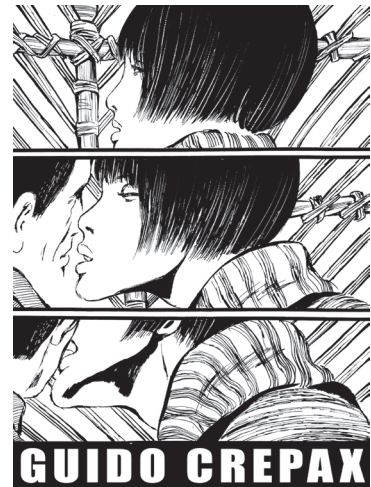


GUIDO CREPAX

NOUS NOUS SOMMES TANT AIMÉS, VALENTINA...

February 7 — April 11, 2026
337 chaussée d'Ixelles | 1050 Bruxelles

Opening reception
Saturday, February 7th from 3pm to 8pm



For this third solo exhibition by Guido Crepax, the Martel Gallery is pleased to present *Nous nous sommes tant aimés, Valentina...*, from February 7 to April 11, 2026.

Half a century ago, France was introduced to Valentina Rosselli in the pages of *Charlie mensuel*, the magazine directed with sure taste by Wolinski, who sought to bring together the very best of international comics. *Charlie's* layout echoed that of the Italian monthly *Linus*, and it was precisely in *Linus* that the long-limbed Valentina was born, in the mid-1960s, from the pen of the Milanese artist Guido Crepax.

Valentina's breasts (rather small) and buttocks (full and voluptuous) could hardly fail to make a strong impression on the young man I was at the time. But I was equally struck by the heroine's gaze: eyes that, in turn, plunged into those of the reader, turned toward some unknown inner abyss, filled with tears or wandered in pleasure. Immense eyes, with light pupils and lightly marked lashes, over which a fringe of ebony threatens to draw the curtain (I did not yet recognize, at the time, the actress Louise Brooks—icon of silent cinema—as the model for this *garçonne* hairstyle), true centers of gravity of a face often left open, without a defining outline. They were perhaps, in the end, what Valentina possessed that was most naked, most eloquent, most moving.

As the episodes accumulated, it also became clear that this character—one of the first truly central female figures in European comics—was not merely the embodiment of a male artist's erotic fantasy, but a fully realized person endowed with a biography (some episodes return to her childhood; one of the artworks on display moreover shows how a drawing attributed to her and dated 1949, when she was seven years old—actually by Caterina Crepax, the artist's daughter—could be recalled twenty years later.), who worked as a photographer, professed Trotskyist opinions, was engaged in a long-term relationship with an art critic named Philip Rembrandt, and who would become the mother of a boy, Mattia, in 1970...

Without ever ceasing to publish other books, Crepax—before taking leave of his creation in 1995 with an episode bearing an unmistakable title, *Au diable Valentina*—devoted

some 2,600 plates to following his heroine, not only through the twists and turns of her life but above all through the far more tortuous paths of her *psyche*, her dream life and her fantasies. The countless doors that appear in his drawings undoubtedly metaphorize this permeability between “reality” and that “world of dreams and memory” in which Valentina seeks refuge when she “feels lost and gives up hope,” as he wrote, to console her, to Louise Brooks, with whom he exchanged several letters. A permeability so complete that, in his narratives, the status of what is represented is very often undecidable.

In this *Wonderland* to which Valentina, a *lost daughter*, retreats, drawing sometimes suffices on its own, as in *The Magic Lantern*, a silent suite of 96 plates drawn in 1976–77. But while text may occasionally be absent, sex generally occupies a prominent place, and Crepax—an admirer of the Enlightenment and of the *Encyclopédie*—explored its entire catalogue: masturbation, bisexuality, hermaphroditism, voyeurism, sadomasochism, bondage, doraphilia (that is, fur fetishism, glorified by Sacher-Masoch), zoophilia—nothing is missing, not to mention the use of all manner of libidinal objects and accessories, which his pen described, along with furnishings, with extreme descriptive care.

