

CZELH COMICS

AT
LICAF 21



CZECH IT OUT!

FROM CAPITALISTIC KITSCH TO CULTURAL ACCLAIM

By Paul Gravett

Against the odds through their first century, all those creators, publishers, and readers with a passion for comics have managed to make them persist and eventually prosper in the Czech Republic, formerly Czechoslovakia, despite sometimes extreme disapproval and difficulties. This year the Lakes International Comic Art Festival continues to highlight the creativity of the current Czech scene by inviting a further five vibrant voices and exhibiting their splendid original artworks. They are among the latest adding to the country's complex, sometimes erratic evolution of the medium.

The very first Czech creator whose comics I was introduced to was Kája Saudek (1935-2015), the twin brother of the renowned photographer Jan Saudek. In the pre-internet era, while co-editing *Escape Magazine* (1983-89), I became pals with Daniel Kummerman in Prague, who explained how difficult it had been at times for Saudek to publish. Strongly influenced by Sixties Marvel comics and adult undergrounds, his often wild, edgy comics and graphics were hugely popular in the Sixties,

but went on to be banned by the Communist regime for being 'injurious capitalistic kitsch'. Daniel kindly sent me a copy of Saudek's new 24-page comic *Arnal and the Two Dragon's Teeth* (1988) and explained how since 1979 Saudek had sidestepped the communist censors by publishing his comics in the semi-legal, members-only bulletin of a Czech society devoted to speleology or pot-holing. As long as these stories included something about cave-exploring, he could enjoy some measure of freedom. So his were truly 'underground' comix, returning the artform to those caves where it all began!

Over time, Saudek's remarkable oeuvre would be reappraised and recognised. I luckily caught a dazzling retrospective of it in 2019 at The Dancing House in Prague. Fittingly, the Czech Award for the best comic of the year, the 'Muriel', is named after his epic *Muriel and the Angels* (1967-69), and among LICAF's guests is last year's Muriel winner, Štěpánka Jislová. As she and Lucie Lomová, Kateřina Čupová, Marek Rubec, and Václav Šlajch brilliantly illustrate, Czech comics, especially as ambitious, authorial graphic novels, are winning growing acclaim and audiences at home and abroad. Add to their profession's creative talents, the drive and expertise of historians and activists like Tomáš Prokůpek and Pavel Kořínek, as well as the Czech Literary Centre's ongoing commitment, and comics in the Czech Republic look set for a formidable second century to come!



KATEŘINA ČUPOVÁ

Noteworthy graphic novel – *R. U. R.* (2020)

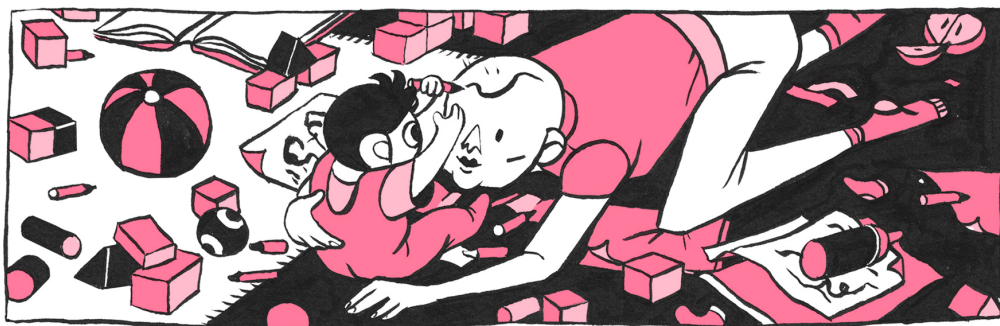
Karel Čapek's play *R. U. R.* or *Rossum's Universal Robots*, famous for giving us the word robot, was written in 1920. Kateřina Čupová stays true to Čapek's story and transfers the original stage settings into comic bubbles. We find ourselves on the island where Rossum has his factory for building robots. The artificial beings, at first sight indistinguishable from humans, are the creators' dreams come true. Rossum, the factory founder, wanted to 'scientifically dethrone God' and 'destroy the slavery of labour' for future generations. The robots, however, become infected with human resentment and rebel against their makers. Though this science-fiction social dystopia may appear somewhat simplistic to today's readers, this adaptation provides it with new energy. The rights to the graphic novel have been sold to France, Italy, South Korea, Spain, and Turkey.

Follow Kateřina

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📌 chechula.tumblr.com/



I was trying to get used to the idea that I would be bald for the rest of my life.



ŠTĚPÁNKA JISLOVÁ




Noteworthy graphic novel – *Hairless* (2020)

In 2020, Štěpánka Jislová (together with Tereza Drahoňovská) published the graphic memoir *Hairless*, based on Drahoňovská's script about her own experiences with the autoimmune disease alopecia. This autobiographical comics tells the story of a girl who has recently graduated from university when her hair starts falling out for no apparent reason, eventually culminating in her losing all of her body hair. The narrator openly describes her experiences from the initial phase of horror at the first symptoms, through depression and a dramatic loss of self-confidence, to a gradual reconciliation with reality and the discovery of the positive aspects of looking at the world and values in life from a different perspective. To portray this powerful personal narrative, Štěpánka Jislová chose an intelligently simplified drawing style which gives a convincing visual form to the script and is excellent at communicating the emotions of the main character.

