



# Posy Simmonds Drawing literature

## EXHIBITION

November 22nd, 2023 - April 1st, 2024

Bibliothèque publique d'information • Level 2



© Bpi / Posy Simmonds 2023

Bibliothèque publique d'information /  
Centre Pompidou  
75197 Paris Cedex 04

### Press contact

Sylvie Chabroux

06 64 25 48 42

[sylvie@chabroux.com](mailto:sylvie@chabroux.com)

Bpi Communication Department

Julie Védie

01 44 78 45 06


[contact.communication@bpi.fr](mailto:contact.communication@bpi.fr)


[www.bpi.fr](http://www.bpi.fr)

[pro.bpi.fr](http://pro.bpi.fr)

[balises.bpi.fr](http://balises.bpi.fr)

 @bpi.pompidou

 @Bpi\_Pompidou

 @bpi\_pompidou

### Access to the Library

Via place Georges-Pompidou  
75004 Paris

### Free entrance

Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and  
Fridays

12-10PM

Saturdays, Sundays and Public holidays

10AM-10PM

Closed on Tuesdays

The Bibliothèque publique d'information (Bpi) is presenting a new exhibition dedicated to the British graphic novelist and press cartoonist Posy Simmonds, starting this autumn.

This retrospective was developed in close collaboration with Posy Simmonds. It is divided into five sections and brings together almost 130 original works, unpublished drawings, sketches, sketchbooks commented by the artist, and film extracts. It pays tribute to the richness and diversity of her career, from press cartoons to graphic novels and children's books.

Visitors will be able to discover a broad overview of the work of Posy Simmonds:

- her beginnings, childhood drawings and student works, as well as her literary influences;
- her work as a press cartoonist for the prestigious British daily newspaper *The Guardian*, in which Posy Simmonds has sketched with humour the English cultured society for several decades. She uses archetypal characters, some of whom became the heroines of her graphic novels;
- her children's books — modern and bold tales;
- her graphic novels, that brought Posy Simmonds to the attention of the general public: *Gemma Boverly* (1999), *Tamara Drewe* (2007) and *Cassandra Darke* (2018). She is considered a precursor of the genre.
- her many drawings on the literary and publishing world, her more recent works and her drawings linked to France.

Visitors will be able to explore the gift for observation, eye for detail, caustic view on the contemporary world and lifestyle, and taste for literature of the artist who enjoys "writing as much as drawing".

The exhibition [Posy Simmonds, drawing literature](#) was made in partnership with Denoël publishing house (Denoël Graphic collection), which has helped to bring Posy Simmonds' graphic novels to the attention of the French public since 2000, and with the invaluable help of **Paul Gravett**, scientific co-curator of the exhibition and a specialist in comics and in Posy Simmonds' work. The exhibition will be accompanied by a programme of events (meetings, workshops, tours, etc.).

Following its exhibitions dedicated to Gaston Lagaffe, Claire Brétécher, Riad Sattouf, Catherine Meurisse and Chris Ware, the Bpi is putting the spotlight on the complete work of an artist who has reinvented the genres of comics in the UK and around the world. This retrospective will be held in the library, a relevant and important venue for an artist who subtly blurs the boundaries between literature and drawing.

Information and programme (in progress): [www.bpi.fr/expo-posysimmonds](http://www.bpi.fr/expo-posysimmonds)

Press images: [www.bpi.fr/presse-posysimmonds](http://www.bpi.fr/presse-posysimmonds)

In partnership with Denoël Graphic



Cartoonmuseum Basel<sup>oo</sup>

## Three questions to Posy Simmonds

### « *I am still doing what I loved doing aged 9 - making comics* »

To prepare this retrospective, you had to delve into your archives and early work... How do you view your career today?

Going through the old portfolios, it seemed that I'd done a lot of work. Some of it, long forgotten, came as a surprise - did I really do that? Apart from the childhood drawings, there's a consistency in the work... a long series of deadlines. Sometimes leisurely deadlines, but more often tight ones. I can still recognise the panic in certain drawings.

I think I was lucky to have worked for a newspaper (*The Guardian*) which gave me the space and freedom to develop ideas. And I was also lucky to have a second phase in my career, when Gemma Boverly was published in French, giving my work an international readership.

Looking back through my archive, it's clear that I am still doing what I loved doing aged 9 - making comics.

