

## ALL MEDIA RELEASE

Cynthia Rose  
[curator@66bellstreet.com](mailto:curator@66bellstreet.com)  
(206) 972 0060

**Begins:** Wednesday August 13  
**Kill date:** Monday August 18

**“La Semaine de la Bande Dessinée”**  
**A Week Celebrating the French Graphic Novel**  
With guest artist **David B.** from Paris

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

### Pierre – François Beauchard (David B.)

Best-known by his chosen pseudonym David B., Pierre-François Beauchard is one of Europe’s foremost contemporary artists. His unique medium is the bande dessinée, an international genre whose style and critical standing he has greatly advanced, most notably through his best-selling “l’Ascension du Haut Mal” (published in English as “Epileptic” by Pantheon/Random House). This work has won more awards in more countries than any preceding serious example of the genre.

A deeply intimate memoir of his childhood and youth after his elder brother Jean-Christophe develops incurable epilepsy (which remains unexplained to his siblings), the series focuses on his family’s search for a cure. From being simply “a normal family in the ‘60s in France”<sup>1</sup>, the Beauchards become nomads, traversing France in search of alternative cures – from masseurs and macrobiotic communes to alchemists and spiritualists. Every page depicts not merely the events of this life but also its emotions: fear and guilt, love and rage, alternating hope and anxiety. In both Europe and the English-speaking world, the work’s moving honesty startled critics, as did Beauchard’s unmatched talent for forcefully visualizing elusive realities such as dreams, the forces of history and



---

<sup>1</sup>David B. to Andrew D. Arnold, “Metaphorically Speaking”, TIME magazine, January 7, 2005

the nature of illness.

“Epileptic” charts the details and the consequences of each failed “cure”, yet every frame of the story is visually interwoven with a portrayal of the emerging artist’s own vivid dream life (filled with threatening armies, dream visions and historic struggles). Woven in also are the lives of his grandparents and great grand parents, with their experience of two World Wars, French Indochina and the war for Algerian independence – as well as the Paris student uprisings of May 1968. These struggles in the past, we realize, helped determine the artist’s future. For instance, David’s great-grandmother, who believes in “white magic”, raises his mother to combat epileptic seizures with voodoo and Ouija boards.

By developing visual metaphors that can contain such chaos, young Pierre-François gains a sense of control and self. This is something, says Beauchard, he realised only while drawing the series. Because his brother’s disintegration threatened everything close to him, he used art as both a response and a defence. When it was published, “Epileptic” rocked the graphic novel genre and more than one critic viewed it as that form’s modern “consecration”: proof that the graphic novel could attain a fusion of art and literature that had no real equal in either discipline.<sup>2</sup> Although technically following an autobiographical path forged in part by Americans such as R. Crumb, Harvey Pekar and Art Spiegelman, Beauchard’s oeuvre and its aspirations are completely European.

As critic Rick Moody of the *New York Times* chose to put it, “Because it is unafraid to dwell in detail on cultural and intellectual lineage, ‘Epileptic’ seems influenced just as much by Gide, Foucault, Malraux and Barthes as by Art Spiegelman...Jean-Christophe’s epilepsy, and its attendant familial disorder, are the fulcrum that forces Pierre-François to become author David B., spawning his magnificent pictures, drawings full of the iconographies of both atavism and surrealism.”<sup>3</sup> In order to describe the power and empathy of Beauchard’s vision, Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper critic even quoted St. Augustine: “The house of my

---

<sup>2</sup> “...one of the greatest graphic novels ever published”, Publishers Weekly, 3 June, 2002; “Disorder in the House”, Rick Moody, The New York Times, January 23, 2005; “Tragedy in Comic Form”, Charles Shaar Murray, The Independent, February 4, 2005

<sup>3</sup> “Disorder in the House”, Rick Moody, The New York Times, January 23, 2005

soul is narrow, too narrow for you to come in – enter it and make it wider.”<sup>4</sup>

In France, David B. became and remains “the André Breton of the bande dessinée.”<sup>5</sup>

As early as 1998, American critics named David B. European Cartoonist of the Year. Then, after multiple nominations at Angoulême’s prestigious annual Festival de la Bande Dessinée, its fourth volume won the exalted Prix de Meilleur Scénario, followed by volume six (the final instalment) earning the Palmarès Prix Internationale de la Ville de Genève. Pantheon Books’ omnibus US edition in English gained Beauchard America’s Ignatz Award for Outstanding Artist.<sup>6</sup>

•

Pierre-François Beauchard was born February 9, 1959, in Nîmes. He undertook his only course of formal art study in Paris, at the Duperré School of Applied Art (a school he chose out of admiration for one instructor, Georges Pichard). After a brief stint at an advertising agency and the completion of his military service, Beauchard broke straight into the B.D. mainstream as a scenarist. From 1985, he both wrote and illustrated, publishing in magazines such as Okapi, A SUIVRE, Tintin reporter, Circus and Chic.

