

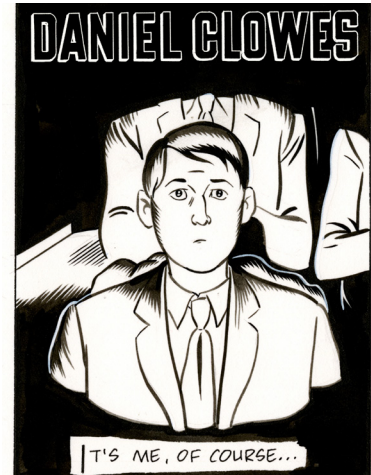
DANIEL CLOWES

ACT THREE

November 19, 2026 — January 16, 2027
Chaussée d'Ixelles 337 | 1050 Bruxelles

Opening in the presence of the artist
Thursday, November 19, from 6pm

Book signing
Thursday, November 19, from 3pm



Galerie Martel is delighted to present, for the first time in Brussels, an exhibition dedicated to Daniel Clowes, a leading figure in contemporary American comics. This is the third solo exhibition the gallery has devoted to the artist, reflecting a long-standing collaboration and artistic dialogue.

Several things strike you when you take the time to examine a selection of works such as those by Daniel Clowes brought together for this third exhibition at Galerie Martel (a reminder of the previous episode: that was in 2024, when Clowes won the Best Album Award at the Angoulême Festival for *Monica*, no less).

To begin with, there is, of course, that line, that drawing style recognisable among a thousand, whose particularity lies in the fact that it cannot even pretend to conceal its obvious genealogy — one that Clowes, moreover, fully acknowledges and openly embraces.

This enduring fascination with popular North American comics of the 1950s and 1960s (from EC Comics productions to *Mad* magazine, representing a particular strand of the pop culture of the time) makes him an unmistakable heir to that graphic tradition, to the point of drawing considerable inspiration from the instincts of the cartoonists and page designers associated with this particular vein. But... because that would be too simple, Clowes achieves the remarkable feat of establishing a style entirely his own, one of the most immediately identifiable approaches to inking in contemporary comics, and has done so for more than forty years.

And even if his fondness for ingenious compositional devices, daring framing and inventive page layouts is beyond doubt (another extraordinary skill when it comes to capturing and sustaining the reader's attention from page to page), let us agree that it is, in itself, a considerable talent to have asserted oneself so decisively, through the singularity of a drawing style, amid the multitude of styles constantly offered by an ever-renewing world of comics creation.

But being a “good draughtsman” does not necessarily make one a “good comics author”: to evoke what is unfolding in Clowes's books, we must look at what connects these two qualifications, and it is precisely there that his other great ability resides.

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This is easy enough to recognise, given the enormous contribution his bibliography has made to some of the finest work seen and read over recent decades. By exploring fictional material in every conceivable direction with each new issue of *Eightball*, his own comic book, in which most of his books were born and developed (from *Ghost World* to *Patience*, via *Caricature* and *David Boring*), the author found a voice and gradually refined a reading of the world unlike any other.

Although the acidity of his work quickly propelled him into the ranks of a vast imaginary brotherhood of celebrated, somewhat misanthropic authors, it ultimately took only a few chapters to understand that what Daniel Clowes was offering us was something else: a kind of vast, multifaceted social critique, more precise than one might initially have imagined when, in the mid-1990s, Generation X enthusiastically welcomed each of these new stories. On the agenda: unease, disorientation, cynicism and strangeness. And from this body of work emerged a number of memorable characters, striking personalities examined by an author who sometimes seems torn between empathy and disgust for his own creations... And beneath the surface, occasionally emerging between the lines, is an analysis of himself, of his own expectations, his joys and his disappointments in the face of existence.

These stories, all of which share a tendency to expose North American superficiality and materialism (with either precision or savagery, depending on the occasion), retrospectively give the impression of a gigantic, multi-layered choral narrative unfolding over more than forty years.

