



At the Comics Art Museum
From 15 December 2015 until
29 May 2016

Jean-Pol

Pleasure in movement

For decades, bakers in every village in Belgium used a small cartoon character to display their opening hours and holiday dates. Kramikske (or Briochon), the little baker boy you can see on a flying carpet here, was the work of Jean-Pol. Even although this hugely-popular baker-boy character was not always directly associated with Jean-Pol, it did mark a breakthrough in the career of this exceptionally talented illustrator. With the modesty typical of so many authors of his generation, Jean-Pol produces light, exceptionally sharp and well-rounded motion characters. Having honed his natural talent at the very best schools, the author went on to produce more than 80 albums and countless parallel projects,

including adverts, illustrations and comic postcards, during his career. From a very young age, the man who would illustrate comic strips including *Kramikske*, *Annie en Peter*, *Fred and Samson*, and take over the mantle of the Sammy series, had great admiration for Marc Sleen, the big-name Flemish comic strip author famous for *Nero*, and the most well-known representatives of the Marcinelle school, Franquin and Tillieux, who worked on Spirou magazine. He took over the "Sammy" series, created for Spirou by Berck and Cauvin, and in doing so proved he could truly bridge the gap between the different humorous family comic strip genres in Belgium. Jean-Pol is sensitive and funny with the attention to detail and reliability of a true professional, but perhaps his exceptional talent lies in his rare ability to communicate his love for the art and give expression to the little boy that remains within him.

Jean Auquier, Brussels Comics Art Museum

Exhibition curator: Kurt Morissens
With the support of the Brussels-Capital Region

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Pleasure in movement

An exhibition of the Comics Art Museum

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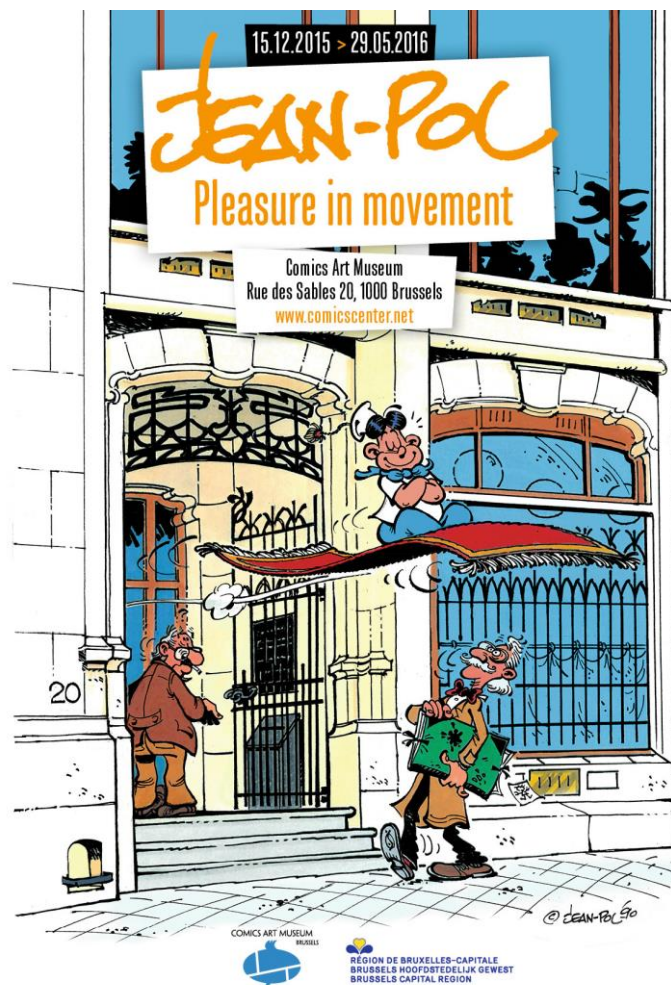
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With the support of the Brussels-Capital Region

The Belgian Comic Strip Center would like to thank Jean-Pol for his involvement in this project.



