

= Willy Vandersteen =

Willy Vandersteen ( 15 February 1913 ? 28 August 1990 ) was a Belgian creator of comic books . In a career spanning 50 years , he created a large studio and published more than 1 @, @ 000 comic albums in over 25 series , selling more than 200 million copies worldwide .

Considered together with Marc Sleen the founding father of Flemish comics , he is mainly popular in Belgium , the Netherlands and Germany . Hergé called him " The Brueghel of the comic strip " , while the creation of his own studio and the mass production and commercialization of his work turned him into " the Walt Disney of the Low Countries " .

Vandersteen is best known for Suske en Wiske ( published in English as Spike and Suzy , Luke and Lucy , Willy and Wanda or Bob and Bobette ) , which in 2008 sold 3 @. @ 5 million books . His other major series are De Rode Ridder with over 200 albums and Bessy ) with almost 1 @, @ 000 albums published in Germany .

= = Biography = =

= = = 1913 ? 1939 = = =

Willebrord Jan Frans Maria Vandersteen was born in Antwerp in 1913 . His family lived in the Seefhoek , a poor quarter of the city , where his father Francis Vandersteen worked as a decorator and stone sculptor . His studio lay next to a printer that produced De Kindervriend , one of the first weekly youth magazines in Flanders . Willy Vandersteen , only four years old , read the new magazine there every week , including Blutske , an early comic strip . His mother Anna Gerard was more interested in ballet and singing . One of her favourites , Wiske Ghijs , may well have been the inspiration for the name " Wiske " he gave to one of the main characters in his main series " Spike and Suzy " .

Vandersteen was creatively active from his youth . He drew pictures with crayons on sidewalks , and invented stories for his friends about knights and legends . He even convinced his young friends to buy him crayons so he could depict the local cycling championship . At school as well , he was more interested in telling stories and learning about art than anything else . His best memory of these schooldays is of a teacher who introduced him to the works of Pieter Brueghel . Outside school , he spent most of his time with comic magazines and adventure books by Jules Verne or books about Nick Carter and Buffalo Bill . At 13 , he enrolled at the Academie voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp to study sculpture , and two years later he started working as sculptor and decorator , just like his father .

The same year , the family moved to Deurne , a suburb of Antwerp , where he came in contact with nature and with scouting , which both had a profound impact on his character and his later work . With the scouts , he became the troop reporter , writing down heavily illustrated reports on their outings and adventures , in a similar vein as what Hergé did in his scouting period . Through the scouts , he also came into contact with Le Boy @-@ Scout Belge , the Walloon scouting magazine where Hergé made Totor , his first published comic . Vandersteen made a few sequels to these adventures for his friends as amusement , which are the earliest preserved comics he made . He continued to follow the work of Hergé later on . Meanwhile , Vandersteen combined his studies at the Academy with his work in his father 's workshop until 1935 , when the market for stone decorations for houses collapsed .

In between some odd jobs , Vandersteen became an avid sporter , from gymnastics over cycling to wrestling . His chances improved in 1936 when he was hired as a decorator for the shop and the display windows of L 'Innovation , a Belgian chain of supermarkets . In the same year , he met Paula Van Den Branden , whom he married on 9 October 1937 . After living in Antwerp for two years and having a daughter , Helena , in 1938 , the first of their four children , the couple moved to the more rural Schilde in 1939 .

While doing research for his decorations , he read in an American magazine the article Comics in

your Life . Fascinated , Vandersteen searched for more information on the subject . He rediscovered Hergé with The Adventures of Tintin in Le Petit Vingtième , but also the realistic work of Hal Foster in Prince Valiant . But it took a few more years before this fascination translated into steady publication of his own comics . Meanwhile , his first published drawings appeared in Entre Nous , the internal magazine of L 'Innovation .

= = = 1940 ? 1944 = = =

In March 1940 , two months before the start of World War II in Belgium , Bob , his second child , was born . When the first tribulations of the war were over , Vandersteen could restart his work at L 'Innovation . From November 1940 until August 1942 , he created his first published comic , Kitty Inno , for the company , consisting of short , simple gags . When the German occupier forbade the publication of American and British comics in the Belgian newspapers and magazines , opportunities arose for local people . On 19 March 1941 , the first comic strip of Tor de holbewoner ( Tor the troglodyte ) appeared in the newspaper De Dag . It continued until January 1942 . Already on 26 March 1941 it was joined by De lollige avonturen van Pudifar ( The funny adventures of Pudifar ) , a weekly comic strip about a cat . This was in May of the same year replaced by Barabijtje , another comic about a cat , which ended in October 1941 .

