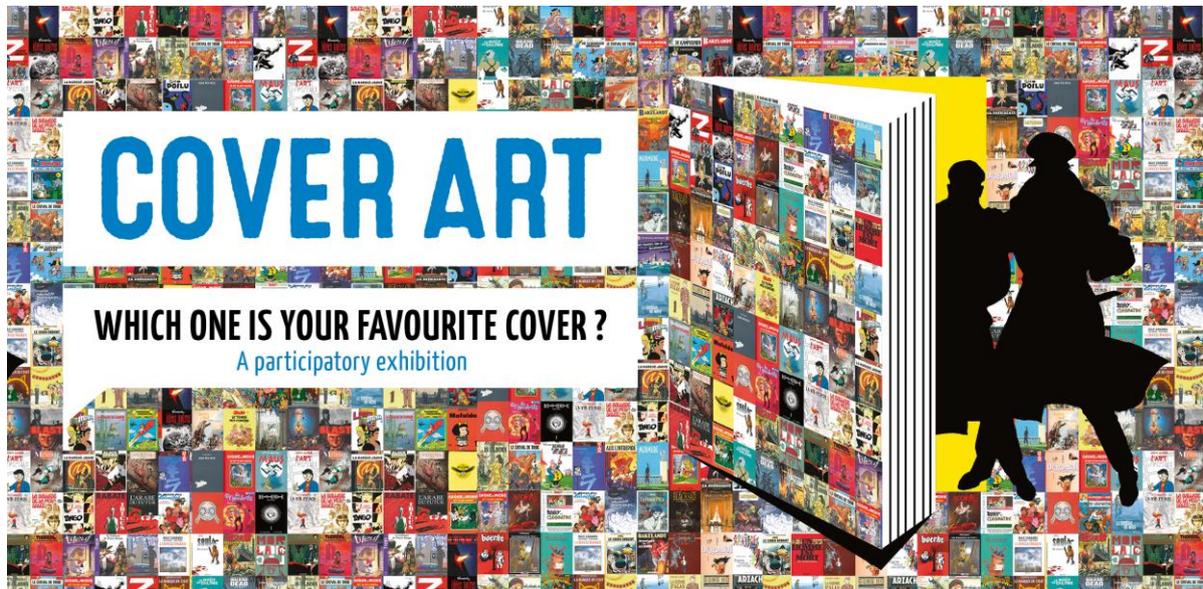


At the Belgian Comics Art Museum
From 20 September 2016 until 28 May 2017

COVER ART



FROM 20 SEPTEMBER 2016 UNTIL 28 MAY 2017
At the **Belgian Comic Strip Center**, 20, Rue des Sables, 1000 Brussels



SLUMBERLAND WORLD



There comes a day when a comic strip reader is so struck by the cover image of an album that he sees it as part and parcel of the album illustrations. When that happens it's for life. Cover art must find a tricky balance between the author's vision and what the editor, art director and head of marketing want. Is its sole to purpose to catch the eye of the prospective purchaser or should it be a work of art in itself, an accurate representation of the graphic narrative? This interactive exhibition, set to make waves on the social media, will bring visitors face to face with this dilemma which authors and editors come up against on a regular basis.

With the support of the Brussels-Capital Region

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

COVER ART

An exhibition of the Comics Art Museum

With the support of the Brussels-Capital Region

*In partnership with Bel RTL, Slumberland BD World,
ActuaBD and Stripspecialzaak.*

Curator of the exhibition: Valérie Constant
Texts : Valérie Constant
Legends: Mélanie Andrieu – JC De la Royère
Scenography : Jean Serneels
Search for original artwork : JC De la Royère and Willem De Graeve
Management of original artwork : Nathalie Geirnaert and Dimitri Bogaert
Management of copyrights : Mélanie Andrieu
Translations : Philotrans Translation Office
Copy-editing : Tine Anthoni, Marie-Aude Piavaux and Dennis Mariën
Social Media: Marie-Aude Piavaux
Interviews : Valérie Constant, Willem De Graeve, Tine Anthoni
and Manuel Fernandez Vázquez
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Framing : AP Frame, Marie Van Eetvelde
Enlargements : Sadocolor
Production : Jean Serneels and the team of the Comics Art Museum
Communication : Valérie Constant and Willem De Graeve

The Comics Art Museum expresses its sincere thanks to all of the contributors from the publishing world for their involvement in this project; the persons who have taken part in the interviews and the surveys; the collectors and authors who have provided the original documents for this exhibition.