« *Parfois, mes personnages évoluent d'eux-mêmes et refusent de suivre le scénario* »

Tell us about the drawing you created especially for the exhibition poster...

I wanted to show an assembly of characters, especially the ones from my graphic novels, who I lived with for long periods. They often invaded my dreams. At the top of the image, Janice (created in 1980) dances with the Most Handsome Man in the World (*True Love*); further down, Raymond Joubert [the baker in *Gemma Boverly*] gazes at Gemma Boverly and Cassandra Darke scowls at the world. The cats, Fred and Baker Cat, feature in books for children; the hens, who only had a tiny role in *Tamara Drewe*, are there because I have a general fondness for chickens.

In the books, the characters mostly went along with the plans I had for them, but sometimes they evolved on their own and refused to follow the storyline - Gemma Boverly turned out not to be suicidal and another demise had to be invented... and, at a late stage of the artwork, a cat needed to be re-named and become Fred.

« *Voir mon travail exposé à la Bpi, aux côtés de milliers de livres écrits dans une langue que j'aime... C'est un immense honneur.* »

A retrospective of your work, focused on your unique way of drawing literature, within a large Parisian public reading library (knowing that you are a Francophile) and an internationally renowned art and culture center... What inspires you about this project?

Whenever possible, my trips to Paris have included a visit to the Pompidou Centre... for the marvellous exhibitions and a wander through the permanent collection. But the bookshop was also an important part of the visit, because it was there in the 1980s, that I discovered French BD, its quality and enormous range.

Having worked for most of my career in the sphere of the British press, it has been wonderful to have become part of the wider world of BD. And to have my work exhibited in the Bibliothèque Pompidou, for it to be surrounded by thousands of books in a language I love... is a huge honour. I couldn't be more delighted.



## Main axes of the exhibition

*"I love writing as much as drawing"* Posy Simmonds says when asked about the perfect symbiosis between text and drawing that prevails in her graphic universe. Blending these two languages to create a unique one — that of comics —, in order to represent the world, is at the heart of Posy Simmonds' work.

This artist's originality serves as the common thread in the exhibition *Posy Simmonds, drawing literature*. It shows the many aspects of her work as well as the different strands of her artistic career, both in space and in time.



### Part 1 - BEGINNINGS: CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

The prologue to the exhibition presents a selection of Posy Simmonds' childhood and student drawings, particularly those made during the year she spent in Paris in the early 1960s. This part also shows her literary and artistic influences, and the first commissioned artworks that launched her career.



### Part 2 - A NEWSPAPER CARTOONIST

Posy Simmonds is a press cartoonist. Although she worked with other English-speaking newspapers and magazines, it was for *The Guardian* that, for decades, she sketched with great acuity the customs of her fellow human beings and the political life of her country, while bending to the constraints of a daily newspaper where the pace of work is often dictated by the news.

The weekly strips published on the woman's page presented the readers with a fresh, modern and feminist reflection on everyday life in British intellectual society. Her recurring characters, members of the Weber, Wright and Heep families, are an amusing satire of the newspaper's readers. Their adventures and moods provide a chronicle of Britain's contemporary transformations.



### Part 3 - MODERN FABLES FOR ALL AGES

In 1987, Posy Simmonds also embarked on a career as a children's book author. This enabled her to work for the first time in colour and with larger images, including double-page spreads. She included comic strip techniques in these books, an approach that had not been common until then.

All her children's books challenge conventions in a playful way and tackle sensitive and important subjects, from the loss of a loved one (*Fred*, 1987) to the exploitation of workers and the need for sometimes improbable alliances (*Baker Cat*, 2004), and macabre humour in *Matilda* (1991).

Trois saisons  
 Babelin, Normandie



**Partie 4 - GEMMA, TAMARA, CASSANDRA**

As her first graphic novel *Gemma Boverly* was published in 1999, Posy Simmonds received international recognition and her work was translated in many foreign languages.

Just like *Gemma Boverly*, *Tamara Drewe* was commissioned by *The Guardian* as a 100-episode series, while *Cassandra Darke* was published directly as a graphic novel. After they were published, *Gemma Boverly* and *Tamara Drewe* were adapted into successful films by Anne Fontaine and Stephen Frears respectively. The trilogy is based on 19th-century literary works — Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* — but Posy Simmonds gave each of them a unique interpretation, transposing them to contemporary times and playing with our expectations.