In 1942 , Vandersteen quit his job at L 'Innovation and started working at the Landbouw- en Voedingscorporatie ( a government organisation for the agricultural sector ) , where he illustrated some magazines . In those years , the family Vandersteen moved , this time to Wilrijk , another suburb of Antwerp .

That same year , he illustrated the pro @-@ occupation book Zóó zag Brussel de Dietsche Militanten under the pen name Kaproen . In the 1970s Willy denied rumors , based on drawing style , that he had been the real artist behind Kaproen , but in 2010 these allegations were confirmed after an investigation demanded by his own family . Unlike his partners , Vandersteen was later not persecuted for his part in publishing the antisemitic drawings , which were considered collaboration with the Nazis .

At the Corporatie , Vandersteen met a colleague whose wife worked at Bravo , a weekly Flemish comics magazine that appeared since 1936 and had a French @-@ language version since 1940 . Due to the war conditions , they were desperately in need of local artists to replace the American comics they used to publish . Led by established Walloon illustrator Jean Dratz , a young team was gathered , with artists like Edgar P. Jacobs and Jacques Laudy . Vandersteen joined in 1943 , and here his comics career really took off . First he created Tori , a reprise of the prehistoric Tor , and a few weeks later his new comic Simbat de Zeerover ( Simbat the Sailor ) was published on the cover and in colour , a first for Vandersteen .

For the Antwerp publisher Ons Volk , he created three comics , published as books without a prepublication in a newspaper or magazine . Piwo , about the adventures of a wooden horse , became his first comic album in 1943 , and was followed by two sequels in 1944 and 1946 . Those comics were also published in French . For the same editor , he illustrated 11 children books . In the same years , he also created the cover illustration for a number of novels from other publishers . In 1944 , he also started working for two more magazines , De Rakker and De Illustratie , where he created some comics and made numerous illustrations . To help him with all this work , his wife Paula inked many of his pencil drawings in these years .

= = = 1944 ? 1949 = = =

After the liberation of Belgium in September 1944 , there was a boom of new magazines for the youth , both in French and Dutch . Many of those tried to mix American comics with local artists . Vandersteen worked in these early years for countless publications . He continued publishing in Bravo , with the medieval gags of Lancelot . Having moved to the suburbs of Brussels to avoid the bombardments of Antwerp , he came into contact with some French language editors . French language magazines he contributed to included Franc Jeu , Perce @-@ Neige , and Le Petit Monde

. Two of the comics he created for Franc Jeu were also published in albums . By 1947 , all these magazines had disappeared .

Defining for his career was the invitation he got in 1944 from the people of Standaard Boekhandel , a chain of libraries who were also active as publishers . They were interested in his work and wanted to publish some books . Vandersteen presented them with the first designs for a daily comic strip , but they put that on hold and first ordered four juvenile books from Vandersteen . These were published in 1945 and 1946 in Dutch and French ( by Casterman ) .

On 30 March 1945 , the daily comic strip Rikki en Wiske started to appear in the newspaper De Nieuwe Standaard , after a positive review by the young illustrator Marc Sleen . It was an immediate success , and the first story ran uninterrupted until 15 December 1945 . Vandersteen though was disappointed to see the editor had renamed the strip Rikki en Wiske instead of his suggestion Suske en Wiske , and also felt that Rikki too closely resembled Tintin .

The next story , Rikki disappeared , and the long series of adventures of Suske en Wiske began with the story Op het eiland Amoras , achieving success beyond the author 's expectations . The first album appeared in 1946 . This story introduced most of the recurring figures and means of transport through space and time , and set the framework for the complete series . Already in 1946 , it was also published in the Dutch newspaper De Stem .

On 22 December 1945 , three days after the start of Suske en Wiske op het eiland Amoras , appeared the first page of De Familie Snoek ( The Family Snoek ) , a weekly series of gags revolving around a contemporary Flemish family . It lasted for 11 albums .