Introduction of the exhibition

The cover of a comic book already conveys the magic of the story, its fun side and its suspense. It conjures up a whole universe, an era and an ambiance... in an enigmatic, beautiful and provocative way. Its purpose is to draw in the readership, in the same way as billboards advertise movies. The cover illustration, the title, the name of the authors and the publisher's logo must tie in beautifully to produce that perfect chemistry.

In order to sell, the book cover must catch the reader's eye in a mere fraction of a second, and then hold it and stop it from wanting to browse elsewhere. By making full use of its codes and references, the book cover's purpose is to tease and intrigue the readership, by promising a memorable adventure that will come up to its expectations.

A whole production chain is set in motion in order to meet these challenges, involving the author, the script-writer, the publisher, the artistic director, the graphic designer, the head of marketing, the sales representatives and the bookshops, all working together with one common goal in mind. That goal is to design a book cover, which the reader will see, remember, and ultimately purchase.

This exhibition, which is not only subjective, but also artistic and didactic, illustrates the creative processes behind the scenes. It shows a wide variety of points of view on comic book covers, and this regardless of their genre or era.–The content of this exhibition has been mainly inspired by observing the production process and by interviews with a number of players from the publishing world.

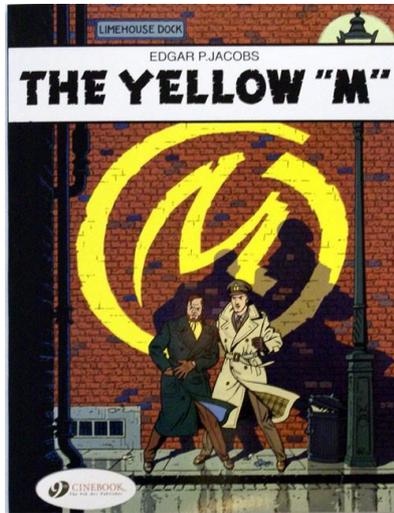
Valérie Constant, Exhibition Curator



The exhibition texts

(© Valérie Constant / Belgian Comics Art Museum 2016)

1.2 BOOK COVERS FOR ALL; AT ALL AGES



the past, comic strips were considered to be a masculine thing and intended solely for a young readership, and for a very long time all that was available were adventure stories targeted at the general public. The stories were enacted by heroes, with whom readers could form an attachment, because they embodied their values and aspirations. These heroes usually featured on the book covers.

As time went on, comic strips started reaching out to an increasingly adult audience, and were covering the favourite topics of their readers, who had now grown into adulthood. Little soldiers waged imaginary wars on real battle fields, and the romantic love experienced by our shy heroes muted into deep-felt passion, not entirely

devoid of eroticism. Book covers have kept pace with this trend.

Comic strips have now extended their field of investigation well beyond the usual stereotypes, and similarly to literature, there are no more limits in terms of topics or genres. This diversity is also reflected in the book covers.

Throughout the exhibition, the Belgian Comic Strip Center will be publishing topical surveys on our favourite comic book covers on its Facebook page. The first survey covered the comic strip heroes from the 1950s up to the present. Selecting the examples was indeed an arduous and subjective task, and has led to a certain degree of frustration, both on the part of the person making the selection as well as the person faced with this selection. We therefore kindly thank you for indulging us, and we are looking forward to finding out about your favourites on our Facebook page.

