



At the beginning of the eventful 1970s, some graphic designers and illustrators from left-wing alternative circles in Geneva began to claim a voice for themselves using leaflets and political brochures. These efforts culminated in the Geneva comic poster, whose protagonists include the cartoonist Emmanuel Excoffier, alias Exem (b. 1951).

In particular during the hotly contested referenda of the 1990s, narrative comic posters in glowing colors proliferated across the Genevan cityscape. Emmanuel Excoffier, alias Exem's 1988 poster is among the key works from this period. A giant octopus emerges from a swimming pool, an aggressive look in its eyes. With its long tentacles, it encircles the diving tower and tears it down. The legendary Geneva lakeside baths Bains des Pâquis were scheduled for demolition at the time. A broad opposition made up of local residents, environmentalists, and urban planners voted instead for the renovation of the charming baths from the 1930s, and won. Exem already demonstrated here the mastery that would be in evidence in his later posters: a zest for associations expands the levels on which the image

can be read, while the precise depiction of the respective scene and the image of the sea monster convey the message in a way that is readily comprehensible. The huge octopus is a reference to Jules Verne's (1828–1905) famous novel *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. The polemical nature of the message as well as the hand-set typography recall the referendum posters by the right-wing conservative designer Noël Fontanet (1898–1982) from the 1930s, the era in which the baths were built. Exem's style with its clear outlines echoes that of Hergé (1907–1983), the creator of *Tintin*. With the octopus he had devised a recognizable symbolic figure that would in later posters come to signify rampant capitalist destruction. (Bettina Richter)

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