Apart from these two long lasting newspaper comic strips , Vandersteen made a number of other comics in these years . Most important was his work for Ons Volkske , the youth supplement of the weekly magazine Ons Volk , which from the end of 1945 on became an independent comic magazine . Marc Sleen was editor @-@ in @-@ chief and filled most pages together with Vandersteen . Vandersteen created a number of realistic stories of about 20 pages each , where he developed his own style after starting very much as a follower of Harold Foster . In his usual more caricatural style , he created in August 1946 the recurring gagstrip De Vrolijke Bengels ( The Happy Rascals ) . More adult comics appeared in the magazine Ons Volk .

In 1947 , two publishers started a legal battle for the right to the names of the newspapers and magazines . Vandersteen , caught in the middle , worked a while for both , but eventually switched to the new owners of De Standaard . He continued to work for Ons Volkske , which was now renamed ' t Kapoentje for a few more months . The publishers of De Standaard also continued the album series of Suske en Wiske , which started modestly with one album in 1946 and one in 1947 . By 1947 , seven albums were available , and the first ones were already reprinted . The first albums of De Familie Snoek had also appeared by then . Supported by large publicity campaigns , they sold very well : the first Snoek album was in its third impression by 1948 . The popularity of Vandersteen , and the impact comics had in Flanders , is attested by the 25 @,@ 000 readers who switched to the Standaard at the same time as Vandersteen did .

Vandersteen worked the rest of his life for De Standaard , but contributed also to the other publications of the publisher : Ons Volkske , a new newspaper supplement continuing the name of the older magazine , and Het Nieuwsblad , the more popular newspaper of the group . Vandersteen made illustrations and comics when needed . For Ons Volk , which also reappeared , he made realistic stories until 1951 .

Vandersteen was now at the height of his productivity as a solo artist . Apart from his work for De Standaard and Het Nieuwsblad , he contributed to Ons Volk and Ons Volkske , he made a special Suske en Wiske story for het Parochieblad ( a weekly Christian newspaper ) , and he started to contribute to Kuifje journal ( Tintin magazine ) that published Hergé . The magazine was very popular in Wallonia , but struggled in Flanders , where The Adventures of Tintin was not yet as well known . A popular Flemish author would give the sales a boost , while it could mean the breakthrough on the French language market for Vandersteen . However , Hergé , as editor @-@ in @-@ chief , set a very high quality standard for his magazine , and Vandersteen had to improve and stylize his drawings , and had to remove the more Flemish , popular aspects of his comics . Vandersteen obliged , and the stories of Suske en Wiske he created for Kuifje are now considered

the best of his career , with the first one , Het Spaanse Spook ( The Spanish Ghost ) , which started on 16 September 1948 , as his masterpiece . It was because of his work for Kuifje that Hergé nicknamed Vandersteen " The Brueghel of the Comic Strip " .

== 1950s ==

Vandersteen could no longer handle the work load on his own . In 1949 , he hired his first collaborator , François @-@ Joseph Herman . Herman stayed with Vandersteen only three years , but his tenure was the start of the large Studio Vandersteen , which has continued the series . He was followed by Karel Boumans in 1952 , who was an anonymous contributor until 1959 . He worked mainly for De grappen van Lambik , a Suske en Wiske spin @-@ off Vandersteen created for the weekly newspaper De Bond , which ran from 24 January 1954 on . But he also inked many Suske en Wiske comics , including those in Tintin . Vandersteen devoted himself more and more towards the storytelling and the initial pencil drawing , which he considered the artistic process , while the inking was more of a craft .

The years from 1949 to 1953 are often considered the highlight of Vandersteen 's career , when he combined large production with consistent high quality in his stories , the jokes , the many characters , and the graphical aspects , in which the charming quirkiness of the early years was balanced with the more rigorous ligne claire of Hergé . Many of these stories were loosely based on popular classics , ranging from Alexandre Dumas over Buffalo Bill to Richard Wagner 's Der Ring des Nibelungen , with as culmination his comic in two parts of the legend of Till Eulenspiegel , made for Kuifje .

