

Three new permanent exhibitions at the Belgian Comic Strip Center

- A. The Invention of Comic Strip**
- B. The Art of Comic Strip**
- C. Horta and the Waucquez Warehouse**



© DANIEL FOUSS / BELGIAN COMICS CENTER

Official inauguration : Tuesday 22 October 2013

A. The invention of Comic Strip

How did the comic strip begin, and how is it defined? This exhibition takes you on a journey in enormous strides through the history of the world and its civilisations.

Curator : Jean Auquier



Texts of « The invention of comic strip»

1. Introduction

There was once, a very long time ago, a man who could neither read nor write. Moreover, the words "read" and "write" did not even exist, any more than any other words. He invented drawing to express himself, to tell stories and to worship.

From the oldest known accounts of cave art to the fierce competition among New York editors at the dawn of the 20th century, the various elements of this exhibition confirm the popular adage that "nothing is invented, everything just changes".

Comic strip is not the result of a discovery. It is the outcome of the ever closer collusion between the desire to tell stories and the art of drawing. It is the most literary of the plastic arts.

During this short journey through time, we marvel at the artistic genius of painters, mosaicists, sculptors, illuminators or weavers as they interpret the story and create movement. Their works had a profound effect on the relationships between human beings.

How did what we now call "comic strip" come about, and how do we describe it? The aim of this exhibition, which spans the history of the world and civilisations, is to answer these questions.

2. The parts of the exhibition

2.1. From his early beginnings, man told his own story in pictures

Since they stood upright, human beings have recounted tales of, explained or worshipped their idols using all possible means. Spanning the centuries, the stories they tell testify to the society into which they were born, their beliefs and their culture. We do not know the names of most of the artists who sculpted, drew, painted or even wove these works that have become part of humanity's shared heritage.

2.2. Monks invent the grammar of comic strip

In Christian monasteries of the Middle Ages, copyist monks devoted their life to reproducing the sacred texts of their religion. Others embellished these unique works with intricate illuminations and illustrations rendering thanks to their Creator. Without realising it, they invented most of the principles used by present-day artists to create a comic strip: dividing the story up into panels, movement, foreground, dialogues in balloons etc.

2.3. Printing opened everything up to a wide audience

The introduction of engraving, published books, newspapers and colour prints sold at fairs enabled a wide audience to be reached. Both masters of their art, the Englishman, William Hogarth and the Japanese, Katsushika Hokusai, told stories by means of a series of engravings or etchings. They are essential milestones in the history of this nascent art, following the example of the Swiss comic artist, Rodolphe Töpffer, who taught movement so well to his pupils.

2.4. In the 19th century, newspapers told stories

As far back as the 19th century, newspapers and magazines understood that, in order to sell advertising space to advertisers, they had to have as large a readership as possible. Along with photo-stories that kept readers on tenterhooks, they featured humorists, caricaturists and the first recurrent heroes, such as Ally Sloper in England or Max und Moritz in Germany, whose adventures were broken down into series of picture

2.5. Comic strip becomes an economic challenge

At the dawn of the 20th century, the American publishers, Pulitzer and Hearst pushed economic logic to its limit. They poached the best elements, journalists or artists from each other. Thus it was that Richard Outcault left Pulitzer's publication for Hearst's, where he created The Yellow Kid (1896) and then Buster Brown. The technical means used also gave rise to a first masterpiece: Little Nemo in Slumberland (Winsor McCay, 1905).

2.6. So, what is a comic strip?

The result of artistic development as old as humanity itself nourished and enriched by every culture, and by technological revolutions, such as the first appearance of paper, colours or printing.... So what, in the end, is a comic strip? The short answer is: a comic strip is a series of images forming a narrative, in which the scenario is incorporated into the images. From there, it is the imagination and talent of the authors that do the rest!



B.The art of comic strip

This exposition proposes to explore the comic strip in all its forms, from the creative process to the range of genres that constitute the European comic strip today.

Curator : JC De La Royère



Texts of « The art of comic strip »

1. Introduction

Like other art disciplines such as literature or cinema, comic strip art is a mode of expression which manifests itself in many ways, through very different genres, styles and formats, for a variety of audiences.

"The art of comic strip" therefore proposes to explore the comic strip in all its forms, from the creative process to the range of genres that constitute the European comic strip today.

