a precursor of comics in the form of graphic novels. That was a powerful driver for me. All of a sudden, everything seemed open. Then I discovered Will Eisner, Frans Masereel... I could allow myself to invent a form, to "ditch" boxes in my storytelling, in my own way. It took me some time, too, to find the courage to tell my own stories. At first, it was more comfortable for me to adapt other texts.

I can no longer consider not writing my own texts, the pleasure I derive from it is huge. I could work with a scriptwriter, but it would really have to be a fantastic match, a kind of evidence – which is rare. If I decided not to write, I'd prefer to freely adapt a text.

N.E.: What are the subjects or themes that you tackle through comics, and why do you think comics are a good way to tackle them?

G.P.: For now, comics as a medium suit me because they fulfil my desire both to write and to draw. As far as the themes I tackle are concerned, I realise – after the fact (I mean, after I've written a script) – that they always revolve around major existential questions! My last book, *La Mécanique du Sage* (Éd. Atrabile), questions the notions of happiness and of wisdom, the previous one was about loneliness in big cities (*La Nuit du Misothrope*, Éd. Atrabile) and *Les idées fixes* (Éd. Futuropolis), for example, was a sort of drawn poem about madness.

Although I love to write, I couldn't see myself writing a novel. I need to draw. Similarly, I don't think it would be right for me to give up comics and focus only on illustration. It's not that comics seem more relevant than any other medium to deal with the subjects I'm interested in, but just that they are where I feel at ease.



N.E.: Where do you draw your inspiration from, especially in terms of the visual aspect of your work?

G.P.: Great artists with an immediately recognizable "touch" are those who have left their mark on my work. Those whose naked, precise, accurate line is gracefully obvious. I'm thinking of Sempé, Reiser, Cabu, Saul Steinberg, Jules Feiffer, William Steig, Georges Grosz... In some of my books, there are drawings that are directly inspired by those of famous cartoonists; it's a sort of nod at them. For example, the German caricaturist Karl Arnold was a great source of inspiration for *La Mécanique du Sage*.

In general, I am very sensitive to any form of minimalism, to the economy of means. I greatly admire the famous Keisai abridged drawings and Japanese prints in general, for instance. There are also all those artists whose work "walks with me", because I have immense admiration for them, yet don't have a direct impact on what I do: Paul Klee, David Hockney, Pierre Soulages...

N.E.: How important is drawing to you? Is it predominant in relation to text, or does it work the other way round? How do they hinge together?

G.P.: I attach great importance to drawing. For years I've been working on my line, trying to make it as accurate as possible. By that I mean that I try to avoid it being unnecessarily talkative. I don't want it to be "pretty", but I am attached to the idea of a certain discreet elegance. I'm a perfectionist, which makes me rather slow when it comes to drawing a comic book. And

Cover and plates from Gabrielle Piquet's *La Mécanique du Sage* (2021). In this comic book inspired by the (true) story of Charles Hamilton and his "ornamental hermit", the author points out contemporary ills – all-out positivism and the search for perpetual well-being – and raises questions about this tyranny of happiness. © Éd. Atrabile

then, wherever I am – in cafés, for example – I also practice free drawing, which is the exact opposite. Then I'm far more fluid, spontaneous – the result is obviously more shaky but now I'd like to tell a story through drawings that are less controlled. It's actually just a question of giving yourself permission! It's not so easy to be okay with displaying a line that wanders a bit, that's raw and uncut!

Much like work on my line, my texts are always the result of extensive research. But I would say that writing is less laborious to me. I take more pleasure in it, or rather let's say that for the moment I feel freer in it. Even though I do have to rework many of my sentence endings because I have a natural tendency to rhyme! It's a strange thing, I can't really explain to myself; everything comes to me this way and it's not so easy to go against the grain!

N.E.: What “comes first”, the drawing (the images) or the text (the story)?

G.P.: It depends. Each one responds to the other; they are, in a way, two “voices” that I try to tune to each other as best I can. I try to make sure that the drawing is more than a mere illustration of the words.

The initial impulse differs depending on the project. For *La Nuit du Misothrope*, for example, I wanted a setting that resembled Harlem, I wanted to set a story there. The will to talk about solitude, the solitude of this neighbourhood's inhabitants, came afterwards. On the other hand, I started coming up with my last book when I heard about the existence of garden hermits. From this historical fact, I built a scenario, and only then came the “concern” for drawing, for putting it into images.

What is common to each project, however, once the story and the drawing have been “found”, is the way the book is constructed. I draw a “railway” storyboard to determine the project's pagination, and for each panel, I throw a few sentences on paper – the essence of what I want to say – along with a few very basic sketches. Then I draw at home, and always write outside, preferably in cafés.



N.E.: You recently won the *Prix de l'Audace*. What does audacity mean to you in comics?

G.P.: That's a hard question! Being audacious means not being afraid. It's not my favourite way to phrase it, but authors, artists who are audacious leave their comfort zone and try new things. As an author, you can feel that you're going down that road – I mean, that you're trying, for example, not to repeat yourself – but it's for others, then, to say if a book is audacious or not. For me, a book can be audacious for very different reasons, be it in terms of form or of content: freedom of tone, a peculiar narrative, choosing a theme that is seldom taken up or tackling an issue in an original, particular way... it's so vast! In comics, I find that the Norwegian author Bendik Kaltenborn shows real audacity in terms of both form and content, and I also think this is the case of David Prudhomme's work, although their worlds couldn't be more different.

N.E.: How do you perceive the evolution of your work?

G.P.: Since my first book, in 2007, I've seen my line evolving, becoming more assertive. I had to work a lot to achieve this. I'm not one of those artists with natural ease and skill – but maybe that's a blessing in disguise. I constantly encounter obstacles that I like to circumvent. It's interesting to come across a limit and to look for a graphic solution. I want to continue along that path.



I don't want to stop when I think I've finally “found” my way of drawing, I want to keep searching.

I'm now trying to integrate colour into my work, and that is no easy task! I approach it as an unknown territory, with excitement and some apprehension, but I feel that it's time for me to “get down to it”! And as for my drawing, as I said earlier, I'm trying to let it live, to be less controlling. At the moment, I feel like I'm starting from scratch and have to relearn everything.

