

plate portraying Tobias and the Angel. Rembrandt replaced the existing figures by the Holy Family on their flight to Egypt, though they are made barely visible in the bushes so that all the emphasis is on Segers's mysterious and picturesque landscape. Van Hoogstraten tells us that Segers, lacking success, in despair and drunk, suffered a fatal fall from the stairs, but this is probably a romantic legend. He had no need to complain about any lack of success, since, in addition to Rembrandt, the steward Frederik Hendrik and the king of Denmark also purchased his work.

As a pioneer of etching, Segers was an example to many twentieth-century artists who thought they recognised a contrary personality in his fanciful fantasy landscapes, one who attempted to transcend the limits of printmaking. The exhibition presents virtually all his known work. In addition to 110 different prints from 54 etching plates, it also includes 16 paintings and two sketches in oils. Three of these additional works are privately owned and have hardly ever been seen, if at all.

ILJA VELDMAN

Translated by Gregory Ball

The Mysterious Landscapes of Hercules Segers, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York until 21 May 2017 (www.metmuseum.org).

Olivier Schrauwen

The First True Internationalist of Flemish Comics

Olivier Schrauwen (b. 1977) may not be a household name in international art circles yet, but this Flemish cartoonist is slowly gathering acclaim from general media and specialized comics circles all around the globe. Recently, his colourful work as an illustrator has regularly been featured in *The New York Times*, but his comics work has enjoyed an even better reception in the United States. His most recent graphic novel *Arsène Schrauwen*, a fictional account of his grandfather's stay in Congo when it was still a Belgian colony, was featured in several 'best of' lists in American media at the end of 2014 and the publication of the book by Seattle-based publisher Fantagraphics Books even preceded the edition of Schrauwen's book in his mother tongue Dutch.

Schrauwen has been slowly developing an international career since 2006. That year, the animation and comics alumnus from art schools in Ghent and Brussels published his debut book *My Boy* in English and French. Several other translations ensued, but the book was never published in Dutch. *My Boy* is a comical tragedy about a father and his son, who has not grown since the tragic day when his mother died giving birth to him. Technically, the book can be seen as a collection of short stories about the father and the songbird-sized son. Together, they visit Bruges and admire paintings by Flemish primitives in one story and find entertainment in the zoo in the next. The book stands out because of its stylistic maturity. The prologue, in which the mother dies, was drawn in a style reminiscent of old-fashioned puppet theatre. The rest of the book evokes the art nouveau sensibility of the best representatives of the American newspaper comic strip, such as Winsor McCay of *Little Nemo in Slumberland* fame. The mixture of a modern sensibility and old styles results in an interesting and funny contrast.

My Boy got Schrauwen critical acclaim immediately. It won him the biannual prize for the first comic by a Dutch-speaking cartoonist at Turnhout's comics festival (Flanders) and his first nomination for the album prizes at the International Comics Festival in Angoulême, France – later,

three more would follow. The book was printed in seven languages and the English version got a second, enhanced edition in 2014. When the Flemish Literature Fund promoted young Flemish cartoonists at the Angoulême festival in 2009, Schrauwen was asked to design the poster. Thus, his status as a leading young talent was confirmed.

The appreciation in his native Flanders did not change his international approach to his work. In 2007, Schrauwen left Belgium to go and live in Berlin, where he currently resides. His second book, *The Man Who Grew His Beard* (2010), was a collection of short stories published in the American anthology *Mome* and the Italian *Canicola* and marked his choice of Fantagraphics Books as his English-language publisher. The short stories in the book are thematically and graphically so different that they seem to have been drawn by different cartoonists. The only things that connect the stories are a character sporting a beard and a wild imagination. Colourful and cruel colonial stories are juxtaposed with stylistically more sober stories referring to pseudo-scientific theories about the link between hairdos and psychological characteristics. Again, Schrauwen's book was nominated for several international prizes.

Instead of always aiming for more ambitious graphic novels, Schrauwen retreated in minicomics and self-publishing for a while after *The Man Who Grew His Beard*. The 38-page booklet *Mowgli's Mirror*, a sequel to *The Jungle Book* originally only published by a small French publisher, and *Greys*, a self-published auto-fiction in English about an abduction by aliens, only reached a very small audience until they were translated or nominated. In addition to being named for the Angoulême prizes in 2012, *Mowgli's Mirror* was his first book nominated for the Eisner awards at the Comicon in San Diego in 2016. In these projects, Schrauwen appreciated the sheer liberty, meaning the total lack of an editorial influence. He subsequently decided to self-publish his next big book, *Arsène Schrauwen*, in instalments before presenting it to his usual publishers.

Compared to *My Boy* and *The Man Who Grew His Beard*, *Arsène Schrauwen* is a less lush book, in two colours only, a choice inspired by printing on a Risograph. After pushing visual narration to the extreme in the wordless *Mowgli's Mirror*, in *Arsène*

Schrauwen, much like in *Greys*, Olivier Schrauwen relies on textual narration, with the images serving as illustrations rather than essential vectors of the story. *Arsène Schrauwen* is Olivier Schrauwen's most ambitious work so far: 260 pages of one continuous story. The red and blue colours acknowledge the legacy of classic Flemish newspaper comic *Bob and Bobette* by Willy Vandersteen (1913-1990) that was long printed in these colours, and the imaginative colonial story, entirely fictional though presented as factual, makes fun of international trends in cartooning: Schrauwen replaces factual biography, reportage, travelogue by their fictional counterpart, while succeeding in mixing the dark atmosphere of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with clichés from classic European comics about so-called leopard men and dangerous parasites. By creatively digesting international comics history, Schrauwen has found a unique style for his idiosyncratic imagination. His uniqueness partially explains his success with prize juries and critics. The more the reader knows about comics, the better he or she will be able to appreciate Schrauwen's rich voice.

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ollieschrauwen.blogspot.be