2. DESIGNING A SUCCESSFUL BOOK COVER

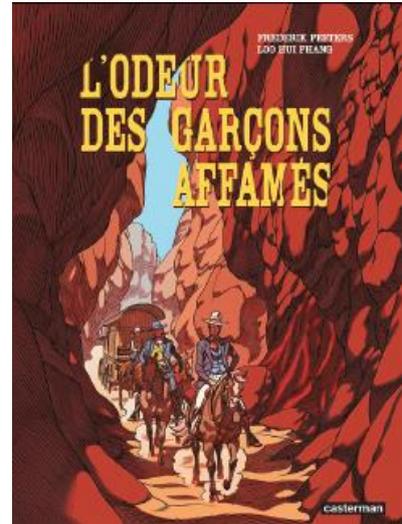
I think the best covers tell a story, and particularly choose a moment, where something is just about to happen, so you're drawn in, and you want to read. Ken Steacy, author

What are the criteria for creating a successful book cover? It is indeed a hazardous exercise and may yield mixed results. After all, an excellent comic artist, a master of sequential art, is not necessarily a good illustrator. The success of an illustration often stems from its legibility, i.e. the ability to combine a lot of information in a minimum number of elements. This is an art form in its own right, which a number of artists from various disciplines are absolutely brilliant at. Hergé, Jijé, Chaland being just a few noteworthy examples.

INTERVIEW WITH FREDERIK PEETERS

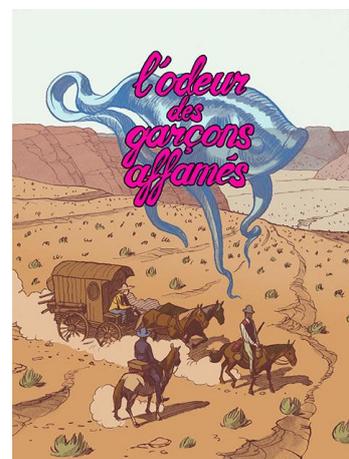
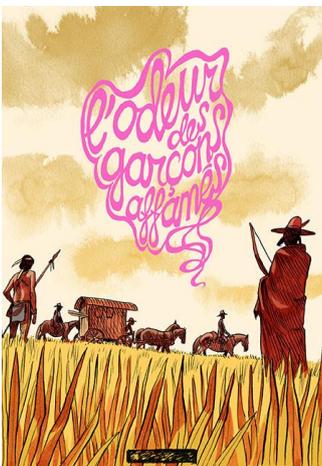
As an artist, how do you go about designing your book covers?

I keep experimenting for days by trying out different designs and techniques. Initially, I may head out into various directions, and then I gradually whittle things down by talking to the publisher. Sometimes my initial gut feeling may be spot on, but sometimes I have to persevere in my search until I get it absolutely right. As far as I am concerned, designing the book cover never comes naturally. That is the part of the book that requires the most effort.



How did the comic book cover for "L'odeur des garçons affamés" come about?

It was complicated because we had to find a balance between the traditional Western genre and the fantastic-intimist dimensions. My initial research focused on sexual issues, the strangeness of the relationships between the characters, which sometimes bordered on being kitsch. The publisher then expressed their intention to focus mainly on the traditional Western style. I suppose that was for commercial reasons. I managed to find the balance by giving the rocks in the canyon an organic, and even overtly sexual appearance. The symbolism has turned out to be powerful and discrete, and I think that the compromise between the different points of view worked well in the end.

