

DESIGN MUSEUM

BRUSSELS

18.10.2025 -
01.03.2026

DESIGN

AND

COMICS

*LIVING IN
A BOX*

PRESS KIT



BE CULTURE
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1 LETTER OF INTENT

The Design Museum Brussels is thrilled to welcome the exhibition *Design and Comics: Living in a Box*, organised in collaboration with the Vitra Design Museum. Offering a deep dive into two creative worlds, this exhibition highlights the fascinating dialogue between design and comics, an exchange that has been going strong for over a century and is still evolving.

A universal visual language, comic strips reflect the aesthetic, social and cultural developments of each era. From the beginning of the 20th century, everyday objects and design creations found their way into comic strips, becoming both decorative elements and symbols of modernity. From Hergé and André Franquin to Charles Schulz (Peanuts), Tove Jansson (Moomins), Guido Crepax (Valentina), Angela and Luciana Giussani (Diabolik) and Javier Mariscal, many comic strip artists have incorporated design into their graphic worlds and helped to enrich our collective imagination.

Through a path rich in historical references and iconic creations, the exhibition illustrates how design and comics share an inventive visual language, a capacity for innovation and a unique power to inspire wonder. It also highlights the essential contribution of Belgium, home to some of the biggest names in comics and the birthplace of the Atom style, a playful and joyful modernism that marked its era, while opening the way to a resolutely international dialogue.

We are delighted to invite everyone to discover this unique encounter between two disciplines that shape our daily lives and stimulate our imaginations.

Geoffroy Coomans de Brachène

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Atomium and the Design Museum Brussels

Arnaud Bozzini

Director of the Design Museum Brussels

2 PRESS RELEASE

From 18 October 2025 to 1 March 2026, the Design Museum Brussels presents *Design and Comics: Living in a Box*, an original exhibition that explores the close links between design and comics. Created by the Vitra Design Museum, this travelling exhibition traces a visual history, from the early 20th century to the present day, of everyday objects and comic strips.

Through a rich selection from the Vitra Design Museum's collection, *Design and Comics: Living in a Box* highlights the many ways in which comic book authors integrate design into their stories. To construct an immediately recognisable visual narrative, these creators have developed a universal graphic vocabulary in which furniture, accessories and everyday objects become narrative tools in their own right.

From the 1900s onwards, comic strips became popular in the American press, then crossed the Atlantic to Europe. In Belgium, major figures such as Hergé and Franquin introduced references to their domestic environment or contemporary objects into their comic strips, sometimes influenced by industrial design and fashionable styles. While it is difficult to speak of 'modern design' in the strict sense for Hergé, his work nevertheless reflects a concern for precision and attention to form that dialogues with the aesthetic codes of his time. The 1930s saw the emergence of the comic book, a new format that further democratised this visual language.

Over the decades, the exhibition shows how comics have been inspired by the major aesthetic trends of their time. Popular genres—superheroes, science fiction, horror, and romance—have influenced their graphic language. Designers, for their part, have sometimes drawn on the visual imagination of comics. The objects drawn in the comic strips then become symbols of modernity or cultural icons. In the 1960s, the worlds of pop art and comics merged, directly influencing the creation of bold objects such as Maurice Calka's Boomerang desk (1969) and Eero Aarnio's Tomato Chair (1971).

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of hybrid creators, both designers and comic book authors, such as Joost Swarte and Javier Mariscal, who deliberately blurred the boundaries between fiction and functionality. Today, as comics are reinventing themselves through graphic novels and digital manga, design studios such as Nendo are drawing inspiration from them to create iconic pieces, such as the Manga Chairs series (2015).

The Brussels presentation of the exhibition stands out for its unique focus on the Atom style and Belgian playful modernism, embodied in the work of André Franquin. His drawings, tinged with humour and modernist utopia, reflect an imagination where clear lines intersect with the vanishing lines of modern furniture.

3 TEXTS OF THE EXHIBITION

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the collection of the Vitra Design Museum, the exhibition *Design and Comics: Living in a Box* explores design and its relationship to the world of comics. In their quest to tell visual stories that could be understood universally, comic artists developed specific visual codes to convey information, including the way design objects were depicted.

At the beginning of the 20th century, press agencies brought comics to the pages of the American newspapers. When their popularity exploded in Europe in the 1920s, comics artists, led by Belgian pioneers such as Hergé and Franquin, began incorporating design objects into their drawings. Comic artists around the world soon followed their example. During the 1930s, readers discovered the extended comic book format.

