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Breaking news for illustrators of graphic novels and comics - we are grateful to the powerhouse team of Elizabeth MacFarlane, Bernard Caleo and Erica Wagner for sharing the exciting beginnings of their new publishing house.

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## Twelve Panels Press

**A new Australian publishing house for long-form comics, by Elizabeth MacFarlane**

The inking for Twelve Panels Press began four years ago in an East Brunswick coffee shop. Bernard Caleo and I had already been scheming for a year over the successful implementation of the University of Melbourne creative writing subject ‘Graphic Narratives’. Now we were discussing the next step in comics domination.

At the end of four coffees and two biscuits, we had a name and the beginnings of a logo. But, as we both acknowledged, also no time and no money. Over the next few years, Bernard made a movie and I made a baby. Twelve Panels Press lingered tantalizingly in the background – something we would eventually get to, when the next project was over, and the next, and the next...

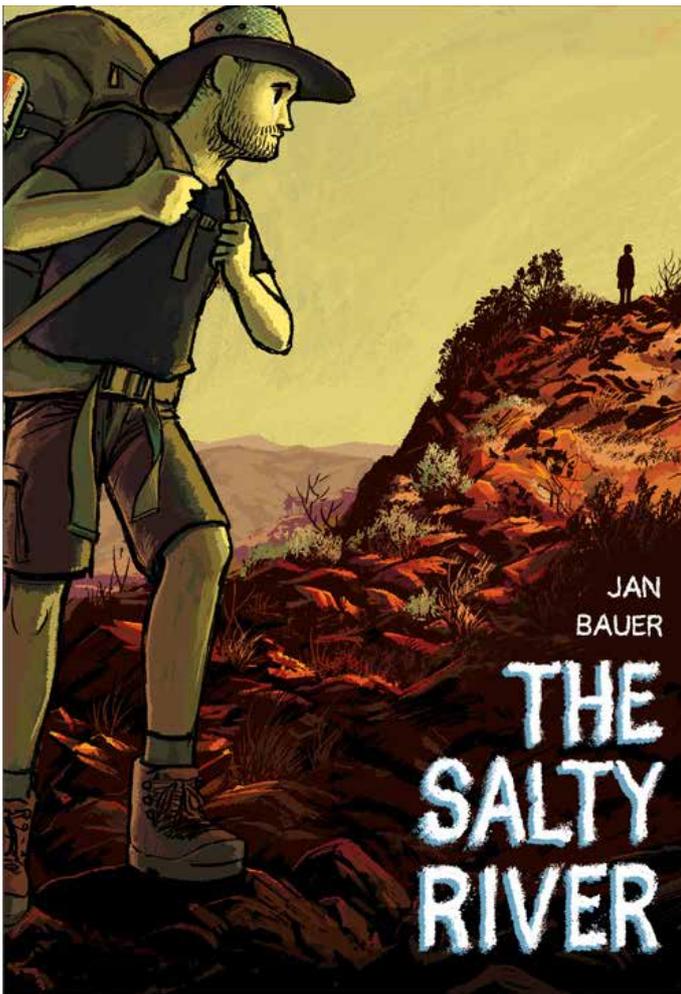
It was clear to us that Australia needed a boutique publisher of ‘literary’ comics – long-form graphic novels with narrative depth, beautiful art, and attention to production values. Books that could be found not just in specialty comic book shops and pop culture convention stalls, but could also sit comfortably on the shelves of Readings Bookstore, Kinokuniya, literary festival events, and your local School and public library. When Bernard came back from travelling around Europe promoting his (and director Daniel Hayward’s) feature documentary *Graphic Novels! Melbourne!* we added books-in-translation to our publishing possibilities.