Basically, I want to move towards a lighter tone. Most of my books have something grave about them, but I think I've changed my tone a bit with the last one, *La Mécanique du Sage*. It's not a question of the choice of themes to address so much as one of ways in which to address them. ■

Cover and plate from Gabrielle Piquet's *La Nuit du Misothrope* (2017). The book, with its melancholic atmosphere, is not meant to be a “detective story”. Rather than focusing on the search for a potential culprit, the little world portrayed raises questions about notions such as exclusion, solitude and dedication. © Éd. Atrabile



Fondation Cité du Neuvième Art – Institut de France

The Fondation Cité du Neuvième Art – Institut de France, created at the initiative of the Cité Internationale de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image, and placed under the aegis of the Institut de France, is the first French foundation dedicated to comics.

The Fondation Cité du Neuvième Art encourages and supports creative and innovative players in the development of projects in which comics and all image-related professions play a decisive role. For its preliminary phase, it benefited from the committed support of economic stakeholders in Angoulême and the Charente region.

The Foundation's actions will be oriented along five axes: supporting creation and authors; enhancing and promoting heritage; using the educational potential of comics; supporting research and innovation; and developing national and international influence. ■



This statue of Corto Maltese, Hugo Pratt's famous character, is the work of sculptor Livio Benedetti. It stands over the buildings of the Musée de la Bande Dessinée, one of the three sites, along with the Maison des auteurs and the vaisseau Moëbius, that make up the Cité Internationale de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image in Angoulême. Photo credit: Mauritius images GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo



LA REVUE DESSINÉE, A MILITANT MAGAZINE

Nadine Eghels interviews **AMÉLIE MOUGEY**, journalist, editor-in-chief of the comic book news magazine *La Revue Dessinée*.

Nadine Eghels: How was *La Revue Dessinée* born and what is its purpose?

Amélie Mougéy: *La Revue Dessinée* was born in 2013 from the initiative of comic book authors who went looking for journalists with whom to work. Just as information can be processed and shared through the written press or audiovisual media, we tell it through comics. Like other media, it can be used as a medium for journalistic investigations.

N.E.: What is the layout in *La Revue Dessinée*?

A.M.: In *La Revue Dessinée* we generally publish five big investigations and then others in shorter format. These investigations are carried out by journalists in pairs with comic artists. They sometimes go out into the field together. One will have a notebook and the other a sketchbook, and then they tell the story of their investigations and reports in the specific language of comics.

N.E.: What is the advantage of this?

A.M.: *La Revue Dessinée* deals with the same general themes as a regular newspaper: environment, society, culture, international relations... Thanks to the sensitivity in comics and their very rich language, we can deal with sometimes complex subjects or hot issues, with human stories that are strongly embodied, in which the protagonists become characters. We thus manage to convey information that may require more explanation or demonstration in another medium.

N.E.: What is your ambition?

A.M.: Our ambition is to position ourselves as a press organization in which investigation holds an important place. To this end, we use drawing as a language in its own right. We acknowledge that it involves a certain degree of subjectivity, as there are two authors, the writer and the drawer, and their perspectives on each subject can align or diverge, which broadens the perspective. Together, they appropriate a subject, and render it through their eyes and their creativity. It's an act of creation that has reality as its object.



N.E.: Do you have any precursors?

A.M.: Looking back, the origins of the genre can be found as far back as the 1950s, with Art Spiegelman. With *Maus*, he opened the way for comics based on reality, a movement that was continued in the 1990s with Joe Sacco and then in the 2000s in France with people like Étienne Davodeau. There are currently authors in France who have long been dealing with documentary subjects to broaden the scope of their use of comics. This was already the case in the 1960s with Cabu's reports in *Charlie Hebdo*. Comics are not confined to fiction at all, they can take on reality. This is a trend we're perpetuating, which has existed since the 1950s and has become more prevalent in the last twenty or thirty years, with more "grown up" comics aimed at an adult readership.

N.E.: Even though authors were already doing non-fiction, federating a general news magazine featuring only comics is still something new.

A.M.: What's new is the number of journalists who write in *La Revue Dessinée*; about thirty authors for each issue, so there are now a lot of journalists who have written for comics.

N.E.: Do they change with each new issue or do you have a permanent editorial team?

A.M.: Either journalists contact us and suggest topics, or we ask them to write for us because we like their perspective. Over the years, a sort of small informal community has formed, with a

pool of loyal journalists and artists with whom we've worked for a long time, but there are also new recruits in each issue, chosen according to the themes we want to feature.

N.E.: How often is *La Revue Dessinée* published, and what is its circulation?

A.M.: *The Revue Dessinée* is published four times a year. The editorial committee defines the contents and chooses the journalist/artist pairings. The print run is twenty-five thousand copies. It's distributed by subscription and we currently have over ten thousand subscribers.

N.E.: There is wide diversity in the drawings in the magazine, some are very realistic and others more fanciful, metaphorical or schematic. How do you manage this diversity in relation to the need to be faithful to reality, since this is a magazine for news, not fiction? Doesn't this limit the artists' creativity?

A.M.: Journalists are doing their job, and they have to be faithful to the reality they're investigating. Artists have to accommodate this constraint, which can sometimes drive creativity. We suggest that artists deal with particular subjects in the graphic style that best suits each subject. Some have a more realistic drawing style, others are more distanced from reality, and we take this into account when we define the contents. They do have some degree of freedom in the settings, the atmosphere, the attitudes, etc., but everything that provides valuable information must be perfectly accurate. In the course of the work, there's a constant feedback

loop between the journalist's narrative content and the artist's drawing propositions, so that one will adapt to the other.

N.E.: Comics are an art of ellipsis, and editing is the first creative step. Who has a say in it?

A.M.: The artist suggests a layout to the journalist. Once they've agreed on it, the journalist will in turn adapt their text.

N.E.: When the article talks about real people, is physical resemblance essential?

A.M.: Not necessarily... The artist can work from photos, or go and meet the protagonists and sketch the settings. But there are articles for which the realistic nature of the drawing is not necessary. Sometimes there are fiction devices that can serve the narrative, but it is essential to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that the reader can distinguish fiction from reality at all times.

N.E.: How do you choose the articles' topics for each issue?

A.M.: With a quarterly publication, subjects can't be immediately topical. When we decide to deal with a topic, we must make sure that it won't be outdated by the time the artist and journalist work on it and the magazine is actually published. So we choose subjects that are contemporary and crucial to society, but not linked to current events, even if the news made them surface in the first place. They need to have some staying power! We choose them in a small editorial committee and then we propose them to artists who want to take them on.

N.E.: Would you say that it is a "militant" magazine?

