

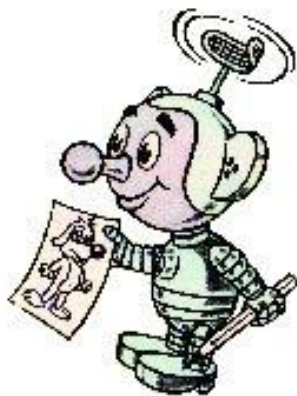
At the Belgian Comicscenter
From October 25th 2011 until May 20th 2012

77 years of Roumanian comics



It is to the credit of Romanian comic strip artists that they have been able to produce such original work of great talent – the fruit of a long inheritance – in the trials and tribulations of a century during which their society has suffered particularly. Sustained by the few European magazines that penetrated the Wall, readers had to wait for the arrival of democracy to see the gradual blossoming of the various genres that make up the rich tapestry that is present-day comic strip. Since then, Dodo Nita, who is president of the Romanian Association of Comic Strip enthusiasts, and Alexandru Ciubotariu, standard-bearer of the new generation of comic authors, have worked tirelessly to uncover the works that pepper the history of Romanian comic strip, encouraged by current authors who have no hesitation in entrusting their works to them. It is this unexplored treasure – original illustrations and panels – that is the subject matter of the exhibition that the Belgian Comicscenter is proud to present.

*With the support of the Roumanian Cultural Institute, the
Delegation Wallonia-Brussels in Bucharest and the Brussels-
Capital Region*



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The introduction of the exhibition

How better to learn about the life and history of a society than through the work of its artists and the way they expressed themselves? The merit of the Romanian comic strip writers was that they succeeded in producing original works of great talent – the fruits of a long heritage – through the vicissitudes of a century in which their society suffered particularly badly.



In its beginning, in the period preceding World War II, the Romanian comic strip adopted the same inspirations as those of western Europe, feeding on American magazines and influences. Quashed before it could develop, the work of the artists of this period has been lost in the upheavals of history.

With the setting up of a totalitarian regime and the country's isolation, only two options remained to the Romanian creators of comic strips: either to produce fantasy cartoons to amuse children, or – for those of a more realist nature, to adapt the approved great national or classic novels, to the exclusion of any personal inventiveness.

Those who were incapable of yielding to these limitations had only two options: to change jobs or to go into exile, like the

great Livia Rusz who left Romania and travelled to Hungary on foot. How can one fail to be moved by her minutely detailed work, rediscovered today in all its glory?

Fed by the rare European magazines which managed to enter through the Wall, Romanian readers had to await the arrival of democracy to see the blossoming of the various genres that make up the richness of the present-day comic strip. Since then Dodo Nita, the president of the Romanian Association of Comic Strip Enthusiasts, and Alexandre Ciubotariu, the organiser of this exhibition and standard-bearer for the new generation of Romanian comic strip creators, have tirelessly sought out the works that punctuate the history of the Romanian comic strip, with the encouragement of the creators of yesterday and today who are only too pleased to entrust their works to them.

This unknown treasure of illustrations and original plates is the subject of this exhibition, proudly presented by the Belgian Comic Strip Center and co-produced by the Romanian Cultural Institute.

Jean Auquier, BCSC

77 years of the Romanian comic strip

An exhibition by the Belgian Comic Strip Center
Co-produced by the Romanian Institute

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The Belgian Comic Strip centre wishes to thank the Romanian Institute, the Romanian Cultural Center in Brussels and the Wallonia-Brussels Delegation in Bucharest, thanks to whom the Romanian comic strip and its authors are now better known to us.