Because she had to create a serial structure for the newspaper and keep to a limit of around 100 episodes for each story, Posy Simmonds developed a singular approach to her pages, juxtaposing comic strips, segments of text and other new narrative and graphic elements. Her innovative methods have enriched the form of the graphic novel, demonstrating that writing can work harmoniously with the panels and speech bubbles typical of comics.

**Partie 5 - LITERARY LIFE ETC**

*Literary Life* (2003, translated into French in 2014) features Posy Simmonds’ series of cartoons, which appeared every Saturday between 2002 and 2005 in *The Guardian*’s “Review” section. Each scene paints a wry and hilarious portrait of the literary world, from disillusioned booksellers to writers in search of inspiration.

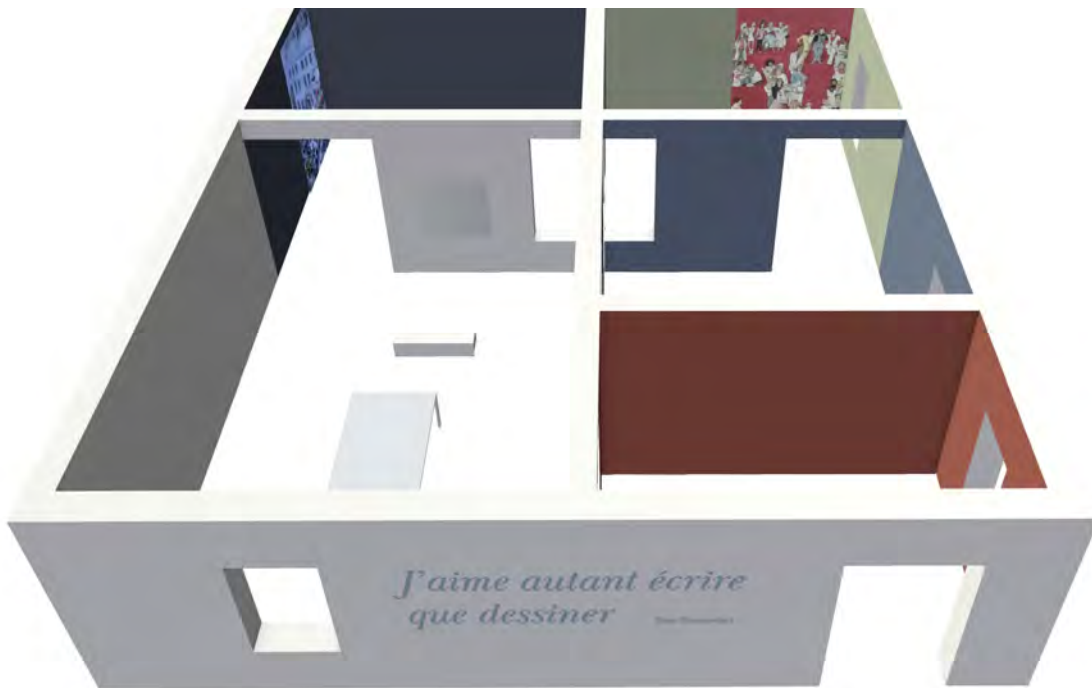
Posy Simmonds’ growing reputation and Francophilia have earned her a number of special commissions in France and abroad, including reports on French fashion for *The Guardian*, a promotional strip for a luxury goods company, and strips for the French newspapers *Le Figaro*, *Le Point* and *L’Obs*.



## Scenography views



© Scénografía



© Scénografía

## Tours, mediations and associated programme

- **Guided tours in French**

Without reservation • 5 pm-5.30 pm

Every day except Tuesdays, weekends and public holidays

By reservation • 2.30 pm-3.15 pm

Wednesday December 6 | Thursday December 21

Wednesday January 3 | Thursday January 18

Wednesday February 7 | Thursday February 22

Wednesday March 6 | Thursday March 21

- **Guided tours in English**



By reservation • 6 pm-6.30 pm

Friday November 24 | Friday December 15

Friday January 26 | Friday February 23

Friday March 29

- **Guided tours in Spanish**



By reservation • 6 pm-6.30 pm

Monday December 18 | Monday January 22

Monday February 19 | Monday March 18

- **Guided tours for groups**

By reservation

Mornings (except Tuesdays, weekends and public holidays)

- **Workshops**

By reservation for the general public and for specific audiences (schools, social fields, etc.) led by the author Louise Laborie with the association Ferraille, organizer of the Formula Bula festival.



