

PRESS RELEASE

COMÈS BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

25/09/2020 – 02/05/2021



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Rediscover Didier Comès' EVA album, heritage-related publication by Casterman Editions. A black and white ode to the mysteries of the human soul.

Special thanks to Thierry Bellefroid

With the support of :

La Fondation Roi Baudouin – De Koning Boudewijnstichting
Région de Bruxelles-Capitale - Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest
Casterman
The BELvue Museum
The National Lottery

The original plates and objects presented in the exhibition «Comès behind closed doors» come from a donation made by the brother and sisters of Didier Comès, coll. King Baudouin Foundation on deposit at the Museum in Piconrue, Bastogne.

M A I S O N



AUTRIQUE

Wednesdays to Sundays

From 12pm to 6pm

Chaussée de Haecht, 266 - 1030 Brussels

02 215 66 00

info@autrique.be

www.autrique.be





EVA, Didier Comès

COMES, THE AUTHOR

Didier Comès (1942-2013) grew up in the Fagnes region, located along Belgium's Eastern border. This is a land of moors and mists, of Germanic legends and ancient Druidic rites. Silence, his first work for the review (*À Suivre*), established him as one of the key authors and masters of black and white fantasy graphic novels. However, the rustic paganism and landscapes that were a constant feature of Comès's daily life played an essential role in this fantastical world.

Other stories followed; these were set in villages in the Ardennes and featured troubled characters confronted with an intense, mysterious natural world pervaded by a suggestion of sorcery. Using a neo-realist approach, the comic book artist produced multiple narratives centering on the fate of protagonists who are literally swallowed up by the relentless landscape. The full effect of Comès's pared-down style can be seen in the silent boards to be exhibited at the Musée BELvue from September 2020 to January 2021.

ÉVA appeared in 1984 in the comics monthly (*À Suivre*). In this story, there are no moorlands or disfigured characters; instead, we have three protagonists face to face with one other in the secluded setting of an isolated house. Rather than taking his inspiration from the landscape, Comès drew on a number of references when constructing this implacable, closed environment, thereby creating a major and unique element within his work.

In a programme broadcast on the French-language radio station RTBF in 1982, Didier Comès had already indicated that he was planning to move away from the fantastical rural tales and local superstitions that had served as his usual sources of inspiration, as he did not wish to be seen as a writer of folklore stories. ÉVA was published a full two years later, confirming the graphic novel author's doubts regarding this psychological thriller, which was a marked departure from his previous works; however, with each new creation Didier Comès set out fresh artistic and narrative challenges. References to Alfred Hitchcock, Will Eisner and Raoul Servais, well as to James Bond and Ridley Scott, are all to be found in ÉVA. Rarely has an example of the black and white graphic genre managed to achieve such a radical quality. Greeted with mixed reactions when it was published, ÉVA is now recognised as one of Didier Comès's masterpieces. This graphic novel was one of the author's personal favourites, although he was not inclined to be indulgent towards his own work.

ÉVA, A FEBRILE, CLOSED ENVIRONMENT

One of the most unsettling aspects of *Éva* is the presentation of a highly sexualised femme fatale – with stiletto heels, fishnet stockings, plunging necklines, heavy make-up and huge earrings – who is confined to a wheelchair. The contrast between the character’s physical appearance and her mode of locomotion causes the reader to experience a whole range of emotions and sensations. These were all perfectly planned by Comès, who left nothing to chance. After Comès died in 2013, his stepson Hugues Hausman received a shoebox full of envelopes bearing his handwriting. We [Thierry B. and Hugues H.], discovered its contents together. Each of the envelopes, which were marked with the words “Front view”, “Profile” and “Three-quarter view”, contained snapshots of Christiane [Comès’s wife and Hugues’s mother], in fishnet stockings and high heels, sitting in a wheelchair. Hugues then remembered that the chair in question had been hired by Comès from the Red Cross in the town of Spa, although he himself was able-bodied. He had immortalised his wife in a variety of poses, so that he would have everything he needed to create *ÉVA*.

