
New “The Spirit of Will Eisner” exhibition at Pordenone’s PAFF!

Watch the new exhibition video and browse the photos.

*Video of the inauguration of the exhibition “The Spirit of Will Eisner”.
Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who attended for your warmth, enthusiasm and
affection – there was an incredible atmosphere!*

Pordenone, 28 October 2022 — The gallery **PAFF!** (Palazzo Arti Fumetto Friuli) has opened its doors for the new **William Eisner** exhibition *The Spirit of Will Eisner*, running from 7 October until 26 February at Palazzo Galvani (Viale Dante 33) in collaboration with Paris-based 9ème Art Références.

There is no stopping **PAFF!** with its track record of attracting top dogs from the world of comics. It has swiftly made an international name for itself thanks to its high-quality exhibitions and prestigious featured artists. Following Cavazzano for Disney, Milton Caniff with his legendary American adventure strips, the Marvel and DC masters with their superheroes, a comprehensive look at Milo Manara beyond erotica, the most renowned fantasy and sci-fi comic book artist in the form of Moebius, and master Juanjo Guarnido, now it is the turn of **Will Eisner**.

The author

American cartoonist and entrepreneur **William Erwin Eisner** is one of the greatest artists in comic book history. A passionate student of language – which he dubbed ‘sequential art’ – he developed an expressionistic technique early on, which aimed to maximise the emotional power of graphic storytelling through framing and shadow play.

Eisner was born in Brooklyn in 1917 and his impressive artistic talent shone through from an early age. Even as a boy, he was thinking of becoming a drawer.

He was not from a well-off background but soon developed a passion for literature and art, in part thanks to his father’s work as a muralist.

Initially working as a humorous and advertising illustrator, he founded one of the first comic book production and distribution companies, **Eisner-Iger Ltd**, aged 20, together with publisher Jerry Iger. It was an instant success. His works were highly influenced by the Great Depression of the 1930s. He created characters such as Bob Powe, Jack Kirby and Bob Kane, through his collaboration with Jerry Iger. However, real fame came with his character **The Spirit** (Denny Colt), a private detective believed dead. The episodes in the story unfolded in an urban setting and always went beyond the classic ‘good vs

evil' paradigm, redefining the grammar and syntax of comic-book language, experimenting with space and time. *The Spirit* deviated from the canons of contemporary publishing because it combined multiple genres: thriller, erotic, violent, romantic, adventurous, supernatural, satirical...

Eisner was an avid user of splash pages, which, in contrast to the Sunday strip, are very short – usually one-page – self-contained stories about the adventures of the most popular heroes of the time.

He breathed new life into the comic-book medium. Thanks to him, terms such as 'graphic novel' became widespread.

After working extensively on *The Spirit* (1940-1952), **Eisner** studied and wrote essays on the language of comics, then came his first graphic novel *A Contract with God*. Written as four stories and a prologue, it was first published in 1978, and in Italy in 1980, to much acclaim. Only three decades later would it surface that the first dramatic episode was in fact inspired by the tragic passing of his teenage daughter, who had died of leukaemia.

Eisner's work was universal but also relatable, embracing every aspect without leaving anything to chance. By using drawing, scriptwriting, composition, anatomy and the body language of his characters, **Eisner** managed to portray real life, how things were in the poor neighbourhoods where he himself had grown up. His work still influences many contemporary authors today. What makes the atmosphere in his stories is the inspiration he took from Pulp literature, thriller films and the New York city of the day. Another fundamental aspect to his art was the use of light and how the background was depicted. Light is often scarce in his works and the setting defined by just one or two elements, sufficient enough to give the scene its context. This means the reader can focus on the characters, dialogue and action. Water was another key element: raindrops, downpours, puddles... Water is a symbol of distress and discomfort, and weighs down the scenes.

Neil Gaiman on Will Eisner

The exhibition at PAFF!

The new Eisner exhibition will be inaugurated on 7 October and will run for some five months until 26 February at **PAFF!** – Palazzo Arti Fumetto Friuli – based in Pordenone's majestic Villa Galvani.

A large section of the exhibition is dedicated to the elements that made his main works famous.

Giulio De Vita, the Artistic Director at **PAFF!** (Palazzo Arti Fumetto Friuli) and curator of the exhibition commented: "There are few people who have undoubtedly made the

history of comics, those whose work and artform have contributed to transforming a popular subculture into an important, influential medium in today's modern image-based society, but **Will Eisner** is one of them". He added: "**PAFF!** has worked tirelessly to bring this important cartoonist to Pordenone, with an extensive exhibition that positions us at the crossroads between research, popularisation and entertainment".

Tiziana Gibelli, Friuli Venezia Giulia's Regional Councillor for Culture, remarked that "Once again **PAFF!** has proved itself to be a leading light in the world of comic books, not just in Italy but across Europe. With this exhibition, **The Spirit of William Eisner**, Pordenone welcomes another big name in global comics. Eisner's works represent a key milestone in the history of this artform, both for their innovative style and the type of stories they tell. This exhibition is sure to be a great cultural event, as well as an attraction for experts and enthusiasts from Italy and abroad".

