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INVISIBLE LINES

# Comics and the Invisible

# Introduction

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This work collects some of the panels of the conference *Comics and the Invisible: Intertwining Academic and Artistic Perspectives*, held in Venice on June 3-4 2022. The conference was the closing event of **Invisible Lines**, a two-year international project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme, conceived and coordinated by the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities of the Giorgio Cini Foundation (Venice, Italy) with the associations Central Vapeur (Strasbourg, France) and Hamelin (Bologna, Italy) and the publisher Baobab Books (Tabor, Czech Republic).

The entire project was shaped around a question: how to draw the invisible?

The question was posed first to twelve young artists selected among more than 400 applicants from all over Europe, who have been involved in an international training experience designed as an illustrated journey through the invisible. At each stage, the hosting partners set up a workshop in which young artists could work and co-create, interpreting the initial question according to their own sensitivity and the *genus loci* of the places they visited: Broumov, Venice and Strasbourg.

Each workshop focused on a different interpretation of the idea of invisibility. The artists explored the invisible as a form of spiritual and metaphysical quest, inquiring both the relationships with the unconscious and with the transcendent. They represented what is invisible in the daily landscapes we cross by drawing places now aban-

done as a result of ever-changing society and historical mutations. Finally, they considered invisibility in its social and political dimension, narrating the lives of some of the migrants and refugees living at the Bernanos Centre in Strasbourg – lives that are too often at the center of media representations yet rarely present with their own stories and voices.

For each workshop the artists were given a special guide: internationally acclaimed artists Stefano Ricci, Juraj Horváth and Yvan Alagbé helped the young artists to draw their own stories, later collected in two visual books and a newspaper.

Their original artworks were also exhibited at three of the major comics and illustration festivals in Europe: BilBOlbul International Comics Festival (Italy), Central Vapeur (France), and Tabook Festival (Czech Republic).

The journey did not end there, because at the final stage of the project the same initial question was asked to a selected group of international comic studies researchers during the aforementioned conference. They too were given the chance to share ideas with some visual artists who were gamechangers in the field of comics and visual narrative: Lorenzo Mattotti, Dominique Goblet, Stefano Ricci, David B. and Manuele Fior. The result of this encounter is the publication you are reading now.

It goes without saying that the question of invisibility remains unredeemable. The artists' discussions and works presented in this publication show how artists explore their vision as well as outside reality not just by drawing what they see but longing for what cannot be seen: the struggle to draw the invisible lies behind the choices, inventions, and tricks that keep comic art evolving.

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# Invisible Minorities

David B.

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On the  
following page:  
Gotlieb, *Chanson  
aigre-douce*,  
"Pilote", 1969



## DAVID B:

Do you know this character? He is a French comic book author named Marcel Gotlieb. He worked for a French magazine, "Pilote", he did humorous comics and I loved him when I was little, we would talk about him amongst friends at school. One day a comic very different from all the others came out in "Pilote", it was called *Chanson aigre-douce* and it was very serious and a little melancholic. In the story there was a recurring rhyme that did not make much sense to me upon first reading. The comic was about the country life led by the main character, who lived on a farm with some farmers who were not his parents and with his only friend, a goat.

I was ten when I first read it, then I reread it around twelve or thirteen and I finally understood everything: it was not about the protagonist's holidays in the countryside but about a thunderstorm! The main character is forced to go to the countryside because there is a storm! It then took me some more time to realize that the storm was World War II and that his parents had sent him to the farm to hide because he was Jewish. So he had to spend the whole war in a family that was not his own, taking care of this goat and not being able to go to school anymore because it was too dangerous. Suddenly the comic became incredible: it never contained the words "war", "jew" or "Nazism", it did not describe anything.

I later found out that Gotlieb had taken this story to René Goscinny, the director of "Pilote", not knowing if he would publish it. Goscinny was Jewish as well, but he had spent the wartime period in Argentina and hadn't experienced the persecutions. After reading those two pages he chose to publish them immediately, no questions asked.

This was the first autobiographical comic I ever read in my life, I was ten years old. But I only thought about it much later, after doing *Epileptic*.

The reason it had touched me was that, during my holidays, I went to a small town called Châteaumeillant in central France, my mother's country of origin. My mother experienced the war there. She came from a peasant family like the one Gotlieb tells about. There were no Jews in that village, there were no minorities, the only person who came from outside was called Papazoglou, he was a Greek-Turkish man who fled persecution and became the county doctor, and so he was accepted because of his role.

Gotlieb's comic reminded me of some family stories my mother used to tell me. When the war broke out, refugees arrived in the village,

# CHANSON AIGRE-DOUCE



J'ai huit ans et je vais à l'école.



Un copain m'attend une compotine!

LEBLÉSMOUTI  
LABISCOUTI  
OUILEBLÉSMOU  
LABISCOU



Je ne comprends pas ce que ça veut dire. Mais après tout, AM-STRAM-GRAM, ça ne veut rien dire non plus. Alors...

LABISCOU?



Il paraît aussi qu'au loin, tout là-bas, il fait un sacré orage. Je ne comprends pas non plus. Il fait si beau, ici.

MYSTÈRE  
ET  
BOULE DE GOMME



LEBLÉSMOUTI  
LABISCOUTI  
OUILEBLÉSMOU  
LABISCOU

c'est l'orage dehors au loin mais dans l'étable je suis bien silence obscurité chaleur



Papa et maman sont restés sous l'orage, là-bas, au loin. Moi, je suis ici, à la campagne. Il fait si beau.

PITTS!  
PITTS!  
PITTS!

COCK!

COROT-COOT

COU!

CAROT  
COROT  
COT



Ses moutons du père Coudray sont marrantes. Ses lapins sont chouettes. (parce que j'habite chez le père Coudray).



Et la chèvre est tellement sympa que je lui chante ma comptine.



LEBLÉSMOUTI  
LABISCOUTI  
OUILEBLÉSMOU  
LABISCOU

c'est l'orage dehors au loin mais dans l'étable je suis bien silence obscurité chaleur



Aujourd'hui, le père Coudray m'a dit qu'il ne fallait plus que j'aille à l'école. A cause de l'orage.



Aujourd'hui, la mère Coudray m'a dit qu'il fallait que j'aille garder la chèvre. Parce que je n'allais plus à l'école.



Et pourtant, il fait toujours aussi beau. Bah, après tout, aller à l'école ou garder la chèvre, hein...

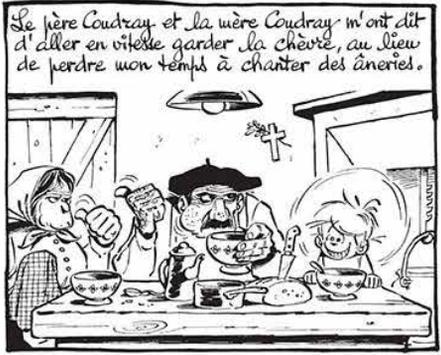


LEBLÉSMOUTI  
LABISCOUTI  
OUILEBLÉSMOU  
LABISCOU

c'est l'orage dehors au loin mais dans l'étable je suis bien silence obscurité chaleur



Ce matin, après le petit déjeuner, je me suis mis à chanter ma comptine.



Le père Coudray et la mère Coudray m'ont dit d'aller en vitesse garder la chèvre, au lieu de perdre mon temps à chanter des âneries.



Alors moi, qu'est-ce que j'ai fait? J'ai chanté ma comptine à la chèvre en allant la garder.



LEBLÉSMOUTI  
LABISCOUTI  
OUILEBLÉSMOU  
LABISCOU

c'est l'orage dehors au loin mais dans l'étable je suis bien silence obscurité chaleur

including some Jews who came from Paris. These people became very important to my mother.

You have to keep in mind that she lived in a small village of three hundred people, without any cultural life whatsoever, and suddenly she saw these Jews coming from Paris who could read, who dressed well, who bathed in the only place where you could bathe in Châteaumeillant.

My mother always told me that they had well made bathing suits, bought in the shops of Paris, while the peasants of Châteaumeillant wore knitted woolen suits which, when wet, became hideous. The Parisians, on the other hand, were beautiful and made her dream.

Among these Jewish refugees was a singer from Paris's Opéra-Comique who, to thank the people of Châteaumeillant for their welcome, organized a show in a place called Chapitre, a deconsecrated church that had been transformed into a space for the farmer's performances and meetings.

When my grandfather went to see the show, he had never met a Jew in his life. When he got back home, they asked him what the singer had done, and he replied: "He sang Jewish songs dressed as a Jew."

My grandmother then inquired and discovered that during the show some pieces of *Les Contes d'Hoffman* had been sung, an operetta by Jacques Offenbach based on Hoffman's stories, who in addition to being a



writer and a musician was also a draftsman. They weren't Jewish songs, but a collection of German nineteenth-century characters. This is to explain what my grandfather's amazed gaze was in front of people who were incredible to him.

As a girl my mother studied at the Lyceum of Châteauroux, the largest city that was near Châteaumeillant. Another event that would be very important for her took place there: in her class there was a man named Saul Friedländer, a Jew refugee. He and my mother were in competition because they were the best in the class, especially in literature. Once my mother got a higher grade in a class test, and Friedländer dedicated a poem to her. It wasn't a love poem, it was a poem to tell her that she was very good, better than him. My mother remembered this poem fifty years later, and she recited it to me; at the time I did not think to write it down and that is really a shame because now my mother died and it is lost.