Then, in May 1990, with six fellow artists,<sup>7</sup> Beauchard co-founded the publishing collective L’Association. With a revolutionary approach to format, style and subject, “L’Asso” revolutionized Europe’s bandes dessinées – even, for a time, changing French forms of book distribution.<sup>8</sup> The idea that artists themselves could take control of the medium, that they could alter and exceed

---

<sup>4</sup> “My face would be yours”, Ian Sansom, The Guardian, February 12, 2005

<sup>5</sup> “Le monde des livres”, Interview de David B., événement.fr, [Mikaël Demets](#), April, 2007

<sup>6</sup> The Ignatz Awards, named for the classic character by George Herriman, are given annually at the Small Press Exposition Festival, to recognize outstanding achievement in comic art and/or cartooning

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Christophe Menu, Lewis Trondheim, Matt Konture, Patrice Killoffer, Stanislas and Mokeït (who left after a year)

<sup>8</sup> The distribution initiatives were abandoned under pressure from Fnac

its conventions, inspired similar publishing enterprises across Europe and, indeed, around the world.<sup>9</sup>

Beauchard published many significant stories in L'Association's magazine *Lapin* and, often, he chose to explore his dreams in their publications. In collections such "le Cheval blême" (L'Association, 1992) and "les Incidents de la nuit" (L'Association, 1999–2000), he honed an elaborate and ornate, almost hand-carved, style. Dream journals supply him with material to which he returns again and again, as in his volumes "Babel" (2004) and "Babel 2" (2006), both published internationally.

But, even as he continued to unfold "Epileptic" over seven years, Beauchard collaborated with other creators of the "nouvelle" B.D., stylists as diverse as Joann Sfar (also destined for success in the English-language market), Christophe Blain and Emmanuel Guibert.

However, Beauchard's stunning, dramatically personal black-and-white style always sets him apart. After an early childhood influenced by the Franco-Belgian classics (Tintin, Astérix and company), he developed his own technique through constant, compulsive drawing and, during the 1970s, via exposure to works by Jacques Tardi, America's Edward Gorey, Italy's Hugo Pratt and German expressionist George Grosz. One British art critic described Beauchard's personal style as filled with a "deep, deep darkness and luminosity. Imagine...Harvey Pekar drawn by Picasso."<sup>10</sup>

L'Association had led the way to a Paris-based B.D. revolution. But it was also fomented (sometimes by the same artists) at the Atelier Nawak. This was a Parisian studio founded in 1991 by an array of artists who included Beauchard; later, due to a relocation, the name was changed to the Atelier des Vosges<sup>11</sup>. It was here that an admiring young Iranian named Marjane Satrapi sought out David B. She became an earnest student of both Beauchard's style and his

---

<sup>9</sup> Cited by Paul Gravett at "Lost in Translation", event held by the Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française, Glasgow, Scotland, on November 7, 2006

<sup>10</sup> "My face would be yours", Ian Sansom, *The Guardian*, February 12, 2005

<sup>11</sup> "En Atelier", Dominique Hérody, *9e Art: Les Cahiers du Musée de la Bande Dessinée*, no. 8, January 2003

matter-of-fact, autobiographical honesty. Encouraged by David B. to tell her own remarkable story, Satrapi went on to create the well-known “Persepolis”. Beauchard nurtured it to completion and convinced L’Association to publish it.

Beauchard departed L’Association in 2005. Since then, he has embarked on another multi-volume epic, for French imprint Futuropolis, entitled “Par les chemins noirs”. A series set in Europe between the two great wars, it is inspired by the poet and communist Louis Aragon, who is the source of its title. His intention, says Beauchard, is to investigate “not the obvious routes of history but history’s indirect paths. I want begin with the dregs and set out to meet those at the margins...the very edges of politics, of literature and even religion.” Published in 2007, its first volume (“The Prologues”) was an official selection at Angoulême 2008.

A year ago, Beauchard also contributed a standout piece to an anthology called “le Jour où...” (“the day when”). To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of France Info radio, thirty artists were asked to choose and depict a real-life event that had touched them. Beauchard illustrated the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, but he did so from the viewpoint of the ayatollahs. “Because what was chilling,” he says, “was that it marked the first time Muslims in their country condemned a Muslim who was living in the West...This kind of projection, turning their combat into a worldwide combat, was a kind of début. And well before Al-Qaida.”<sup>12</sup>

Beauchard is now also creating a second series, one he is building around traditions from the thriller (“a genre I adore”). Its first album will relate the saga of Les Postiches, an audacious gang of bank robbers active in 1980s Paris. Known by their false wigs, moustaches and beards, the gang were lionized by the public and press of their time. (They also drove police to try to invent a wig-detecting device). However, Beauchard sees a “fresh angle” in their story – to him it symbolizes that decade’s worship of money, success and material gain.<sup>13</sup>

•

---

<sup>12</sup> “Le monde des livres”, Interview de David B., événement.fr, Mikaël Demets, April, 2007

<sup>13</sup> “Le monde des livres”, Interview de David B., événement.fr, Mikaël Demets, April, 2007

Mr. Beauchard's works comprise a benchmark of achievement in the bande dessinée, an art that has both a presence and a following in the Puget Sound region. It also provides, at every level, with chances to initiate informed and thoughtful discussion. The subjects of his "Epileptic" (family, personality, illness, dreams and change) will be familiar to any reader/viewer and David B.'s visual style is compelling to explore, whether critically or descriptively.

Last, but hardly least, his work maintains strong ties not merely to the continuum of French history but also to the importance of the intellectual in contemporary French society.

The Alliance Française de Seattle, Fantagraphics Books and 4Culture of King County are delighted to host this magnificent, modern auteur.

**ONLINE PRESS ROOM [www.afseattle.org/bdpress.html](http://www.afseattle.org/bdpress.html)**