

PRESS RELEASE

WILL EISNER – THE ART OF LIFE, THE LIFE OF COMICS

From October 23, 2026, the CLAP Museum in Pescara presents a major retrospective dedicated to Will Eisner, the master who revolutionized comics and paved the way for the modern graphic novel

One hundred original works, spanning 1942 to 2004, tell the story of more than sixty years of art and innovation: from *Joe Dope* to *The Spirit*, from *A Contract with God* to *The Escapist Meets The Spirit* and *The Plot*. An exhibition presented in agreement with the Eisner family and curated by Denis Kitchen and Dario Gulli. In Pescara from October 23, 2026, to February 28, 2027.

Pescara, October 23, 2026 – There is a before and an after Will Eisner in the history of comics.

On **October 23, 2026**, the **CLAP Museum in Pescara** will open *Will Eisner – The Art of Life, The Life of Comics*, a major retrospective dedicated to one of the undisputed masters of the Ninth Art, regarded as the father of the modern graphic novel and one of the key figures in establishing comics as an author-driven art form.

The exhibition will remain open until **February 28, 2027**.

Presented in agreement with the **Eisner family**, the exhibition brings together **100 original works**, selected to create a chronological journey through more than sixty years of Eisner's career, from **1942 to 2004**.

This is not simply a collection of celebrated pages, nor is it only an exhibition about *The Spirit*.

It is the story of Will Eisner told through his original artwork – and, at the same time, the story of how comics became a mature, author-driven and literary form of expression.

WHY WILL EISNER

Will Eisner was one of the creators who changed the way comics are conceived, written and drawn.

With *The Spirit*, beginning in the 1940s, he explored an extraordinary degree of narrative freedom: page composition, lettering, perspective, light, shadow and urban architecture became integral elements of storytelling.

But his revolution did not end there.

Eisner understood that sequential images could tell stories not only of adventure and entertainment, but also of **memory, identity, immigration, poverty, family, faith, politics, loneliness, ageing and everyday life**.

In 1978, he published *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, a landmark work in the modern development of the **graphic novel**: a book in which comics addressed the lives of ordinary people with narrative and thematic ambitions traditionally associated with literature.

The term *graphic novel* already existed, but Eisner played a decisive role in establishing its cultural and publishing significance.

This was also one of the turning points from which a new conception of contemporary author-driven comics emerged.

This transformation lies at the heart of the CLAP exhibition.

100 ORIGINAL WORKS. FROM 1942 TO 2004

The exhibition follows Eisner's career and life chronologically through works created during different periods of his artistic journey.

It begins in 1942 and 1943, during World War II, with three large and exceptionally rare original *Joe Dope* works created for the U.S. Army: *Sidearms*, *Machine Gun* and *T-Slot*.

From there, the exhibition enters the world of *The Spirit*.

A complete seven-page sequence from *Half-Dead Mr. Lox*, originally conceived in 1948, introduces visitors to the extraordinary period in which Eisner continuously reinvented the language of the comics page.

The exhibition continues with a splash page from *The Meanest Man*, the origin story of *The Spirit* and a variant cover created in 1974.

Visitors therefore encounter more than one of the most important characters in American comics history. They can see firsthand **how Eisner constructed a story**, how he used the page, controlled rhythm and transformed drawing into visual direction.

1978: A NEW IDEA OF COMICS

The year **1978** represents one of the exhibition's central chapters.

Alongside inked pages from *A Small Business*, the corresponding **original pencil drawings** will also be displayed, allowing visitors to observe Eisner's creative process from the initial line to the finished artwork.

Most importantly, the exhibition includes six original pages from ***A Contract with God***, from the story *The Super*. It is one of the most significant moments in the entire exhibition. With that book, Eisner demonstrated that comics could take on the form and ambition of a novel, exploring people, places, grief, faith and memory without the need for superheroes. From this point onward, the exhibition gradually changes tone, just as Eisner's work itself changed.

THE CITY, THE PEOPLE, LIFE

The 1980s reveal an artist who was completely free to explore the possibilities of sequential storytelling. A remarkable drawing from **1980**, depicting prehistoric people drawing comics on the walls of a cave, humorously introduces Eisner's reflections on the very origins of storytelling through images.

The exhibition continues with seven pages from ***Humans*** from 1985 and ***Pianissimo*** from ***New York: The Big City*** from 1986.

The city becomes one of the great characters of his work.

In **1988**, the exhibition presents eight original color works from ***The Last Vote: A Fable***, a reflection on democracy, as well as an important group of works from ***A Life Force***: three pages from the *Enchanted Prince* sequence, four from *Momma* and ten from the celebrated cockroach sequence.

Seventeen pages provide an extraordinary insight into one of Eisner's most mature works.

In 1989, visitors encounter ***City People*** and a surprising **self-portrait of Eisner with his feet in the sand**.

The exhibition increasingly reveals the man behind the artist.

THROUGH TO HIS FINAL WORK

The journey continues with ***The Count of Monte Cristo*** from 1990, character studies and a complete sequence from ***A Family Matter***, before reaching the final years of Eisner's career.

An important section is dedicated to ***Fagin the Jew*** from 2003: **eight original pages**, the **original cover painting**, and two pencil studies.

And finally, **2004**.

Six pages from ***The Escapist Meets The Spirit*** document **Will Eisner's final work**.

Alongside them are ten consecutive pages from the 1894 chapter of ***The Plot***, his final graphic novel.