Over the years, Friedländer became an important writer, a Holocaust historian, he went to live in Israel and was also mayor of Jerusalem. He has written a book of memoirs in which, however, there is no mention of his period in Châteauroux; when she read it, my mom was very sorry that there was



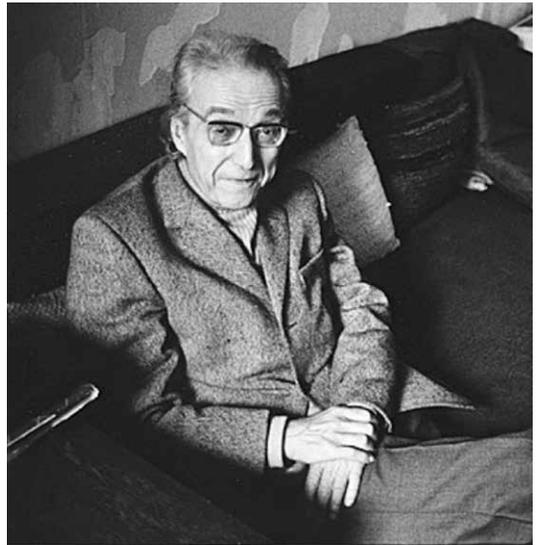
no mention of that period, of that cultural struggle. She always talked to me about it, she told me: "I don't understand why he doesn't mention it in his memoir".

I then also read the book and it was true, he had dismissed everything in a sentence: "I went to the Lyceum of Châteauroux", and that was it.

My mother was always interested in culture, literature, ideas, art, and always tried to meet great French intellectuals. She once wrote to Simone de Beauvoir, who at the time was a great intellectual figure in France. There were two intellectuals, Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and luckily they lived together so my mother only had to write once. But she never got a reply.



On the following page  
and on page 13:  
David B., *L'Ascension du  
Haut Mal*, L'Association,  
1996-2003 (Italian  
edition *Il grande male*,  
Coconino Press, 2020)



She later became fascinated by Raymond Abellio and his novel *Heureux les Pacifiques*. He was known as an esotericist and was very interested in the Cathar religion, which my mother was also very fascinated by.

He was very successful at the beginning of his career, then little by little he was forgotten. His esoteric thinking can be found in the *La structure absolue*, a book that I have read but of which I have not understood anything. If I had to summarize it, I would say that he had found a sort of mathematical formula capable of explaining the workings of the universe, nothing less. I think my mother did not understand anything about that book either, but she did not want to admit it.

At the time, Abellio was not well known: with books like that, even though Gallimard published him, he touched few people. My mother was one of them. She went to see him and he explained some things to her, gave her big speeches, mostly trying to get her into bed. But, as my mom told me, he had triple lens glasses, he was short, and while he certainly had an intellectual charm he did not possess an erotic charm.

He experienced a period of success during the war when he published his memoirs. In some pages of *Epileptic* I have talked about his winding journey as a collaborationist. He was part of a fascist movement called the revolutionary social movement, which had strongly anti-Semitic ideas. So my mother,

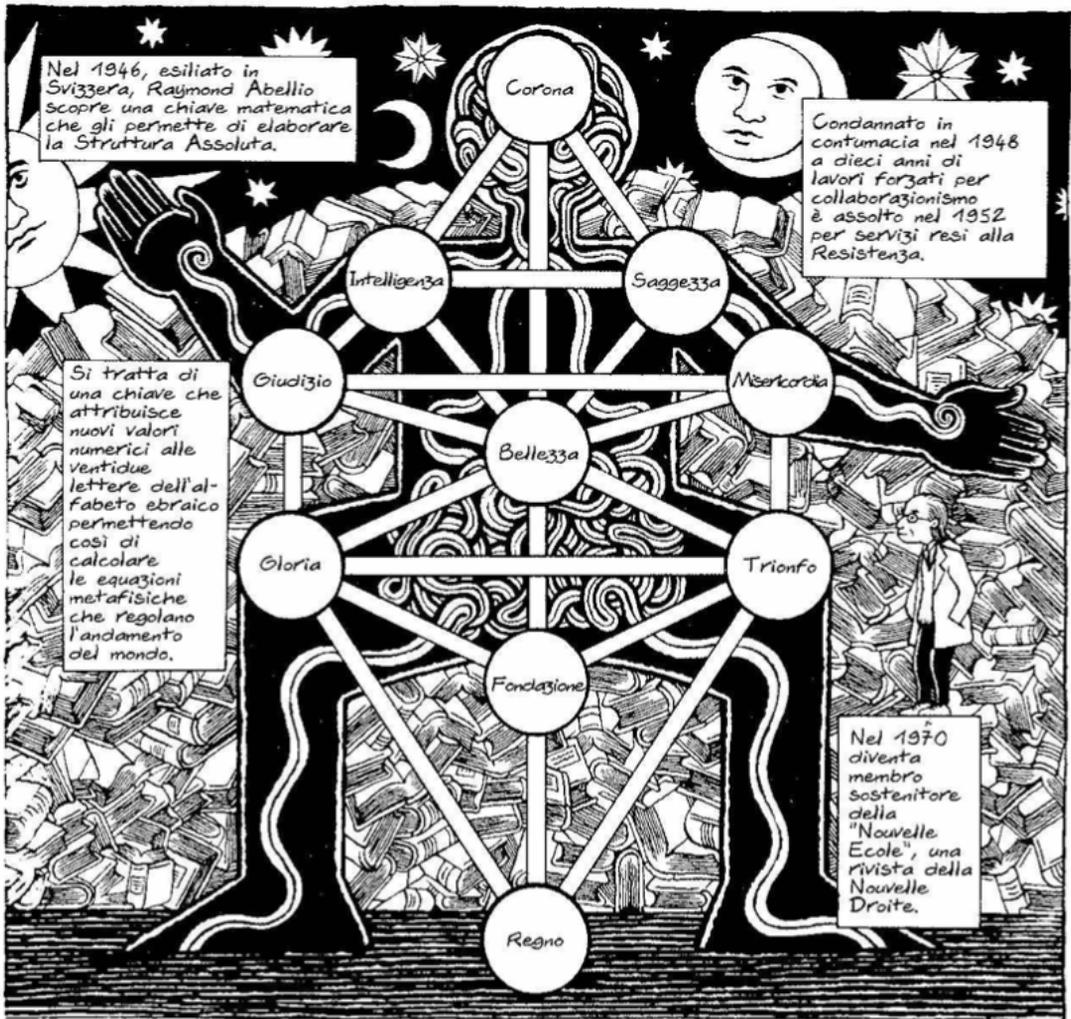
who has always been interested in Jewish culture, the only time she managed to meet an intellectual she found one of extreme right thinking. It is a bit sad, but she did not know this at the time. And after the war, Abellio tried to pass himself off as a partisan, like many others.

#### **EMILIO VARRÀ:**

This speech you are giving is also, paradoxically, a lesson on how you tell stories. And you could tell another 700,000 stories about *Epileptic* but I have some questions instead. Let's start with the topic of minorities. Both in *Epileptic* and *Les incidents de la nuit* you talk a lot about your relationship with Jewish culture: did your mother influence you?

#### **DAVID B.:**

Actually, my mom was never interested in the Jewish religion. She took from Jewish culture what she was interested in: she saw Jews as intellectual people, who came from Paris to bring culture, and then there were those kids she liked on the bridge...



Quando arriva all'appuntamento la madre non sa nulla di tutto questo.



Nella lettera che ha mandato ad Abellio gli parlava di Jean-Christophe.



**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

So they represented a possibility of cultural and social redemption.

**DAVID B:**

Yes, she was the daughter of a farmer and a teacher, she was passionate about books but she was the only one reading in the village, the other farmers had no desire to learn.

**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

But this relationship is your mother's, then there is your own relationship with Jewish culture.

**DAVID B:**

Yes, but it is still her who passed it on to me. She was interested in Jewish intellectuals, in writers, not in mystics. She gave me books, she pushed me to read. She always told me: "A good writer must either be homosexual or Jewish", so for her Marcel Proust was the greatest author in the world. She saw that I was interested in the fantastic and she gave me books by Isaac Bashevis Singer, Gustav Meyrink, the author of *The Golem* (who was not Jewish, although at the time it was thought he was) and other authors, like Bruno Schulz. So I became interested in Jewish literature through the fantastic, and in the end I did not read Marcel Proust but I read Bruno Schulz and from there I moved on to Jewish mysticism.

**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

If I think about your work, it seems to me that the relationship between the individual, the community and minorities - three things that don't always fit together well - is a recurrent theme. What do you think about that?

**DAVID B:**

It's true, I have always been interested in history, in religion, in esotericism, in heretics, in the slums of cities and therefore in cultural minorities.

**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

Also on the autobiographical side, the story that you lived with your family, and that you tell in *Epileptic*, has created a separation.

**DAVID B:**

Yes, when my brother got sick we became a minority, we changed position in society. My brother had become a sick person and we the family members of a sick person. I remember when my brother would have a seizure on the street people would stop and look at him and say, "Who is that, what's wrong with him? He is a madman, a drug addict, he must be put into jail". The reactions he elicited were incredible.

This is why I started this speech by talking about the moment when a minority arrived in my mother's village, a small town in central France where there was nothing. This arrival changed many things for my mother who then passed them on to me and my sister. It is wonderful that she has told us a thousand stories about her life, and that they were all so exciting.

Fatto prigioniero e rinchiuso in uno stalag in Slesia. Lì incontra degli ex appartenenti al movimento di estrema destra la Cagoule.

Nel 1941 viene liberato e torna a Parigi.

Entra nel Movimento Sociale Rivoluzionario, un partito collaborazionista diretto da Eugène Deloncle. Diventa membro del comitato direttivo del movimento.

