

karlien de villiers

A childhood in South Africa

A new talent hit the comic scene with "My Mother was a Beautiful Woman". Born 1975 in South Africa, Karlien de Villiers widened the pallet of autobiographical comics (with her first book) using modern history backgrounds. She tells the story of a white girl's childhood and youth at the end of apartheid in South Africa, using a smooth, suggestive picture language.

The only line of narration traces the collapse of her family: Her parents divorced when little Karlien was only seven. At first Karlien and her sister lived with her mother. Financial problems but mainly her mother's battle with cancer made life together very difficult – the two sisters, separated parents and step-mother would not only be confronted with death, but were also under pressure to appear like a completely normal functioning family in a repressive South African society. Her mother died when she was eleven.

The portrait of a crumbling family with it's friends and frustrations became a metaphor for the tension within a community, of which everyday life was plastered with inhuman racial laws and dictator-like repression (against the whites too).

Her complex ventures are set by de Villiers in a simple, very effective style putting her intentionally kept, abstract figures in front of detailed backdrops. Certain political and cultural characteristics of the South African society are described by her in short footnotes. In spite of the sobering views, the story is not short of sympathy and ironic, broken nostalgia.

Karlien de Villiers was born in Cape Town. She completed her studies in graphic design at the Stellenbosch University. Her first comics were released in a comic magazine called "Bitter Comix" (published by her teacher Anton Kannemeyer, alias Joe Dog). "My Mother was a Beautiful Woman" will appear in time for this year's Fumetto as a world premiere with the Arrache Coeur publishing house, Zürich. Karlien de Villiers currently lives in Pretoria.