

Magic realism, Schrauwen-style

The Man Who Grew His Beard

OLIVIER SCHRAUWEN

'The Man Who Grew His Beard' consists of seven, very different, surrealistic short stories. About men with beards, of course, but the book also features a highly imaginative alternative creation myth and a story about drawing lessons. Once again, Schrauwen uses Flemish cultural heritage to his advantage. This time it is not the Flemish primitives or the architecture of Bruges that occupy a leading role, but a naïve version of colonial Belgium. The author lets his artistic imagination run riot, as though he wants to create his own comic version of 'Tintin in the Congo'.

One of the most original books of the year, by a long way

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His painterly, sometimes unusual illustrative style appears complex, but usually consists of simple lines and basic colouring. With each new story, Schrauwen changes his style: he uses different colour palettes, makes stories without words, composes pages as miniatures instead of the usual grid layout. In spite of their graphic virtuosity, his pages do not always look completely finished, which is typical of the artist's style. All of this ensures that the book in its entirety creates an overwhelming impression, but also reinforces the effect of alienation. A unique exercise in style by an extraordinary talent.

Graphically flawless, whilst also being smart and crazy in a good way

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The work of a master storyteller

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AUTHOR



Olivier Schrauwen (b. 1977) calls himself a tinkerer. Since his award-winning debut, Schrauwen's work has achieved international success, and the author has become something of a phenomenon. He has a highly confident style that teeters between fluid naturalism and graphic abstraction. Schrauwen's comics are consistently surprising, while unraveling a mysterious thread that binds all of his works together. Art Spiegelman (of 'Maus' fame) referred to him as 'the most original cartoonist I've fallen onto since Chris Ware or Ben Katchor'.

ORIGINAL TITLE De man die zijn baard liet groeien (2010, Bries, 112 pp.)

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