In the first part of the exhibition, each module illustrates a stage in the creative process – synopsis, scenario, rough sketches and pencil drawings, inking, and colouring techniques, including the graphics palette – and highlights the work of authors, scriptwriters and artists who have kindly allowed us to use their original documents and work in progress as practical examples for this exhibition.

In the second part, "The art of comic strip" presents the range of genres that constitute the present-day European comic strip, from the genre comic to the graphic novel. In this section as in the first, each comic strip genre is illustrated by a varying selection of original documents and artwork.

2. The creative process of comic strips

2.1. The art of the scenario

A scenario is the storyline which the author develops in whatever direction his imagination takes him. He structures it by first drafting a synopsis, a very brief summary setting out the basic plot. His next step is to break down the action and decide how many pages to devote to each sequence. The author then develops the sequences by subdividing them into boxes. He then creates the complete final scenario setting out all the details of the background, the action and the dialogue box by box.

A conscientious scriptwriter will also provide his artist with a physical and psychological description of the characters and entrust him or her with all the documentation he has accumulated while working out his story.

2.2. The art of the pencil drawing

As soon as he receives the scenario, the artist sets about sketching out the portraits of the main characters, drawing studies of their costumes and the backgrounds against which the action will be set. This is a period of intensive documentary research. Those authors who can afford to often go themselves to research the locations and take the photos they will need later on.

In order to visualise all of the work to be done, the artist creates a storyboard by sketching out the pages for the future album very small, with small boxes and speech bubbles which prefigure the action on each page. Armed with all this information, the artist can finally make a start on the actual drawings. He begins with a rough sketch, which he will improve and alter until he has obtained the perfect scene which he will carefully copy onto the final support medium.

Original artwork drawn in pencil is rare because the drawings are not intended to remain in this state. However, some artists do their inking on a new medium using a light table, and the original pencil drawing then remains intact.

2.3. The art of inking

Before he can ink the plate, the artist must know the form in which it will be published. If it is to be printed in colour, he can simply ink over the pencil lines. If the album is to be printed in black and white on the other hand he must take account of the lighting, the contrasts and the way the shadows fall, while attempting to distribute the flat black areas evenly and harmoniously on the page. The inking is the final stage in the drawings: it allows him to give a clear definition to any faint pencil lines and to choose the final outline of the drawing when the pencil drawing is charcoal-like.

Use of a paintbrush gives a very artistic, flowing line, but the black can sometimes look rather grey. A quill pen gives a more precise line and a stronger black, but demands greater diligence. Some artists draw in the strokes by quill pen to give the illusion of brush strokes. The lines produced by a rotating pen are thinner and less sharply contrasted than those drawn by quill, but this pen has nevertheless been adopted by many artists for its ease of use. Felt-tip pen is also practical and gives a satisfactory finish, but may quickly fade or deteriorate.



2.4. The art of colouring

The oldest method used for colouring in comic strips is the "blueprint" method. Here the inked plate is printed on art paper in its publication format and colour is then applied using gouache or watercolours. The photoengraver extracts the three base colour films (cyan, yellow and magenta) and adds the black film with the lines: the printer then has the four films required to reproduce the page by the four-colour printing process.

It is possible to avoid printing off the blueprint by taping the film with the black lines onto a sheet of paper (Leonardo blue) and then applying the colours on the reverse side at a light table. The advantage here is that the paper cannot distort away from the film with the black lines; the disadvantage is that the artist does not have a clear view of the end result while he is working.

Another solution is to scan the inked plate in its publishing format and then to colour it by computer. Quick and economical, this can also be a satisfactory solution provided that the artist resists the temptation to overuse the many artificial effects which are so easily accessible.

Direct colour is the most attractive solution, but also the one that requires the greatest skill. It involves applying colour directly onto the pencil drawn or sometimes simply sketched plate, which then becomes a kind of painting, with or without the speech bubbles which may be overlaid by computer.

2.4. Digital art

More and more artists are resorting to using computers to finish their plates, which are first drawn on paper and then scanned in so that they can be corrected, cleaned up or completed on screen. Other artists work their vignettes separately on paper, and then scan them in and put the plates together by computer.