Nel 1942 partecipa agli intrighi e ai conflitti tra i vari partiti collaborazionisti e il governo di Vichy.

Parallelamente entra in contatto con la resistenza alla quale passa le informazioni ottenute attraverso l'M.S.R.

Nel 1943 conosce Pierre de Combas che lo inizia all'esoterismo.

Nel 1944 entra in clandestinità per proteggersi dai collaborazionisti e vi resta durante la Liberazione per sfuggire ai partigiani.

**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

Did you already have an ending for *Epileptic* when you started drawing the first spreads?

**DAVID B:**

No. For twenty years I thought about doing *Epileptic* and one day, finally, I threw myself into the work. I drew the first page, where I go into the bathroom and see my brother totally transformed by the disease to the point that I no longer recognize him. I knew that that would be the first page and then I continued without thinking about how I would do it, the book came little by little.

As a child I was fascinated by medieval miniatures in which realism and fantastic mix. I also used this mixture a lot. In *Epileptic*, for example, I used the tree of the sefirot to talk about Abellio, who at first was anti-Semitic then used a lot of Jewish spirituality and mysticism to found his esoteric thinking.

**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

Can you tell about your book *Mon frère et le roi du monde*?

**DAVID B:**

It is a book based on an exhibition I did at the Anne Barrault gallery in Paris. It consists of 72 portraits, 36 of my brother and 36 of an esoteric character called *The King of the World*. It comes from the book *The King of the World* by René Guénon, another French esotericist, and it is a mythical figure who represents the union between the spiritual and the material on Earth. For example, King Arthur or Alexander the Great were "kings of the world", they somehow united heaven and earth.

**EMILIO VARRÀ:**

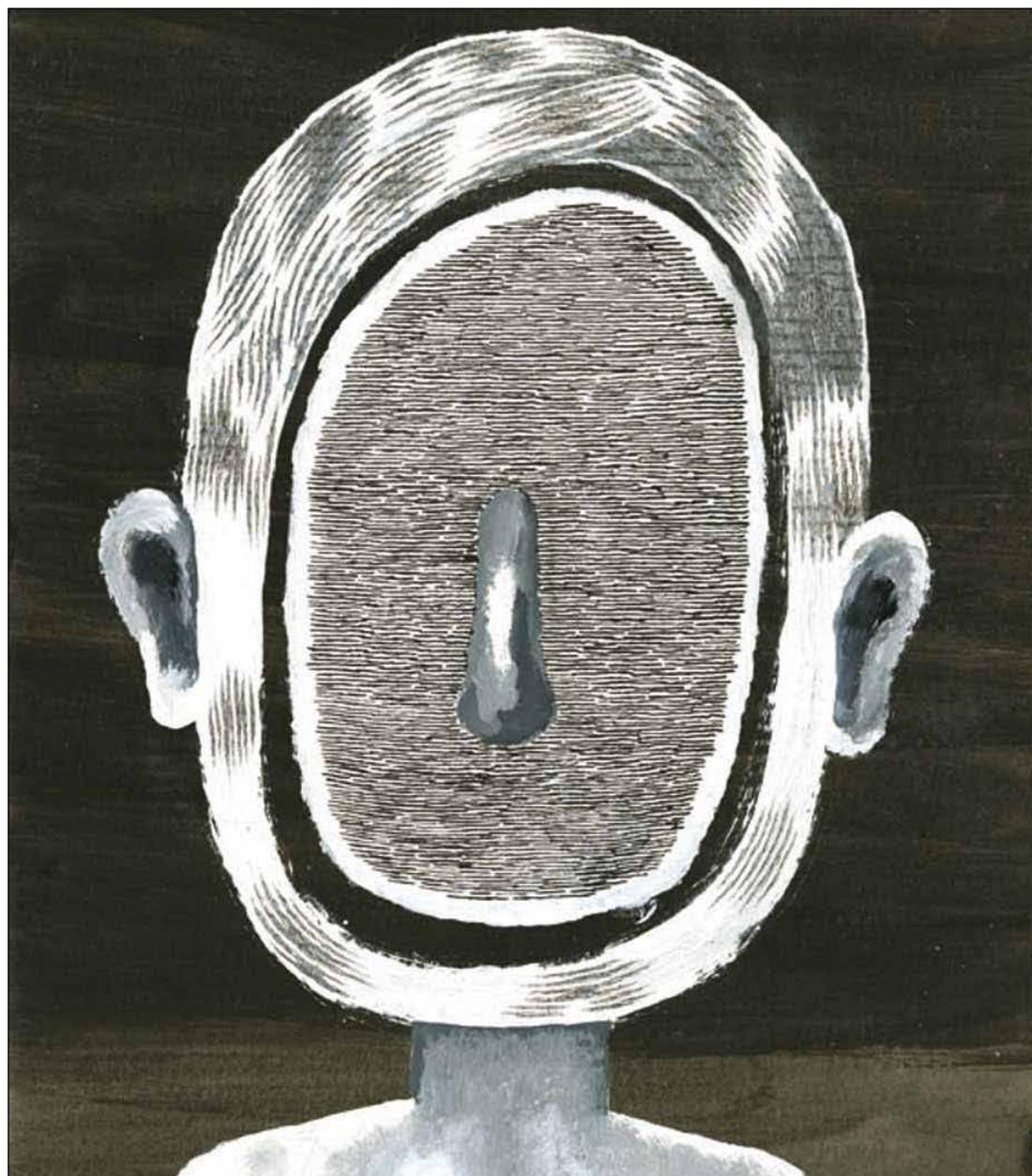
I asked you to talk about this book because I find it very important for two reasons. The first is that I believe the symbolic dimension in your work is not just a way to make the invisible visible but a way of saving one's life. The center of your poetics is the awareness that reality is a fracture, a wound, and that we have to invent ways of mending it while knowing that we will never be able to fix it. In my opinion the stories, the symbols, the myths, the continuous progression of the story then become a way of trying to mend this wound. In this dialogue the relationship between the symbol and the harshness of reality is felt constantly. And the fact of constantly coming back to the portrait of your brother, drawing it in always different ways, is a way of finding forms.

**DAVID B:**

I drew all these portraits with different techniques that I do not usually use, I really experimented a lot. By combining these two characters, my brother is the king of the world, I wanted to show my brother's weakness in the face of the other's power.

My brother had great ambitions, he too wanted to be a great novelist, to be known, and the disease really destroyed him, destroyed the creative side of him. Even a character like King Arthur, for example, does not remain the king of the world for life. At one point he falls, he dies in battle. There, I wanted to show the possibility that the king of the world might fall.

It is a bit like my brother had the chance of being the king of the world and for one rea-



David B., *Mon frère et le roi du monde*, L'Association, 2016

son or another he had fallen. We don't know where his illness comes from, the doctors have never been able to explain it to us, there is no reason. As Gotlib once said: "Let them deal with it".

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### David B.

David B. is among the French cartoonists whose work was most influential for the development of contemporary graphic novel, both in France and abroad. He started his artistic career in 1985 as a screenwriter and designer for magazines such as "Okapi", "À suivre", "Tintin Reporter" et "Chic". In 1990 he assumed an increasingly central role in the comic book scene both as an artist and as one of the co-founder publishing house L'Association (the other being Jean-Christophe Menu, Lewis Trondheim, Matt Konture, Patrice Killoffer, Stanislas and Mokeït).

Through his books and artistic experiments he built a true blueprint for graphic novel as we know it today. Most of his earlier works from the 90s are published in "Lapin magazine", then collected in the volumes *Le Cheval blême* (L'Association 1992) and *Les Incidents de la nuit* (L'Association 1991-2000). From 1996 to 2003 he devoted himself to *L'Ascension du Haut Mal* (L'Association; *Epileptic*, Pantheon Books 2002-2005), an autobiographical graphic novel in six volumes who won the Best Screenplay award at the Angoulême International Festival. His artis-

tic contribution to historical and non-fiction comics as well was seminal, as attested by the series *Les Meilleurs ennemis* (Futuropolis, 2011-16), a graphic novel in three volumes exploring the complex relationship between USA and the Middle East, written with French historian Jean-Pierre Filiu.

In 2005 he left L'Association, where he returned in 2011 as a member of the editorial committee. In 2018 he published as a screenwriter the 37th volume of the series *Alix* (Casterman 2018-2020) with designer Giorgio Albertini.

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### Emilio Varrà

is the president of Hamelin, and one of the organizers of BilBOlbul International Comics Festival. He teaches Children's Literature at the University of Bologna and is a professor at the "Illustration and Comics" course at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna. He wrote several academic publications dedicated to comics and illustration, and he collaborated with magazines such as "Li.B.e.R", "Gli Asini", and "Lo straniero".

# A Third Meaning

Stefano Ricci / Dominique Goblet

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### **ILARIA TONTARDINI:**

Observing the works of Dominique Goblet and Stefano Ricci, one can see a strategy for expressing the invisible made up of fragments placed side by side, a way of putting things into relation using fragments that break with the linear nature of time. This confuses the reader, because the full picture of the story becomes apparent only at the end. So my question for you is: how does piecing together fragments of history and time function in your work? And why did you choose to work on this break in linear time?

### **DOMINIQUE GOBLET:**

Comics is a medium that uses text and images, as you all know, but what is interesting is that the interplay of text and images produces two levels of interpretation. The image says one thing, the text says another

Dominique Goblet, Kai Pfeiffer, *Plus si entente*, Actes Sud BD, 2014

On the following page:  
Stefano Ricci, *Mia madre si chiama Loredana*, Quodlibet, 2016

and the relationship between these two elements produces a third meaning.

When you write, as a cartoonist, you do not write a story which is then cut or illustrated, but you write text and image at the same time: this is the basis.