A.M.: Yes. We're not militants *per se*, but there is something of the order of commitment, it's a question of talking about things to make them evolve, even transform them. It's about putting the spotlight on subjects that are of public interest, with the sensitivity and strength made available by comics. ■

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EXHIBITING COMICS

By **BENOÎT PEETERS**, writer, scriptwriter and critic



André Franquin (1924-1997) and Jean-Claude Fournier, original illustration for the article "Il y a un gaffeur à Champignac", published in the magazine *Spirou* n°1671 of 23 April 1970, Indian ink on paper, 47.7x33.6 cm. Sold by Christie's auction house in 2018. © Christie's

The fate of the original

The original comic book plate is a curious object, with an uncertain status. For a long time, it was considered by most authors and publishers simply as a stage in the creative process. For the publisher, the printed result was all that was at stake. The original had served its purpose once the photogravure was done; they had no qualms about leaving technical information or a stamp on it. Sometimes they forgot to return the plates to artists. At other times, the plates were light-heartedly discarded. Winsor McCay's son, Robert, cut out many of his father's plates when trying to create new sequences for *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. And originals by Franquin or Peyo were used by novice colourists to sharpen their teeth.

When artists were lucky enough to get their plates back, they stored them as they could, often without much concern for their preservation. In the best of cases, the original was considered a document, a trace of their work. Hergé gave pencil sketches, and more seldom inked plates, to some of his guests. He lent some others for school presentations; those were sometimes trimmed and crudely glued onto cardboard.

Everything changed in the 1980s. Artists' line, their technique and their pentimenti have come under increasingly minute

and passionate scrutiny. Original comics became objects of consideration, of exhibition and soon of speculation. Specialized galleries proliferated, big auction houses became interested and the prices of pieces from some authors soared, starting with Hergé, Jacobs, Franquin and some major American authors. For a certain number of collectors, plates now seem to represent the essence of comics, even more so than albums.

In itself, there is nothing illegitimate about this interest. As they generally are much larger than the print, original plates show the artist's gesture and reveal the quality of their line (or lack thereof). They allow observers to guess at the author's technique and the fragility in them can be moving. With Pratt or Moebius, the drawing may sometimes be faded or partially erased, due to the use of felt-tip pens, for instance. With others, pencil marks, collages, retouching with white gouache can catch the eye. Others yet work directly in colour, which makes their plates even more appealing.

However, fetishism around the original and the rapid development of this market raise many questions. For when it is hung on a gallery wall or in an enthusiast's home, the meaning of a page from a comic book radically changes. Isolated from the story it was part of, often deprived of text, the page is transformed into a decorative rather than a narrative object. Displayed on a wall, it is viewed rather than read. Framed, it gains in solemnity what it loses in humour and impertinence.

Were the sale of originals to become more lucrative for authors than album sales, the very nature of the "ninth art" would probably be overturned. Comics artist are quick to realize what kind of plates are likely to appeal to collectors: few panels, spectacular images and preferably no speech bubbles. Some might be tempted to draw more of those and less of other more discreet pages, that are harder to separate from the story. A part of the art of comics would then move towards simulacra, much like street art has since the art market took a hold of it. However, there is nothing inevitable about such an evolution. For many authors and readers, beyond the original, the primary strength of comics remains the free and lively telling of a story that can be read as much as it can be viewed, the harmonious coexistence of several images on the same page, the association of these images with texts that are themselves made graphic, and the use of ellipses and echoes, accelerations and contemplative moments.

In the gallery

Comics have been exhibited for a very long time, at least in France, since the first major exhibition, "*Bande Dessinée et Figuration Narrative*", was presented at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1967. It mainly featured enlargements of panels by the great American and European masters: Winsor McCay, Alex Raymond, Harold Foster, Burne Hogarth and Milton Caniff were

especially central, alongside paintings by artists belonging to the "*Figuration Narrative*" movement such as Hervé Télémaque, Eduardo Arroyo and Jacques Monory.

Since then, there have been exhibitions of all kinds: simple displays of original plates in art galleries, didactic presentations, highly staged exhibitions such as those the Angoulême Festival has long presented, and major retrospectives like Hergé's at the Grand Palais in 2016. A superb exhibition of Emmanuel Guibert's work was recently held at the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

In itself, the legitimacy of comics as an object of exhibitions is therefore now taken for granted. Be they monographic or more general in scope, there are museums dedicated to comics in Belgium, France, the United States, Japan, China and several other countries. The way in which comics are exhibited, however, remains a key question. While presenting originals is the most commonly followed path, there are many other possibilities too. Being an art form destined for technical reproducibility, comics are designed for print first and foremost. In Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* and many other early twentieth-century American comics, colour features only in the published version. It was designed for newspapers and produced according to the technical possibilities of the time. When originals are exhibited alone, viewers are deprived of an important part of the work, while another part of it is revealed.

It is also important to know whether the emphasis is to be placed on the aesthetic dimension by highlighting the work of an artist, such as Hugo Pratt, Moebius or Catherine Meurisse, or whether the main aim is to portray a world, such as those of Lucky Luke, Batman or Titeuf. This determines the place that should be given to reproductions, enlargements, objects, and interactive installations.

One thing that deeply bothers me – as it does my friend François Schuiten – is the confusion of genres. It is distressing to see public institutions, sometimes even museums, frame reproductions as if they were originals. When curators and art historians propose an exhibition on a painter or artist from a classical discipline, they do so rigorously, according to long-established standards. When showing comics, it is essential to act with the same seriousness and respect as for the other arts, and above all not to mislead the public about what is being exhibited. This does not mean that reproductions should not be presented, but that their format and the way they are hung should dispel any confusion. Without ethics, the recognition of the ninth art would only be another illusion. ■

THE LONG ROAD TO LES ÉDITIONS 2024

Nadine Eghels interviews **OLIVIER BRON** and **SIMON LIBERMAN**, co-founders of the publishing house 2024

Nadine Eghels: How did you get into comics?

Simon Liberman: Too stupid to publish novels, and too provincial to go into contemporary art?

Olivier Bron: Quite simply, we've both been big comic book readers for as long as we can remember, and when we started our illustration studies (at the Estienne school, where we met), our main wish was always to stay close to comics. Sure, we imagined ourselves as authors rather than publisher at the time, but it's an art form that has always driven us...

N.E.: How would you present your work as an author, what are the guiding lines?