Vandersteen spent a lot more time at documentation from this point on . While the early comics were mostly filled by his imagination and visited imaginary countries or stayed close to home , he now started travelling to visit locations for new comics . Visits to Bruges , Monaco and Venice were the inspiration for three stories in Kuifje

In 1953 , when Tijn Uilenspiegel was finished , Vandersteen created a new comical strip for Kuifje . ' t Prinske told the humorous adventures of a young prince in a fictional country . It lasted until 1959 and ran for some 300 comics .

In 1951 , Vandersteen encountered Karel Verschuere , a young unemployed artist . Vandersteen hired him , and Verschuere soon became his mayor artist for the realistic series . His first series was Judi , a retelling of the Old Testament in four albums , which first appeared in Ons Volkske . The series was not very successful , and Verschuere later finished a fifth part on his own . Verschuere also contributed to the second part of Tijn Uilenspiegel , just like Bob de Moor and Tibet did , but his main contribution to the output of Vandersteen was his work on Bessy , a Western series inspired by the success of Lassie , which started in 1952 in the Walloon newspaper La Libre Belgique . The series appeared under the pseudonym WiRel , a combination of Willy and Karel , indicating the importance of Verschuere 's work . He continued working with Vandersteen until 1967 , helping with many of the realistic series Vandersteen created in these years , including Karl May , Biggles and especially De Rode Ridder .

The success of Bessy , which from 1953 on also appeared in Dutch , led to the creation of the Studio Vandersteen , acknowledging , albeit mostly anonymously , that many of the comics were no longer made by Willy Vandersteen on his own . Together with the publications in Kuifje , it made Vandersteen a popular artist in Wallonia as well , and all Bessy and Suske en Wiske comics were published by Erasme in French .

== 1960s ==

In 1966 , Vandersteen finally moved back from Brussels , where he had lived at different locations since World War II , towards Antwerp , and more precisely Kalmthout , a rural village to the north of Antwerp . There , next to his villa , he created the location for his main Studio .

The Bessy comics were also published in Felix , a German comic magazine by Bastei Verlag . From 1965 on , they wanted to publish a complete new story every month , a rhythm they increased

to twice a month in 1966 . Unable to produce so fast , Vandersteen had to expand his Studio considerably . Led by Karel Verschuere , a team of some ten young artists mass @-@ produced the comics , which were of considerable lower quality . The most important of these artists were Frank Sels and Edgar Gastmans , while many stories were produced by Daniël Janssens . When in late 1967 Verschuere quit , and at the same time Bastei increased the rhythm again , now to one complete comic a week , the Studio was disbanded and Sels and Gastmans started to work on a free lance basis . The next year , they decided to go behind Vandersteen 's back and to sell directly to the Germans . Vandersteen then had to reorganize the Bessy Studio and hired Jeff Broeckx . The Studio continued until 1985 , with artists like Patrick van Lierde , Ronald Van Riet , Eugene Goossens , and Walter Laureyssens . It produced more than 900 Bessy @-@ comics .

Bastei Verlag , enamoured by the success of Bessy , asked Vandersteen to provide a second weekly series . With the popularity of superheroes , especially Batman , in Belgium and Germany in these years , Vandersteen proposed a spinoff series of Suske en Wiske , based on Jerom , the strongman of the series . Called Wastl in German , 173 stories were produced between 1968 and 1972 , with a publication that reached 150 @,@ 000 copies at its summit . The best of these stories were published in Dutch as well , just like it was done with the later Bessy 's , but the weakness of the stories ended the series after only four years .

The main artists in the Studio Vandersteen in the 1960s and later were Karel Verschuere , Frank Sels , Eduard De Rop , Eugene Goossens , Karel Biddeloo and Paul Geerts . Eduard De Rop joined the Studio in 1959 , after Karel Boumans departed , and stayed for over thirty years . He worked mostly on minor series like Jerom and Pats , but contributed to almost all series , including Suske en Wiske . One of his main contributions was the early adventures of De Rode Ridder . De Rode Ridder was in 1946 created by writer Leopold Vermeiren , and published in books since 1954 , with illustrations by Karel Verschuere . The success led to the creation of a comics series as well , with as main contributors Verschuere , Eduard De Rop , and Vandersteen 's son Bob . De Rode Ridder became the third main success story of Vandersteen , and is now the longest running series behind Suske en Wiske . Karel Verschuere was replaced by Frank Sels in 1963 .