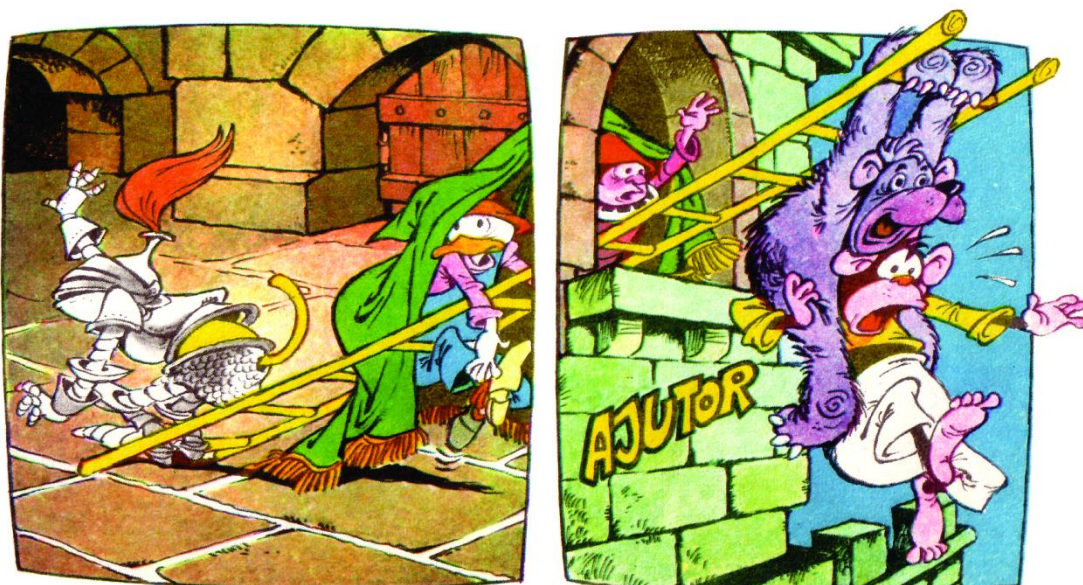
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Short history of the Romanian comic strip

The heroes and the magazines

The interwar years can be regarded as the Golden Age of the Romanian comic strip thanks to the large number of comics published during this period. This was also the epoch in which the most famous Romanian comic strip character, *Haplea*, first appeared. Dreamed up by the writer Nicolae Batzaria (1874-1952), a former Turkish minister and member of the Romanian Senate who was thrown into prison by the Communists in 1952 because of his political past, *Haplea* was first drawn by Marin Iorda in the magazine **Dimineata copiilor** (1924-1938) and by Pascal Radulescu in **Universul copiilor** (1925-1948). *Haplea's* notoriety was such that his adventures were to form the subject of six albums published before 1940, two more published during the Communist regime and four more after 1990. *Haplea* also became the subject of a cartoon film in 1927 and a theatre play in 1938.

O ocupație
plăcută



The other most popular character from this era, now forgotten, was the soldier *Neatza*. Drawn between 1939 and 1943 by the writer and caricaturist Neagu Rădulescu, he set out to "fight" the Bolsheviks in the pages of two albums, earning his artist a ten-year publishing ban when the Communists came to power. During this period, French-speaking Romanians were able to visit the Hachette bookshop in Bucharest to buy and read the *Bécassine*, *Zig et Puce*, *Bicot* and *Professeur Nimbus* albums in French.

Between 1948 and 1955, the comic strip – a symbol of capitalism – was completely banned from the Romanian press by the Stalinist regime. It did not reappear until the Khrushchev Thaw, at the time of publication of the first issues of **Vaillant** – the future **Pif Gadget** – in Romania. As in other countries in the Soviet bloc, this unique magazine of western comic strips was to feed the imagination of Romanian authors and readers for a long time. It was published by the French Communist Party.

George Voinescu, 1943

The rise to power of Nicolae Ceausescu in 1965 allowed (apparent) development of Romanian society, also felt in the comic strip. In 1967 the weekly magazine **Cutezatorii** began to include two or three cartoon plates per issue,

drawn by the great names: Puiu Manu, Burschi, Dures, Pompiliu etc. At the same time the monthly magazines **Luminita** and **Arici Pogonici** (for 7 to 9-year-olds) published the adventures of *Mac si Cocofifi*, a duck and a monkey drawn by Livia Rusz, the best Romanian woman-cartoonist. Later, between 1970 and 1987, her redrawn cartoons were published in albums and translated into German, Hungarian and Spanish.