Alberto Parigi, Pordenone City Council's Councillor for Culture, stated:

"The combined cultural offering provided by **PAFF!** and the City Council make **Pordenone** a real point of reference in the art scene, with a first-class programme lined up for the autumn and winter. Two big names – **Eisner** in comics and **Erwitt** in photography – will be on display, alongside other important exhibitions. This should serve to encourage us to network further and promote these initiatives together as a team, communicating and exploiting the city's enormous potential and cultural pull, to the benefit of all involved."

The works on display

The exhibition will retrace Eisner's footsteps including some 180 original works, from final strips to sketches, plus an additional 126 publications from his lifetime. The works will be displayed in different rooms according to theme, telling the story of comics and its evolution through images.

1 - The Spirit of the thriller

The first section will focus on **The Spirit of the thriller**, providing a brief introduction to the comics industry in late-1930s America, and explaining, first, the boom caused by the arrival of comics on the market, then, readers' infatuation with thriller comics and with 'avenger' and 'bandit' characters, and, finally, the gradual arrival of the first 'heroes in a costume' (with DC Universe and Marvel: Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman and Capitan America). Thriller films greatly influenced the works of **Eisner**. This introductory section leads into an exploration of Will Eisner's own background – at the time, a hard-working, poor young cartoonist, trying to make his way in an America devastated by the Great Depression. **Eisner** was one of the greatest graphic novelists, taking the genre to new heights and achieving international success.

2 - The Spirit of synthesis

In the second space visitors can read the full **short stories** from *The Spirit* on panels. There are six in total, each made up of seven pages. This diverse offering will create an immersive visitor experience, helping to better appreciate just how rich the series is, borrowing from different genres and registers. Visitors will explore the narrative techniques used by **Will Eisner** – his style, rhythm and efficiency – which allowed him to condense a story into seven pages, when comic book adventures were usually spread over 15 or 20. Eisner was indeed also the face behind many splash pages, some of which have become actual posters.

3 - The creative Spirit

The next section provides a foray into **The creative Spirit**, Will Eisner's narrative and artistic techniques, and his main works, from a graphic angle, to understand how his style made its mark on comic-book history. It dives into a study of his drawings and technique, blowing up some of his strips to examine them more closely. Eisner attempted to break away from rigid publishing rules and construct 'sequential art', in which it is the author pulling the strings of the story. Some strips have no words at all, with the subjective use of images making his creations unique and exceptionally creative.

4 - The inspiring Spirit

Will Eisner can be considered **The inspiring Spirit** for a new generation of artists. He is considered to be a master by so many contemporary authors, in part thanks to publisher Denis Kitchen, who brought the old stories in these comics back to life. Both works from his collection and works he inspired will be on display.

5 - The Spirit of the graphic novel

The graphic novel format became famous thanks to **Eisner**, when he wrote *A Contract with God*. The novelist saw its potential and transformed it into a children's favourite, taking the comic strip concept from magazine to book format. In doing so, **Eisner** could do away with editorial obligations, and constraints regarding length and periodical publication dates. The atmosphere he created in his graphic novels is particularly intriguing, set in a dark, macabre New York, his hometown, in the Great Depression. These stories have flashes of autobiography and are extremely contemporary, almost futuristic. **Eisner's** graphic novels succeeded in breaking the rigid rules of comics (despite him having chosen some of these rules himself), moving away from the comics industry and creating a different vision for the world of comics.

The location

The prestigious exhibition location offers ample and impressive exhibition spaces: a historic villa, sleek modern art gallery, auditorium, learning area, large terrace, bookshop, cloakroom, offices, basement and coffee point.

Outside, the enchanting public park features a rose garden, a children's play area and a small lake.

The 1850 Venetian-style villa, once the residence of successful ceramic merchants, the Galvani family, is located within the public park of the same name, close to the town's historic centre. After decades of neglect, the villa underwent a complete renovation in the 1990s, transforming it into an exhibition space.

It was extended in 2010, further increasing exhibition areas to around 2000 m² with a 90-seat auditorium.

Galvani Park, in which the museum is immersed, adds enormous value to the natural extension of the museum experience towards the exterior space and forms part of the process of redeveloping the area, restoring unity to the natural and architectural environments.

What is PAFF!

PAFF! (Palazzo Arti Fumetto Friuli) in Pordenone is the first cultural institution in Italy – and one of only a handful in Europe – promoting art and science through the medium of comics, which enables an immediate and entertaining understanding of cultural issues. Through the intuitive and playful language of images, **PAFF!** presents temporary exhibitions, training courses, play and educational initiatives, events and conferences for a variety of audiences.

Founded in 2018 by **Giulio De Vita**, together with a team of professionals with experience in a wide range of sectors, **PAFF!** uses comics as a tool to interact with visitors in a creative, smart and multidisciplinary way, offering them a fun outlet to engage with culture.

The **PAFF!** museum is managed by **Associazione Vastagamma APS** and supported by **Friuli Venezia Giulia's Region Council** and **Pordenone's City Council**. Originally conceived as an experimental project, today it is a permanent institution that supports culture, encourages professional training, facilitates social exchange and promotes the area, thanks to its originality and an ability to engage with very distinct areas and themes including art, science and social disciplines, through the unique nature of comics.

[Press area](#)

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