But artists can also dispense with paper completely by using a graphics tablet. Sophisticated software allows them to draw on an electronic tablet connected to a screen, so that every stage in the construction of the plate is completed on the same support medium. The graphic tablet gives the artist access to every possible virtual tool, and any unwanted line is erased with a single click. This remarkable tool suits all styles, from the most synthetic to the most sophisticated, with no artistic limits.

2.6. The art of the cover

The cover is the poster for a comic strip album. It must be representative of its content while meeting the commercial requirements of legibility and originality, its objective being to make the album stand out from the plethora of other works.

Generally the artist will choose to depict one of the powerful moments in the story, but the album cover also conveys other pieces of information which are sometimes more important, such as: who are the authors? Is it part of a series or collection? Who is the publisher? This is where the graphic designer comes in.

The graphic designer is usually responsible for laying out all the albums in a collection in order to give it some degree of unity. He selects from his basic options according to editorial choices. For example comic strip heroes are often better known than their creators, so the author's name will be accorded less importance in a series than in a one-shot.

2.7 The art of publishing

Generally speaking a comic strip is born from the will of its author, who may be a scriptwriter, an artist or both at the same time. The project is then offered to a publisher. If the publisher agrees to include it in his catalogue, he will assume the artistic direction and printing of the albums as well as their sale and remuneration of the authors.

A publisher's catalogue is defined by his publishing policy. This policy gives the publisher an original identity, guides his artistic choices and defines the commercial objectives.

The publisher sells his albums through the intermediary of a distributor, a wholesaler who is responsible for distributing the albums to the different points of sale, bookstores or hypermarkets. To promote his new works the publisher calls on specialists: marketing and advertising managers, a communications manager to deal with the press and promotional activities (exhibitions, competitions, media partnerships) and a field sales force which encourages purchases at the points of sale.

2.7.1. Derivative rights and foreign rights

The biggest publishers in the market have separate departments whose aim is to reach and attract new readers and to keep existing readers loyal by offering them objects that allow them to get closer to their favourite series. Produced by companies with an operating licence, these spin-offs such as boxes of chocolates or animations for mobile phones can also generate significant income. When a company selling perfumes, cars, fast food etc. wishes for its activities to be associated with the sympathetic image of a comic strip hero or series, it too will call the derivative rights department.

For its part, the foreign rights department will seek to boost distribution of a work or series in another language by relying on local publishers who can guarantee a quality product suited to market requirements, and fair and honest management of the authors' rights.

Finally it can be noted that cinema is increasingly looking to the comic strip, its scenarios and even its authors for inspiration. These adaptations of the stories for the cinema also allow comic strip publishers and authors to reach a new audience.

3. Comic Strip genres

3.1. Humorous comic strips

The art of telling funny stories in comic strip form covers very different disciplines according to the format used. Little stories in three boxes call for minimalist drawing and repetitive humour. Gags, or stories on one page, allow the author to develop more eventful situations, and require dynamic presentation. The short stories over several pages recount the story in greater detail before arriving at its conclusion. As for the great humorous adventures, these call for a humour-laden scenario which hinges on a rigorous dramatic structure.

3.2. Realistic comic strips

A realistic comic strip is a comic strip in which the drawing but not necessarily the storyline is realistic. These are real people acting within real settings, but improbable adventures may befall them.

Realistic style drawing is a discipline full of constraints which demands abundant documentation. In a realistic comic strip, one must be able to recognize the make of the car crossing the box. And like a real film or TV series director, the realistic artist chooses the angle from which his sequences are seen, the camera movements and the lighting for the story he is presenting.

3.3 Expressionist comic strips

Some artists choose to caricature reality in order to make their stories more powerful. This allows them to translate more dreamlike or more harrowing, and in fact more "realistic", stories into images than the realistic artists. Expressionism is ideally suited to the use of heavily charged lines and violent contrasts of black and white, but also has a following among users of the direct colour method.

3.4 The graphic novel

The graphic novel is a more intimist and literary comic strip genre than the classic adventure series. Sometimes over a hundred folios long, it is published in the compact form of a novel. Through artistic choice as much as through financial constraint it is often printed in black and white, and the graphics must be simple and expressive. The graphic novel is very often a real-life account; it is less well suited to works of pure fiction.