### Contact, information et reservation

01 44 78 13 83

01 44 78 44 45

[visites@bpi.fr](mailto:visites@bpi.fr)

- **Guided tours in LSF (French sign language)** for deaf/hard of hearing people



Wednesday December 13 • 4 pm

Sunday January 21 • 3 pm

Monday January 5 • 3 pm

Friday March 8 • 6 pm

### Service Lecture & Handicap

[lecture-handicap@bpi.fr](mailto:lecture-handicap@bpi.fr)

- A tour filmed and commented by co-curator Paul Gravett will be available after the opening of the exhibition.

- **Meetings around the work of Posy Simmonds** (program in progress)

Thursday November 23 • 7 pm • Posy Simmonds & Coco • Maison de la poésie (as part of Festival Paris en toutes lettres)

Saturday January 20 • Bibliothèque publique d'information (as part of the Nuits de la lecture)

Monday February 19 • 7 pm • Interview with Posy Simmonds • Petite salle of Centre Pompidou

Monday March 11 • 7 pm • Petite salle of Centre Pompidou

- Also discover the file from *Balises*, the Bpi magazine, dedicated to Posy Simmonds in the Centre Pompidou and the Bpi, and online: [balises.bpi.fr/dossier/posy-simmonds](http://balises.bpi.fr/dossier/posy-simmonds)

## Catalog

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of Denoël Graphic collection and to complete the exhibition, a book-catalogue was published on the 25th of October 2023. It pays tribute to Posy Simmonds and her graphic novel *Gemma Boverly*, which is behind the creation of the collection by Jean-Luc Fromental in 2003.

*True Love, Une Romance Graphique* is a hybrid book. It is named after the 48-page story drawn for *The Guardian* in 1981, 20 years before *Gemma Boverly*. It consists of three parts:

- the texts of the Bpi exhibition, written by scientific co-curator and specialist in Posy Simmonds' work Paul Gravett, and illustrated by a selection of recent works by the artist;
- unpublished drawings and stories, as well as stories unpublished in France, including *True Love*, showing the nuances of Posy Simmonds' palette — comic strips she drew for *The Observer* and *Harper's*, and satirical short stories in colour;
- a long interview of the artist by journalist Anne-Claire Norot, a specialist in comics and in Posy Simmonds' work. It covers the different stages of her career, her choices, her commitments and her struggles, in particular to bring women into the patriarchal world of the British press.





## Biographical landmarks

1945

Posy Simmonds was born in Berkshire, UK.

1962

Posy Simmonds stayed a year in Paris to study French civilisation at the Sorbonne, as well as art.

1969

Her very first book, *The Posy Simmonds Bear Book*, was published by Berkeley Publishers (London) and marked the beginning of her career.

1977

Posy Simmonds became a cartoonist for *The Guardian*, after she began occasionally publishing drawings to illustrate articles from 1972 onwards.

1987

Posy Simmonds created her first children's book, *Fred*, which allowed her to explore colours.

1999

*Gemma Boverly* was published as a weekly series in *The Guardian*. It was adapted and published as a graphic novel by publisher Jonathan Cape, then translated into French and published by Denoël in 2000.

2003

*Literary Life*, a collection of strips for *The Guardian's* weekly "Review" section, was published.

2005

*Tamara Drewe*, a new series of 100 episodes, was published in *The Guardian*.

2007

*Tamara Drewe* was adapted as a graphic novel and published by Jonathan Cape. It was published in French by Denoël in the Denoël Graphic collection in 2008.

2010

*Tamara Drewe* was adapted as a feature film directed by Stephen Frears.

2014

*Gemma Boverly* was adapted as a feature film directed by Anne Fontaine.

2017

Posy Simmonds became jury president of the Official Awards of the Angoulême International Comics Festival.

2018

Posy Simmonds created *Cassandra Darke*. It was published as a graphic novel by Jonathan Cape and translated into French by Denoël Graphic in 2019.

2021

A major retrospective of Posy Simmonds' work was organised at the Cartoonmuseum Basel, following several exhibitions in England and in several European countries.