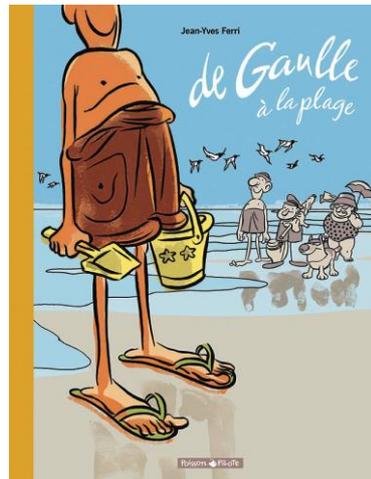
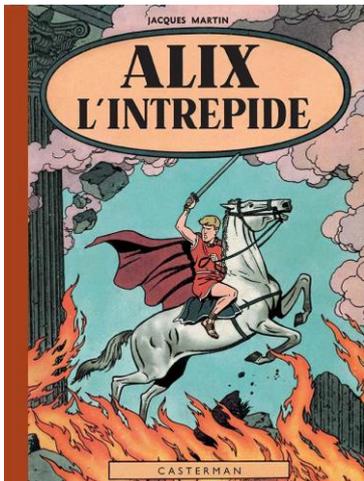


2.1 IN THE INTIMACY OF THE ARTIST'S WORKSHOP

Even though the concept may be put forward by the publishing company, the artistic director or the script-writer, the book cover will nevertheless first see light and subsequently be developed in the comic artist's workshop. It will be him who will design the crucial image that will encompass all others. This 'prima ballerina' will be born from the artist's imagination and drawing pens. Taking centre stage, the book cover can only rely on a few items of decor to finally shine and captivate the readership. Just like a film director, the author will have to visualise its final composition. Based on the author's suggestions, the editorial team will put their heads together and incorporate the title of the series and of the comic book, the name of the authors and of the publisher, and suggest the best possible framing. A multitude of versions may be created before the final book cover is found that will have the right qualities in terms of information, aesthetics and marketing.

The best book covers have gained celebrity status.

2.2 COMPOSITION AND FRAMING



Similarly to the art of painting, the rules of composition will vary depending on the authors, the styles and genres. An illustration's legibility will depend on its spatial organisation and on its composition.

The directional lines of force determine whether or not an image is balanced. The line of the horizon or the lines of objects or coloured areas and

the lighting of certain elements can either create a pyramid effect, or horizontal, vertical or diagonal lines, or even full or empty space. They contribute by giving meaning. Pyramids, for example, create a sense of hierarchy. Vertical and diagonal lines tend to reinforce feelings and create tension. Full and empty space can either enhance or generate silence. Our eye will primarily be drawn to the point where the lines of force converge.

Designers and graphic artists have tools available to them to enable the reader to understand the subject matter at a glance, tools such as the perspective, the succession of the plane surfaces, the direction of the light, the colours and contrasts.

However, to create their book covers, some authors have opted to use the sequential principle of comic strip art.

2.3. FROM FULLY PAINTED ARTWORK TO SOFTWARE

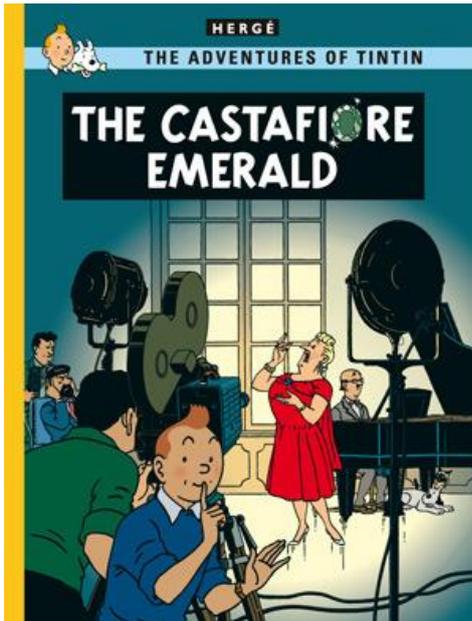
Book covers may be processed in a traditional way or by digital means. In that respect, they evolve with the technologies available to the comic artists. The latter sometimes

use processes that are different from those used to illustrate the book itself. Rosinski, for example, created his book covers in oil on canvas, like a painting.

2.4 THE POINT OF VIEW

I believe that if a beginner summarises the story on the front cover, he will do so at his peril.