The texts of the exhibition

1 An ambition from an early age

- *I have always wanted to draw*, Jean-Pol tells us. Following closely the three main publishing models which revolutionised the Belgian comic strip scene back in the 1950s, this native of the Flemish Brabant (Leuven, 15 March 1943) was a fervent admirer of Marc Sleen. Since 1947, Sleen's hero Nero had been taking readers on some truly crazy mad epic adventures, all drawn with the light rounded plume of this champion of Flemish comic strips. He showed equal admiration for two mainstays at Spirou magazine which he read avidly each week. Like hundreds of other young readers, he was totally enthralled by the vivid drawings and powerful stories of André Franquin (*Spirou and Fantasio*) and Maurice Tillieux (*Gil Jourdan*). Sleen, Franquin, Tillieux... his childhood heroes. One day he would follow in their footsteps.

Jean-Pol created his first comic strip at the age of 12, taking his inspiration from magazines such as Bravo and Ons Volkske which published the work of great names such as Willy Vandersteen, Edgar P. Jacobs and Bob De Moor. The bold young cartoonist would regularly visit the authors who lived close to his family home.

Maurice Gerald Forton, Marc Sleen and Tillieux often welcomed him into their homes, armed with a folder packed with his drawings.

Maurice Tillieux would play a vital role in shaping his future... he paid €12.50 for the right to use one of Jean-Pol's gags and, even better, gave him the details of a Brussels agency, Real Press, with which he should be able to place his work. Meanwhile, Jean-Pol learnt as much as he could. He studied the decorative arts at the Saint Luc school of fine art, took evening classes in graphics and advertising and even did a work placement in a screen printing workshop.



2 Talent is good but work is better

Jean-Pol was a talented young man, not afraid of hard work and able to take on board the advice of his elders. When he submitted his first story "Calypso mène la danse" [Calypso

leads the dance] to Real Press (at the age of 19), it was rejected but was accepted after he made some changes. As Tillieux had told him: *You must never give up*. "Calypso" was published in the Het Volk/La Cité group's iconic Samedi-Jeunesse (December 1962). Each month the group published brand-new and complete albums by the great names in Belgian popular comic strips (Marc Sleen, Berck, Craenhals...) on recycled paper. Jean-Paul Van den Broeck adopted the pen name Jean-Pol.

In 1964 he entered into a collaboration with scriptwriter Jacques Acar which would last for more than 10 years. His ability to move on to complete stories was tested with Tintin, which was virtually a rite of passage for young illustrators in weekly comic strip publications. Still working with Acar, he went on to produce *Les scénarios refusés* [The Rejected Scripts] in Pilote, *Le Mystère de Mornetour* [The Mystery of Mornetour] in the French daily newspaper Sud-Ouest and *Bertje Kuizenaar* for the woman's magazine Libelle which wanted to ensure its competitor Femmes d'Aujourd'hui was not the only one to feature original cartoons.

And this was just the beginning. In 1966 he created some comic strips featuring *Bibendum*, the famous Michelin man, for Michelin's agency IFS. These stories, created for an international audience, met with success in countries as far away as South Africa. For the same agency he created *Les Snoks*, which was published in a number of European dailies. Now Jean-Pol had a career, a recognised talent and, the icing on the cake, a regular income.

In Flanders, Jean-Pol had become a name to be reckoned with. The prolific author was producing an increasing number of works, not all necessarily translated into French, the more noteworthy being *Jip, Pickelby* and *Willy Wervelwind* for Averbode's Bonne Presse, He also returned to *Pats*, where he created *Oskar*, a series of one-page gags about a plucky explorer, *Piet Fluwijn en Bolleke* [which appeared in France under the name *Miche et Célestin Radis*] and *De lustige Kapoentjes* (literally *The Joyous Rascals*), created by Marc Sleen. Marc Sleen? His childhood idol? Yes, the very same. He even went on to meet him, stand in for him and become his friend.