It is therefore gradually that this inclination towards an unspoken form of metafiction has become apparent: dialogues evoke memories of earlier readings, different periods may intersect or overlap, subjects interpenetrate and echo one another across the books, but also through the various projects the author undertakes. Through comments operating on a second level, epilogues that set something else in motion, and extending to title pages, back covers, illustrations scattered throughout the press or elsewhere, there is always the same common thread: well concealed behind the disguise of a drawing style deceptively steeped in classicism, the idea seems to be to reach out to the reader, to stimulate them through every possible stratagem.

One such device stands out, and brings us back, precisely, to this notion of looking: those faces seen head-on, and those fixed eyes, which Clowes depicts more often than most, like so many punctuation marks frequently scattered throughout his work. Without their presence ever feeling unjustified, one can find and line up any number of faces looking “straight into the camera”, which likewise seem to address the readership directly (or, in this instance, the visitors to this exhibition): from David Boring to Enid Coleslaw (the bespectacled girl from *Ghost World*), not forgetting the devil himself, they all address us, eye to eye. Playing with the fourth wall is never far removed from the world of modern comics, but Clowes seems to make something very particular of it.

And the discomfort that follows, this presence extending beyond paper and ink, bears witness to the artist's mastery.

It is this strangeness that we feel in the gaze of Kelly — or of the actress Constance Towers as drawn by the artist — in *The Naked Kiss*, Samuel Fuller's classic film, from which Clowes drew inspiration for several illustrations commissioned by the prestigious Criterion Collection.

It is also the lingering unease in the eyes of *Sleeping Beauty* and those of her little family, finally reunited at the very end of a harrowing and disconcerting story conceived for *Little Lit*, the collection of children's stories initiated by Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman, those insatiable and tireless driving forces working in the service of ever more ambitious comics.

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It is often the same oddness at work from one page to the next, from one drawing to another, occasionally throwing off our entire perception of a Clowes story. Stirred up, shaken, senses turned upside down, the disoriented reader may feel as though their brain has been put through a washing machine.

Ultimately, like Fuller in his films, or Mouly and Spiegelman in their publications (*), Dan Clowes multiplies allusions and quotations, never stopping to wonder how some daring idea that might serve his purpose will be received; and, without making a great fuss about it, brings a rare ambition and singularity to the ways of telling stories, describing and commenting on society. One result, in particular, is that he elevates comics as few other authors have managed to do before him.

None of this came to light yesterday, and the exhibition offers a magnificent overview of the artist's graphic and narrative evolution across the decades. This is precisely what the selection presented by Galerie Martel BXL highlights, marking another step in the gallery's ambition to celebrate the richness of the North American comics landscape and its most significant creators, its most emblematic innovators (following Emil Ferris and Joe Sacco).

The range of inking styles, the exploration of colour, the inventiveness of the framing within a single composition, the systematic meticulousness that characterises the whole: everything is there, laid out before our eyes.

The unreal and the real engaging in dialogue behind our backs, biting humour as a lifeline, the strange condition of being human viewed through a multitude of distorting mirrors: all of this is there, too. And so much more besides: nothing is missing.

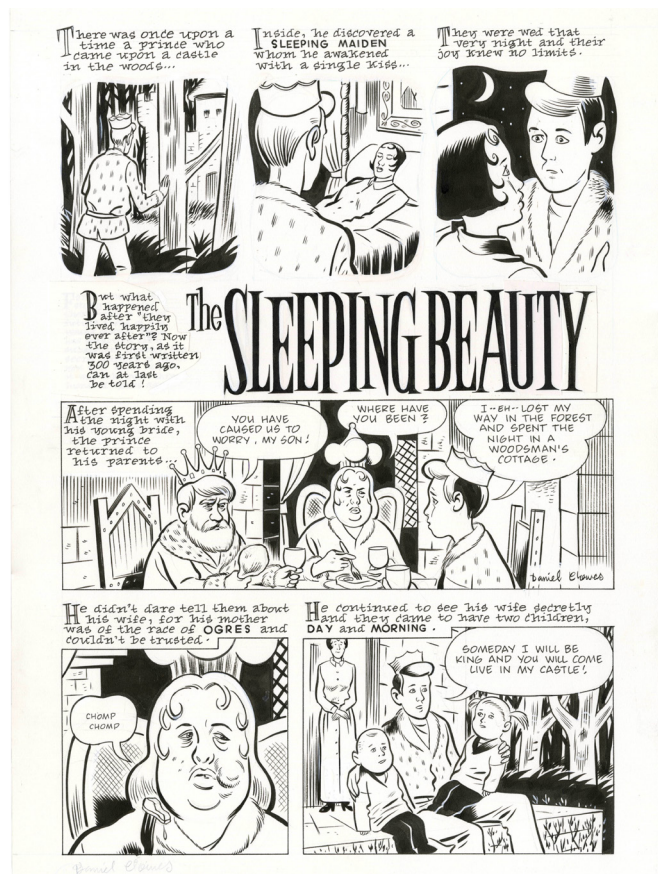
There is so much to discover in the work of Daniel Clowes.