The journey ends here.

From the large military illustrations of 1942 to the final pages of 2004.

One hundred original works telling the story of sixty-two years of a life devoted to comics.

It is precisely this chronological progression that makes the exhibition distinctive: visitors are not simply witnessing the evolution of an artist.

They are watching comics evolve alongside him.

From *The Spirit* to the graphic novel.

From Will Eisner to contemporary author-driven comics.

DENIS KITCHEN: EISNER, AS TOLD BY SOMEONE WHO KNEW HIM

Denis Kitchen, curator of the exhibition together with **Dario Gulli**, will be a central figure at the opening on October 23.

A cartoonist, publisher, writer and one of the most authoritative figures in the history of American independent comics, Kitchen is also one of the leading witnesses to Will Eisner's artistic and cultural legacy.

In 1969, he founded **Kitchen Sink Press**, becoming a major figure in the American underground comix movement and later helping introduce Eisner's work to new generations of readers.

The relationship between Kitchen and Eisner became both professional and personal: Kitchen was his publisher, collaborator, agent and friend.

The founder of the **Comic Book Legal Defense Fund**, Denis Kitchen was inducted into the **Will Eisner Comic Book Hall of Fame** in 2015.

His presence in Pescara therefore brings something to the original works that no document can fully replace: **the testimony of someone who lived that history.**

NICOLA MATTOSCI: "CLAP WAS CREATED TO BUILD THIS DIALOGUE"

The Will Eisner retrospective marks a new stage in the cultural project that led to the creation of the **CLAP Museum**, conceived and promoted by Fondazione Pescaraabruzzo under the presidency of **Nicola Mattosco**.

From the enhancement and preservation of the extraordinary legacy of **Andrea Pazienza** to a dialogue with one of the great international masters of the Ninth Art, the guiding principle remains the same: to recognize comics as an integral part of contemporary culture and to establish Pescara as a meeting place for different artists, generations and visual languages.

“CLAP was born from the conviction that comics represent one of the great artistic languages of contemporary culture and deserve to be preserved, studied and presented with the same attention devoted to other art forms.

We began with Andrea Pazienza, his story and his profound connection with Pescara. With Will Eisner, we take another symbolic step: from Pescara, we open ourselves to one of the absolute protagonists of world comics history.

Bringing together one hundred original works spanning more than sixty years of Eisner's life, and presenting them alongside Denis Kitchen, fully embodies one of the reasons we wanted to create CLAP: to transform memory into an opportunity for knowledge, dialogue and international exchange.”

Nicola Mattoscio

President, Fondazione Pescarabruzzo

THE OFFICIAL CATALOGUE PUBLISHED BY SAE COMICS

The exhibition will be accompanied by an **official book-catalogue prepared and published by SAE Comics**.

Rather than simply documenting the works on display, the publication is conceived as an editorial project in its own right, exploring Will Eisner, his visual language and the legacy he left to contemporary comics.

The book will follow the chronological journey of the exhibition and will feature **special contributions from leading figures in international comics and culture**.

The names of the contributors will be announced shortly.

THE CLAP MUSEUM

The **CLAP – Comics Lab Art Pescara**, inaugurated in 2022, is a cultural space entirely dedicated to comics and the visual arts.

Conceived and promoted by **Fondazione Pescarabruzzo**, the museum extends across four levels in the heart of Pescara and is dedicated to the preservation, research, education and promotion of the Ninth Art.

At the heart of its permanent collection are **324 works by Andrea Pazienza**, complemented by temporary exhibitions, meetings, workshops, educational activities and publishing projects.

With the Will Eisner exhibition, CLAP takes another significant step in its international development, connecting Pescara with one of the fundamental figures in the history of world comics.

DARIO GULLI – CURATOR

Dario Gulli, international author and producer and Editorial Director of SAE Comics, develops and coordinates cultural and exhibition projects bringing together comics, animation, design, publishing and pop culture.

He previously curated the exhibition dedicated to the **Winx** universe at the CLAP Museum and, in 2026, curated **Home Fairy Home – Designing Everyday Magic** in Milan, a project exploring the relationship between the Winx universe and contemporary design, developed by Rainbow in collaboration with **Regione Lombardia, Politecnico di Milano – School of Design, and Poliarte – Academy of Fine Arts and Design**, as part of Milan Design Week.

For **Will Eisner – The Art of Life, The Life of Comics**, he serves as **co-curator with Denis Kitchen**, developing an experience in which the exhibition journey, research, events and publishing project are conceived as interconnected parts of the same cultural narrative.

“The strength of this exhibition lies in its simplicity: starting with one hundred original works and allowing them to tell the story of a life.

From the first *Joe Dope* of 1942 to the final pages of 2004, we watch Eisner change – and, at the same time, we watch comics change with him.

By the end of the exhibition, we realize that we have travelled through two parallel stories: the life of Will Eisner and the story of modern comics.”

Dario Gulli

Curator

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

WILL EISNER – THE ART OF LIFE, THE LIFE OF COMICS

CLAP Museum – Comics Lab Art Pescara

Via Nicola Fabrizi 194

Pescara, Italy

Opening: October 23, 2026

Exhibition dates: October 23, 2026 – February 28, 2027

Curators: Denis Kitchen · Dario Gulli

On display: 100 original works, 1942–2004

Official catalogue: SAE Comics

The opening time, related events programme, guests, catalogue contributors and visitor information will be announced shortly.