3 A delicious recipe for popular success

By now Jean-Pol had become a real pro and knew how to create the characters everyone wanted. When the weekly publication of the Christian union

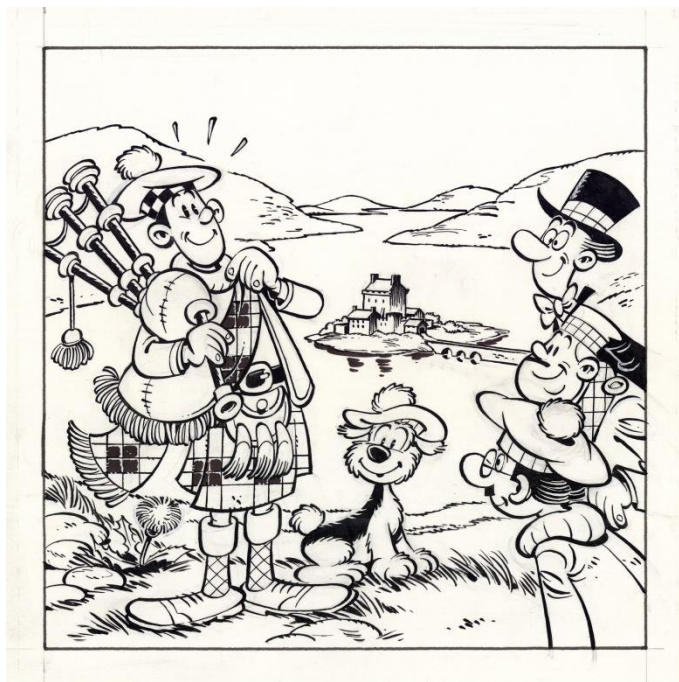
De Volksmacht commissioned him to produce a comic strip series about a worker (1969), he joined forces with scriptwriter Daniël Jansens and came up with *Kramikske*, a young baker's apprentice.

Who would have thought that this ingenious funny little man who had just appeared on the scene would go on to become so popular outside the traditional world of comic strip? He made his first appearance in the union's weekly publication on 20 January 1970 but his adventures went on to be published in many magazines and Het Volk albums. And then he was adopted by a specialist flour distributor and popped up in the displays and on the bread packaging of every bakery in Belgium. In 1982, overwhelmed by work following the success of his little baker boy, Jean-Pol employed a young assistant, Dirk Stallaert, who went on to enjoy a very successful career in his own right. In 1995, after 25 years, Jean-Pol decided to bring the series to an end.



Perhaps Jean-Pol did not anticipate the success of *Kramikske* because in 1971 he created *Annie en Peter* for the children's weekly *Tremplin* published by Averbode, working for the first time with Eddy Ryssack, another exceptional talent of the Flemish comic strip scene. He too was moulded by the Marcinelle school and had been working on its *Spirou* magazine for over 10 years.

Very soon Eddy took over from the initial scriptwriter (Haerens) to work with Jean-Pol for many years. It was the start of a beautiful friendship. The *Annie en Peter* series followed the Flemish comic strip tradition: the adventures of two adolescents just like any others whose day-to-day life every young reader could identify with. They were just like the girl and boy next door. Just like their friends. Although only seven adventures of *Annie en Peter* would be published in French (*Annette et Pierre*, Fleurus), dozens of titles hit the shelves in Dutch.



4 Television, adaptation and re-creation

In December 1982, presenter Danny Verbiest invited Jean-Pol onto the children's program *Kameleon* produced by the Flemish public TV broadcaster known as BRT at the time (it is now VRT). This encounter would lead to a successful collaboration almost 10 years later. Danny Verbiest is actually one of the spiritual fathers of the popular children's characters Fred and Samson.