In the 1940s and 1950s, new genres such as superhero stories, horror, romance, and science fiction gained widespread popularity. As more comics were published, design objects became increasingly present in the imagery. By the 1960s, with the rise of the Pop Art movement, the colourful and fantastic visual language of comics began to influence design itself, as seen in Maurice Calka's Boomerang Desk (1969) and Eero Aarnio's Tomato Chair (1971). During the 1970s and 1980s, a new generation emerged at the intersection of design and comics, including artists/designers Joost Swarte and Javier Mariscal, who playfully bridged the two worlds.

Today, printed magazines are increasingly giving way to digital formats, while graphic novels and manga have become sources of inspiration for remarkable design pieces, such as the Manga Chairs (2015) by Japanese design studio Nendo.

In Brussels, the exhibition *Design and Comics: Living in a Box* will pay special attention to design in Belgian comics, focusing in particular on the Atom Style and the playful modernism characteristic of Franquin's work.

SUPERMAN

Since his first appearance in 1938, Superman has grabbed comic book readers' attention with his superhuman strength and a captivating double life that sees Clark Kent, the inconspicuous newspaper reporter, morphing, whenever trouble strikes, into the eye-catching superhero from the planet Krypton. Not only did Superman soar through Metropolis - a fictional city based on the impressive skylines of Toronto and New York City - to confront villains on a regular basis, he also fought to protect justice, the American Way, and, not least, his secret identity. The chair shown here represents the dual nature of Superman's own persona - from one side, it's an unassuming upholstered office chair, and from the other, a streamlined aluminium machine. The setting sun in Gaetano Pesce's work, *Tramonto a New York*, which depicts the urban skyline, provides the perfect backdrop, reminding us of Superman's Metropolis.

PEANTUS & DIABOLIK

Designed by brothers Achille & Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, respectively in 1962 and 1967, the Taccia and Snoopy table lamps work simultaneously as sculptural busts and playful characters. The Taccia, which has become a status symbol appearing in countless comic strips - such as the Italian strip

Diabolik - since its launch, ironically flips our expectations on their head, providing indirect light from what looks like an upside-down lamp. The Snoopy lamp's name and shape are more literal: inspired by the beagle with the recognizable snout in the comic strip Peanuts, the lamp has joined the ranks of some of the most beloved characters of all time.

BRETECHER

Javier Mariscal was part of the vanguard of creatives who reinvented the visual identity of Spain at the end of the Franco era. Influenced by the flourishing underground comic scene of the 1970s, Mariscal created witty protagonists for mature audiences, such as the Garriris, a set of hedonistic mice who spend most of their time at the beach - or, as Mariscal described them, a "psychedelic version of Disney's creations". With his vision of the newly opened, contemporary Spanish society, Mariscal blurred the boundaries between comics, graphic design, and product and industrial design. The Duplex Stool from 1980 appears in his comics, and the Garriris Chair from 1987/88 would never have existed without the initial success of the eponymous characters. Thanks to his light-hearted approach to design, Mariscal was invited in 1981 by Ettore Sottsass to contribute designs to the first collection by the Memphis Group: needless to say, all of Memphis's work - a selection of which can be seen on the shelves nearby - are standout "characters".

STYLE ATOME

Born in the wave of optimism that followed the Second World War and popularised in Belgium at Expo 58, the Atom style embodies a collective fascination with science, technology and the future. Characterised by its bold geometric shapes, clean lines, bright colours and use of modern materials such as plastic, aluminium and glass, it reflects the faith of an era in progress synonymous with comfort, efficiency and beauty. The Atomium, the emblematic monument of Expo 58, perfectly symbolises this collective imagination, transforming the structure of an iron crystal into a futuristic and monumental architecture celebrating science and modernity.

This spirit is fully reflected in the work of André Franquin, who populates his comic strips with modern design furniture and objects. The offices of Spirou and Fantasio feature Tulip armchairs reminiscent of the creations of Eero Saarinen, lamps with chromed bases and coloured shades bringing back to mind Guzzini, and coffee tables with organic shapes like Scandinavian and Italian furniture from the 1950s and 1960s. But the Belgian designer is not only illustrating the Atom style, with the universe he creates, he also draws an era where progress sometimes arouses sceptical amazement. In this way, André Franquin's comics and the Atom style appear as two complementary expressions of the same changing society, where hope for a better future was expressed as much in the shape of a lamp or a chair as in the stories drawn.