In my artistic career I have often felt the need to deal with brutal themes, but it is impossible for me to face brutality head on, so I always try to find secondary ways of building my stories. I am especially interested in extracting beauty from brutality, grasping its element of tenderness. When a story is very crude, I try to go around its core to bring out

a different perspective, to show how the mechanism of a violent interaction can go all the way around and arrive at empathy.

The comic is a perfect medium for this type of work, due to the double text-image axis that allows you to heighten the tension by combining a very violent text and an image that uses a code of profound sweetness. For example, logic would have it that if I write a story about World War I will have to use earth tones, draw rainy and gloomy atmospheres. On the contrary, if I use soft colors, water-colors, I produce a short circuit of meaning and this will be what suggests violence.

#### **STEFANO RICCI:**

Yesterday I visited the *Open-End* exhibition here in Venice by Marlene Dumas and I saw a painting that I did not know, called *The Bride*. It is the image of a woman with a white, al-

most transparent veil covering her face. She made me think of my mother's best friend, a cloistered nun. Her convent was in the center of Bologna, there was a garden surrounded by very high walls, an independent space.

We used to visit her with my mother and my brother. We would enter a small room, go through a door and sit on a small bench. My mother would take a few steps and approach a window in the center of the room that had iron bars. To the right of this window there was a wheel, let's say a kind of barrel where my mother would throw small gifts for her friend. The barrel turned and from the opposite side of the adjoining room, behind bars, a door would open and my mother's friend would come in. She had a transparent black veil on her face, you could see her and also could not.



Of all the women I met who were close to my mother she was, in my memory, the most beautiful. The two of them talked very quietly, they would exchange a small packet of paper on the wheel, while my brother and I waited and waited. Over time I have tried many times to draw her veiled face, that transparency which is also what we look for when we try to draw skin-tones; a living thing that in a certain way is in relation with the truth. When I drew and wrote my book *Mia madre si chiama Loredana* I went into that room again, I tried to draw it and despite all my attempts I just could not.

I asked my mother why her friend wore a veil and she answered: What veil?

### **DOMINIQUE GOBLET:**

I would also say that in my artistic journey there are two ways to make a book: I can know the axis of the project, so I am able to write it before getting to the drawing; and there are projects that gradually emerge from drawing, which are the result of a connection with the unconscious. This second modality is perturbing, it requires you to listen to your drawings and ignore a part of yourself that suddenly emerges like a flash.

This was the case with my latest project, *Ostende*. During the Covid period I was at the seaside, in Ostende, Belgium. I was going through a rather complicated period of my life. I was dealing with a very painful separation, but I did not want to talk about it with anyone.

I felt the need to start working on a new personal project, testing myself with new techniques. I really like to start working with new techniques to get closer to projects I have never done before, because I think knowing how to produce something with an unknown

instrument brings something pure and personal into the work. To produce a truly effective work, it is essential that artist know how to put themselves into a difficult position, that they know how to work with a 60% handicap and a 40% of competence.

The real challenge is learning to love your own difficulties. And not just love them, but try to make them your own and always show them off. It is not a given that something that has never been seen before will come out of it, but certainly something will emerge from the heart's most intimate part, like an erupting volcano. When working with self-imposed limitations, it becomes automatic to ask yourself the reason for what you are doing.

In *Ostende's* case, what does it mean to draw a landscape today? The first question I asked myself as soon as I arrived at the sea was: what happens to me when I arrive in front of the sea? Ostende's sea is a sea that does not appear immediately, to see it you have to climb a sand dune and each time on the other side there is a different landscape, with different colors, and this change produces in me emotions related to smells, feelings, colors.

I don't want to reproduce it exactly, I want to give the drawing the impact that the sea has each time, depending on the emotion with which one reads it. The sea is different there, it is not a vacation spot, it is not the Mediterranean. It is made up of unique colors, not only the classic blues but many grays and browns, it brings with it many emotions that are not easily translated.

When I started drawing the sea, being a purely frontal landscape, I decided to eliminate blue both from the sky and from the water, thus giving it its own identity and feel.

Dominique Goblet,  
*Ostende, FRMK, 2022*

### ILARIA TONTARDINI:

I find the idea of spatial order and disorder that is created by the interplay of text and image in your work very interesting. In particular, if I think of Stefano Ricci's books, they always contain parallel stories that cross and overlap. It is like weaving, only at the end you can see the overall texture. What is your creative process?

### STEFANO RICCI:

I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, in a working-class family in Bologna. There was a courtyard: it was long and without grass, with acacia trees (poor things, almost petrified), and there were cars. People, families did not change cars often, so they took care of them. In the evening, all the people who had a car - and there was a very long view of them, there must have been at least sixteen - covered it with gray plastic sheets fastened with rubber bands. All the vehicles, which had different shapes, became gray ghosts in the evening; you couldn't even see the wheels. My brother and I went to bed, and in the courtyard there were those sleeping ghosts. I have tried to draw them many times, but have never succeeded.

One day in the studio, looking for paper, I pulled out a drawing of a car, a Ford Capri owned by the father of some of our friends who lived on the ground floor. The drawing wasn't anything, it was just this Ford Capri. So I took some transparent white tempera paint and covered it, it took me a few minutes.



A few days later I met a person, his name is Gagliardi, he is my age and draws identikits very well, he works at the police station. I had tried to meet him because I had read about him regarding the Uno Bianca murder. This man had drawn two portraits, two identikits that were the result of some oral descriptions; because this is the enigma that preoccupied me on the question of identikits, the oral description of a face that becomes an image.

These two portraits / identikits had been hung in the hallway at the police station. The Savi brothers, the two murderers, some-

times robbed small suburban banks and the first thing they would do was shoot the surveillance cameras.

In a small branch, in Budrio I believe, they had fired but the video camera had not broken; the bank manager had noticed that the camera had continued recording, so he printed the photos of the Savi brothers, he went to the Bologna police headquarters and asked to meet with a magistrate.

While waiting for the magistrate, he saw the two identikit, in front of which many policemen had passed for several years, and he recognized the two Savi brothers and understood. He went home and realized that the matter was very serious.

I had read about this in some articles and for this reason I wanted to meet Gagliardi, ask him some questions about the drawing, about the face, about being permeated by an oral description to execute an image, and also about the mystery of not falling into the temptation of making a beautiful drawing, but to be solely a tool that makes a person's invisibility visible.

When I was finally able to meet him at the police station, I did not know where to start. He was very kind, I asked him: "How would you define what you can do? What are you capable of doing with drawing? "

He thought about it for a long time and told me: "Look, I think I can draw at least 7000 different cheekbones".

And I thought that if you can draw them it means that you can see them. You can see 7000 different cheekbones, you can see the transparency, the face under the veil of the skin, you can recognize these differences, you can see the uniqueness of this beauty. I asked him: "Could you please draw some?".



Dominique Goblet, *Ostende*, FRMK, 2022

On the following page:  
Stefano Ricci, *Bartleby le scribe*,  
Futuropolis, 2021

And he said: "Sure!". He took paper, a pencil, and began to make these signs like an alphabet: one, two, three, four ... When we reached thirty, I was enchanted, and I said to him: "I believe you, I give up".

### **ILARIA TONTARDINI:**

The visible and the invisible, the way an image becomes a story, lead me to another question that has to do with the human body. In both your works the body is the main character, albeit in very different ways. In Stefano Ricci's books the body is an instrument of memory; in those of Dominique Goblet the body is exposed in its most erotic, sensual side, it is a real presence that catalyzes narration. How important is the representation of the body to you?

### **DOMINIQUE GOBLET:**

If we talk about graphic novels, whether fictional or autobiographical, the characters are one of the engines of comics. In my last

work in particular, *Ostende*, I tried to think about bodies not so much as sensual presences but to think of their relationship with the typical characters of the comic in terms of proportion. I inverted the proportion of space dedicated to the landscape in relation to the characters, placing minuscule characters in a boundless landscape.

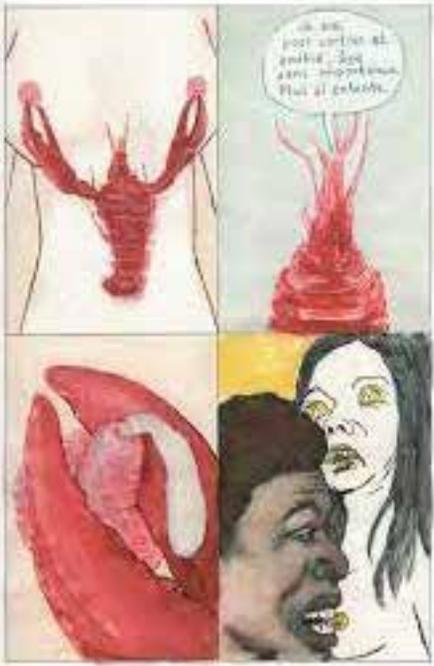
**STEFANO RICCI:**

When I started drawing I did civil service in an ambulance for two years. One day, for a geometry of destiny, the switchboard called us as we were about to finish a nine-hour shift and told us to go to 13 Montello road, which was where I lived. I grew up with my grandfather there, my father always worked

so I spent all of my time with him. He often said that he wanted to die on his feet. He was 96 years old and two days before the ambulance went to the house where I lived he had bought two white John Player Special bathrobes. We went inside, there were two of us, me and the driver; I went into the bathroom, my grandfather was shaving and had fallen, that is, he was leaning against the mirror. He still had a lot of white hair that he kept all slicked back, he was wearing the white John Player Special bathrobe, long white socks and white slippers. It was indeed a sacred body.