Karel Verschuere also started the series Karl May , based on the famous books , in 1962 . The contributions of Vandersteen to this and similar series like Biggles was minimal and consisted mainly of supervision and some first sketches . Frank Sels continued the series between 1963 and 1966 .

Vandersteen had to deliver a number of pages each week for the newspaper supplement Pats , increased to 16 pages in 1965 . Eduard De Rop revived De Familie Snoek with a new series of gags for a few years , and other series like Karl May were published here as well . The place of Karl May in the main newspaper was taken by Biggles , yet another realistic series started by Verschuere in 1965 .

When Frank Sels left the Studio in 1967 , Karel Biddeloo took over most of the realistic series of Vandersteen . He made Karl May from 1967 until 1969 , when the Bessy @-@ studio took over the job . He also took over Biggles , which ended in 1969 , when it was replaced by the jungle series Safari , inspired by Daktari . At the start of the series , Vandersteen did most of the creative work , but after a few albums he left most of the work to Biddeloo . The series ended in 1974 . Biddeloo then devoted most of his time to De Rode Ridder , where he started inking the stories by Vandersteen in 1967 and took completely over in 1969 , when Vandersteen lost his interest . He continued working on it until his death in 2004 .

= = = 1970s = = =

Paul Geerts joined the Studio in 1968 , where he at first worked as an artist on the German Jerom comics . Already in 1969 , he replaced De Rop as the main inker for Suske en Wiske . Geerts also drew Vandersteens attention when he proposed a few scenario 's for Jerom , and in 1971 he made his first story for Suske en Wiske . From 1972 on , he became the main creator of the flagship series Suske en Wiske , which he continued until the late 1990s . De Rop and Goossens again became the main inkers , with Geerts responsible for the stories and the pencil art . In these years , Suske

en Wiske reached its peak popularity , and the older stories now were republished in colours in the main series . In 1975 and 1976 , the Dutch television broadcast six puppet movies with new Suske en Wiske stories . They were very successful and sales of new albums reached over 200 @, @ 000 copies . The merchandising business boomed as well , and commercial comics were one of the main new jobs for the Studio .

The Studio was mainly established with the artists that joined in the 1960s , but two new artists were Erik De Rop and Robert Merhottein , who became the only artist to leave Studio Vandersteen and start his own successful series .

Vandersteen , liberated of the work on the daily comic , started on a comic series based on one of the novels he had read as a youth : Robert en Bertrand , the story of two Flemish tramps at the fin de siècle . The series debuted in De Standaard in 1972 . The series was the first in a long time to renew the enthusiasm of Vandersteen , and the graphical quality and the stories were a lot better than most of the Studio production of the time .

For the newspaper supplement Pats , he also created the title series in 1974 , but he left most of the work to Merhottein . The series changed its name to Tits in 1977 after a lawsuit , and disappeared in 1986 .

In 1976 , Vandersteen 's wife Paula died . He remarried on 25 June 1977 with Anne @-@ Marie Vankerkhoven . Vandersteen , now a celebrated artist with complete TV shows made about him , both in the Netherlands and in Belgium , continued to work on his comics . The same year 1977 gave him a coveted Alfred award from the Angoulême International Comics Festival for the best scenario , for the Robert en Bertrand story De stakingbreker ( The Strike Breaker ) , while in 1978 a Suske en Wiske statue was unveiled in the Antwerp Zoo .

= = = 1980s = = =

The next decade was one of mixed successes . Some of the minor or less successful series ended : Robert en Bertrand , a critical but never a commercial success , folded in 1993 , 8 years after Vandersteen had stopped writing the stories . Jerom and Bessy both were restyled but disappeared a few years later in 1988 and 1993 . Pats , later renamed Tits , already disappeared in 1986 .

Suske en Wiske meanwhile was a steady success , and although the sales have dropped from the peaks of the 1970s continues to be one of the most popular Flemish comics .

Willy Vandersteen created one last new series in 1985 : De Geuzen , a historical , humoristic comic set in Flanders in the sixteenth century . Similar in theme to the thirty years older Tiji Uilenspiegel , the comic combined many of Vandersteen 's passions , including the art of Pieter Brueghel the Elder . It contained his most mature , developed characters , compared to the often one @-@ dimensional characters of his earlier series , and reached a graphical level that approached his work for Kuifje . The comics were not prepublished and were mostly created by Vandersteen alone , which ensured the quality but also decreased the publication rhythm . Only ten albums appeared , and the series ended with the death of Vandersteen .