3.5 Comic strips for children

At around seven years of age, when they are beginning to read independently, children are able to discover the delights of humorous or adventure comic strips which can be read on several levels. But albums have also been written for the very young; these explore the world of early childhood with humour and imagination. Some of these comic strips are silent, which makes them even more accessible and interactive. When they do have a text, parents are called upon to help their children enter the wonderful world of the comic strip.

3.6 Comic strips for adolescents

Between the ages of 12 and 14, boys and girls leave the world of childhood as they start to become aware of their sexuality and experience the first pangs of love. Their preoccupations change, and so does their reading. At a time when publishers are presenting their abundant output in increasingly targeted collections, some of the comic strip creators most in tune with the spirit of the age have found their vocation writing for this very specific niche of male and female readers.

3.7 Comic strips for everyone

Intended for young people, the first stories in images to be published were children's stories and adaptations of series designed for the very broad readership of the big American daily newspapers. The French-Belgian comic strip was created in this venerable tradition and intended for readers aged "from 7 to 70 years", to borrow the famous slogan of the Tintin magazine. Besides the humorous and realistic series, a hybrid "semi-realistic" genre reached its apogee among Belgian publishers in the second half of the 20th century.

3.8 The family strip

An ancestral genre that started with *La Famille Fenouillard*, created by Christophe in 1889, the family comic strip portrays groups of individuals within their family unit. The latter often consists of a married couple with one or more children but it can also be a destructured family with sometimes mysterious connections. The genre presents its tales in gags, short stories or big adventures and is a classic of the comic strip for everyone.

3.9 Historical comic strips

Ranging from the strict recounting of historical facts to fictionalised intrigues based on real events, the historical comic strip is a diverse genre drawn in realistic, semi-realistic or simply humorous form. All periods are evoked, from the legend of Gilgamesh to the Gulf War, with a predilection for Ancient Rome, the Middle Ages and the Napoleonic Wars. Many works of a biographical nature are also associated with the genre.

3.10 Heroic fantasy

The heroic fantasy was originally a sub-genre of fantasy literature, revisiting medieval times to spin tales of magic and sorcery. Its popularity was revived by the role-play game "Dungeons and dragons" in the 1970s, and it made its grand return to the comic strip in 1983 with "Quête de l'oiseau du temps" by Serge Le Tendre and Régis Loisel, whose graphics have inspired a whole new generation of artists to devote themselves to drawing heroic fantasies since the start of the 1990s.

3.11 Science fiction

A vast domain encompassing distant galaxies, extra-terrestrial beings, time warps, alternative histories and futuristic scenarios, the science-fiction comic strip was a very Anglo-Saxon genre before being adopted by many European and in particular French-Belgian authors. The most committed writers willingly use this medium to evoke failings of our society by transposing them into imaginary worlds often ruled by totalitarian regimes.

3.12 Animal comic strips

Familiar since Aesop's fables, animal literature is an indirect way of evoking the human condition through anthropomorphic animals. It is the kingdom of the fable. The genre found great success in the comic strip world, where it allowed authors to deal with sensitive subjects such as World War II (*Maus*, *La Bête est morte*) but also lighter subjects where the most realistic fiction mingles with the most unbridled humour.



3.13 Educational comic strips

Long accused of impoverishing the intellects of their readers, comic strip publishers initially reacted by introducing true stories and other edifying tales into their publications, before realizing that the comic strip could be a dynamic modern medium capable of disseminating knowledge very widely. This is why many promotional albums resemble educational comic strips.

3.14 Press cartoons

The comic strip has had a presence in the daily press for many years in the form of humorous strips and cartoons, often supplied by American agencies at prices that excluded all European competition. But the true press comic strip artist is a chronicler who comments on current events and political developments from one day to the next. The press comic strip may sometimes be broken down into sequences of images, making it part of the great comic strip family, but its vocation is essentially journalistic.

