Tradition and Innovation in Franco-Belgian bande dessinée

On 13 March 2020 the University of Leicester hosted an International Symposium on « Tradition and Innovation in Franco-Belgian bande dessinée » organised in collaboration with Wallonia-Brussels International. This one-day symposium was organised with generous support from the ASMCF, the Society for French Studies and the School of Arts at the University of Leicester.

The day was opened by Simon Lambert as Academic and Cultural Liaison Officer for Wallonia-Brussels in the UK, in conjunction with Fransiska Louwagie (University of Leicester). Keynote speakers were Professor Laurence Grove from the University of Glasgow and graphic novelist Michel Kichka. Across three panels, the day focussed on various forms of tradition and innovation in Franco-Belgian bande dessinée: the first panel was dedicated to “Revisiting the classics”, the second panel to “Contemporary perspectives”, and the final ASMCF panel to “Reshaping Franco-Belgian bande dessinée”. The closing remarks were organised as a roundtable session on collaborative international research projects.

The call for papers attracted a very broad range of international participants, including early careers scholars, faculty and artist contributors, based in Greece, Switzerland, Portugal, Canada, Panama and the UK. Arrangements were made to include an on-line panel for non-European participants. In the context of the Corona-virus, these arrangements for remote participation were extended to adapt to a changing context in the lead-up to the event. Michel Kichka’s interventions were therefore delivered via Zoom, with professor Grove stepping in as moderator for the public seminar on 12 March. Interventions from Greece and Portugal were also delivered remotely, with technology allowing for high quality exchanges both during the public event and the symposium.

Professor Grove’s opening keynote examined the “Relevance of Tintin” and provided a fascinating insight in the presence and popularity of Hergé’s work, referring to its ongoing distribution as well as its broad and ongoing impact on the field, as a model and/or counter-model. In his keynote presentation, Michel Kichka gave a unique look into the development and shaping of his work and discussed his major influences, including Spirou, Tintin, Gaston Lagaffe, *Pilote* and *Mad*. This keynote conference, recorded through Zoom, has now been made available on-line with permission.

Conference papers across all panels provided valuable synergies and discussion points on contemporary Franco-Belgian bande dessinée. Two papers by Cristina Álvares and Annick Pellegrin, focusing on the influence and various interpretations of Spirou, offered the opportunity to discuss the decisive influence of Émile Bravo, also acknowledged by Michel Kichka, and considered the representation of history and memory in bande dessinée. This topic was linked to a broader discussion of the uses of this medium in interdisciplinary research and educational contexts, including during the closing roundtable which comprised a presentation by historian Alexander Korb on the international research project “Narrative Art and Visual Storytelling in Holocaust and Human Rights Education”. The contemporary position and recognition of bande dessinée was further explored by Numa Vittoz in his analysis of innovative online blog practices. Ilan Manouach discussed key ideological issues arising in traditional bande dessinée in relation to his own work *Abrégé de bande dessinée franco-belge*: this 48cc uses hypertextual collage techniques to transform and question the traditional codes of bande dessinée, with particular attention to issues of violence, gender representation and racism. Two further papers by artist Alain Arias-Misson and by Nicolas Martinez, shedding light on the transnational circulation of bande dessinée, could not go live during the day but will be included in the proceedings, with artist interventions and scholarly contributions currently being gathered for a thematic journal issue focusing on the central axes of the symposium.

**Programme links:** [**https://cutt.ly/etz622t**](https://cutt.ly/etz622t) **and** [**https://cutt.ly/0tz67NM**](https://cutt.ly/0tz67NM)

**Youtube video Michel Kichka:**[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqYMmUT8gbc**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqYMmUT8gbc)

**Blog post Michel Kichka:** [**https://fr.kichka.com/2020/03/20/spirou-pilote-mad-conference/**](https://fr.kichka.com/2020/03/20/spirou-pilote-mad-conference/)