ASTERIOS POLYP

The 344-page Asterios Polyp by David Mazzucchelli is more than just a graphic novel: it's a story of epic proportions, "a treatise on aesthetics and design and ontology". The novel presents its complicated antihero, Asterios Polyp, an arrogant professor of architecture who, after a devastating fire, leaves his successful career behind in order to find meaning in life. Mazzucchelli takes every advantage the comic-strip medium has to offer, experimenting with shapes throughout the book: since Asterios is obsessed with modernist furniture, rationality and aesthetics, he is drawn in clean geometric shapes, with rectangular speech bubbles. On the other hand, his on-and off love interest, a free-spirited sculptor named Hana, is all curves and hatching. When the characters meet for the first

time, their shapes, styles, and speech bubbles begin to merge on the page, signifying their instant connection. The complexity of the novel - full of symbolism and drawing on memory and emotion - means reading it once is never an option.

READING CORNER

Fancy a break? Here, you can relax, browse, dream... and leave with your head full of images and ideas!

Designed as a cozy and inspiring space at the heart of the Design and Comics: Living in a Box exhibition, here you will find comics to enjoy, heroes and heroines to rediscover, as well as books that tell the story of design, its objects, and their stories.

Design and comics speak the same language: shapes, colors, tales... So let yourself be surprised: observe, compare, imagine... and why not invent your own stories?

Whether you are with family, friends, a group, an enthusiast, or just curious, this space is yours. Take the time to read, discuss... or relive a bit of your childhood. Please note: books are for onsite reading only, so everyone gets a chance to enjoy them. Do not forget to return them when you're done. Happy reading... and enjoy the journey

FRANQUIN

The 1950s marked a major shift in design in post-war Europe, and the Franco-Belgian comics of the era saw similar formal changes: unlike the straightforward *ligne claire* graphic approach of Hergé, the creator of Tintin, a more varied, energetic style appeared in the work of Jijé (Joseph Gillain). Jijé made the strip Spirou and Fantasio a household name and infused his work with depictions of contemporary design. He was also the mentor of a group of talented students, among them the future creators of Lucky Luke, The Smurfs, and Gil Jourdan. But it was Jijé's student André Franquin - who took over Spirou and Fantasio after succeeding Jijé in 1947 and is best known for his characters Gaston and Marsupilami - who brought the dynamic, rounded atom style ("atomic style") in comics to fruition. Moreover, he used design as a symbol for post-war youthful optimism and forward-thinking sensibilities: forsaking the dark, bourgeois interiors of the older generation, Franquin surrounds his youths with furniture characterized by freeform shapes such as Marco Zanuso's emblematic Lady Chair or Osvaldo Borsani's P40 Chair.

TINTIN

In 1929, the Belgian comic artist Georges Remi, known by his pen name Hergé, introduced audiences to the curious boy reporter/explorer Tintin and his dog Snowy, in *The Adventures of Tintin*, a comic strip published in the newspaper supplement *Le Petit Vingtième*. Originally inspired by comic-strip elements from the United States such as speech bubbles, Hergé went on to create his own distinctive drawing style, *ligne claire* (meaning clear line), which was characterized by strong black outlines, solid colours, and a lack of shading; it is unsurprising therefore that Hergé often depicted his characters sitting on formally reduced designs such as the No. 14 Chair by Thonet or the MR 10 by Mies van der Rohe, both pictured here in the fifth volume of the Tintin series from 1936, entitled *The Blue Lotus*. While the release of this story marked a shift in Hergé's approach - never before had the plot lines and destinations of Tintin's adventures been so well researched - the comic has since been criticized for its colonial and racist depictions. Nevertheless, *The Adventures*

of Tintin have been translated into over 70 languages, becoming one of the most popular comic adventures worldwide

BOOK FROM THE GROUND

Visual communication has become so prevalent today that people often replace the written word with GIFs, emojis, and emoticons when expressing themselves. The Chinese visual artist Xu Bing explores these forms of communication in his graphic novel *Book from the Ground: From Point to Point*, released in 2014. The book is framed like a comic - with sequential images side by side - but in lieu of the text, dialogue, and hand-drawn illustrations often found in comics, it relies solely on symbols, icons, and logos from modern life to tell a story. While the artist attempts to create a universal language with the book, the digital pictograms can be difficult to read when removed from their original context. In light of society's growing interest in digital media, the book also highlights the uncertain future of printed comics. In a similar vein, Dirk van der Kooij's *Chubby Chair* from 2012 forces us to question the way high-tech methods are now utilized in design to create contemporary versions of traditional forms. Although it is produced using advanced 3D-printing techniques that offer endless design possibilities, the chair ultimately resembles a conventional four-legged seat with a backrest, albeit a more playful version of the standard artefact. Yet by leaving surface clues about the chair's production - which involves a robotic arm "squeezing" out the recycled synthetic material layer by layer - the designer blurs the boundaries between today's low-tech, hacker aesthetic and the high-tech possibilities of the future.