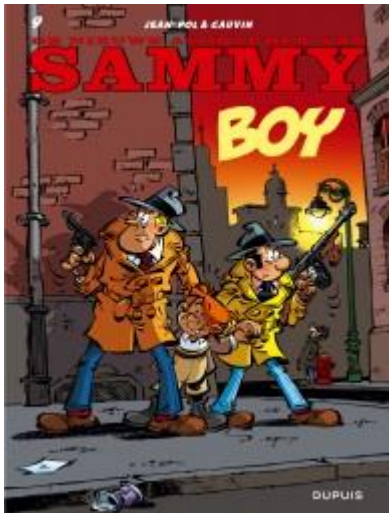
In 1990, Jean-Pol suggested to Danny that he create a comic strip featuring the two characters who were becoming increasingly popular at the time. His proposal was not accepted immediately

but Jean-Pol's enthusiasm finally managed to win over not only Danny Verbiest, but also Gert Verhulst and Hans Bourlon, the other managers at Studio 100 which owned the characters.

The first Fred and Samson album appeared in June 1991 and was immediately a resounding success... but also a lot of hard work. Between 1991 and 2005, 33 albums were published and read avidly in the Flanders and the Netherlands. During this time Jean-Pol had to rely on his assistants Wim Swerts and Luc Van Asten to help him keep up the pace of publishing four albums a year!

The success of Fred and Samson would give rise to a new Flemish comic strip genre: the successful re-creation (as opposed to adaptation) of popular television programmes. In 2000, Jean-Pol was appointed to the board of the animation team at Studio 100, now a major production company. This allowed the comic strip author to share his many years' experience with some talented young illustrators. In addition to a large number of advertising commissions there was the launch of a comic strip based on the character of *Gnome Plop*.

5 The bodyguards are in safe hands



Like his idols before him, Jean-Pol knew how to capture the attention of his readers by creating larger than life characters surrounded by realistic backdrops. There was nothing grandiose or pompous about them, they were created purely for the pleasure of his fans. This set him among the ranks of other talented illustrators, among whom was his fellow Louvain native Arthur Berckmans (Berck).

Now that year (1994), the illustrator of *Strapontin, chauffeur de taxi* [Strapontin, taxi driver] (1958, with Goscinny, in Tintin) and *Sammy* (1970, with Cauvin, in Spirou), had decided to tidy away his pencils and retire.

Rather worn down by the comic strip scene after 31 episodes about two volatile American bodyguards at the time of the prohibition, Berck had sold his rights to *Sammy* to the

publisher Dupuis. And it was through the intervention of Raoul Cauvin that Jean-Pol entered this new chapter of his career.

- *I believe that Raoul thought my style would ensure a smooth transition. I did a dry run then just took the plunge*, Jean-Pol explains quite naturally. At that point in time he already had 68 albums and thousands of other different works to his name. Excited by the new challenge, he set to work. The script for the 32nd title in the series – *La B.A. des gorilles* (*The Bodyguards' Good Deed*) completed, all that remained was for it to be made into an album (1996) and become a resounding success.

Feeling quite at home, the illustrator worked his magic while the scriptwriter still let his youth shine through in his reworking of the American story in his own style. The story follows the adventures of Jack Attaway and Sammy Day, gorillas at the Attaway Agency, as they overcome obstacle after obstacle and take a malicious pleasure in breaking up criminal gangs, peppering shiny Packards with bullets, basically they cleaned up the US with great blasts of the explosive contraband hooch. In 2009, after 40 albums, the last nine illustrated by Jean-Pol, the series was brought to an end, primarily because the authors were – understandably - exhausted. Jean-Pol's fame had, in the meantime, reached an all-new high.