Benoît Peeters, Writer and Script-writer



When we come across a book cover, we are often given an insight into a crucial moment in the story that tells us what the comic book is all about. The author tries to attract the reader's attention by giving him or her a few clues. However, there is an exception to this rule, and that is when the protagonist actually helps us to explore the scene. *The Castafiore Emerald* in which Tintin invites us to quietly enter a film set is a perfect example of this.

2.5 AHEAD OF TIME or THE DEADLINE ISSUE

These days, marketing has become so all-important that the front cover may even be designed before the comic book is actually written. That may seem a complete paradox in comparison to an era when the book cover was the icing on the cake, and the reward after three years of publishing a story in a magazine. **Charles-Louis Detournay, Critic**

Given that they are the main visual marketing component, book covers have to be produced to a tight schedule. It is the book covers that the publisher will proudly show off to their sales force (the distributor's sales representatives organised by geographical area) when they present their catalogues of future publications. In turn, the sales representatives will show off the book covers on their sales rounds to the bookshops to encourage them to purchase the latest products.

Consequently, the book cover must be ready at least six months before the book is published, even before the ink of the last plates of the comic book has had a chance to dry. Even if only on a provisional basis, the book cover must embody the essence of a story in the making.

3.1 A FEW PUBLISHING RULES

Even though a good front cover provides a sort of introduction to the story, it must be able to stand on its own two feet and sell on its own merit.

Jan Bex, Journalist and Comic Strip Expert

Advertising and posters share a same purpose with comic strip book covers, and that is to capture the public's attention in order to affect its behaviour. They achieve this with the use of sociology and psychology by approaching a topic in such a way so as to create an ambiance that is full of promise. They use identification and engage with our emotions to generate interest and to trigger a purchase. Other common tools also come into play, e.g. an alluring title and subtitle, a visual, and the signatures (publisher and authors).

It is certainly no coincidence that Hergé has produced some of the most effective book covers in comic strip history, and this by applying the common rules of legibility and narrativity from the advertising world. His training as an advertising artist has enabled him to master these skills so perfectly.

3.2. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

On a good front cover, the drawing will run from left to right. This is also how we read, so the intention is clear: To encourage us to open the book and to read it.

Ferry Van Vosselen, Author

How do we read a comic book cover? How do our eyes perceive it? Within just a fraction of a second our gaze may be attracted by a colour, light or perhaps a favourite topic. Then comes the moment in which we register all the items that make up that image: the setting, the choice of colours, the light, the characters, the publisher's logo, the name of the authors and the title of the series. Our eyes subsequently decipher how the image is organised:

- How the characters and objects are positioned in relation to each other (foreground, background, depth of the field, the framing, etc.).
- Layout of the area of text in relation to the image.

These different stages enable the reader to get an idea of the ambiance emanating from the image, and to understand the message which the latter aims to convey. The reader decodes the direct and indirect meaning hidden in this message.

4. COLLABORATIVE WORK

4.1. THE PUBLISHER'S ROLE

There are no doubt as many methodologies as there are authors and publishers. From providing light guidance to extremely detailed guidelines, there is great diversity in the

extent of intervention. It will depend on the publisher's personality and the demands made by the authors.

The publishing company, with the support of the artistic director, the graphic designer and the marketing staff, will work with the authors to determine the choice of the visual and the title, the graphic design, the typography and the layout. The publisher may reject a book cover that is deemed too weak or not sufficiently explicit. They may decide to change the book cover over the course of the editing process, for reissues, or for the publication of a full version or other luxury version. They may also make use of codes that will enable the readership to instantly identify their collections. The publisher Futuropolis, for example, has always turned its art work into its trade mark.

Webtoons, or Korean digital comics, however, have moved away from the traditional book cover and use a format of film credits, which may take up several screens.