MANGA CHAIRS

Although often lumped together with comics in the West, Japanese manga truly exists in a league of its own. Genres exist for all imaginable ages and groups of society, and with hundreds of manga printed every week, the medium constitutes 22 per cent of all printed material in Japan. As a nod to this - now global - cultural phenomenon, the Japanese design studio Nendo released the series *Manga Chairs* in 2015. Each of the chairs is designed to represent a separate element of manga's intricate visual language: one chair flashes across the room at the speed of light, another bounces across the floor, while the third collapses in on itself - without actually moving at all. And like the manga themselves, the chairs' reflective surface acts as a mirror of society, inviting new characters to join the story.

4 VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM

The Vitra Design Museum numbers among the world's leading museums of design. It is dedicated to the research and presentation of design, past and present, and examines design's relationship to architecture, art and everyday culture. In the main museum building by Frank Gehry, the museum annually mounts two major temporary exhibitions, such as "Plastic: Remaking Our World" (2022), "Here We Are! Women in Design 1900 – Today" (2021), "Home Stories: 100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors" (2020), "Objects of Desire: Surrealism and Design 1924 – Today" (2019), "Balkrishna Doshi: Architecture for the People" (2019), or "Charles & Ray Eames. The Power of Design" (2017/18). In addition, smaller shows are presented in the Vitra Design Museum Gallery, which often follow a more contemporary and experimental approach.

The Vitra Schaudapot which was designed by Herzog & de Meuron, presents approximately 400 key objects from the extensive collection and hence resembles one of the largest permanent collections and research sites on modern furniture design world-wide. The annual presentation at the Vitra Schaudapot reveals the collection in a fresh light every year. Often developed with renowned designers, many of the museum's exhibitions cover highly relevant contemporary themes, such as future technologies, sustainability or questions like mobility and social responsibility. Others are presenting historical topics or monographic exhibitions on iconic designers.

The work of the Vitra Design Museum is based on its collection, which includes not only key objects of design history, but also the estates of several important design personalities. The museum library and document archive are available to researchers upon request. The museum conceives its exhibitions for touring, and they are shown at venues around the world. On the Vitra Campus, they are complemented by a diverse programme of events, guided tours, and workshops.

The exhibition *Design and Comics: Living in a Box* is based on the original concept of the exhibition *Living in a Box: Design and Comics* by the Vitra Design Museum.

5 THE ANDRÉ FRANQUIN SECTION

A passionate collector and renowned expert in 20th-century Belgian design, Thierry Belenger has devoted more than twenty years of his career to highlighting Belgium's design and architectural heritage. In 2007, he founded Archives Design Projects, an organisation dedicated to studying and promoting the work of Belgian designers and architects. His approach is distinguished by its profoundly human dimension, in which anecdotes, personal accounts and private archives complement and nuance academic research.

It was during the exhibition *Le bon et le mauvais goût* at the Fondation pour l'architecture in 2002 that Thierry Belenger met Christophe Gevers, an iconic figure in post-war Belgian design. This encounter led to a long-standing collaboration and two monographs:

- *Inventaire d'un inventeur* (Fondation pour l'architecture, 2008)
- *Christophe Gevers, the architecture of the detail* (Design Museum Brussels, 2023)

These projects, combining rigorous documentation with narrative sensitivity, demonstrate his desire to place designers back in their human, cultural and social context.

As part of the *Design and Comics: Living in a Box* exhibition, presented at the Design Museum Brussels, Thierry Belenger was also invited to curate the Belgian section devoted to André Franquin. In this section, he explored the subtle links between the world of the creator of Gaston Lagaffe and modern design. This unique approach once again highlights his ability to bring together different disciplines, eras and imaginations around this material culture.

6 DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS

The Design Museum Brussels, a museum project initiated and developed by the Atomium, is a space dedicated to design from the 20th century to the present day and to its evolution. More than just a formal, aesthetic, and functional object, design is presented here as a witness to the economic, social, ideological, cultural, and technical dynamics of its time. Since 2015, [the Plastic Design Collection](#) has explored the use of plastic in design, from the mid-1950s to the present. This emblematic collection offers a key to understanding the creative and technical landscape of the second half of the 20th century. In September 2020, the museum inaugurated [belgisch design belge](#), a permanent exhibition space dedicated to Belgian design, highlighting its richness, diversity, and uniqueness.