2022

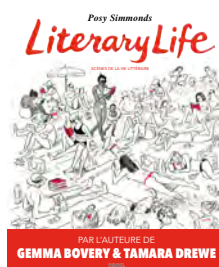
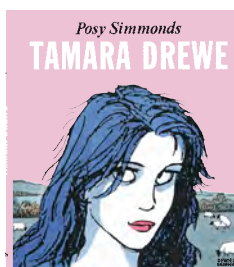
Posy Simmonds was awarded the Grand Prix Töpffer, following many other international awards.

## Bibliographical landmarks

*The Posy Simmonds Bear Book*, 1969  
*Bear by Posy* - Mayflower, 1974  
*Mrs Weber's Diary* - Jonathan Cape, 1979  
*True Love* - Jonathan Cape, 1981  
*Very Posy* - Jonathan Cape, 1985  
*Fred* - Jonathan Cape, 1987  
*Lulu and the Flying Babies* - Jonathan Cape, 1988  
*Lulu and the Chocolate Wedding* - Jonathan Cape, 1990  
*Matilda, Who told such Dreadful Lies* - Text from Hilaire Belloc - Jonathan Cape, 1991  
*Gemma Boverly* - Jonathan Cape, 1999  
*Lavender* - Jonathan Cape, 2003  
*Literary Life* - Jonathan Cape, 2003  
*Baker Cat* - Jonathan Cape, 2004  
*Tamara Drewe* - Jonathan Cape, 2007  
*Mrs Weber's Omnibus* - Jonathan Cape, 2012  
*Literary Life Revisited* - Jonathan Cape, 2016  
*True Love* (digital edition) - Sequential, 2016  
*Cassandra Darke* - Jonathan Cape, 2018

### • In French

*Gemma Boverly* - Denoël, 2000 ; Denoël Graphic, 2012 ; 2014, avec une préface d'Anne Fontaine  
*Tamara Drewe* - Denoël Graphic, 2008 ; 2010, avec une préface de Stephen Frears  
*Literary Life, scènes de la vie littéraire* - Denoël Graphic, 2014 ; Folio Gallimard, 2015  
*Cassandra Darke* - Denoël Graphic, 2019



### • Youth albums in French

*Lulu et les bébés volants* - Hatier, 1988  
*Mariage au chocolat* - Hatier, 1991  
*Matilda, l'horrible petite menteuse* - Albin Michel Jeunesse, 1991  
*Le Buffle en colère* - Albin Michel Jeunesse, 1994  
*Le Chat du boulanger* - Casterman, collection Duculot, 2005  
*La Fabuleuse vie secrète de Fred* - Sarbacane, 2014

### • About Posy Simmonds

*Strange Stories for Strange Kids* - Edited by Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman - Harper Collins, 2001  
*Posy Simmonds : catalogue d'exposition* - Introduction by Liz Forgan - *The Guardian*, 2009  
*Posy Simmonds* - Paul Gravett - Thames et Hudson, 2019  
*So British : l'art de Posy Simmonds* - Paul Gravett - French edition: Denoël Graphic, 2019  
*True Love, une romance graphique* - Exhibition catalog - Interview of Posy Simmonds - Denoël Graphic, 2023

## The Bibliothèque publique d'information



Bpi © Sergio Grazia



Centre Pompidou © Manuel Braun

Unveiled in 1977, at the same time as the Centre Pompidou it is a component of, the Bpi is a national library reporting to the Ministry of Culture and Communication.

Its three-level 107,640-square-foot space is open to all, without formalities, 6 days and 62 hours a week – more than 4,000 daily visitors for a total of nearly 1.3 million visitors in 2015.

Its mission is to gather and give free access to a regularly updated multidisciplinary documentary offer, both digital and physical.

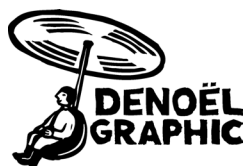
Particularly oriented towards current affairs, it strives to mobilize rich and diverse documentary resources so as to allow a good understanding of and a relevant perspective on the world we live in. Very well supplied with individual reading and work places (more than 2000), it also hosts many cultural events (exhibitions, meetings), as well as mediation activities using different forms of learning, whether individual or collective.

With a strong presence on the Internet, it strives to produce and promote attractant and effective course guidance.

Recognized nationally and internationally as an influential and innovative player in the world of libraries, it carries out cooperation programs in areas as diverse as the access to digital resources, the social and civic dimension of public libraries, access for visitors with disabilities, documentary cinema, the observation of the audiences and cultural uses of digital technology.

