



Art Trek: The Sixth Generation

Fourteen graphic artists from around the globe join forces above the renowned comic book store Mekanik in Antwerp for the sixth edition of an intriguing exhibition that gives us a glimpse at the future of this contemporary art

REBECCA BENOOT

Giving a new generation of graphic artists the opportunity to show their work to a larger audience is the goal of *Art Trek*, a unique annual concept launched by *Antwerpenaar* Eva Cardon. "We started *Art Trek* as an art show because we felt there was a void in the art landscape for young illustrators who don't work around conceptual art but prefer to draw," she explains. "I just felt there was something missing. So we decided to do our own exhibition, and it snowballed into an annual event."

Art Trek turned out to be a vibrant and interesting exhibit, aided by an eclectic combination of styles and techniques. A playful touch was added to the mix, emphasised by the title, a play, of course, on *Star Trek*. "Because the exhibition is above a comic book store with a lot of memorabilia, we thought it was an appropriate title," explains Cardon, 30. Also, it's a 'trek' through the young art scene. One of the *Star Trek* series is called *The Next Generation*, and we show a new selection of artists every year."

The organisers want to attract a broad audience and make this kind of work accessible to everyone, especially those who don't normally venture into comic strip shops. The historical relegation of graphic art found in comic strips to the "low arts" is slowly fading due to these kind of inspiring collaborations that feature often very impressive work.

Cardon has selected 14 artists from all over the world: "Through MySpace an Flickr you get to know new artists and their work but also through friends of friends. When you're interested in a certain type of visual art, it's easy to connect." And to make one exhilarating show.

Cardon is often more recognised by her artist name Ephemeron and is one of the featured artists in *Art Trek*. Her work suggests vulner-

ability and often resemble snapshots of very personal moments. "I try to express what I feel when I see certain types of images," she says. "I work a lot from photography and pictures that I take myself or that I find on the internet. I try to translate them into lines and colours and even shapes. It's something natural; I don't really think about it."

The wood panels that she has created for *Art Trek* are suggestive and graceful, exuding the emotive qualities the characterise her work. "It's always people with feelings or a very quiet or loving moment. But, on the other hand, I also like drawing houses and animals. Sometime you don't know why; it's just the imagery that attracts you."

She isn't the only featured Belgian artist. Fellow *Antwerpenaar* Ward Zwart's eerily evocative drawings are on view, as well as the work of Ghent-based Brecht Vandebroucke, who tells me that he "looks at everything, even if it's bad. I just love discovering new things. I look at movies or music to make drawings; it's all input."

This combination of inspirations is visible in his chaotic works – a mish-mash of figures and pop culture references topped off with a slightly melancholic atmosphere. The main theme is life's little absurdities. "There is nothing more confusing than reality. I look at the world and see things, and it gets mixed in my brain."

The mixture sometimes comes out in intricate black-and-white drawings steeped in ironic awareness or big, colourful blocks in the shape of monsters, robots or aliens.

"I sometimes wake up with an image in my head, and think I have to do it. But I also try to control what I do because often I see certain routines forming. I remind myself that much of this has been done in the past and that I should make something differ-

ent. It's a world you create with your characters, and you have the power."

Other highlights in *Art Trek* are British illustrator Marcus Oakley, whose figurative ink drawings are realistic and to the point but with a whimsical 1960s twist. New Yorker Marc Todd, meanwhile, creates slightly satirical works based on comic book covers filled with vibrant colours and Americana.

A bit more straightforward and with a dash of innocence is Brazilian-born Pacolli's work, whose drawings simply burst with colour and humour. Louis Reith of the Netherlands prefers geometry, simplicity and elegance. His work is slightly reminiscent of Malevich but with a more refined complexity.

"The Unusual Child" is both a literary and pictorial series – a touching short story about a little girl and her cat that hits all the right notes. Gemma Correll's tale is illustrated with simple black-and-white drawings with a splash of red.

Offering an international and inspirational mix of eye candy, *Art Trek* is definitely worth a visit. This experience will once again reassure you of the bright future of contemporary graphic art. ♦

Art Trek 6

Until 12 September
Galerie Mekanik
Sint-Jacobsmarkt 73
Antwerp

→ www.art-trek.be

Eva Cardon, otherwise known as Ephemeron, illustrates vulnerability (top); a detail from one of the intricately mixed-up worlds of Brecht Vandebroucke (middle); the edgy, imperfect style of Ward Zwart (right)