SL: Olivier washed up a long time ago in the author/publishers' graveyard. As for me, I continue to draw and make comics without showing much to anyone, apart from the odd participation in a fanzine here and there, or a publication in *L'Employé du Moi* in 2014. I move forward blindly, like a sperm whale in the abyss. A jewel will come out of it or, more likely, something that smells of old cetacean.

N.E.: You founded *éditions 2024* ten years ago, how did this project come about and how did it evolve?

OB: It all started at the Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg (now called HEAR): we created a sort of collective with a dozen friends; we printed a fanzine, we ran a webzine and, regularly, we published small books, combining digital reproduction and traditional printing techniques (silk-screening, engraving...). Of course, after graduation this dynamic ran out of steam a bit, as we all started more ambitious and demanding personal projects. Simon and I had developed a taste for all this; as we were already in contact with a distributor who was interested in the collective's publications, everything was in place to create the structure.

Among our desires, the idea of following the whole manufacturing process was also important. In comics, the work of art is not

Opposite and below: *UOS* by Benjamin Adam (2021). In a devastated world, near the ocean, a shaggy man in an astronaut's suit lives alone, like a scruffy lighthouse keeper from previous centuries. © Ed. 2024

Right: *Emma's First Ball*, by Donatien Mary & Sophie Dutertre (2017). Where Tim Burton meets Edward Gorey, Emma's First Ball introduces its actors in the manner of a gothic Carnival of the Animals. © Éd. 2024



the plate on the desk but the printed book. At the start, understanding manufacturing and printing seemed fundamental to our work as authors; in the end, we found ourselves fully focused on publishing, but we still discuss the book as an object with the authors a lot, we try to open up this reflection process with them.

At the beginning, we thought we'd publish two or three projects a year, as a sideline, but quite quickly, we found ourselves working full time for 2024, which forced us to redefine our needs and objectives. We remained volunteers for a long time, and have only been salaried since last year. Ever since we set up the business, we've also been designing exhibitions around books for festivals, media libraries and, more recently, for museums as well. These exhibitions provide a complementary source of income and allow

books to live longer... Exhibitions travel in a timeframe that's very different from that of bookshops, which is a good thing.

N.E.: What are the founding principles of this publishing house?

OB: We didn't really set any precise guidelines from the outset... We were surrounded by a lot of people whose work we liked, authors we met during our studies or through micropublishing... We let ourselves be carried along by what felt self-evident. The fact that there were two of us certainly made it easier in the end to shape the core of our catalogue. Shared enthusiasm fosters certainty. After a few books, the main lines became clear: a sort of refusal to be anchored in reality – no autobiography, no journalism – certainly in reaction to what we were seeing everywhere else at the time. We also naturally defend young authors and want

to support them in the long run, to help them build a singular approach, with a commitment to visual aspects. And then there's the care we take in making the objects, which ended up becoming one of our company's core components.

The creation of 2024 is the result of many things, but also of a collective effervescence that's allowed us to embody a kind of current, or at least a fairly coherent dynamic, along with other publishing houses created around the same time. After ten years in existence, the status of our first authors is beginning to change, and ours with it! We're evolving, quite naturally. We're happy to be joined every year by younger people, who are always extremely talented and also identify with what we're continuing to build. Conversely, some authors who have already achieved recognition want to work with us. It's flattering when it makes sense, and it opens up new perspectives... While many bookshops support us now, many still don't really understand our catalogue; we still have a long way to go!

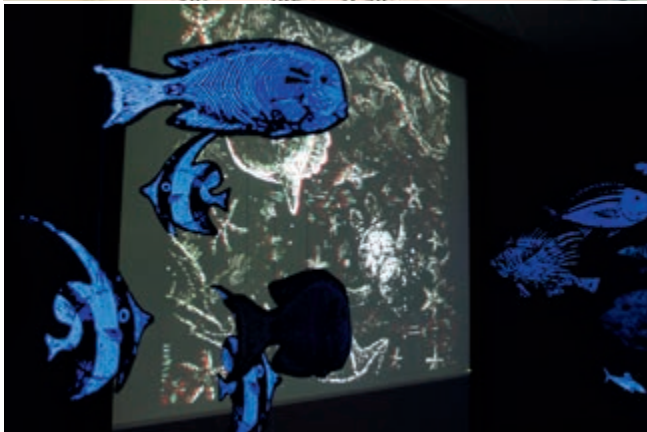
N.E.: How do you combine your career as an author, which is necessarily singular, with your work as a publisher, which opens on collective efforts?

OB: Actually, I've entirely set aside my ambitions as an author. I'll probably come back to it one day, but publishing takes up too much energy for me to be able to really put the work in and create in parallel – or at least I don't feel capable of it. So far, I don't really find it frustrating; you get emotionally invested in every book you publish, and working on several books at once keeps you in a very rich kind of whirlpool. I don't envy the long and often solitary work and the doubts that authors live with. In a small



Left and below: *Le Mirliton Merveilleux* (1868) by J. Rostaing and Telory. With this book, Merveilleux, a genre of its own – with fairy tales, supernatural stories and magical worlds – made one of its very first forays into comics. © Éd. 2024

Below: *Jim Curious (nuit)*, an exhibition based on the book *Jim Curious, Voyage au cœur de l'océan*, by Matthias Picard. Plunged into a dark space, lit only in black, visitors are literally immersed in the world of Jim Curious © Éd. 2024



company like ours, we do a lot of very different things every day: deadlines are always a little short, we sometimes have to struggle a bit with each other to make room for reading work – on which we would always like to be able to serenely focus – but there is also something exhilarating about this pace, and a lot of things are exciting, so... Having said that, this question of frustration is not at all trivial, and it is important to reflect on it regularly: the publisher must not envy the author. We also work on books, we often discuss the content of the work with the author, we may cut parts of it or give guidelines for a redesign... this exchange can only be healthy if everyone is in the right place.

N.E.: How is the aspect of heritage taken into account in your work, both as an author and as a publisher? In which ways does it matter?

OB: It started from a frustration as a reader: I was often curious about old books but unable to put my hands on them. So, when we created 2024 we quickly articulated the desire to be involved with the history of comics. Many of the authors have since passed away, and when the heirs to their estates aren't proactive, it's up to publishers to keep these works visible – and some of them are fundamental. One doesn't create from nothing, authors build each other up, and artistic movements often follow fairly logical paths... The field of comics still lacks memory; this can be explained by several factors (historically, a younger readership and the predominance, at certain times, of the illustrated press rather than the album...), and the situation is gradually improving. But we must keep this work up so that creation can truly progress. And it encourages us to remain curious, to rummage through old shelves, to meet with institutions like the BnF or people from academia... We often go from one surprise to the next, it's both interesting and fun.

