



Exhibition WILL

Belgian artist whose fame touched each of the neighbouring countries, WILL is one of the leading cartoon artists of the latter half of the twentieth century. Willy Maltaite for the records office, born on 30 October 1927 in Anthée, in the province of Namur, was inspired at the age of 15 by the artistic and family life of Joseph Gillain (alias Jijé) who would introduce him to sculpture, etching, painting, sketching, life drawing – and incidentally, to cartoons – and to a certain way of life that would place drawing as a central focus in his life.

His pupilage with the great Jijé was all the more rewarding as he spent time in the company of André Franquin and Maurice De Bevere (aka Morris) and there were continuous exchanges between these four artists bonded by friendship and the same creative passion. The mutual stimulation was at its height early on in the friendship between these artists. And so, while his colleagues and friends had already found their own style, WILL perhaps lacked confidence in himself a little at the beginning of the 1950s, but soon found his talent, his work and the years of training with Jijé eventually bore fruit and showed him to be a great cartoon artist.

In 1955, the input of the scriptwriter Maurice Rosy in the series *Tif et Tondu* was to be decisive. The style was there, clearly defined, and the comic books with impressive graphic quality linking each to the next, would become classics like *Ecole de Marcinelle*. The *Journal de Spirou* was based on several key foundations, and WILL was one such element. While he developed related experience (artistic director for *Tintin* from 1958 to 1960, series creator and covers for the magazine *Record* between 1962 and 1965, advertising commissions, etc.), it was Dupuis publishing house that became his most natural partner. And the arrival of series such as *Eric et Artimon* in 1962 then *Isabelle* in 1969, along with the creation of the *Carrousel comic book collection* in 1966, formed part of a creative and editorial sequence that allowed for exploration of other channels, always with the same meticulous nature, talent and quality.

It was in this way that WILL would provide for his friend, André Franquin, the futuristic framework for the city of the *Pirates du Silence* (1955), as well as the setting for the first *Benoît Brisefer* books (*Les Taxis rouges*, 1960 et *Madame Adolphine*, 1963) by Peyo and the *Natacha* book by François Walthéry and Marc Wasterlain (*L'Île d'Outre-monde*, 1983). Outside cartoons, WILL continued to paint since starting in the late 1940s, and it was this that allowed him, at the beginning of the 1990s, to bravely and naturally take on comic books in direct colours and with more “adult” themes. The care given to these single volume stories (*Le Jardin des Désirs*, *La vingt-septième Lettre*, *L'Appel de l'Enfer*) made them immaculate creations, as well as effective and impressive displays of graphic skill.

WILL passed away on 18 February 2000, leaving his readers with an abundance of works, always elegant and magnificently crafted.