A cultivated man of great refinement, Guido Crepax translated numerous literary texts into drawings: classics of erotic literature such as *Story of O*, *Justine*, *Emmanuelle*, or *Bataille’s Story of the Eye*, which whipped his imagination and whose rawness he did nothing to soften, but also works of fantastic literature (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*). At the same time, he engaged with Homer, Kafka, Schnitzler, and D’Annunzio, while paying homage to filmmakers such as Ingmar Bergman and Sergei Eisenstein, to artists like Alexander Calder, Wassily Kandinsky, Yves Klein, Henry Moore, and Andy Warhol, as well as to designers and musicians.

This constant dialogue with other arts did not prevent Crepax from cherishing comics, which he saw as a formidable territory of freedom, and whose endlessly reinvented relationship to the space of the page he particularly loved. A virtuoso of composition, he invented the process of hyperfragmentation, multiplying small panels and inserts arranged in series or columns. The exhibition clearly demonstrates the full scope of his creativity in this area: tightly gridded layouts with thick borders, large square panels pushing the top and bottom of the page toward the margins, more irregular puzzles (*Valentina Pirate*), images with irregular, floating contours (*Un poco loco*), and wide horizontal bands accommodating reclining figures...

Even when confined within narrow frames, neither Valentina nor Crepax’s other heroines (Bianca, Anita...) were ever prisoners; free women, they have always known how to escape the page in order to seduce us—and to haunt us.

Thierry Groensteen

Comic art historian

Correspondent for the Academy of fine arts (Paris)

Relations Presse : Galerie Martel | +33 6 10 19 30 02, contact@galeriemartel.fr

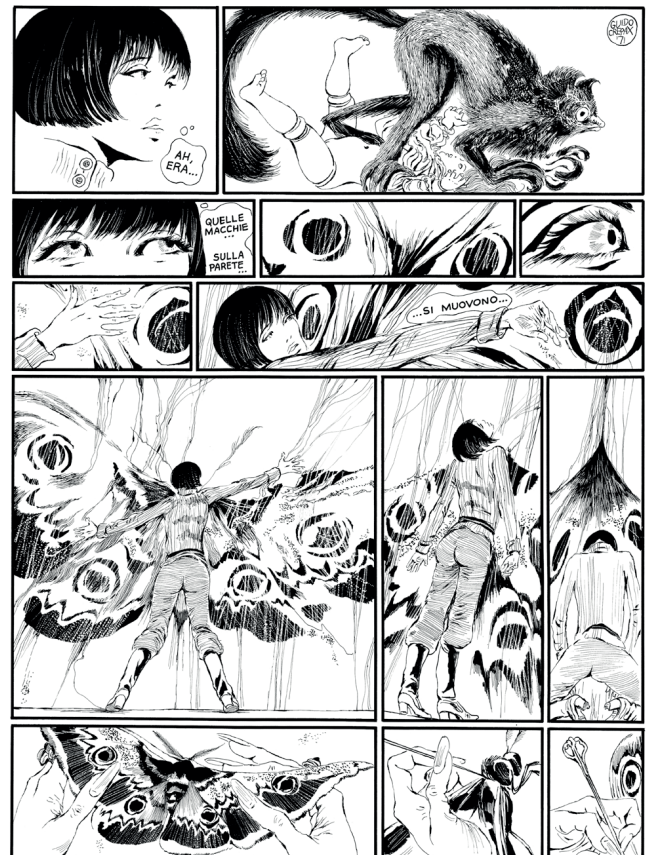
MARTEL PARIS | 17 rue Martel, 75010 Paris, France | +33 1 42 46 35 09

MARTEL BXL | Chaussée d’Ixelles 337, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgique | +32 2 721 79 57

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Guido Crepax, *Funny Valentine - Valentina speciale 01*, 1969, 36,5 x 51 cm, indian ink on schoeller cardboard ©Crepax / courtesy Galerie Martel



Guido Crepax, *Baba Yaga 16*, 1971, 36,5 x 51 cm, indian ink on schoeller cardboard ©Crepax / courtesy Galerie Martel



Guido Crepax, *Trasparenze e iridescenze*, 1985, 36,5 x 51 cm, indian ink on schoeller cardboard ©Crepax/ courtesy Galerie Martel



Guido Crepax, *VALENTINA - Valentina pirata 24 - 2° sogno*, 1976, 36,5 x 51 cm, indian ink on schoeller cardboard ©Crepax/ courtesy Galerie Martel

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