Introduction

The Editors

European Comic Art as an Industry and an Art

As preparations get under way for the celebration, in 2009, of the eightieth anniversary of *Tintin* and the fiftieth of *Astérix*, it seems strange that, until now, there has been no journal in English dedicated to European comic art. In France recent *Astérix* albums have outsold *Harry Potter* and *The Da Vinci Code* put together. The movie *Astérix aux jeux olympiques* ['Asterix at the Olympic Games'], released on 13 January 2008, is one of the two most expensive French film productions of all time (with *Le Cinquième élément* ['The Fifth Element'], on which cartoonists Jean Giraud and Jean-Claude Mézières collaborated), and has topped box office charts in Spain. Like *Astérix* in Paris, Belgian *Schtroumpfs* ['Smurfs'] have their own theme park, and Italy's *Corto Maltese* is popular enough to appear on scratchcards, Swatch watches and TV programmes across Europe.

But it is not all big business. The Paris-based L'Association publishing house promotes up-and-coming artists whose *bandes dessinées d'auteur* use the medium's plasticity to reflect upon their art form in an uncanny echoing of the French New Wave filmmakers, whose work helped pave the way for art-house cinema. And despite the recent peremptory declaration by *Time Magazine* of the death of French creation – 'France today is a wilting power in the global cultural marketplace' – it is interesting to note the large number of non-mainstream *bandes dessinées*, including *Epileptic* ['L'Ascension du haut mal'] and *Persepolis* (the film of which was nominated for an Oscar), that have not only been translated into English, but have made it onto the *New York Times* best-seller booklist.

In terms of non-French authors, the vibrancy of recent releases, such as Dieck and Balzer's *Salut, Deleuze!*, Gipi's *Apunti per una storia di guerra* ['Notes for a War Story'] or Canales and Guarnido's *Blacksad* series continues a tradition of comic art in Europe, or in European languages, that is known through works by Hugo Pratt (Italy and Argentina), Joost Swarte (Netherlands), Ralf König

(Germany), but also Slim (Algeria), Barly Baruti (Congo) and Julie Doucet (Québec), among many others. And the influence that such works have had beyond their countries of origin points to the culture of the European comic as that of a new Renaissance, a hybrid form of expression in today's text/image world that is rapidly becoming the pan-continental art form of the future.

European Comic Art as a Journal

European Comic Art (ECA) is the only peer-reviewed, English-language journal dedicated to such creations. We will provide analysis and updates on current and past works from as broad a variety of critical angles as possible, whether literary, sociological, semiotic, art-historical, cultural history, market-related, or indeed a mixture of these and other approaches. In tone we aim to be scholarly but not dry, lively but not sensationalist, in short, readable but also viewable, with ample illustration, as befits our subject.

In general, each issue will present four or five illustrated papers, plus a news and reviews section. Often numbers will be themed, as in the case of Volume 1 Issue 2, which will explore the expression of national identity and trans-nationalism in comic-art traditions. *ECA* will appear in paper and online (<http://www.eurocomcart.org>) editions, and correspondence and submissions are warmly encouraged.

European Comic Art Volume 1 Number 1

This opening issue of *ECA* showcases the potential and achievements of European comic art by covering a broad range of themes. Lance Rickman presents a historical approach to the European tradition of comics, while considering the relationship with the then fledgling art of cinematography. Paul Gravett also uses a comparative approach: he looks at how the Italian artist Gianni De Luca met the challenge of adapting one literary form – the plays of Shakespeare – to another one – the graphic novel. Clare Tufts analyses how *bande dessinée* broaches social questions in the work of Étienne Davodeau. Matthew Screech closely scrutinises an innovative, autobiographical work by a major (but still under-appreciated) cartoonist of the twenty-first century, Edmond Baudoin, with reference to techniques of representation in *bande dessinée*, but also in prose, painting and sculpture. Finally, Thierry Groensteen considers the art form of *bande dessinée* in general, and provides a précis of approaches and scholarly attitudes to it in recent decades.

The diversity of the contributors to this issue reflects that of their topics. Some work at universities in Europe and North America, whereas others are independent scholars and publishers. They have disciplinary foundations in several fields, including film studies and literature. The emphasis on the French tradition in this opening issue reflects the dominant place that *bande*

dessinée has in European comic art, in terms of festivals, criticism, the number of artists, and the sheer volume of creative works, but future numbers will also explore other national traditions.

Finally the news and reviews sections indicate our intention to consider the broader picture, which is literally and playfully represented in Tanitoc's illustrations.

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