Yesterday, at the Marlene Dumas exhibition, I saw a short film which is an excellent example of how a person, an artist, is a body in-





Where will she stop? At that point the camera approaches the body and a hand with the wedding ring emerges from the edge of the sheet, and the gaze stops there. Here are all the looks that Dumas was able to make happen. It takes a lot of courage, in my opinion, to do such a thing.

### ILARIA TONTARDINI:

I am going to ask Dominique one last question, again on the topic of bodies. Before you were talking about brutality and grace, about the need to work on opposite sensations to show what cannot be seen. I was thinking of the book *Plus si entente*, which you wrote together with Kai Pfeiffer: the body of a woman who has experienced the unspeakable pain of losing her daughter is put at the center, a body that encompasses beauty and violence. How do you relate to the representation of intimacy, which is also, in part, the life of the body?

### DOMINIQUE GOBLET:

The matter is very complex and would deserve more time, so I prefer to talk about the creative process behind this book. *Plus si entente* is a work of pure fiction, even if there is a trace of oneself in every fictional work. I made it with Kai Pfeiffer, who lives in Berlin, so we had to invent a way of working remotely. We worked on pages divided into four panels in which to write and draw in a very open and free way: one person started and the other reacted, like a sort of ping pong. In the end we mixed everything, trying to understand if a narrative could emerge from that process. At the center of the story is a woman who invites all the men she has met through dating apps to her home and tries to live like an empress, promising them the ultimate reward: her body.

habited by a multitude of conditions which, when transformed into painting, produce a multitude of different points of view.

It is hard to explain, but the film was the Super 8 image Dumas recorded of her daughter, who was in her twenties at the time. Her daughter is lying down, asleep, the sheet partly covers her and partly not, and Marlene Dumas films her. I can be wrong, but it is as if we saw more than one person picking up the camera: a mother (at least I thought I saw a mother) looking at this magnificent, turgid, fertile, innocent flower sleeping, full of beauty.

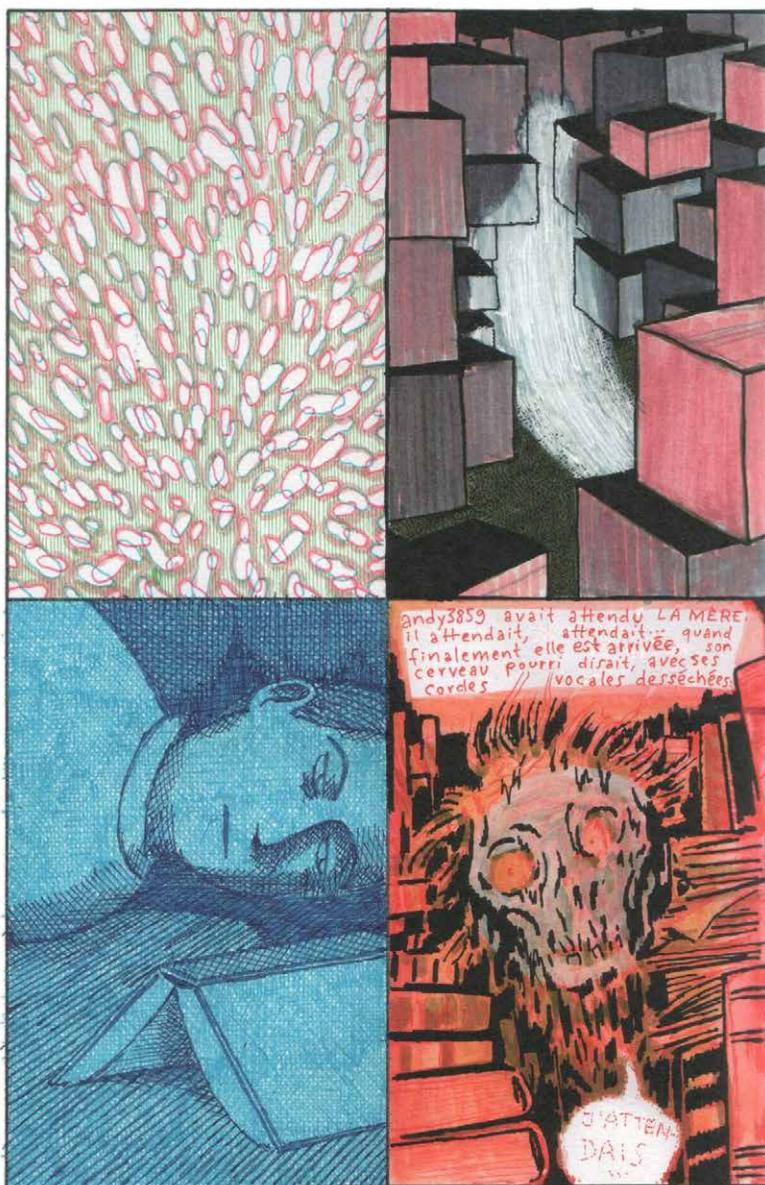
Then at some point she films her from another point of view and I felt that she was looking at her as I would look at her, that is, with desire.

Then there is another moment where you also feel all the bewilderment of the fact that Dumas is looking in a mirror, she is filming the mirror and her own reflection. I thought:

The characters do not fall into the stereotypes of comics, because I love working on ambiguity. I think it is fundamental, both in comics and in life. I can find a disgusting man handsome and vice versa; beauty as we describe it usually doesn't interest me. I prefer to look for the beauty behind the not

beautiful things. I would have liked to call *Ostende*, my latest book, *Derrière*, "behind". All that is hidden interests me.

Below and on the previous page:  
Dominique Goblet, Kai Pfeiffer,  
*Plus si entente*, Actes Sud BD, 2014



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**Dominique Goblet** is a Belgian visual artist, illustrator and pioneer of the European graphic novel. She is one of the most prominent artists of the alternative publishing house Frémok (FRMK), which in the 90s has been a major influence on the independent Franco-Belgian and European comics scene, challenging traditional notion of comics and defying mainstream trends through incessant artistic research and the production of avant-garde comics. Goblet in particular has worked on an experimental approach to comics language, playing extensively with the fragmentation of narrative space and traditional plots, and fostering a fruitful contamination between comics, illustration, painting and contemporary art. Among her most influential works: her debut *Portraits Crachés* (Fréon 1997), a collection of stories and illustrations previously appeared in the magazine "Frigorevue"; *Souvenir d'une journée parfaite* (Fréon 2001); her most known graphic novel *Faire semblant c'est mentir* (L'Association 2007; published in the US by The New York Review Comics in 2017 with the title *Pretending is Lying*), an unconventional memoir merging her experiences with alcoholism and child abuse and the story of a lover tormented by an ancient

lost love; *Les Hommes Loups* (FRMK 2010); *Chronographie* (FRMK 2010), a collection of portraits Goblet and her daughter made of each other during the span of ten years; *Plus si entente* (Actes Sud BD 2014), made in collaboration with Kai Pfeiffer. Her latest book is *Ostende* (FRMK 2022), an experiment in landscape painting that pushes further her exploration of fragmented narratives.

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**Stefano Ricci** is an internationally acclaimed Italian cartoonist and illustrator. His work is always threading on the borders between illustration and comics, painting and experimental writing, visual arts and music. Since 1985 he has collaborated with the alternative press both in Italy and abroad (some of his stories have appeared on magazines such as "Frigidaire", "Dolce Vita", "Linea d'ombra", "il manifesto", "Esquire", "Panorama", "LesInrockuptibles", "Lo Straniero" "la Repubblica"), some of them featuring collaborations with artists such as Philippe de Pierpont (*Tufo*, Amok 1996) and Gabriella Giandelli (*Anita*, avant-verlag 2001). Some of his most influential works are *La storia dell'orso* (Quodli-

bet 2016); *Eccoli* (Quodlibet 2015), a graphic memoir combining his childhood memories and a short documentary shot at a former asylum in Gorizia; *Bartleby le scribe* (Futurpolis 2021) a visual adaptation of Herman Melville's novel; *Mia madre si chiama Lore-dana* (Quodlibet 2021) a touching portrait of the artist's mother built on the juxtaposition of visual and narrative fragments. He has worked in theater, dance and cinema productions; he was selected by the ADI, Design Index 2000, and the 2001 Compasso d'Oro award for his design and illustration projects. Together with Giovanna Anceschi, since 1995 he curated the publishing house Edizioni Grafiche Squadro, based in Bologna and specialized in avant-garde comics and illustration, and the following year he founded "MANO", one of the most important magazine in the Italian underground publishing history. He is also among the founders of Sigaretten Edizioni, an independent publishing house based in Bologna that focuses on promoting young artists and rediscovering alternative gems by some of the most important international cartoonists. He taught comics at the University of Udine, the Hamburg University of Applied Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna.

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**Ilaria Tontardini** is a lecturer of History of Illustration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna. Since 2005 she is part of Hamelin, where she curates projects dedicated to comics and illustration and is among the organizers of BilBOlbul International Comics Festival.

# Building the Invisible

Manuele Fior / Lorenzo Mattotti

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On the following page:  
Lorenzo Mattotti, Jerry Kramsky,  
*Ghirlanda*, #logosedizioni, 2017

### EMILIO VARRÀ:

The invisible is part of the creative process: first there is nothing and then there is something. I would like to start from this, and from the memory of some things you have said to me, and which I will now quote simply to introduce the question.

The last time I saw Lorenzo Mattotti, one of the first things he said to me was: "I'm sick of stories! Plots are totally useless because they trap you". I remember when, many years ago, he showed me the preparatory drawings of *Ghirlanda* and explained how complicated it was to start a comic and how much he felt the weight of it, not only because it is a long process but also because putting the panels in sequence narrows one's field of action.