A stakeholder in the cultural dynamics of the Centre Pompidou, it makes an essential contribution to it from the angle of its own areas of expertise: literary creation, debate of ideas, international social issues, digital culture, “Young Adults” cultural practices, etc.

## Partners of the exhibition



Denoël Graphic

Cartoonmuseum Basel<sup>00</sup>

Cartoonmuseum of Basel



Madame Figaro



Le Figaro



France Télévisions



Les Arts dessinés



Canal BD



Pop Women festival

## Images available for the press

See all the imagery available for the press at [www.bpi.fr/presse-posysimmonds](http://www.bpi.fr/presse-posysimmonds)



Drawing created for the poster of the exhibition  
 © Posy Simmonds 2023



Poster © Bpi / Posy Simmonds 2023



Posy Simmonds  
 © Hervé Véronèse / Centre Pompidou



Posy Simmonds  
 © Hervé Véronèse / Centre Pompidou



Student work, 1966 © Posy Simmonds



Margaret Thatcher, *The Guardian*, 2013  
 © Posy Simmonds



Self-portrait, 1963 © Posy Simmonds



March of Feminism, *The Guardian*, 1989 © Posy Simmonds



Fred, 1987 © Posy Simmonds



Matilda, 1990 © Posy Simmonds



Flopsy Bunny, *Literary Life*, 2003  
 © Posy Simmonds / Denoël Graphic 2014



Bet They Haven't Got It, *Literary Life*, 2003  
 © Posy Simmonds / Denoël Graphic



Christmas Turkey, *Literary Life*, 2003  
 © Posy Simmonds / Denoël Graphic, 2014



Gemma Boverly, 1999 © Posy Simmonds



Gemma Boverly, 1999 © Posy Simmonds / Éditions Denoël, 2000



Gemma Boverly, 1999 © Posy Simmonds / Éditions Denoël, 2000



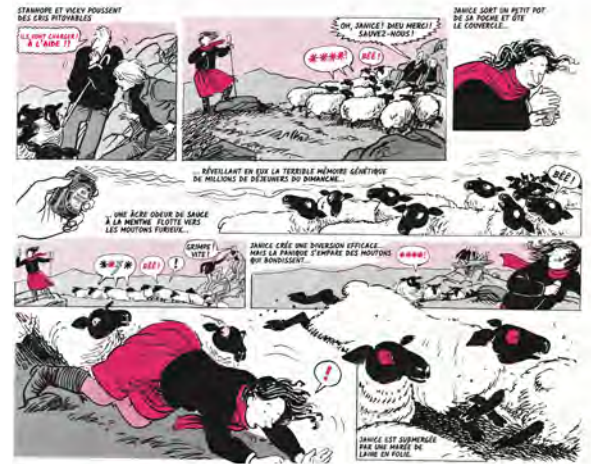
*Tamara Drewe, 2007 © Posy Simmonds /  
 Denoël Graphic, 2008*



*Tamara Drewe  
 © Posy Simmonds / Denoël Graphic*



*Tamara Drewe, 2007 © Posy Simmonds /  
 Denoël Graphic, 2008*



*True Love, 1981 © Posy Simmonds /  
 Denoël Graphic, 2023*



*Cassandra Darke, 2018 © Posy Simmonds /  
 Denoël Graphic, 2019*



*Cassandra Darke, 2018 © Posy Simmonds /  
 Denoël Graphic, 2019*



*Cassandra Darke, 2018 © Posy Simmonds /  
 Denoël Graphic, 2019*

## Curators of the exhibition

La Bibliothèque publique d'information - Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou is a national public establishment placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture.

### Executive management

Christine Carrier

### Supervising curators (Bpi)

Isabelle Bastian-Dupleix

Emmanuèle Payne

Zélie Perpignaa

### Scientific curator

Paul Gravett

### Production manager

Lise Tournet-Lambert

### Scenography

Agence Scenografia

Valentina Dodi, assisted by Suzon Auber

### Graphic design

Claire Mineur, assisted by Marion Ribera

### Production

The exhibition [Posy Simmonds - Dessiner la littérature](#) is produced by the Bibliothèque publique d'information (Bpi).

### In partnership with

Denoël Graphic

Cartoomuseum Basel

### Media partners

*Madame Figaro*

*Le Figaro*

France Télévisions

*Les Arts dessinés*

Canal BD

Pop Women Festival

The Bibliothèque publique d'information warmly thanks Posy Simmonds.