Another aspect that we like about these reissue projects is that, as publishers, we become the sole driving force behind the book. Generally we work with an author who is overflowing with the desire to see his or her book come into existence. In building a few projects differently within the catalogue, there's also something for us to gain. ■

editions2024.com

Frédéric Poincelet, *Le marquis #5*, 2020, ball pen, spray paint and coloured ink on paper, 65 x 50 cm.

Courtesy Galerie Catherine Putman



THE EVIDENCE OF DOUBT

Catherine Meurisse, of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, interviews author and comic artist **FRÉDÉRIC POINCELET**

Catherine Meurisse: At what point did you start telling yourself that you were going to be an artist, make comics, show drawings?

Frédéric Poincelet: The big revelation, when I first felt I had this aspiration, was when I saw a photocopy machine at the local supermarket. Duplication! To be able to produce, and reproduce my productions, as I wanted. Because that's what interested me as a child: making books. This magic was what always drew me in, so I started to produce images, drawings, photos, texts... to fill the pages of these proto-zines I was making. Anything printed fascinated me. I became aware of what "art" could be through Jack Kirby (1917-1994). In the mass of things I was looking at, reading, in this body of well-polished, establishment-friendly works, Jack Kirby's work was the first crack through which I caught a glimpse of pure drawn matter, of "somewhere else". This was not comfortable to look at, it raised questions: why did "drawing" lead me into another world? Why was I sensitive to it?

A dogma which later resonated with me was that of Pascal Doury and Bruno Richard's graphzines *Elles sont de sortie* (a "post-punk" graphic movement founded in 1977, close to the group Bazooka). They denied the interest of fetishism of the original work, of the market that goes with it, and advocated for printed art above all else. To them, the only way to show, to distribute, to sell one's art was the book, as a portable exhibition for everyone – books of pure drawing. For a long time I was immersed in their books, in the world of *graphzines*, which anyone could enter and which had become mine.


C.M.: What about comics?

F.P.: The recognized and acknowledged quality in comics is very often a recognizable virtuosity, a Grail that hypnotizes the public eye. Whether one is a connoisseur or not, the two meet in boasting about this convention around the gift of drawing. For each of a handful of creators whose immediacy is their true voice, how many display virtuosity going mechanically around in circles? Simultaneously, how dubious is labour, how shameful is work, how much of a hindrance to creativity are they deemed to be, whether they are aimed at “doing well” or “being twisted”... In my view, virtuosity must be fought against, because it is vacuous. It must be fought, to make it fragile, to make it need work. For me, a true great comics artist is Alex Toth (1928-2006). He spent his whole career pushing the limits imposed by his virtuosity, constantly looking for forms to give to his stories. I love the questionable, the comics that you have to go and fetch in the underbelly, in the garbage... The drawings are twisted, the intentions are frontal, no posing, no authorism. I speak of failures as an occult flip side to beauty, a tainted beauty that one prefers to hate because one must have travelled to appreciate it at its true and high value. I see a lot of comics that are confused in their intentions: artistic for some, artisanal for others... I look at them all in the same way, because they are still drawings in front of me, but even so my brain knows in which commercial field they’re playing. Because originally, this medium is an industry, it puts craftsmen to work: Tezuka, Franquin, Hergé, Kirby... They are craftsmen that the

publishers pressed, they made them produce at all costs. And despite that, these craftsmen produced artworks. What’s wrong, in fact, is to believe that you have to be an artist to make a work of art.

C.M.: Is that what beauty is for you?

F.P.: I believe that beauty is the very essence of irreverence, which we want to serve up to this world of entertainment, of all things commonplace and agreed-upon, to make it suffer it a little. Beauty will not be fooled by the ambient postmodernism, by good-natured derision, by jokes, by political involvement in the first or second degree. Beauty will never be fooled by its own people; it is Art, it knows that we work for it and not for ourselves, certainly not for our little careers and the dividends that come with them.

C.M.: I discovered your work in *Le périodique*, your drawing was very different then.

F.P.: At that time, the time of the first *Périodique* (an autobiographical comic published by Ego Comix in 1999), I’d just produced *Une relecture* (Ego Comix, 1999), an attempt at narration, or at least at trying my hand at comics. That idea for a comic was appealing to me, with its airs of “come upstairs, darling, and I’ll tell you a story”... After *Relecture*, it was impossible to continue in the same vein, you can only pull that one off once, not twice. I got tired of this way of working, of the acquired, repetitive ease that came with it. To counteract this, I changed my mask, pushing for realism and purity with *Mon bel amour* (Ego Comix 2006) and *Le château des ruisseaux* (Dupuis 2012). As I have a natural inclination to get tired of myself, to aspire to move forward, to keep myself from suffocating, I continued to dig into realism, even if it meant losing the pictorial originality I had acquired for a while. Rather than collecting revenue from my



estate, I avoided letting myself kill me. From each experiment to the next, the grotesque has mutated...

C.M.: Do you know what you are looking for?

F.P.: I know very precisely what I want to produce as a drawing, where I want to go when I make a drawing... but, by chance, I fail every time! I fail and I end up somewhere else, fighting against something other than what I expected... and it’s always thrilling, exciting to overcome because the result is always more interesting than what I wanted to find. In drawing, one mustn’t be afraid of oneself. Our era is caught up in the blackmail of personality, of each person’s vision, which must be held at all costs, the originality of one’s art, one’s vision... I’d say of their fraud. Everyone is fooling their little world with their little talent and their overstated uniqueness. We’re the first ones to scam ourselves with our belief in our gifts, so eager are we to believe that art belongs to us and that it can be toyed with. We create with our eyes closed to our lies. Everything is food to produce art, we all work for the same cause, whether our voice is shitty or brilliant... You can work, give everything to the “divine” and be sobbingly petty, be the most cynical of artists and have grace...


C.M.: What do you think of your drawings?

F.P.: Allow me to make two or three things clear about the relationship to one’s culture, to one’s critical sense... without bringing the notion of one’s own work into it. I don’t have the taste, nor the culture that my drawing may seem to have. I don’t need to have the eye of my work breathing down my neck watching my taste, and that of good taste checking my curiosity. And conversely, I don’t need my culture monitoring my drawing. These are two separate worlds. We’re all multiple and it is delightful to not always be the same person.