I also remember that, while working on his exhibition *L'intervista* for an old edition of the BilBOlbul festival, Manuele Fior said that it was very important for him during the creative process not to know exactly how to proceed.

We started by saying that the creative process is to make visible something that was not there before, but it seems to me that one of the things that unites you is the effort of trying to maintain the invisible even during creation.

How does this constant contrast between constraint and freedom (therefore also between marks on the sheet of paper and the invisible) act in your work?

### LORENZO MATTOTTI:

For me, drawing means concretizing the invisible. Any drawing I make is an effort to put on paper something that I feel or recognize and which, once thrown on the sheet of paper, becomes something. To draw is to build the invisible.

One of the most difficult things in comics, for example, is to concretize smell and music. In fact, I remember that sometimes, when we were doing stories with my scriptwriter friends, I said to put in the captions the smells that the character could smell.

But let's go back to when I was talking to you about *Ghirlanda*: at the time I was feeling the clash with the language of comics. I had been trying for a long time, in my head, to build a story based on the improvised drawings of my notebooks, drawings I call "fragile line" that are improvised on the spot, flashes, visions that are born on paper, flickering, disarmed.

When I took it upon myself to build a sequential narrative that had this extremely sensitive quality, I started having to follow conventions, and a certain character who had started out with an incredible fragility of drawing required building. Just the fact of having to draw it many times transforms



the line into a structure. The light marks that previously evoked a landscape becomes, when you begin to write a story, a road, or a forest ... Everything is trapped in the convention of language.

This convention allowed me to communicate to the reader, but at the same time those drawings that were fragile, emotional, full of invisible evocations were impoverished. In narrating the invisible, sometimes the story gave me an itinerary, because the reader understood a drawing or a sequence that could not be explained without words. But there are things that can only be explained with lines and images, and that is where every now and then I have tried to arrive at, that is, the maximum power of the mystery of drawing, which is after all the concretization of a mystery that does not even need to be revealed. This is why I say that our work is a continuous attempt to give shape to the invisible.

#### **MANUELE FIOR:**

I am excited to have this talk because it is the first time that I speak with Lorenzo and I will quote his work many times, not out of flattery but because he represented so much for me.

So, the invisible: perhaps due to my past as an assistant to archaeologists ( I did many jobs before becoming a cartoonist) the invisible is linked to unearthing things. I have the impression that there are images and core narratives that are already present but cannot be seen; the artist begins to scabble, then he glimpses a small detail and goes on like this, like an archaeologist who does not really know what he will be facing.

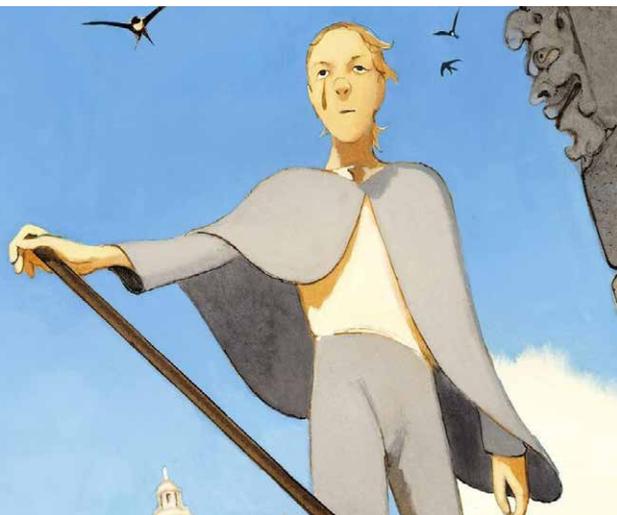
I remember that once in Alexandria, Egypt, I was sitting on something that was pricking my bottom; at a certain point we began to dig around in that area and found the skeleton of a gentleman buried there in the 1700s.



Even with drawings, this is often the case. I will quote Mattotti for the first time now: once I asked him how he had worked on *Fuochi* and he said to me: "Well, I started with very strong images and I built bridges between one image and another". This for me is making comics: to make a true story you don't have to know what it is about; you will know that in the end, maybe, because even after the end a story is always equivocal, always interpretable.

In the last comic I did, *Celestia*, I started as I always do from the first page knowing only that I wanted to work around the topic of the island where we are today, Venice. I had taken possession of it, I began traveling, reading everything I could, all the comics that had been made about Venice including that of Lorenzo Mattotti, *Scavando nell'acqua*. In the first panel I drew a black silhouette: I needed a character who would open the story. Then, as soon as I turned him around

Below and on the  
previous page:  
Manuele Fior, *Celestia*,  
Oblomov Edizioni, 2019



in the next page so that he was looking at me, I stared him in the face and, I don't know why, I put a tear on his face. As soon as I drew the tear, I felt a snap and thought of Pierrot: on the one hand as a character in the *Commedia dell'arte*, a sort of melancholy poet but also a murderer; on the other hand, though, I was also thinking about a memory from my childhood.

As a child I always forgot everything! Once I even forgot the school carnival party, so my mother, in order not to make me go without a costume, dressed me in white, put a black cap on my head, drew a tear on my face and said: "You are Pierrot". This character, therefore, wasn't indifferent to me right from the beginning.

This is how the invisible is revealed and asks to be revealed. The process of unveiling it is

an enchantment, it is an ability that we have, and which unfortunately we censor a little as adults - the ability to be entranced in front of images, music, a landscape, even in front of a person. This process of unveiling is a wonderful thing, in the sense that it arouses wonder and it is for this feeling that the whole gestation of the book is endured.

Because in order to make comics, as Lorenzo rightly said, one must acquire a language to be able to transmit this enchantment to others, otherwise it is like telling a dream. Perhaps the most appropriate definition is precisely the unearthing of something that had always been present but that we did not know was there, and this gives a great feeling of surprise.

#### **EMILIO VARRÀ:**

You both spoke of revelation, enchantment, wonder... We are then in an impalpable territory, but there is also the solidity of the moving body, of the drawing being made. So I ask you to zoom in on the act of drawing: what is the revelation there? Which is the discovery and which is the failure?

#### **MANUELE FIOR:**

This question has to do with the basis of comic language that Dominique Goblet spoke of. The problem with comics is that they are made up of two very simple things: drawings and text. The sum of these two things, however, produces something more than a talking figurine.

It is like an antenna, and whoever draws receives a message that is sometimes disturbed and sometimes very clear. We must rely on this message, develop what is around it; the technique is a producer of contents.

For example, when I did *L'intervista* I very quickly drew night skies in which a cloud would appear with the blow of an eraser: this is the most absolute concreteness, it is technique showing you where to go, what to explore.

#### **LORENZO MATTOTTI:**

One of the big problems I have when I have to draw stories in color is that by drawing the sketches in pencil first, I have the anguish that a certain expression, for example, will end up being covered by color. Sometimes I have photocopied or scanned my books in black and white!

The color in your head, which is invisible, finally blooms when you see it on paper, and it does not always come out the way you expected. What you imagined as blue has become half green and half orange, what you

had in your head is actually something else. We have emotions, music and drawings inside, but the mechanism that makes them real is not direct. You think you are doing one thing and then another comes, you have to question it, look for side routes, go back until finally what you had inside appears. Because you have it, but it is shapeless, it is an emotion. This is the magic of working this way. Improvisation has always transported me, grafting a moment of magic within a structured code... There is an energy that you can only find in improvisation.

And readers understand it, communication passes through this energy. I am convinced that if I am enchanted, the reader will also be enchanted, and if I am bored the reader will also be bored. I have more and more confidence in the improvised image, I believe that there lies the core of the mys-



Manuele Fior,  
*L'intervista*,  
Coconino Press, 2013

tery, of the charm of drawing, of the image speaking with the language of images.

### **EMILIO VARRÀ:**

In your stories you both often tell of characters who are in search of something. This has to do with invisibility because the future has to do with invisibility. What are your characters looking for?

### **MANUELE FIOR:**

I don't know where my characters are going... But it is certainly the reflection of a kind of restlessness that made me (and Lorenzo too) travel. My dad is a former air force pilot and for this reason I never lived in the same place for more than two years; I did elementary school in two different schools... It was very easy to understand but it took me psychotherapy to figure it out: the place where I have lived the longest is Paris, not Italy!

So I think this is a litmus test of my life. After traveling a lot with my family, I left Venice because I could not take it anymore and I was afraid of ending up doing a job in a technical studio. I had my family in hot pursuit of me, so I fled to Berlin in 1998 and returned to live in Venice a year ago, after being away for twenty-two years, first in Berlin, then in Norway, and in Paris.

In my opinion comics, being adaptable, eat everything that happens to you while you do them. Generally it takes a few years to finish a graphic novel, and in the meantime maybe you have changed your life, you have had a child, all sorts of things have happened to you, you are no longer the same person you were when you started. The graphic novel is the trace of this movement. I honestly don't know what my characters are looking for, in

every story it is something different. In *5000 km al secondo* they simply get lost in the world, they leave without knowing where to go, without knowing if they can call themselves Italian, French...

