

## Interview with Steffen Kverneland on “A voluntary death”

*by avant-verlag*

1. „A voluntary death“ is a very personal book you share a lot of very intimate family photos and memories with your readers amongst others pictures of your son – was he one reason to make this book? Was there a reason why you wanted to tell your father's story now?

Yes, although I've been thinking about making a book about my father's suicide for years. In 2011 I made a short story for Kanon 4 where I told my friend and colleague, Lars Fiske, about my father's suicide. But after me and my wife adopted a little boy from Vietnam a couple of years ago, I suddenly saw myself in the role of being a father, and I saw some of myself as a little boy in him, and also started to think of my own father. One memory led to another, I started taking notes, and gradually it dawned on me that this was the book I was gonna make right now.

2. For „Olaf G“ and „Munch“ a lot of research needed to be done artistically and also historic facts – how was the working process of „A voluntary death“? Did you have to do a lot of research or did you start with a collection of photos and keepsakes?

Early on I decided not to do any research, but just base the story on my own memories. I didn't want the book to be like some kind of crime story where I was trying to find the exact answer to WHY he did it, because I don't think that answer exists. It will always remain a mystery to me, because, as I state in the book, I don't have the same darkness in me, I've never contemplated doing suicide, and I hope I never will. So I decided that the book was going to be a subjective autobiographical account on the impact the suicide has had, and still has, on my life. But of course, I did a lot of visual research, for the clothes, the hairstyles, the interiors and the city-scapes.

3. You have also worked with literary texts would you say there is a fundamental difference between adapting a literary text and your own memories?

Oh yes, it's very different, and yet, there are some similarities. I always start my manuscripts verbally, I write the first draft, instead of sketching it, which I think is the most common way for comic artists. Then I try to visualize the text, but it's still with words. I write in parentheses what should be shown in the frames, and THEN I start making sketches. But from this point on, the pictures take full charge, and I like to give them a lot of space, let them breathe. I think a lot of comics today doesn't have enough space in them, they are often claustrophobically cluttered and dense, with too much information on small spaces. But I guess it's just a matter of taste. Or poorer eyesight because I'm growing old.

4. Your work always had a very close incling to satire and humor an integral part of "Olaf G." and even "Munch". „A voluntary death“ also includes ways of drawing that we are used to see in satire despite the topic that at first sight seems dark and heavy – is humor for you a way to keep balance in life?

Yes, humor is one of the most important things in life, I think. Like love, friendship, things like that. And especially in times of crisis, black humor has brought me through many crisis, not least the suicide of my father. When I showed parts of the book, as it was being made, to my wife, my publisher, and Lars Fiske, I called the project Suicide Funnies and things like that.

5. The artwork of this book contains a very wide range of approaches from photos to watercolors to sketch-like drawings. Was it also an artistic quest? Did you have your story and your graphic stile in your head before starting or did it grow organically?

I really wanted this book to take me to new places artistically. Because of the intense emotional impact, I needed some kind of reward, or a carrot, while working on it, like total artistic freedom and lots of new experiments. Before I started, I was extremely ambitious, I guess I wanted to transcend and reinvent both myself and the comics medium, and crazy as that may seem, it's an excellent attitude to start a book with, because if you don't achieve all your almost impossible goals, you manage to stretch yourself as hard as you can, and move forward from your last book, instead of just repeating it with other words and pictures.

6. What is your next project going to be?

I'm currently working on more autobiographical stuff, from childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, but this time it's much lighter, humoristic and anecdotal. I needed a break from the darkness that lurks underneath even the funniest scenes in "A voluntary death".