And this culture is not the bedrock of my drawing. The drawing is another me. That’s why I’d like to be able to criticize, love, hate, without my drawing being singled out, without being reminded of “who I am”, “who am I to allow myself”... Precisely, “nobody”: it’s better like that.

Sometimes when I’m drawing I say to myself: here... I’ve touched something! Something huge, a moment of grace! That nobody will see! No one will realize the fabulous thing I just found... because we don’t look, because we don’t care. We’re all too busy to really look at each other’s work. And the critics, who have nothing else to do, wallow in the facile, in what they understand, in what flatters their anecdotal or even partisan references.

We artists know that we’re very clever, and that’s normal, we can’t really work without wanting to atomise what has already been done. We kill ourselves at work for that, to find... in vain. But it’s also good that our egos are constantly trampled on, it allows us to know what we want, what we really want. What I really want is for my drawing, this old friend, to surprise me. I have an idea of what it’s going to tell me, I think I know what conversation we’re going to have every time, and in fact... no! It always twists its story in ways I didn’t expect, it betrays my expectations, upsets my preconceptions. But even when it disappoints me, it’s better than what I was going to ask for. I can’t control it.

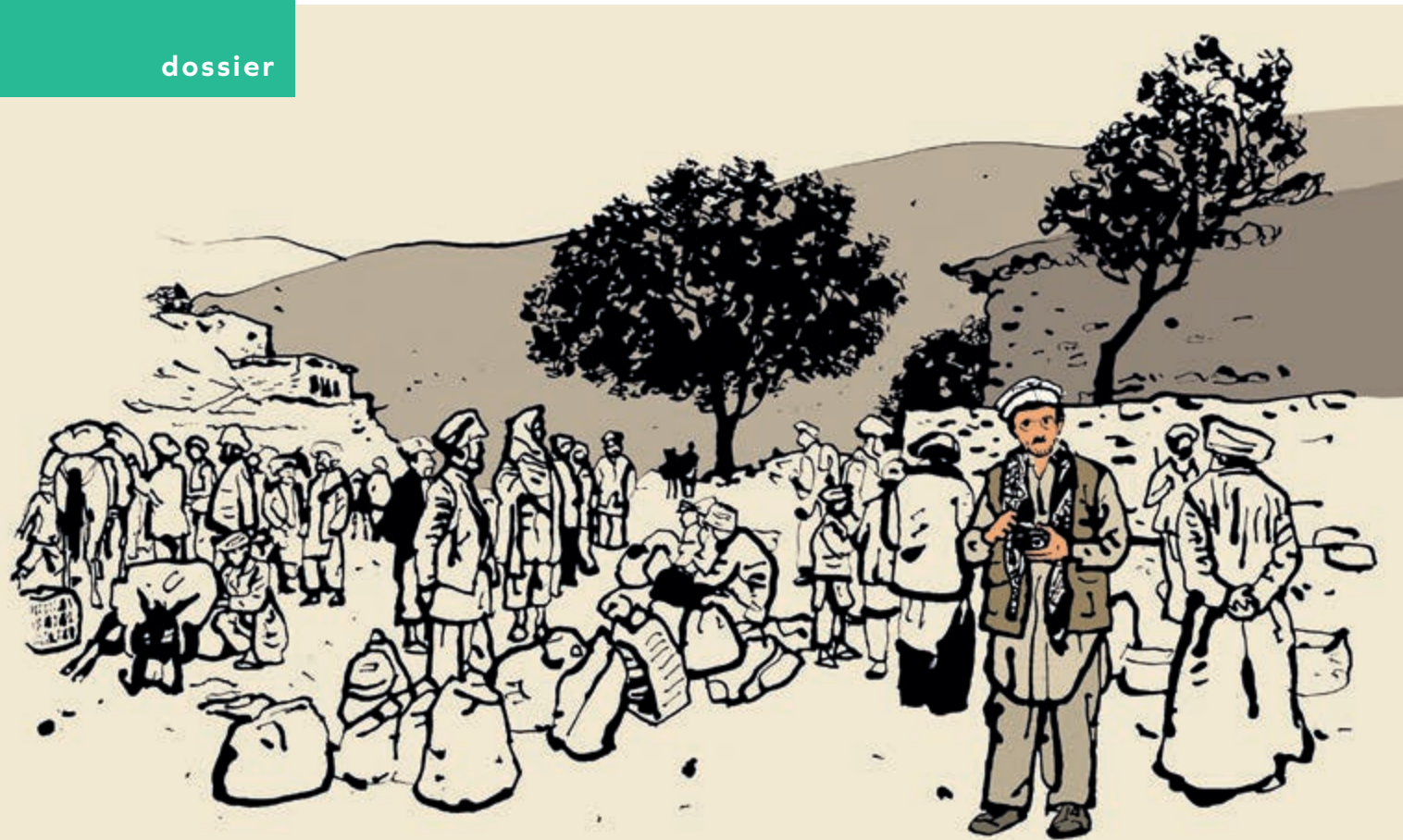
Art protects me from everything: from life, from the world, from our times, from itself... from its puerile pretension, when it is only entertainment, just a commercial product, only complacency and seduction. From feeding on this every day, one ends up knowing what is edible and what is not... Am I an artist who draws because I have this natural understanding of drawing, or does this understanding of drawing come from my position as a drawer, from the fact that I speak this language? Drawing can be an infinite number of things, but what best sums up my feeling is in Saul Steinberg’s word: “What I draw is drawing”. Here, we are not trying to understand the world, drawing is not at the service of our petty questions. It is inventing an autonomous world governed by no rules... So what if many young people have stopped creating even though they had talent... good, that’s a great thing! We’re rid of them, we don’t need good students who use their talent as a hobby. It takes something other than talent to be an artist: you need to be convinced of the evidence of doubt.

“Why does this eternal battle, instead of bringing me down, lift me up, instead of discouraging me, console me”... Thus spoke Delacroix. ■

Top: Frédéric Poincelet, plates from *Mon bel amour* (2006) and the covers of the first issues of *Le Périodique* (1999), published by Ego comme x.

Opposite: Frédéric Poincelet, *Sans Titre (série Le Palais)*, 2021, ball pen, spray paint and coloured ink on paper, 65 x 50 cm.