Apart from the Hitchcockian atmosphere in *ÉVA*, what other aspect of this febrile, closed world will remain in the reader’s memory? It must surely be Comès’s obvious mastery of visual language. One could say that he had extended his vocabulary and condensed his grammar. This was an author who had confidence in his artistic medium, particularly in wordless panels. He believed in the image, and he is to be found deep within the heart of his art, in the heart of this language that he loved so much. The drawn image expresses everything through the contrast between the concentrated areas of inky blackness and the immaculate whiteness of the page. The panels are set neatly side-by-side; some form a grid,



EVA, Didier Comès



EVA, Didier Comès

KLAUS NOMI

Klaus Nomi, an opera singer who created eccentric cover versions in the early 1980s, inspired the make-up given to the “actors”. In 1981, the German singer with the soprano voice and otherworldly New Wave mannerisms immortalised The Cold Song from Henry Purcell’s opera King Arthur, and breathed new life into the aria Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix (“My heart opens to your voice”) from Camille Saint-Saëns’s opera Samson et Dalila.

When ÉVA was published, Klaus Nomi had just died of AIDS, which, at that time, was a stigma marking the “deviant” behaviour of homosexuals. This alone was enough for Comès to introduce him into his work – an opera singer with a love of rock music who shattered conventions with his extraordinary vocal range and physical appearance. He gave Nomi a role as one of the automatons in a gallery that included models inspired by various figures, from Marlene Dietrich to Liza Minnelli, the latter having created such an unforgettable character in the film Cabaret, released twelve years earlier.

PARTNERS

Didier Comès is one of the major authors of the Belgian comic strip, a master of black and white and fantasy.

He enjoyed dazzling success in the early 1980s with a graphic novel that left its mark on a whole generation of readers, *Silence*. The story of this simple-minded deaf-mute exploited by the landowners of Beausonge and whom a witch will awaken to consciousness, is intertwined with the character of Comès, marked by all forms of rejection, exclusion and violence, whether rural or urban.

Master of silences, Comès passed away in 2013, without ever receiving the honours of a major exhibition in Brussels. Thanks to the Comès Fund of the King Baudouin Foundation, people will be able to discover or rediscover this work of art through exclusively silent boards and a staging designed in harmony with the venue.

Originals of *Corto Maltese*, the most famous comic strip by Hugo Pratt - a great friend of Comès and a fervent defender of silent boxes - will also be presented, as will those of an author who has often been presented as the spiritual son of Didier Comès, Christophe Chabouté.

The exhibition is an initiative of the King Baudouin Foundation to promote the artistic heritage of Dider Comès, as part of the donation of his work by his brothers and sisters, and is curated by Thierry Bellefroid and Eric Dubois.

Contact Fondation Roi Baudouin

Exhibition 'Comès. Of Shadow and Silence'
BELvue Museum, Place des Palais, 7. 1000 Brussels.

From 25th September 2020 to 3rd January 2021

www.belvue.be

Cathy Verbyst

verbyst.c@kbs-frb.be / 02 549 02 78 / 0478 75 01 41



« Comès, d'Ombre et de Silence », Thierry Bellefroid

THIERRY BELLEFROID « COMES, D'OMBRE ET DE SILENCE »

The catalogue of the great Comès exhibition, which sheds light on his work in the light of his personality.

Contact Casterman

Valérie Constant

0473 85 57 90

www.apoposrp.com

<http://www.facebook.com/AproposCommunication>



Thierry Bellefroid

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

INTERVIEWS:

Etienne Schréder (manager of the Autrique House)
Alexandra Rolland (director of the Autrique House)

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CONTACT

info@autrique.be
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www.autrique.be

PRESS OFFICER

Alice Herman
Alice.herman4444@gmail.com
LinkedIn – Facebook
0472 92 73 41

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