Follow Štěpánka

 jislova.com

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 [facebook.com/stepanka.jislova.art](https://www.facebook.com/stepanka.jislova.art)



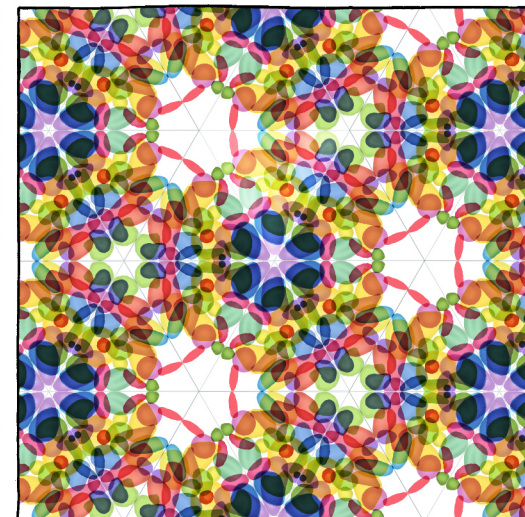
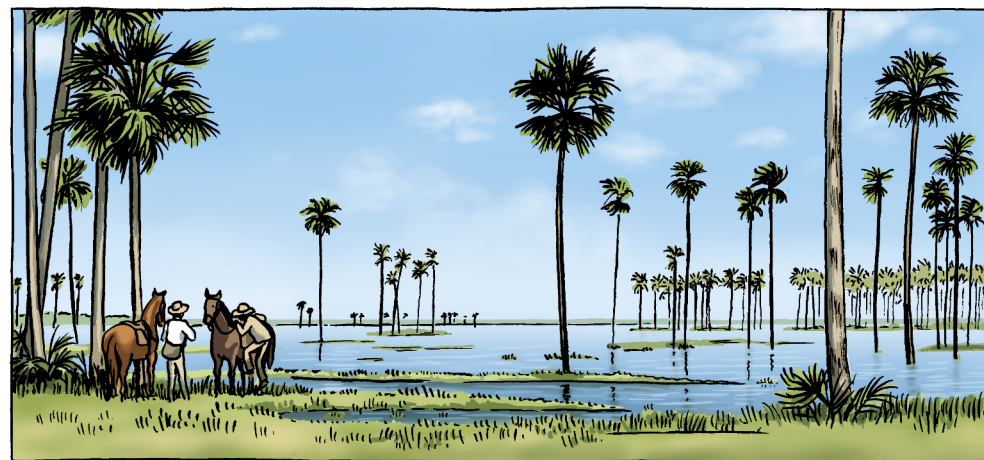
LUCIE LOMOVÁ

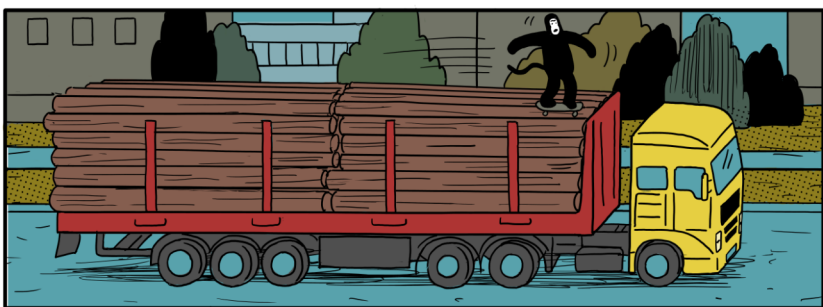
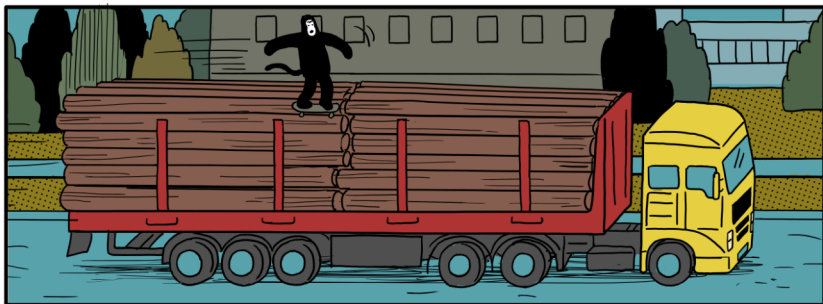
Noteworthy graphic novel – *Savages* (2011)

The graphic novel *Savages*, constructed around the memoirs of the Czech adventurer Alberto Vojtěch Frič, tells a remarkable story based on real events about how the famous explorer brought back a Chamacoco Indian named Cherwuisch from his travels around South America to Prague in 1908. Three years of preparation and work on the graphic novel paid off in the precisely captured atmosphere of the early 20th century and the final years of pre-war Austria-Hungary, and in a convincing, sophisticated, full-colour presentation over 150 pages. By presenting the various amusing and unsettling trials and tribulations of this disparate pair, the work thematizes issues of ethnocentrism, otherness, the (apparent) opposites of 'civilization' and 'savagery', as well as the possibilities and limits of inter-cultural understanding. It was very well received and has also been published in French, German, and Polish.