Courtesy Galerie Catherine Putman



"NO PHOTOGRAPHS! ONLY DRAWINGS"

By **BERNARD PERRINE**, correspondent of the Académie des Beaux-Arts (photography section)

This is the name that Plantu gave to one of his albums. Yet photography and comics have been inseparable since their very beginnings, each one supporting the other in their accession to the recognition of these arts of the image and the imaginary. In the chapter on photography in his *Bouquin de la bande dessinée*², Thierry Groensteen writes that they were born together in 1827, and tells their story. While, in St-Loup-de-Varennes, Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833) was photographing – heliographing – his "vue du Gras", in Geneva, Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846) was producing the first version of *M. Vieux Bois*, "a literature in prints" which is considered to be the first comic. It was signed and published in 1837, around the same time as Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) presented his daguerreotype.

But while Töpffer would rage against Daguerre's invention in texts like *"De la plaque de Daguerre. À propos des excursions daguerriennes"*³, the caricaturist Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, known as Nadar (1820-1910), author of *La vie publique et privée de Monsieur Réac* (1848), took the opposite path and joined the booming photo industry, which gave him the means to create his "Pantheon".

From then on, with regard to form, to the construction of reality or to producing its illusion, the two modes of expression would progress hand in hand, borrowing from each other and sharing their fictional dramas.

Photography as a tool to assist creation

The works of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey on chronophotography provided painters and artists with the keys to give their characters lifelike movement. Yet photographing or commissioning photographs of models, animals or animated objects was what made them feel even closer to the truth of gestures or of movement. To establish a setting or an atmosphere, they would rely on the documentary function of photography through location scouting or by collecting reviews, magazines, catalogues of all kinds, and postcards – collections which are now often replaced by online resources.

These habits and practices were enhanced with the introduction of digital photography and especially the computer, which makes it easier to hide the origins of photographic documents or, conversely, to create real fake photographs. Thus Dave McKean, for instance, makes albums in which a single plate includes drawings, colour photographs, and collages of documents or newspaper pages, to create "impossible images".

Photography as "certification" in the narrative of collective memory

In *Photographie et mémoire dans la BD* ("photography and memory in comics"), Isabelle Delorme⁴ examines the place of photography in comics and in particular in narratives about the memory of historical events, a genre that emerged in the late 20th century (Art Spiegelman's *Maus*). The use of photography, in various forms, is almost systematic in this genre because

it "helps to reinforce people's memories and heighten the narrative's connection with private life and the past". This is a reference to Roland Barthes' famous "It was" ("*ça a été*"), an idea that is contradicted by artists creating false photographs or reconstructions of old sepia family photographs. Digital tools make it easy to make a drawing look like a photograph, and vice versa.

Over time, photographs also came out of hiding to appear openly within the narrative: handwritten or typescript speech bubbles are superimposed on the images. Thus, in 2012, Patrick de Saint-Exupéry inserted black and white photographs into a colour album to "signify" the past events of the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

With Emmanuel Guibert, Didier Lefèvre and Frédéric Lemerrier's *Le Photographe*⁵, comics met photojournalism. There is no artifice here; from contact prints to boxes, photographs sometimes even take up an entire page. It gives the album an authenticity that is even implicitly visible in the drawings.

In *La Fissure*, Kérosène or Cartier-Bresson, *Allemagne 1945*⁶, the story is told in a mixture of a photo book and a graphic novel, in a world close to that of comics but neither in a comic book *per se* nor in a photo comic – the latter form being more akin to photographers' contact prints or to film. Photo comics, or "film in drawn plates", which descend from the *photoliterature* initiated by Alphonse Daudet in the late 19th century, or arguably from 1930s Russian constructivism, seem to have been born in 1947 in the Italian magazine *Il Mio Sogno*, before Cino del Duca's version of them in *Nous Deux*. This history was brilliantly retraced during the grand exhibition "La vie en Roman-Photo" presented at the MUCEM in Marseille in 2017-2018. It plainly demonstrated how many celebrities (Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, Johnny Hallyday, Mireille Mathieu, Dalida, Dick Rivers, Hugh Grant, etc.) owed their early careers to photo comics, yet how persistently virulent the criticism levelled at these comics was. Despite being universally despised, and accused of being mawkish and perverted, the genre became a full-fledged industry, a best-seller in popular culture. Barthes claimed that *Nous Deux* was more obscene than Sade's novels. The communists thought of it as a new opium of the people, Pope John XXIII wrote an encyclical to warn of its dangers, and Michelangelo Antonioni did a brutal satire of it in 1949. In France, Professor Choron and his cénacle eventually led photo comics



towards satire. This gave birth to a whole generation of authors, while Guy Debord's situationists hijacked them to make them subversive political pamphlets. Yet, while photography and comics achieved artistic recognition, Régis Debray⁷ casually threw them into the "after show" category and predicted "their noble embalming by sending them off to join painting and sculpture in the solemn sanctuaries of aesthetic respectability". ■

1 - Plantu, *Pas de photos. Seulement des dessins*, Le Monde, 1997.

2 - *Le Bouquin de la bande dessinée*, published jointly with the Cité Internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image (Angoulême), presents a complete and structured state of the literature about comics.

3 - *De la plaque de Daguerre. À propos des excursions daguerriennes*, 1841 republished in 2002 by Le temps qu'il fait.

4 - Isabelle Delorme, *Photographie et mémoire dans la BD*, Sciences Po Art & Sociétés.

5 - *Le Photographe*, Emmanuel Guibert, Didier Lefèvre and Frédéric Lemerrier, Éd. Dupuis, 2003.

6 - *La Fissure* by Carlos Spottorno and Guillermo Abril, Éd. Gallimard. *Kérosène* by Alain Bujak and Piero Macola, Éd. Futuropolis. *Cartier-Bresson, Allemagne 1945*, Jean-David Morvan, drawings by Sylvain Savoia, photographs by H C-B, Éd. Dupuis.

7 - Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image : une histoire du regard en Occident*, Folio essais, 1995.

Elections



During its 23 June session, the Académie des Beaux-Arts elected the photographer Dominique Issermann to Seat III, previously occupied by Bruno Barbey (1941-2020), the architect Anne Démians to Seat IV, previously occupied by Roger Taillibert (1926-2019), and the sculptor Anne Poirier to Seat VI, previously occupied by Gérard Lanvin (1923-2018).

Dominique Issermann works mainly in fashion and advertising. She collaborates with major French and international magazines and has photographed a whole generation of artists in a light and with an emotion that make her work immediately recognizable. Sonia Rykiel put her in charge of her advertising campaigns and was followed by Christian Dior, Chanel, Nina Ricci, Yves Saint-Laurent, and Hermès, amongst others. In the darkness of the studio, she invents a white light that seems to come from inside the characters, and that is taught in photography schools as “Issermann light”. Her works are exhibited on a regular basis.