In 1970 the Romanian comic strip underwent a major evolution. The magazines **Cutezatorii** and **Pif Gadget** launched the first of three competitions for amateur cartoonists, judged by the creator of *Pif le chien* in person. A Spanish cartoonist and Republican, José Cabrero Arnal (1909-1982) had fled Franquist Spain and come to live in France in 1939. 230 prizes and diplomas were distributed among the 4,300 entries received. Some 20 of the prizewinning cartoonists went on to have works published,

including Radu Marian (first prize), Viorel Pirligras, Valentin Tănase, Calin Stoicanescu, Mircea Arapu, Traian Marinescu, Sorin Anghel, Zeno Bogdanescu, Laurentiu Sirbu, Feszt Laszlo,....

The same year saw publication of the first specialised collection of comic strip albums. This was a series of ten titles, adapted from novels by great Romanian and foreign writers: Mihail Sadoveanu, Radu Tudoran, Jules Verne, Ernest Hemingway, E.R. Burroughs. It was during this decade that most of the 50 albums published after the war in Romania appeared. Nine of these albums were by Sandu Florea.

Unfortunately in 1981, Ceausescu decided to pay off his debts and **Pif Gadget** was no longer available in Romania (supposedly due to the lack of foreign currency). To become self-funding the literary magazines and theatres began publishing almanacs and supplements with some good comic strips in them. Science fiction was also enjoying a boom at this time. Several new fanzines of science fiction comic strips came into being, most of them photocopied. A new generation of "amateur" cartoonists emerged. They were driven by passion, and did not dare to dream of earning a living through their work.



In 1983, three cartoonists, Valentin Iordache, Marian Mirescu, Viorel Pirligras met up with Dodo Nita, future animator and historian of the Romanian comic strip, in a science fiction club in Craiova. They decided to create an unofficial association, "BD Craiova", to promote the comic strip in Romania. In the following years they published sci fi comic strip fanzines, wrote the first studies on the comic strip, translated French and American comic strips and above all, published works intended for an adult readership for the first time in their country. Two years later the first proper Romanian sci fi comic strip magazine **Orion** came into being for five issues (32 pages in A3 format, 150,000 copies). It met with great public acclaim.

After the fall of the Communist regime at the end of 1989, the Romanian comic strip went on to experience the same explosion of enthusiasm as all of the country's media. Publications for children were particularly popular. Even the oldest ones changed their names and published more comic strips, signed by new authors.

Sandu Florea, 1985

Between 1990 and 1993 many short-lived comics made a brief appearance, most of them published by the authors themselves. **Carusel** was the only one that lasted for two years, but it too ceased when its editor, the artist Sandu Florea, departed for the United States where his cartoons were published by the big American editors. The galloping

inflation of 1993 (300%) brought the new impetus to an end.

Published regularly in the newspaper supplements and magazines, three to five albums are produced each year by Romanian comic strip writers such as Alexandru Ciubotariu, Șerban Andreescu, Radu Marian, Viorel Pirligras, Nicolae Nobilescu, Valentin Tănase and Gabriel Rusu. 1990 saw the foundation of the Romanian Association of Comic Strip Enthusiasts, which succeeded "BD Craiova". With occasional support from the Wallonia-Brussels Delegation in Bucharest and the 'Romanian network of the Alliances Françaises' the Association organised an international comic strip festival every year, travelling in different major Romanian towns. Besides promoting the comic strip genre it also encouraged meetings between Romanian and western authors. Its president Dodo Nita published several reference works on this subject including this revised and expanded History of the Romanian Comic Strip in 2010, with the support of the Romanian Institute.

Jean Auquier,
with the assistance of Alexandru Ciubotariu and Dodo Nita.
[Istoria Benzii Desenate Romanesti](#), editura Vellant, 2010.
(with appendix in French and English).



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