

Years of the Elephant

A very personal story about loss

'Het Jaar van de Olifant is both heartbreaking and touching; the story cuts like a knife through your soul and leaves no normal person untouched. Sadly.'

Flemish newspaper De Standaard

'Het Jaar van de Olifant has a very authentic feel to it. However, Linthout has put not only his heart and soul into the story, but also some surprising graphic innovations.'

Flemish magazine Focus Knack



author

Willy Linthout

original title

Het Jaar van de Olifant

rights

Willy Linthout

about

suicide, grief, father and son

pages

8 volumes of approx. 20 pp.

rights sold

English (Ponent Mon)

Spanish (Ponent Mon)

prizes

Dutch Stripschapspenning award for best literary graphic novel 2007

Flemish Community Cultural Award 2008

Bronzen Adhemar 2009

copies

over 4,500 copies sold

Years of the Elephant is a surreal and touching graphic novel about the emotional void and confusion created for father Karel when his son Wannes commits suicide. *Years of the Elephant* shows the brutal and insidious way in which such an act of despair can tear apart the lives of those who are left behind.



The central character is Karel, a man in his fifties. He is married to Simone, has a regular job, and his only son Wannes is the apple of his eye. One day, the police come to his door with terrible news: Wannes has killed himself by jumping off a roof.

From the very first page, Linthout draws us into the difficult process that is awaiting Karel. Karel lurches between different emotions: loneliness, grief, incomprehension, and love, often losing sight of the difference between reality and fiction. No one can tell him how to deal with the death of his son. The world wants nothing to do with it. Because, of course, when it really comes down to it, each of us stands alone. Completely alone.

In eight parts, Willy Linthout describes the various tragic, beautiful, emotional events that Karel experiences as he goes through the process of mourning.

The story is autobiographical and the main character is, in fact, Linthout himself. A number of years ago, his 21-year-old son Sam decided to put an end to his life. *Years of the Elephant* is based on this tragic occurrence. The book was initially intended as therapy. Linthout's mourning process took the form of a comic and he used the story as an attempt to deal with the loss of his son. However, the originally modest project unleashed a flood of reactions and therapists now use the book as a recognised aid for coping with grief.

Years of the Elephant consists of rough, unpolished pencil drawings. This stylistic choice has made the series of comics an even more personal document. The atypical style is very Flemish, and yet universal.

Linthout has created a powerful, groundbreaking graphic novel that grabs the reader by the throat.

Willy Linthout (1953) is well known in Flanders and the Netherlands as the illustrator of *Urbanus*, a series about the crazy, fictional adventures of a famous comedian of



the same name. The *Urbanus* series now includes over 130 stories and millions of books have been sold. Willy Linthout has worked as a scriptwriter on series such as *Roboboy* and as an illustrator on titles including the very popular *Kiekeboe*, *De strip van 7* and the recently launched *Het Laatste Station*. Humour and comedic situations feature prominently in his work. The contrast with *Years of the Elephant* could hardly be greater, even though Linthout also uses humour as one way of processing the terrible events.

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