4.2 THE TEXT



The comic book title, the names of the authors and of the publisher are all aspects, which the potential buyer may possibly identify. A clashing or intriguing title, or one that instils fear or contains some fun element may also help to attract the customer's attention. In order to be effective, it must contain some reference or be original, but it must be precise and understood at a glance. The golden rule requiring a title to be short and concise no longer holds true today. Titles may even consist of full sentences in order to be more effective at drawing us into an ambiance without revealing anything about the plot.

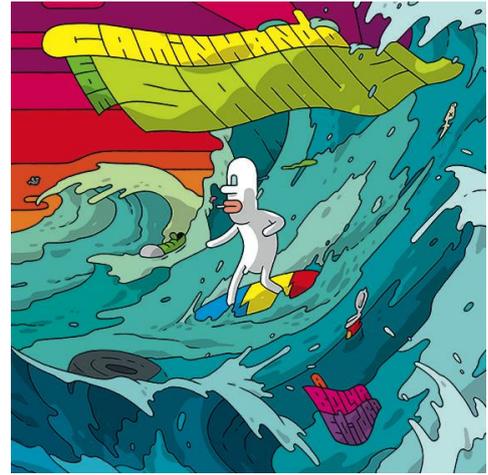
Book covers are sometimes displayed with a wrapper or a sticker to convey a commercial message.

As for the list of the other titles in the series, a brief summary of the story, a brief biography of the author, journalists' quotations, the barcodes and the sale price, those are reserved for the back cover.

4.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE TYPOGRAPHY

The design and the use of the different typefaces for the titles, the authors' names and the remaining text are of the utmost importance. As they convey meaning, the choice of the typeface (serif or sans serif) and of the font (body, style and bold), in turn, generate a whole set of references to periods or art movements, and are a further source of creativity.

The titles and subtitles of the first comic books were often created by their comic artists, turned typographers for the occasion. With the arrival of computer technology and the proliferation of typefaces, artistic directors and graphic designers now tend to select the typographies from impressive catalogues before presenting them to the author and the art worker to create the final layout.



However, with changes taking place in printing technology, there is now renewed interest in typography and this offers new opportunities for graphic designers and heads of production. By using bulky paper, for example, the title can be debossed, i.e. printed to produce a recessed relief image.

4.4 THE CONTAINER AND THE CONTENT

During the interviews, all the people questioned agreed on one requirement, and that is that the container must adequately reflect the content. Who hasn't experienced that feeling of excitement when heading towards a promising comic book cover only to be hit by that sinking feeling upon opening the book? The cover of the comic book, however spectacular it may look, then turns out to be just ordinary packaging. This type of trickery is not a recent phenomenon; publishers have practised this short-term policy since time immemorial. For the reader, the feeling of disappointment is as strong as the initial seduction. The cover is then perceived as deceitful, and the deceit immediately discredits the publishers who are offering the book for sale.

4.5 DIFFERENT FORMATS FOR EVERY TARGET AUDIENCE

We have stopped counting the different sizes of comic books and comic book covers available on the market. The traditional format that ensured a neat alignment on the bookcase is now just one among many others. Descriptions, such as large format, French (vertical) or Italian (horizontal) format... mean different dimensions depending on the publishing company and the period. This offers authors yet another opportunity to express their creativity. And what can we say about the digital formats that are used on reading devices that impose yet another set of technical constraints whilst at the same time providing even further opportunities for the artists?

BOOKBINDING

Bookbinders mainly use a semi-strong coated paperboard onto which they glue the printed cover. Using a fully automated process, the cover is then cut, folded and may become subject to further inlaying by being put through the machine a number of times. The bookbinders' ingenuity and the art workers' creativity play a major role in creating refined book covers that live up to the quality of the book.

Some comics have been bound like old-fashioned textbooks or literary collections.

4.7 ON DISPLAY IN THE BOOKSHOP

I realise that after 25 years in the business, comic strips about history, and more particularly the Second World War, are very popular. After all, we all have a father or grandfather, who has lived through war. It forms part of our subconscious and our personal history.