List of artists displayed « The Art of Comic Strip » »

Arleston / Astier / Azam / Azara / Balac / Balthazar / Baru / Baudoin / Béhé / Benacquista / Birkhofer / Blesteau / Boidin / Bonifay / Boon / Bouüaert / Bravo / Broeders / Carpentier / Carrière / Cauvin / Chetville / Christin / Christopher / Comès / Coppée / Cothias / Cromheecke / Cruchaudet / Culliford / Dany / Darasse / De Brab / De Heij / Johan De Moor / De Poortere / Delaf / Deprez / Drèze / Dubuc / Dufaux / Duhoo / Dupré / Falzar / Ferry / Filippi / Findakly / Francq / Frank / Franquin / Garcia / Garray / Gazzotti / Geerts / Geluck / Giroud / Glogowski / Godard / Goldsmith / Eugeen Goossens / Goscinny / Haldeman / Hergé / Hermann / Jacquemart / Jean-Pol / Joly / Jost / Juillard / Kox / Kucerovsky / Lamquet / Laudec / Laurel / Laurent / Le Gall / Le Tendre / Leemans / Legendre / Létzer / Lelouch / Leonardo / Liberge / Lindingre / Lob / Loisel / Loustal / Macherot / Madsen / Marvano / Mats / Melanijn / Merho / Mézières / Midam / Mittéi / Nix / Osi / Paringaux / Peyo / Piot / Pratt / Renaud / Ribera / Richez / Rouaud / Satrapi / Schröder / Sente / Serdu / Servais / Severin / Sfar / Sokal / Spaey / Swerts / Swysen / Taymans / Trondheim / Uderzo / Van de Perre / Van Hamme / Van Oudheusden / Vanas / Vance / Vandersteen / Vanistendael / Vehlmann / Mort Walker / Walthéry / Wasterlain / Yslaïre / Yves H. / Zep / Zidrou.



C. Horta and the Waucquez Warehouse

This exhibition tells the story of a shop the like of which is no longer seen. Now over 100 years old, this is the only semi-industrial building designed by Victor Horta still in existence today. And what an existence it has had!

Curator : Jean Auquier



Texts of «Horta and the Waucquez Warehouse »

« It was like the concourse of a station, surrounded by the balustrades of the two upper storeys, intersected by hanging staircases, and with suspension bridges built across it. The iron staircases, with double spirals opened out in bold curves, multiplying the landings; the iron bridges, thrown across the void, ran straight along, very high up; and beneath the pale light from the windows all this metal formed a delicate piece of architecture, a complicated lacework through which the daylight passed, the modern realization of a dream-palace... »

Emile Zola, « The Ladies Paradise »

It is the story of a shop unlike anything built nowadays. Over 100 years old, it is the last semi-industrial building designed by Victor Horta that is still in existence! During the first 70 years of its life, cloth and fabrics were sold there, as planned by Charles Waucquez and successive owners of the shop at 20 rue des Sables.

Witness to the transformation of Brussels, in a district that is without doubt the one that had suffered most from...20th century progress, the shop closed in 1970, and thereafter experienced its most difficult years. Then new hopes, new projects appeared.

In 1984, the building was bought by the federal State, with the aim of establishing a museum devoted to comic strip. This project began around 1980 under the benevolent eye of Hergé. Opened by the sovereigns on 3 October 1989, the Belgian Comic Strip Center was not only intended to preserve and promote comic strip, but also to restore meaning and life to the stain glasses, the arabesques, the spirals and the light in this Victor Horta masterpiece.

1. Victor Horta and Art nouveau

Under the long reign of Leopold II (1867-1909), Belgium experienced a period of burgeoning development. Artistic disciplines proliferated and new techniques were developed in the field of construction, notably the use of steel and glass, enabling the construction of vast open spaces flooded with light. Art Nouveau consisted in harnessing these techniques, and applying them to architecture, giving the modern world a harmonious, balanced appearance.

Career of a genius

After studying architecture at the Académie de Gand, and by turns being the pupil of the architects Jules Dubuysson and Alphonse Balat, designer of the Royal Greenhouses at Laeken, Victor Horta (Gand, 1861-Brussels, 1947) designed his first houses from 1885 onwards. Here we remind the Maison Autrique (1893) and the Hôtel Tassel (1895) true representations of the Art Nouveau style. Masterpieces followed, one after the other: Hôtel Solvay (1898), Maison du Peuple (1899), his own house (now the Horta Museum, 1901), and shops such as A l'Innovation (1903) and the Waucquez Warehouse (1906). The architect was then at the peak of his career.