= = = Death = = =

Willy Vandersteen died on 28 August 1990 , weakened by a long disease . He continued working until shortly before his death , and his Studio still continues , with Suske en Wiske and De Rode Ridder as main series .

= = Themes and influences in the work of Vandersteen = =

Willy Vandersteen used a wild variety of themes and influences in his work from early on . He made fairytales , historic series , westerns , but also science fiction and many contemporary comics . While some series like De Familie Snoek and Bessy stuck very close to their origin ( an everyday Flemish contemporary family for the former , and a pioneer family in the American Old West in the latter ) , others were more loose . De Rode Ridder , the story of a medieval knight , wandered from

Arthurian tales over the crusades until the explorations of the fifteenth and sixteenth century , thereby spanning some ten centuries , and later ( when Vandersteen was less involved in the series ) brought in many elements of sword and sorcery and fantasy .

Suske and Wiske is a contemporary series , but many stories used the plot device of time travelling , either by a machine or by some poetic device . This enabled stories to evolve in a myriad of periods , often again in the Middle Ages though . Furthermore , did Vandersteen use local legends of Antwerp and Limburg , parodies of American superhero series like Batman , science fiction , and popular TV series . Vandersteen also got inspiration from the different long journeys he made , like his long trip to the Far East in 1959 . Some of the earliest realistic comics of Willy Vandersteen also clearly show the strong influence he has had from American comics like Prince Valiant and Tarzan , but he later developed his own distinctive style .

= = International success = =

Vandersteen always strived to have success beyond Flanders , and reduced the typically Flemish character of his comics soon after his debut . He already worked and published in French during the War , and already in the 1940s he expanded the reach of Suske en Wiske to the Netherlands with some newspaper publications , and to Wallonia and France through the publication in Tintin magazine . All Suske en Wiske albums , and many albums of other series like De Familie Snoek , were also published in French by Erasme . Bessy was even first created for a Walloon newspaper , before being translated in Dutch . By 1978 , an estimated 80 million Suske en Wiske albums had been sold in Dutch alone .

Other countries and languages followed soon . The first German translations appeared in 1954 , and in the 1960s Bessy and to a lesser extent Jerom were an enormous success , with combined over a 1000 weekly comics with a circulation of some 200 @, @ 000 copies . Later in the 1950s followed publications in Chile and Portugal , and Spain followed in the 1960s . In the following years , Vandersteen 's comics and especially Suske en Wiske are published in dozens of languages , but in most cases only one or a few albums are translated . More than 10 albums are published in the United States , and in Sweden 69 albums are published , accompanied by a lot of merchandising . The Finnish series is a big success as well .

= = Merchandising = =

In the 1950s started the merchandising around Suske en Wiske . Vandersteen , always a businessman as well as an artist , was enthusiastic when he got the proposal to make a puppet show of the series . Already in 1947 , the first puppets were for sale . They were followed by a series of 5 hand puppets in 1957 and a Jerom @-@ game in 1960 . In 1955 , two years after the start of television in Flanders , an animated adventure of Suske en Wiske was broadcast every Saturday afternoon . Other merchandising ranged from Suske en Wiske drinking glasses in 1954 to 5 large handpainted ceramic statues of the main heroes in 1952 . Coloring books , calendars , puzzles , ... followed soon. Two records were released by Decca in 1956 . Vandersteen also created a number of commercial comics with Suske en Wiske , starting with a touristic comic for the province of Antwerp in 1957 .

= = Awards and recognition = =

1959 : Honorary citizen of the community Deurne near Antwerp

1977 : Angoulême International Comics Festival prize for Best Foreign Author , France

2007 : Prestige award at the Prix Saint @-@ Michel in Brussels

Vandersteen is also honorary citizen of Kalmthout . A statue of Vandersteen is located on Willy Vandersteen Square .

According to UNESCO 's Index Translationum , Vandersteen is the sixth most often translated Dutch language author , after Anne Frank , Dick Bruna , Cees Nooteboom , Guido van Genechten ,

and Phil Bosmans and before such famous authors as Janwillem van de Wetering , Harry Mulisch , Hugo Claus , and Johan Huizinga .