Anne Démians has been running an agency of 30 architects and engineers since 2005. She is an assiduous contributor to theoretical projects opening up new models of construction and functional assemblages and new forms of cities, and participates in numerous research groups on sustainable development, land use planning and innovation (RBR 2020-2050). She is a member of the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine's Board of Directors and of the Académie d'Architecture.

Anne Poirier met Patrick Poirier at the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, where they decided to work together. Anne Poirier describes herself as an “archaeologist” and an “architect”, refusing to be called a “painter” or a “sculptor”. All of her works are underpinned by mythology, dreams and utopia. They point towards the notion of memory and reflect the fragility of civilizations and cultures. Anne and Patrick Poirier's joint oeuvre is now exhibited in leading museums. ■

Photo credit: Bernard Perrine

At its 24 February session, the Académie des Beaux-Arts elected **Sylvie Hugues** as correspondent to the Photography section and, at its 2 June session, **Bernard Marcadé** as correspondent to the Painting section.

Tribute
Pierre Cardin

Pierre Cardin died on 29 December 2020. In 1992 he had been elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, of which he was the oldest member.

Born in 1922 near Venice, Pierre Cardin arrived in Saint-Etienne two years later with his family. He went to Paris at the age of 17 and started working for Paquin. There he met Cocteau, for whom he designed the costumes for *Beauty and the Beast*, and was hired by Christian Dior.

A visionary designer and a mythical figure in haute couture, which he brought to the streets by marketing an apparel line in 1959, he used the principle of licensing to become an international landmark. A precursor in all fields, driven by an exceptional inventive and intuitive creative spirit, he saw work as the most important virtue. “I have invented everything” was his claim. He wished he was a sculptor and united the eye and the hand in his work with fabrics and innovative materials such as vinyl, metal and jersey wool, which he cut out and modelled to his constantly active thought process. He was the embodiment of the futurism materialized in the Cardin style, inspired by op art, going as far as designing custom furniture to fit his Palais Bulles. A man of culture and an honorary ambassador of Unesco, Pierre Cardin was in tune with the times. The space race inspired his unisex jersey suit *cosmocorps*.

Driven by his passion for theatre, music, dance, and entertainment, he opened the Espace Cardin in 1970. A regular at spectacular fashion shows (in Japan, where he went in 1957, or on the Great Wall of China in 1979, for example), he presented the 70-year career of the Maison Cardin at the invitation of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 2016, in its *Grande Salle des Séances*. It was the Académie des Beaux-Arts' way of paying tribute to the man who, in 1993, created the five annual Pierre Cardin prizes to support excellence among young artists.

In all ways an heir of the Renaissance, Pierre Cardin placed humans at the centre of all creation. An extraordinary creator and entrepreneur, he reinvented and enchanted everyday life with his couture collections, exhibitions and shows, which went on into his festival at Lacoste and Maxim's. His ultimate project, the Palais Lumière in Venice, remains, if not a utopia, at least a humanist's wish. ■ Photo credit: Juliette Agnel

Lydia Harambourg, correspondent of the Academy des Beaux-Arts (Painting section)

Exhibition



Salgado ~ Amazônia

The exhibition of works by member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts Sebastião Salgado and his wife Lélia Wanick-Salgado at the Philharmonie de Paris, which is set to Jean-Michel Jarre's “symphony of the world” based on actual forest sounds, also renders and amplifies the voices and testimonies of the Native American communities featured in the photographs.

Following on from the *Genesis* project, in which he photographed the most remote regions of the planet to document their majestic beauty, the photographer undertook a new series of journeys to capture the incredible natural diversity of the Brazilian Amazonian Forest and the ways of life of its peoples. He spent several weeks in their villages, photographing ten ethnic groups. Salgado's images, taken from small boats or aircraft, reveal the complex labyrinth of winding tributaries that feed the river and mountains, some of which stand as tall as 3,000 metres, and the waterlogged skies through which celestial rivers run. The exhibition magnifies not only the fragility of this ecosystem, but also the richness of the Amazonian sound universe, by echoing Salgado's impressive photographs with an original creation by Jean-Michel Jarre based on real forest sounds. More than 200 photographs highlight the fragility of this ecosystem, along with immense projections, to match this unique natural setting. Through the power of these images, Sebastião and Lélia Salgado hope to stimulate thought and action in support of the preservation of this invaluable heritage of humanity. ■

Exhibition curator and scenographer: Lélia Wanick-Salgado
• Musical creation for the exhibition: Jean-Michel Jarre. In collaboration with the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève

Top: *Famille Korubo, État d'Amazonas, Brésil, 2017.* © S. Salgado

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Publications



Paul Andreu

Architect and member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts Paul Andreu, who died on 11 October 2018, was also a writer and a painter. Two books, a novel and a collection of essays, have recently been published by Éditions Alma.

Paul Andreu's last novel, *Kaleidoscope*, which he completed shortly before his death, is a polyphonic novel and – as Yannick Haenel puts it in his beautiful preface – a destiny novel as the author, through nine characters, staged his own death as well as his whole life, and the radiance of his youth. Far from being just a strict narrow biography, what unfolds in it, with the multiple facets that are endlessly recomposed through the lens of a kaleidoscope, is a true work of fiction. *Faire et refaire* is a collection of essays based on some fifty texts selected from the impressive body of writing left by Paul Andreu. It is about architecture, but also about culture, landscapes, media, space, past and future, development and interiority, writing and painting. In short, life, in all of its ways of being self-evident and diverse.

An exhibition of Paul Andreu's paintings will be held at the Galerie Éric Dupont (138, rue du Temple, 75003 Paris) from 4 September 2021, for three weeks.

An exhibition of architecture by Paul Andreu will be held at the Centre Pompidou (Musée National d'Art Moderne), starting on 7 September 2021, for 9 months. ■

alma-editeur.fr | eric-dupont.com | centrepompidou.fr



Page 1: back of the head of a Brussels puppet resembling a famous comics character, 1971. Puppets originated from an order by the Lord of the Netherlands, Philip II of Spain (1527-1598) who, knowing that his people hated him, had the theatres closed to prevent them from becoming places of assembly. As the story has it, the people of Brussels then replaced actors with *poechenelles* (dummies) in clandestine theatres.

Photo credit: CmP



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