Press release written by **June Julien Misserey**

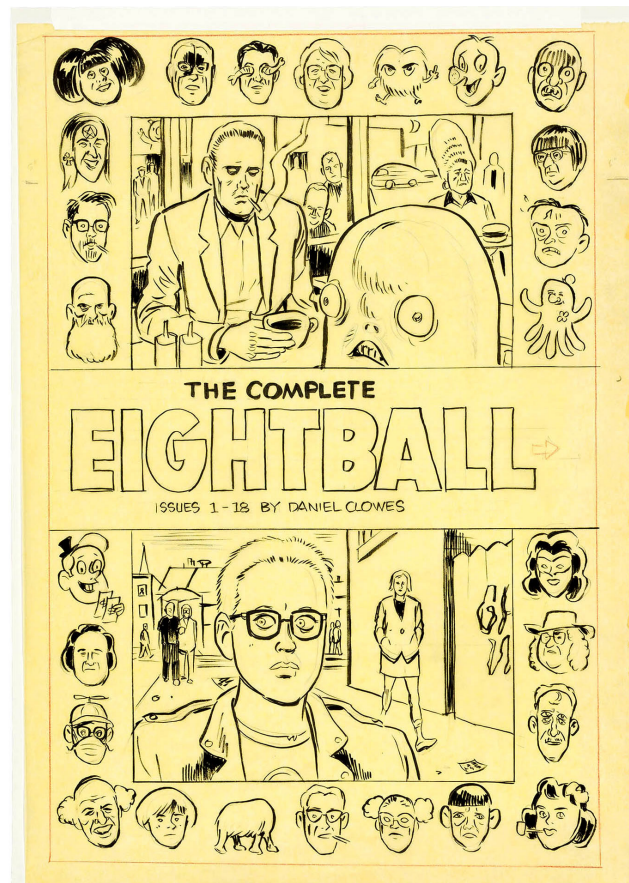
(*) It is worth noting that, from 5 November 2026 to 16 January 2027, Galerie Martel will celebrate the renowned North American cultural magazine *The New Yorker*, an exceptional publication whose art editor since 1993 has been Françoise Mouly, and which has regularly featured in its pages some of the greatest names in sequential storytelling, including Adrian Tomine, Chris Ware, Sempé, Lorenzo Mattotti and, of course... Daniel Clowes.