Beyond its collections, the Design Museum Brussels aims to be a living platform for reflection and exchange. Its temporary exhibitions, along with its cultural and educational programming, express a desire to promote a transversal, inclusive, and accessible approach, crossing disciplines and perspectives. In doing so, the museum traces the cultural and technical story of the objects that have shaped our daily environments, revealing how these creations reflect the evolution of our lifestyles, values, and know-how.

From this perspective, the museum accompanies the major transitions of our time by questioning the role of design. As a place of awareness and education, it contributes to the development of critical thinking and to bringing design closer to society. It is also committed to archiving knowledge, preserving and transmitting the material and immaterial heritage of design, thereby enriching its understanding for present and future generations. By combining heritage and innovation, memory and foresight, the Design Museum Brussels asserts its mission: to make design a tool for interpreting the world and a lever for change.

The museum has been committed for several years to an eco-design approach, integrating sustainability as a guiding principle in the conception of its exhibitions. In this context, 80% of the scenographic elements presented here come from reclaimed materials or are designed to be reused in future projects. This long-term strategy not only helps reduce the environmental footprint of our activities, but also extends the lifecycle of materials, limiting waste and promoting circularity. By rethinking the way exhibitions are designed and produced, the museum demonstrates its determination to combine creativity with environmental responsibility, and to make sustainability an integral part of its cultural mission.

7 PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

Cultural program *Design and Comics: Living in a Box*

ENCOUNTERS

Meet the Curator – Thierry Belenger

Date to be confirmed - FR

Visit the exhibition in the company of curator Thierry Belenger

Through the eyes of Eric Verhoest

Date to be confirmed - FR

Discover the exhibition through the eyes of author and publisher Eric Verhoest.

Intergenerational guided tours

07.12.2025 and 15.02.2026 – 2:30 p.m. (NL) and 3 p.m. (FR)

Let our guides take you on a journey of discovery through the exhibition. In collaboration with Korei Guided Tours.

ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

Comic Strip/Illustration Workshop

16.11.2025 – 2:00 p.m. > 4:00 p.m. - NL

Creative workshop for children with illustrator Karolina Szejda.

In collaboration with the Dutch Library of Laeken and on the occasion of Kusnten Dag voor Kinderen.

Design Brunch

14.12.2025 – 11:00 a.m. > 2:30 p.m.

Tour of the exhibitions, activities for children, behind-the-scenes tour of the museum, followed by a convivial brunch

Reading at the museum (FR)

12.11.2025, 10.12.2025, 14.01.2026, 11.02.2026 – 2:00 p.m. > 4:00 p.m.

Story time for children (from 7 years old)

In collaboration with the French library of Laeken

Reading and drawing at the museum (NL)

07.02.2026 - 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Story time for children (from 7 years old)

In collaboration with the Dutch library of Laeken

NOCTURNE

Nocturne

12.02.2026 – 7pm > 10pm

An evening full of experiences: exhibition tours, performances, and a festive atmosphere

KIDS WORKSHOPS

Journey through time

27.10 > 31.10.2025 - FR

Creative workshop for children aged 8–12

Carnival workshop

23.02 > 27.02.2026 - FR

Creative workshop for children aged 8–12

GROUPS

Are you a school group, a group of friends, a non-profit organization, a cultural group, or a company? We offer guided tours tailored to your group, available on reservation. Contact us at info@designmuseum.brussels

This program is subject to change. Please visit our website for the latest information and to register for the activities: designmuseum.brussels/en/agenda/

8 COLOPHON

ATOMIUM + DESIGN MUSEUM BRUSSELS

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Jérôme Petit, Gala Faura

Acknowledgements to the Atomium Team

The Design Museum Brussels would like to express their warmest gratitude to all the people, designers, collections and institutions for their authorisation to present the works in this exhibition. However, despite a due diligence search to identify the right holders of certain reproductions, some right holders could not be identified or located. We therefore invite these right holders or beneficiaries to manifest themselves by contacting the Design Museum Brussels.

9 PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Design and Comics : Living in a Box

18.10.2025 > 01.03.2026

Design Museum Brussels
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1020 Brussels
designmuseum.brussels

Facebook: @designmuseumbrussels
Instagram: @designmuseumbrussels
TikTok: @designmuseumbrussels
LinkedIn: @designmuseumbrussels

Open from monday till sunday 11h > 19h Tickets: €10 (+ other discounts)

Permanente tentoonstellingen:

[the Plastic Design Collection](#)

[belgische design belge](#)

designmuseum.brussels

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