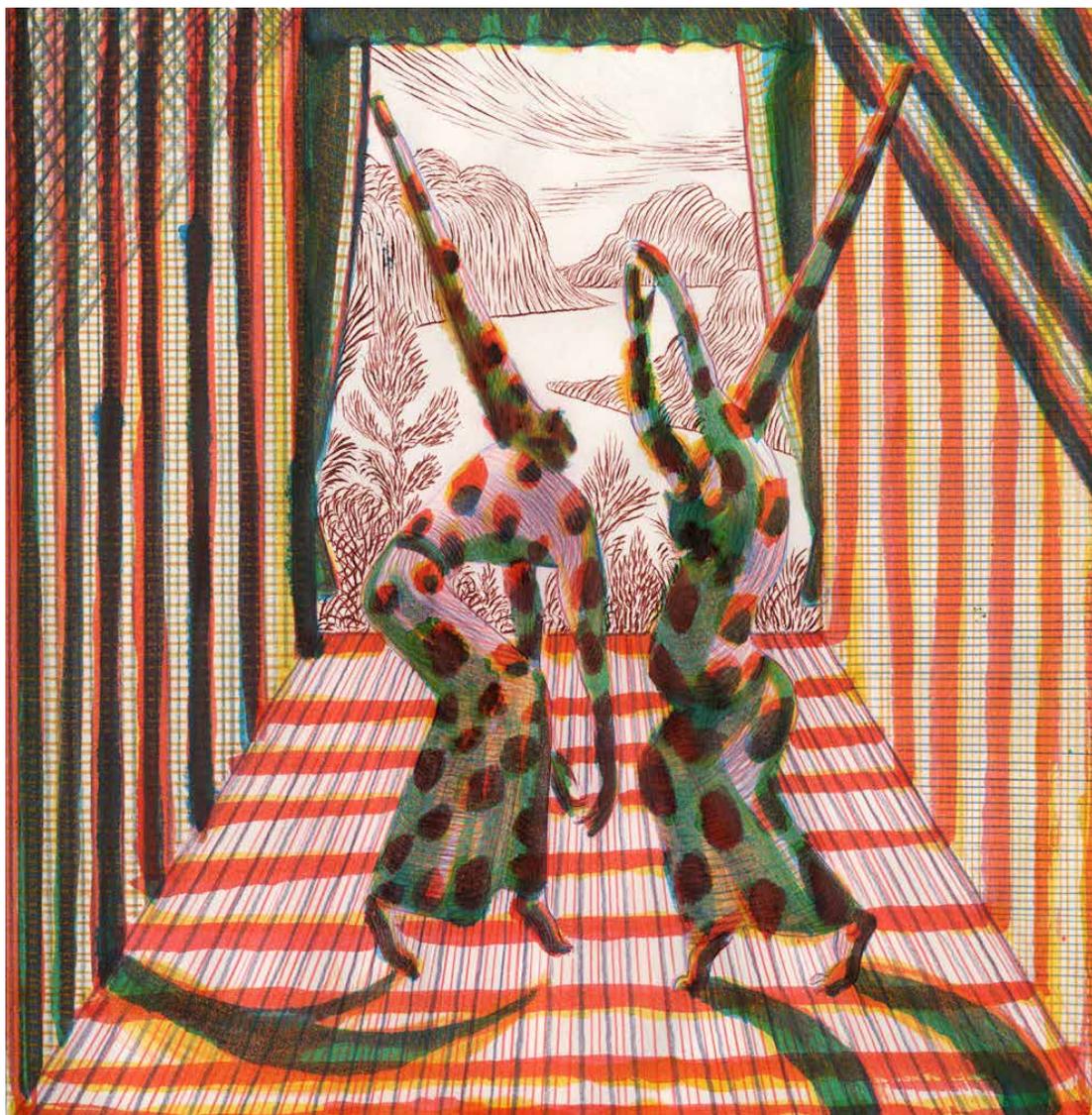
When I was working on that comic, at the end of the Nineties, it was very easy for people to travel, while now it feels like the world is shrinking. Everything was opening up then, but now this bubble is closing. When I heard that after Brexit UK universities would no longer accept students who did not know English, I thought that I had never gone to a country whose language I already knew.

Adventure, a term that I love very much and which has long been looked down on, is actually the adventure of our lives, which sooner or later will have to end. It has temporary, large or measurable movements and the characters are part of this movement - they win, they lose, they fall in love, they hurt each other. I think it is the closest thing to a character's life that you can instill in a small paper sketch.

### **LORENZO MATTOTTI:**

I very much agree. Among other things, we have had similar experiences: my father was also in the military and we spent four years in one city, then four years in another... I reflected on the fact that also for me Paris is the city where I have lived the most.

When you have a life like this, you get used to change. The idea of staying in a city for more than four or five years makes me anxious, the idea of staying in one place for so long anguishes me. I probably poured this aspect of mine into comics: I cannot always do the same thing, I have to question everything otherwise I become a professional in comics,



Lorenzo Mattotti, disegno  
tratto dai quaderni dell'autore,  
utilizzato dal Teatro Nuovo  
Giovanni Da Udine

On the following page:  
Manuele Fior, *5000 km al  
secondo*, Coconino Press, 2010



Lorenzo Mattotti, *Fuochi*,  
Granata Press, 1991

On the following page:  
Manuele Fior, cover for the book  
*Il diavolo sulle colline*, Cesare  
Pavese, Einaudi, 2020

an illustrator of children's books or a director of animated films. Instead I want to find adventure every time, and question myself.

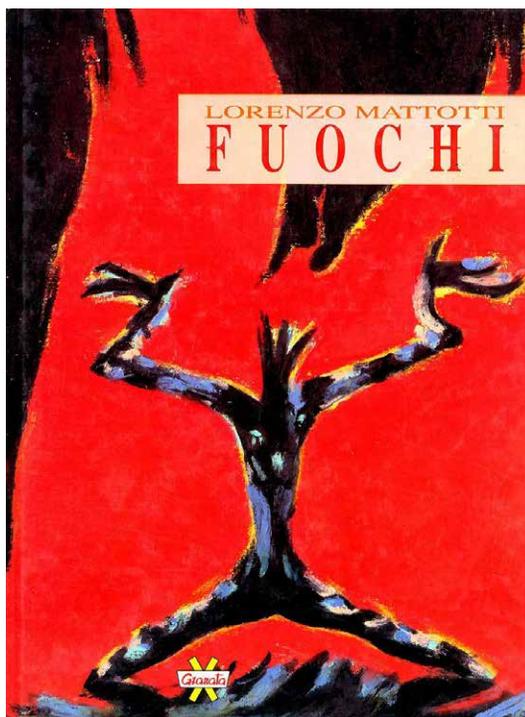
Back to your question about movement. I add change. In my stories I have always tried to record the changing of my characters; for them the story must be an experience and the same goes for me as a designer and narrator. Time passes and the drawings change. All my comic stories have become my experiences.

If you look at *Fuochi*, at the beginning the character is in a certain way and little by little he transforms.

My stories are always in motion, and in the process of change they are also a metamorphosis. Perhaps unconsciously I always dream of change, even though as you get older you realize that nothing ever really changes... But the attempt to change is the engine that keeps me drawing, makes me destroy the mannerisms which I hate because they mean that I am not in motion. And Manuele is right in saying that the story absorbs all of this. Stories change, they are objects in continuous motion.

#### EMILIO VARRÀ:

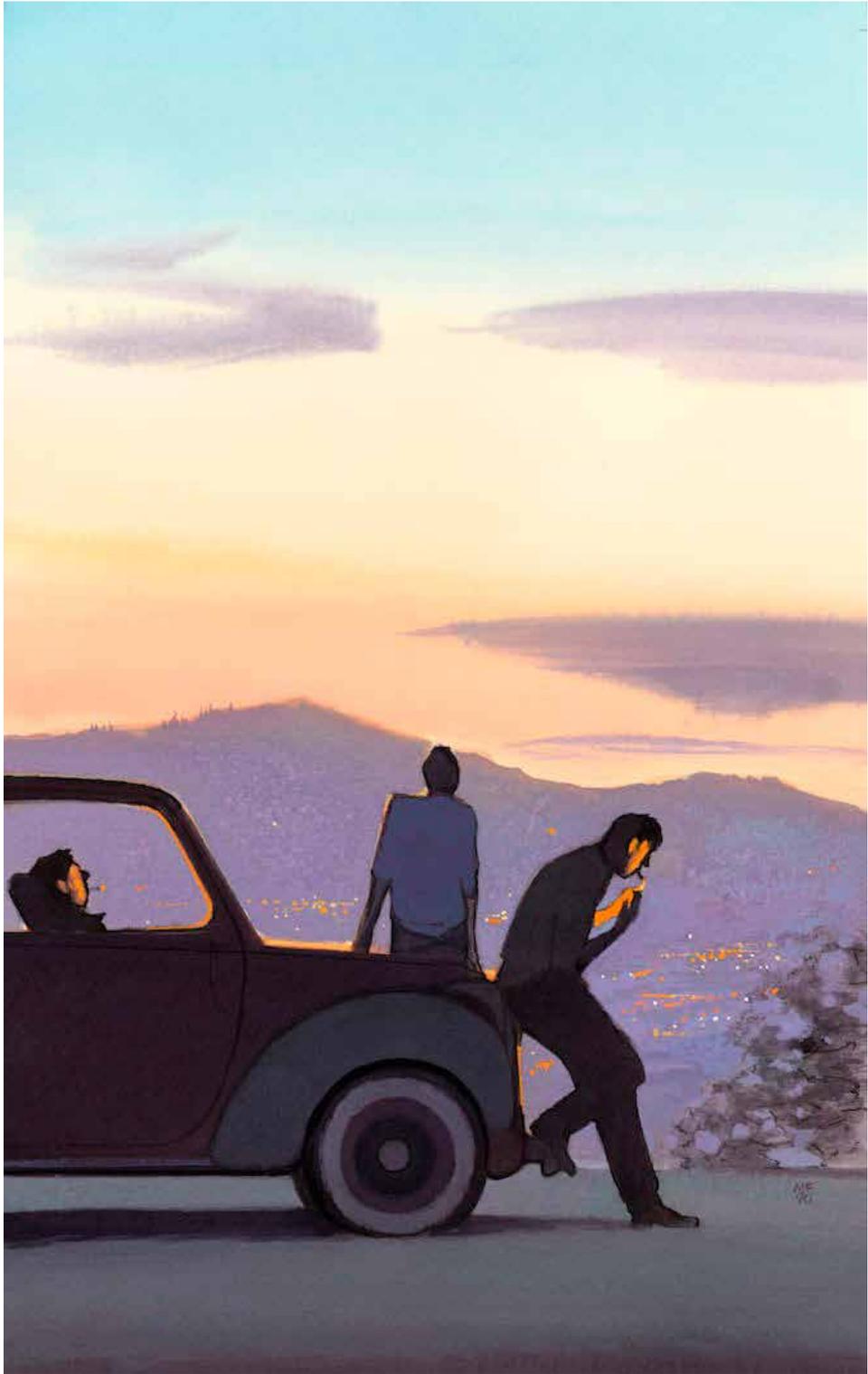
How does this process change when you work on a single image? The temporality changes, and the relationship with invisibil-



ity changes, in the sense that if the comic is also an act of filling up empty spaces between one drawing and another, in illustration or in a single image the invisible speaks. How does the relationship change between what one sees and what one decides not to show in illustration?