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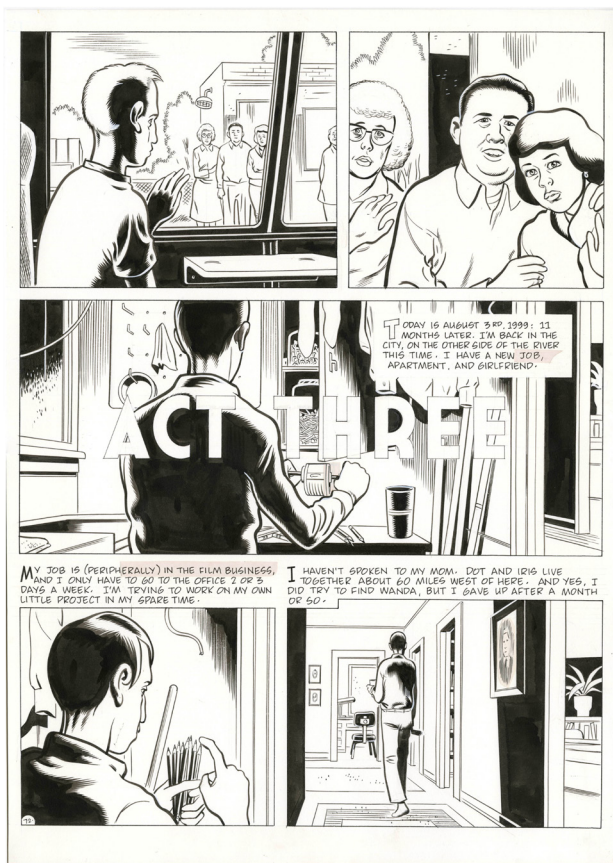
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Daniel Clowes, *The Sleeping Beauty* - Little Lit vol.1, p.1, 1999, ink on paper 30 x 47 cm ©Daniel Clowes, courtesy Galerie Martel



Daniel Clowes, *Complete Eightball*, softcover front cover sketch, 2023, ink on paper, 38 x 54 cm ©Daniel Clowes, courtesy Galerie Martel



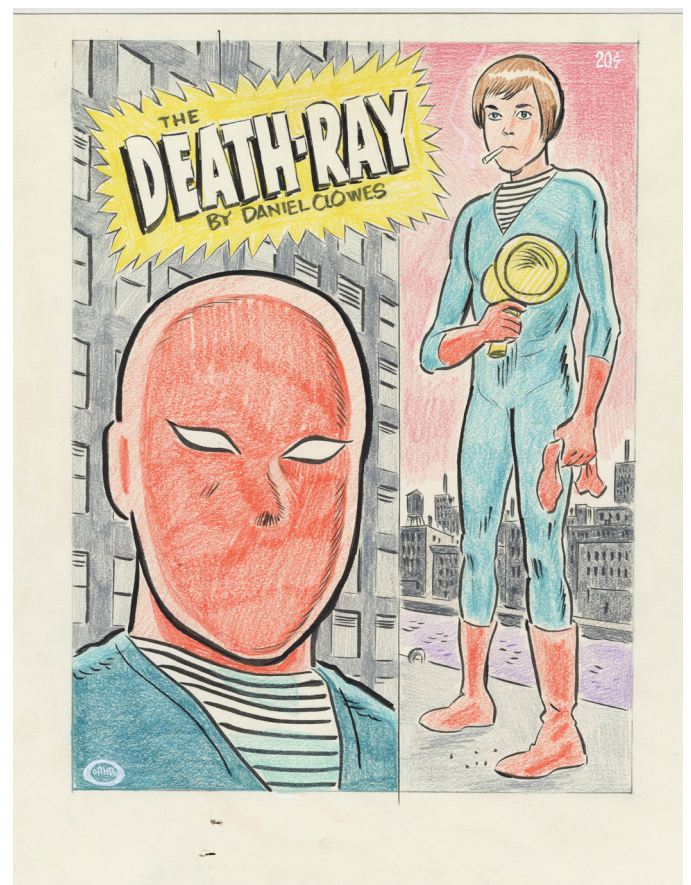
Daniel Clowes, *David Boring*, p.72, 2001, ink on paper, 37 x 51 cm
©Daniel Clowes, courtesy Galerie Martel



Daniel Clowes, *David Boring*, p.108, 2001, ink on paper, 37 x 51 cm
©Daniel Clowes, courtesy Galerie Martel



Daniel Clowes, *Lloyd Llewellyn Special #1*, p.8, 1987, ink on paper, 31 x 51 cm ©Daniel Clowes, courtesy Galerie Martel



Daniel Clowes, *The Death-Ray*, cover sketch, 2023, ink, graphite and colored pencil on paper, 28 x 35,5 cm ©Daniel Clowes, courtesy Galerie Martel

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