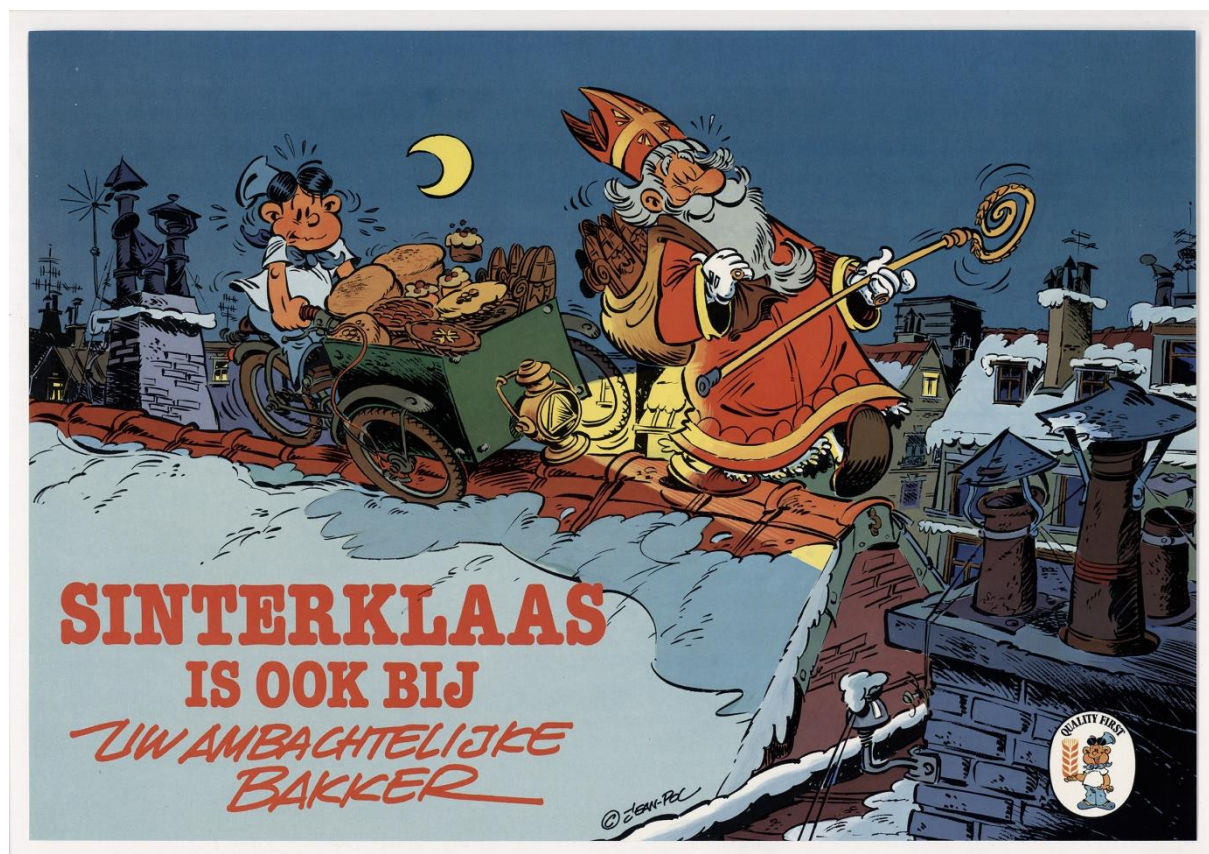
6 Style makes the man

Jean-Pol acquired the nickname of Action Man, and for good reason. One project seemed to follow on from another.

And comic strip illustration was only one of his many talents. He illustrated manuals for garages and for bistro owners who did not know how to use a beer pump properly. He even turned his hand to political caricatures. His portfolio also included an impressive series of humorous postcards featuring soldiers out on manoeuvre which were particularly popular with all ranks of the armed services.

Jean-Pol was commissioned by a clothes designer to create Nikkel, a trendy little black guy wearing a baseball cap who can be found on pullovers, T-shirts and even school exercise books.

This final section is intended to give a quick overview of this aspect of Jean-Pol's work and bring into the public eye some hitherto unseen works from his prolific portfolio! Our ultimate aim is to illustrate that his distinctive sharp, round style works well in any medium.



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.



(Photos © Daniel Fouss/Comics Art Museum)

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