

Only beauty can save us

Soldier-Gardener

JORIS VERMASSEN

Gardener Alois is called to arms in the summer of 1914 and promises his fiancée Clothilde that they'll marry when he gets back, hopefully before Christmas. Those six months ultimately stretch into four years. The self-restrained Alois and his foulmouthed friend Raymond are sent to the front, after which – because of their age – they end up in northern France for the rest of the war. There Alois is able to work as a gardener, in painter Claude Monet's magnificent garden among other places. Throughout that time, Alois and Clothilde write to each other. In their letters they say nothing about the everyday horrors and keep promising each other that everything will turn out fine. But as time goes on, Alois becomes more and more conflicted, about what good is, who God is, and who he is himself.

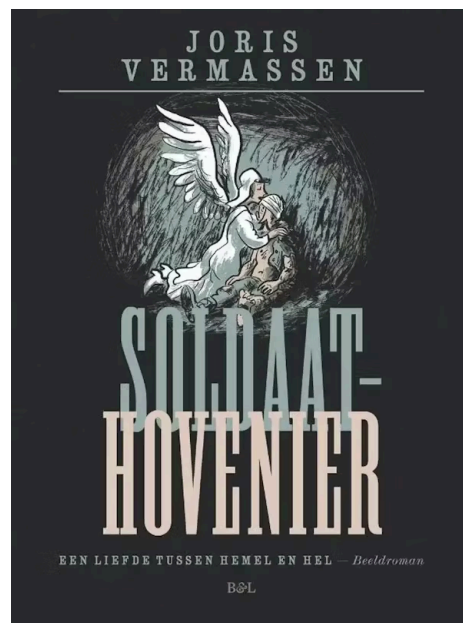
An impressive account of hope, love and devastation. *****

NRC

In this voluminous tale in soft greys and browns, Joris Vermassen stresses the importance of beauty and love in all their forms, against the background of the hell of the First World War. With his deep love of horticulture and his meetings with Monet, who succeeds in capturing the splendour of his garden on canvas, Alois creates his own beacons of beauty to counter brutal reality. It's the beauty of his silent love for Marie, Monet's maid, however, that ultimately throws him off balance. With drawings that are as restrained and modest as the central character, 'Soldier-Gardener' is a nuanced portrait of a man and a world in crisis.

'Soldier-Gardener' is no graphic pamphlet, no war epic, no love tragedy – and yet it is all of those things. Above all it's an ode to beauty as the last bastion of humanity.

9E KUNST



AUTHOR



Joris Vermassen (b. 1964) used the pseudonym **Fritz Van den Heuvel** for over twenty years, creating a series of absurdist comics, performing as a stand-up comedian and scripting the amusing children's comic strip 'De Bamburgers' for artist Simon Spruyt. In 2014, *Mad with Joy* was published, his first graphic novel and his first work using his real name.

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