2. The birth of the Waucquez Warehouse

At the time when the nascent century was sparkling brightly, a Brussels fabric wholesaler met an architect at the pinnacle of his glory. Their meeting would give birth to a masterpiece, the perfect symbol of the union of art and a booming consumer society. Charles Waucquez commissioned Victor Horta to design a building to house his wholesale fabric shop. The Waucquez Warehouse was established in 1906 in the rue des Sables.

The former rue des Sables

Busy and bustling, warm and joyous, the rue des Sables contained many convents and a barracks housing three thousand infantrymen, which was demolished in 1905. It was also in this street that an important part of Belgium's press began or developed: L'Etoile Belge, L'Indépendance Belge, Le Peuple, La Cité, Het Laatste Nieuws, Het Nieuws van de Dag and De Nieuwe Gids, Panorama, Libelle, Mon Copain and others.

3. Life and death of the Waucquez Warehouse

From sale to takeover, the shop prospered for years before experiencing the effects of radical urban upheaval. The old chestnut of the construction of the North-South railway junction comprehensively destroyed this popular district of Brussels, called the Bas-fonds. Shops gradually began to close, and the Waucquez Warehouse eventually decided to move elsewhere too.

The stages of a life

At the request of the owner who was keen to develop his business activities, the architect Charles Veraart designed two mezzanines on both sides of the entrance hall between the ground floor and the first floor and in keeping with Horta's architecture. Then, while retaining its usual name, the shop was sold in 1923 to the company Verberckt, and then in 1957, to the Vertex group. The Waucquez family retained ownership of the building to the end.

4. Metamorphosis of a masterpiece



Abandoned during the 70s, the Magasins Waucquez building was known only to the initiated and a few night-owl inhabitants, vagabonds or petty thieves. In 1975, the architect Jean Delhay, a former colleague of the master, Horta, secured official historic building status for the former Magasins Waucquez. Ten years later, the place finally received a funding allocation thanks to two men: Guy Dessicy, friend and former colourist to Hergé, and Jean Breydel, the architect who had given much thought to the renovation of the architectural heritage of Brussels. In 1984, a not-for-profit organisation was set up, with the support of associations of French-speaking and Flemish comic strip authors. The dilapidated building was bought by the Belgian Buildings Agency with the aim of establishing a Belgian Comic Strip Center.

Exemplary renovation

A young architect, Pierre Van Assche (Cooparch) was commissioned to oversee the renovation. He made deliberate use of contemporary elements – luminous wall lamps, footbridges – where these proved essential, thus enhancing the work of Horta. The building was in very poor condition, and the best craftsmen in the country were brought in to restore it. It took two whole years to complete the work.

5. The marriage of the ninth art and Art Nouveau

On 6 October 1989, three days after its opening by the King and Queen, the first visitors saw this Art Nouveau temple devoted to the ninth art. A promotional tool for comic strips, an exhibition venue, a documentation centre and cultural ambassador among other things, the Belgian Comic Strip Center soon became a major international museum and one of the most popular attractions in Belgium. And the philosophy of the project still holds in this twin affirmation: if you come to see comic strip, otherwise known as the ninth art, you'll go away with your eyes aglow with Art Nouveau, and vice versa!

Tintin and Haddock on the stairs

In 1986, the Studio Hergé, still run by Bob De Moor, entrusted the kingpins of the future Belgian Comic Strip Center with the drawing reproduced in this space. With this clear line drawing, the Hergé Foundation made an important contribution to the creation of the Belgian Comic Strip Center, because it provides a strong and symbolic image.

The BELGIAN COMIC STRIP CENTER

The Belgian Comic Strip Center? In the land of Smurfs and Tintin, visitors can discover a range of permanent exhibitions, illustrated with original comic strip drawings and unique objects. Simultaneously, there are also several temporary exhibitions on display.

The Belgian Comic Strip Center is also the former Waucquez Warehouse, a gem of Art Nouveau by grand master Victor Horta (1906).



Photo by Daniel Fouss

Belgian Comic Strip Center
Rue des Sables 20
1000 Brussels (Belgium)
Tel: +32 22 19 19 80
www.comicscenter.net
visit@comicscenter.net

Open every day
(except on Monday)
from 10 a.m. till 6 p.m.

Press info: Willem De Graeve: willem.degraeve@comicscenter.net - +32 (0)2 210 04 33

Press images: www.comicscenter.net/en/press, login: comics + password: smurfs