Follow Lucie

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🌐 [behance.net/LucieLomova](https://www.behance.net/LucieLomova)





MAREK RUBEC



Noteworthy graphic novel – *Jarmil* (2018)

After a series of diverse short stories, Marek Rubec created the recurring character of *Jarmil*, and following a period of artistic experimentation he is currently enjoying the opportunity to concentrate on developing one specific world and the central character who operates within it. Jarmil is an ape living among people, who are usually less alarmed by his hairy appearance than they are by his reluctance to adhere to the written and unwritten rules of civilization. In order to depict Jarmil's spontaneous behaviour, the author employs the form of a wordless comics, a cleverly simplified cartoon line and a minimalist use of colour. As a result, his ape hero has the potential to reach a very wide audience: Jarmil's adventures work equally well in children's magazines and comics anthologies for adults.

Follow Marek

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🌐 marekrubec.wixsite.com/marekrubec/comics



VÁCLAV ŠLAJCH

Noteworthy graphic novel – *Štefánik* (2021)

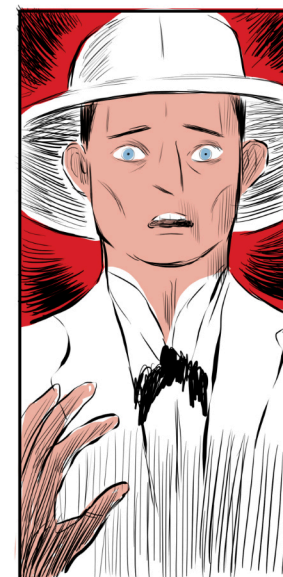
A graphic novel about a man with many faces. But which was the real one? All of them, or none of them? A man of grand gestures and petty foibles. Entertaining, sociable, lonely, ambitious, misunderstood. A careerist, seducer, show-off, and Don Quixote. A story about the masks we wear and the (im)possibility of truly knowing others.

Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919) was a politician, general, astronomer, citizen of the world and, above all, an adventurer. He was perhaps the most unique figure in modern Czechoslovak history. Several years after his untimely death, the sculptor Bohumil Kafka set out on the trail of Štefánik. He was searching for who Štefánik really was – in the eyes of his family, friends, colleagues, as well as lovers. However, each meeting contradicts the previous image of a figure who Kafka is supposed to immortalize in a monumental sculpture.

The graphic novel *Štefánik* was written by Gabriela Kyselová & Michal Baláž and illustrated by Václav Šlajch.

Follow Václav

 vaclavslajch.blogspot.com
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HERE AND NOW, AN EXHIBITION OF CZECH COMICS

The exhibition *Here and Now – Contemporary Czech Comics* brings together **ten talented comics artists** who are part of the contemporary comics scene. It offers information about the diversity, multiformity, and inventiveness of modern Czech comics, the range in terms of its expression and genre, and the impressive way it has managed over recent years to communicate with the public both in the Czech Republic and abroad. The boom in Czech comics is happening here and now and through this eponymous exhibition visitors can at least become indirectly involved.

The exhibition *Here and Now*, a Czech Centres' project, is being held at the **Brewery Arts Centre**, right at the heart of the festival. **On Sunday at 2 PM**, you can be guided through the exhibition by one of the curators, Pavel Kořínek.

EVENTS FEATURING CZECH ARTISTS

THE ART OF CREATION – LIVE DRAWING

SATURDAY 16 OCT., 11.45 AM – 12.45 PM, THEATRE, BREWERY ARTS CENTRE

Czech artist Lucie Lomová, alongside artists Manuele Fior, Jul Maroh, and Boulet, will take part in an entertaining live drawing session!

CZECH IT OUT! AN EXTRAVAGANZA OF COMIC ART FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC

SATURDAY 16 OCT., 3.30 PM – 5 PM, WAREHOUSE, BREWERY ARTS CENTRE, KENDAL

With a mix of discussion and presentations on Czech comic art, Paul Gravett will introduce you to five of the best Czech artists and their fascinating body of work.

MEET THE RESIDENTS

SUNDAY 17 OCT., 11.30 AM, WAREHOUSE, BREWERY ARTS CENTRE

Czech artists Kateřina Čupová and Štěpánka Jislová, French artist Marine des Mazery, and British artist Sayra Begum will present some of the work created during their residency stays in Kendal and Prague.

The Czech focus at LICAF 21 is organised and supported by the Czech Literary Centre, a part of the Moravian Library.



Cover illustration by Václav Šlajch
Graphic design by Alexandra Zamouřilová
Edited by Jan Zikmund and Pavel Kořínek
Published by the Czech Literary Centre & Moravian Library

2021

