

A shocking look inside a psychiatric clinic

# Icons

ERIK VLAMINCK

In 'Icons' Erik Vlamincck offers us a glimpse inside closed mental institutions in Flanders in the 1970s. Twenty-six-year-old Brother Medardus sits beside his mother's sickbed and tells her about the psychiatric clinic where as 'brother economist' he is in charge of the bookkeeping. The goings on in the St. Anastasius Clinic are not particularly Christian. Patients are inhumanely treated, left to their fate or, even worse, subjected to medical experiments. It soon transpires that Medardus himself is less than altogether trustworthy. He cooks the institute's books and conducts a reign of terror. In his private life too, Medardus has his secrets and demons. He wrestles with the traumas of a childhood spent with a violent father and a loving but repressed mother. Medardus seeks refuge outside the clinic in a rented apartment, where he can indulge his transvestism in secret.

**A rock solid j'accuse, full of black humour, pent-up rage and intensely felt sympathy, about the state of psychiatry.**

HUMO

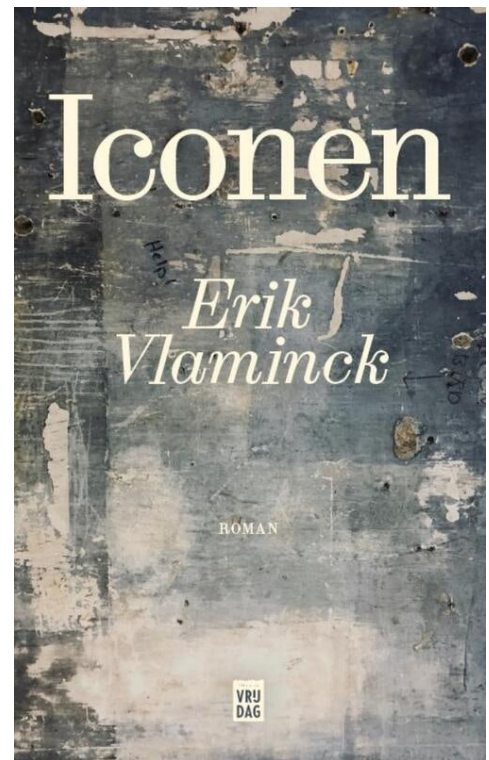
In a down-to-earth and apparently simple idiom, Erik Vlamincck takes us with him into the head of a corrupt monk. Medardus seems to save his own skin time and again, until a new generation of doctors and nurses lays bare the abuses. For this story, Vlamincck draws upon his own experiences as an educator in an institution in that same period. Implacably, but not without humour or hope, he paints a picture of abuse of power and of neglect by providers of mental healthcare in the twentieth century.

**An overwhelming, nihilistic novel. \*\*\*\***

DE VOLKSKRANT

**Razor-sharp observation by Vlamincck.**

BAZAROW



## AUTHOR



**Erik Vlamincck** (b. 1954) is a theatre-maker, columnist and author of a large oeuvre. In the tradition of Louis Paul Boon he writes with great psychological insight about family and ordinary people with striking life stories. His work is suffused with social engagement and always reflects an authentic working-class character. Many of his texts are based on (historical) fact or on his own experiences working in psychiatric care and in homeless shelters. Vlamincck's language is laconic, juicy, insightful and authentic. *Photo © Chris van Houts*

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