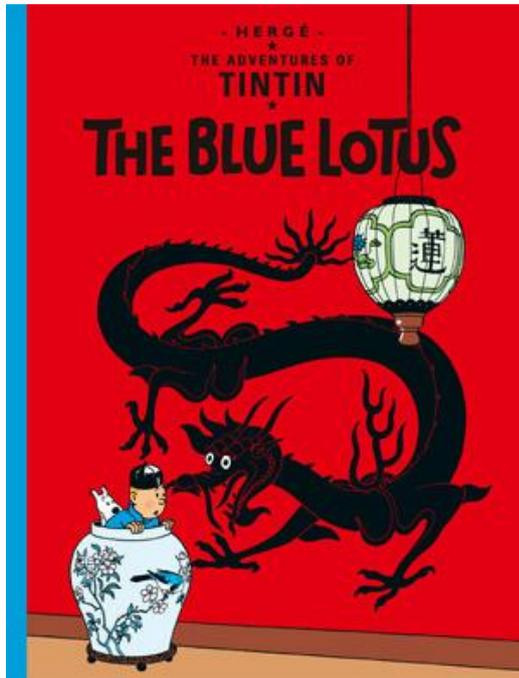
(Carine Schmitz, Librarian)

Beautiful women, cars and swastikas! Listening to the bookshop owners, one would think that good sales figures are primarily due to such iconographic choices. This observation has some truth, as we are attracted by what we know and what resonates with us.

Generally speaking, the comic book cover will provide the first visual impact (sometimes fleeting), which the bookshop owner will experience when negotiating with the publisher's sales representative. Based on the book cover and just a few inside pages, the bookshop owner will be ordering a number of copies that will hopefully sell. There is a lot at stake. The most promising comic book covers will end up being stacked onto a table of novelties or will take pride of place in the 'branded' marketing stands supplied by the publishing company. The less convincing ones will be neatly placed onto the bookshelves, with the spine of the book having to do all the convincing.

At this stage, we are three to six months away from the official comic book launch and the arrival of cumbersome pallets from the publisher. Concealed in their cardboard boxes, the comic book covers are now on site, ready to work their charm, proudly displaying their title and the names of the authors, and claiming their affiliation with a publisher. Their hope is to hit the headlines by making eyes at the journalists.





4.8 IN THE HANDS OF THE READER

When reading the book, its cover helps us to distinguish it from the other comic books that have already been read or are still to be read. It takes pride of place on top of the pile, or may have slipped under the bed, or it may simply be rising with the breath of the reader who has suddenly fallen asleep. The flap can be used as a bookmark, even though the more meticulous ones among us might use a dust jacket so as not to damage it.

Once the comic book is closed, the cover will remind us of the experience we have had; it will be forever associated with an emotion and with the pleasure we have gained from it. It will then be preserved in the confines of our memory before being put on the bookcase where it will

find its peers filed by order of publication, by alphabetical order, or by genre or size. Thus masked but nevertheless referenced, it will wait there until it is shared again, moved, or simply returned to for a second or umpteenth reading...

Your opinion is important to us!

Feel free to take part in our survey about the most beautiful comic book cover on the Facebook page of the Belgian Comic Strip Centre.

If you would like to watch the interviews shown at the exhibition and others, please go to the YouTube channel of the Belgian Comic Strip Center.

COMICS ART MUSEUM

An accomplished attraction located in the heart of Brussels, the Comics Art Museum has been honouring the creators and heroes of the 9th Art for more than 25 years. The regularly renewed permanent exhibitions and a diversified programme of temporary exhibitions enable visitors to discover the countless aspects of comics art. Tintin and the Smurfs lead the way towards further adventures, an encounter with a world where creativity has no limits.

Enhanced by an exceptional Art Nouveau home designed by Victor Horta, the Comics Art Museum is just as much a tribute to the pioneers as a glimpse of contemporary comics art.



(Photo © Daniel Fouss/ Belgian Comics Art Museum)

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