#### MANUELE FIOR:

I do not consider myself a good illustrator, perhaps not even a good cartoonist. But I am a bit better as a cartoonist than as an illustrator, in the sense that Lorenzo Mattotti is capable, like other great illustrators, of enclosing a world in a drawing, while I have a lot of difficulty doing this and it always seems to me that I have to explain it in some way, put something in front of and behind that single image... Basically to make a comic! But I am absolutely seduced by the ability some art-





ists have to condense everything into single images. Böcklin's painting or an illustration by Kubin function as generators of narrative universes, for example.

What I do for work with illustrations does not matter very much to me. The most important things in single illustrations are those that hardly anyone notices but that open a kind of "bubble", things that are not particularly beautiful or significant but which point into a direction, as if someone with a telescope had sighted an island.

There is a beautiful four-part documentary about Miyazaki that explains this con-

cept. It is about *Ponyo*, one of his most famous films. There he is, suffering like an animal because he is not able to start, the whole studio swearing after him because they are late, but he cannot begin because he doesn't have an image, and at a certain point he starts messing with paint, he finishes a drawing, he looks at it and says: "There, we've got the film!".

I have a very instrumental relationship with the image: I make it, I put it away in a drawer and I need it to explode into the whole story. Dora from *L'intervista*, for example, was born from a profile, from a sketch that I had framed

for personal purposes, because when I drew that profile, that nose, it was as if I had always known it, as if I had already seen it. This is the relationship I have with single images: they are comic book detonators.

**LORENZO MATTOTTI:**

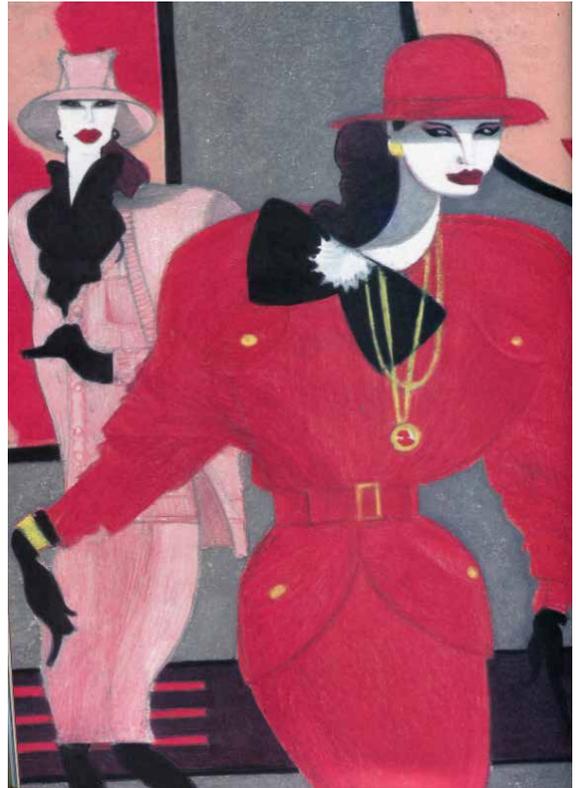
At first, when they started asking me for illustrations for the press, it felt like an epiphany. I came from *Fuochi*, where each panel was a potential story, a concentrate of energy and narration. To make one panel I would spend a week thinking, so when they asked me for a single drawing it seemed very easy. Illustration has been oxygen for me, because it has allowed me to take advantage of my ability to draw quickly and make still images that had to be strong but did not need all the design complexity associated with a sequential story.

Then it became more complicated because, upon reflection, there are free illustrations, illustrations for posters or covers, or for literary novels, and each one has its own language.

With experience you learn to create an illustration that works like a closed narrative, in which the eye continues to turn ... There is a big difference, however, between illustration and free image: an illustration exists in relation to something, it has a function, while a free image is just for you. I have sometimes used free images for magazine covers, but illustration follows a very precise logic, it pushes us to focus on the internal tension of the image and on a general evocative power. I remember that, concerning my fashion illustrations, a director of various magazines said: "Mattotti doesn't do mannequins, he continues to make living characters". After all, if you have the nature of a storyteller, a

story comes out in any situation. There are illustrators who do not tell any, whose charm lies elsewhere; I feel them distant, I feel that they do not create characters but shapes. A bit like certain painters who follow a rational, cold, detached logic. Bacon for example, and all of modernism with their idea of an image that must completely detach itself from narrative. Even though not even those painters succeeded completely, because every image tells a story.

On the previous page:  
Manuele Fior, *L'intervista*,  
Coconino Press, 2013



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**Manuele Fior** is one of the most relevant Italian contemporary comic book artists, and one of the most celebrated and recognized abroad as well. With his graphic novel *5000 km al secondo* (Coconino Press 2010) he won the Fauve d'Or Award as Best Album at the Angoulême International Festival in 2011. Among his other publications: *Rosso Oltremare* (Coconino Press 2006); *La signorina Else* (Coconino Press 2009) based on the novel of the same name by Arthur Schnitzler; *L'intervista* (Coconino Press 2013); *Le variazioni d'Orsay* (Coconino Press - Fandango 2015); the short story collection *I giorni della merla* (Coconino Press - Fandango 2016). His latest graphic novel, released in 2019 by Oblomov Edizioni, is *Celestia*, a science-fiction tale in two volumes set in a futuristic city inspired by Venice, in which Fior uses his visual and narrative imagination to envision the future of humanity.

His graphic novels have been translated all over the world and international editions have been published by Atrabile and Delcourt (France), avant-verlag (Germany), Jippi Forlag (Norway), Sins Entido (Spain), Fantagraphics Books (USA).

Alongside making comics, he works as an illustrator for magazines such as "The New

Yorker", "Vanity Fair", "La Repubblica", "Le Monde", and "Il Sole 24 Ore" and for some of the most important Italian publishing houses.

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**Lorenzo Mattotti** is perhaps the most known and globally celebrated contemporary Italian comic author and illustrator, thanks to the undeniable impact of his work, ranging from different artistic forms: comics, illustration, children's literature, animation, cinema, painting. He has been an acclaimed artist since the 1970s, with works such as his illustrations for *Le avventure di Huckleberry Finn* (Ottaviani 1976) and stories like *Alice brum brum* (Ottaviani 1977) and *Incidenti* (Hazard 1996), published in the supplement of the Italian alternative magazine "Alter alter". His ever-transforming visual style has paved the way for contemporary comics, making him one of the forerunners of graphic novel at a time when no one had ever even heard of "graphic novel" yet. His production is vast and diverse; among his most important publications: *Il signor Spartaco* (Milano Libri 1982); his masterpiece *Fuochi* (Dolce

Vita 1988), historically considered a trail-blazer for an unprecedented way of making comics; *L'uomo alla finestra* (with Lilia Ambrosi, Feltrinelli 1992); *Stigmatè* (with Claudio Piersanti, Einaudi 1999, ); *Jekyll & Hyde* (Einaudi 2022, written by Jerry Kramsky); *Chimera* (Coconino Press 2006); *Ghirlanda* (#logosedizioni 2017, written by Jerry Kramsky). Skilled manipulator of color and lines and tireless experimenter, he collaborated with all the most relevant independent Italian magazines such as "Frigidaire", "linus" and "Il Corriere dei Piccoli". In 1983 he co-founded the Valvoline group in Bologna with other avant-garde artists, marking a turning point in comics. He also drew covers for magazines such as "The New Yorker", "Vanity Fair" and "Glamour", advertising campaigns, and children's books. He has worked in cinema and animation alongside directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Steven Soderbergh and Wong Kar-Wai. In 2019 he directed the animated film *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* from Dino Buzzati's novel. His works have been exhibited all over the world.



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“Comics and the Invisible” collects some of the talks that took place during the international conference Comics and the Invisible: Inter-twining Academic and Artistic Perspectives, held at Fondazione Giorgio Cini on 3-4 June 2022.

Inspired by the EU funded project Invisible Lines, the conference investigated different aspects of the invisible in comics culture, as a complex notion that can offer a fresh perspective around what is seen and what is not seen – and the motivations behind these absences – within the historical and contemporary traditions of the ninth art.

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**Editing** Hamelin

Invisible Lines thanks all the artists for the interviews.

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Some of the photographs appearing in the David B. interview are courtesy of the artist’s personal archive.

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