Erica Wagner joined the conversations around the middle of 2014 and brought with her over 25 years of publishing experience, including pioneering the Allen & Unwin graphic novels publishing program which has included such titles as Nicki Greenberg’s adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* and *Hamlet*, Bruce Mutard’s *The Sacrifice*, and Mandy Ord’s *Sensitive Creatures*. Erica and Bernard had also been talking for years, discussing possibilities and angles and mad schemes. It was time for the three of us to start drinking coffee and plotting together.

On my office wall I have a little sketch of Bernard that I drew while he gave a talk to my Graphic Narratives students. The quote in his speech bubble: “The currency of comics is obsession and unreasonable love.” For all three of us, the medium of comics is a passion. It is a storytelling form we believe in so strongly that most of our various projects involving comics have been labours born of love and returning nothing but love. We want Twelve Panels to be not just a press, but a presence: a way of fostering and enriching the reading community’s understanding of and engagement with this beautiful medium. We would like each of our books and their authors to spark the seeds of discussion: in book clubs, school and university classrooms, bookshops, public forums. Each of us has a unique channel by which we approach the form of comics – as artist, academic, publisher – and we want to use and share this dynamic with as broad a readership as possible.

At the beginning of 2015, things began to happen remarkably quickly for Twelve Panels Press – so quickly that we found ourselves in April with the contract and distribution rights for our first book, *Der salzige Fluss (The Salty River)* by Jan Bauer. Bauer, a Hamburg author, animator and teacher, will be a guest at the Melbourne Writers Festival in August, and a number of other festival events

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nationally. Twelve Panels Press will be proudly promoting the English translation of his beautiful debut graphic novel.

*The Salty River* follows its author-protagonist Jan Bauer who is reeling from a difficult break-up and a sad loss in his native Germany. Bauer sets off for the Australian desert in search of himself. His 450-kilometre journey takes him into the scorching hot centre of Australia. There he meets a fellow wanderer, the young French woman, Morgane. The two grow closer as step by step they traverse the tough and beautiful Larapinta trail's dry and salty riverbeds. The story is a tender and unexpected love story set in a spectacular environment, a story of learning the importance of keeping an open heart. Throughout the book the reader is treated to Bauer's stunning full-page drawings of the landscapes of Australia's centre.

Translating Bauer's book is at the time of this article still in process. Our wonderful translator, Judith Pattinson, has previously translated the award-winning German novel *Erebus* by Ursula Poznanski. She studied European languages in Australia and on the shores of Lake Constance in Germany and has worked as a translator, production editor, web designer and bookseller. The unique challenge

of translating a German graphic novel whose two main characters are speaking English as their second language has been a stimulating process for both Judith and the three of us as we edit the manuscript. Judith wrote to us recently: "It's just such a cool project to be involved in that I still can't believe my luck!" We agree sincerely.

As a small publisher starting out and coming to grips with the market, Twelve Panels Press will keep things modest going forward. We are in discussions with a number of other potential authors, both local and international. At the start of all our meetings, Erica reminds herself (and us) to "try to stay calm". Not an easy task when we are seeing the beginnings of a 5-year dream approach reality. **1**

*Dr Elizabeth MacFarlane is a writer and lecturer in creative writing at the University of Melbourne. In 2011 she designed the subject Graphic Narratives, the first tertiary subject in Australia devoted to the comics medium. Elizabeth also co-directs the Comic Art Workshop, an annual residency for emerging comics artists, and is currently researching Graphic Medicine – the relationship between comics, illness narratives, and medical schools.*

### {CLICK!} More Information

Learn more about the work of the members of  
Twelve Panels Press:

**Bernard Caleo** <http://www.cardigancomics.com>

**Elizabeth MacFarlane** [www.elizabethmacfarlane.com.au](http://www.elizabethmacfarlane.com.au)  
[www.comicartworkshop.com.au](http://www.comicartworkshop.com.au). Look for the "Graphic  
Narratives at Melbourne Uni" page on Facebook.

**Erica Wagner** <http://www.ericawagner.com.au> - also  
please see edition 1, 2014 for a full profile on Erica's work.

