

Book Presentation

The Magic Showcase 50 Years of BolognaRagazzi Awards, Publishers and Children's Books

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The "Magic Showcase" of the title of this book published in two languages (Italian and English) refers to the display case that has, for five decades, exhibited the prize-winning books from the Bologna Children's Book Fair. Over the years this truly magical showcase has housed and provided visibility to some of the most important books and illustrated comics for children, created by writers and illustrators of international fame and published by some of the leading publishers from every corner of the globe. Furthermore, the Bologna Children's Book Festival can be considered a "magic showcase" for the global children's book industry: since the event's establishment in 1964 it has welcomed numerous important international publishers and authors who have been able to exchange books, projects and ideas within a climate of lively efficiency. With the focus on children's books, the "magic showcase" evokes images of a fantastical emporium of children's literature, where it is possible to buy coloured sweets, unusual curiosities and books of spells and magic; the latter being the stories and illustrations offered to young readers.

With these ideas in mind, the book retraces the history of the winning publications for children and teenagers over the last 50 years, centre stage is reserved for the commitment and endeavours to promote and acknowledge editorial and graphic excellence in the publications for younger readers. The prizes of the BolognaRagazzi Awards (BRAW) of the Children's Book Fair are part of an exclusive list of important international awards that are assigned by expert juries to the best editorial products for children and teenagers. For more than half a century the Children's Book Fair has been an unmissable event in the calendar for publishers, authors and illustrators of children's literature from all over the world. The event brings together in Bologna resources and high profile personalities from five continents involved in the sector of publishing for younger generations: the BCBF is the source of huge interest from around the world and commands the attention of many of the best artists on the world scene.

Over fifty years, the Children's Book Fair has always been committed to the promotion of graphic and creative quality in children's publishing through prizes, which, assigned by juries made up of internationally recognised experts, have identified and encouraged works of excellence in the sector of literature for children and teenagers. A substantial and precious publishing legacy has thus been accumulated, consisting of products of significant graphic and narrative quality that this book will examine, acknowledging some of the many commendable works that have been recognised by the Fair. In many senses retracing the history of these prizes has meant also retracing the history of social and cultural changes during the last five decades: transformations in the graphic styles, the changing themes of the narratives, the development of new publishing techniques, all pass under the microscope in order to reread, interpret and try to comprehend these fifty years of recent history.

Hopes, difficulties and dreams have all been represented in the best books for young readers and have become a sort of precious catalogue of the imagination, and not only children's imagination. The books that have won awards at the Fair during this half century have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to deal with the most pertinent issues of their time: from children's books with strong social themes in the sixties and seventies that recognised and reinterpreted the tensions and hopes of those years of transformation, then passing on to the nineteen eighties and the illustrated comic books' ironic and intelligent critiques of conservatism and the regression of that decade, moving on to recall memories of childhood stories of the many wonderful books of the nineties, then the rediscovery of sentiments and emotions from the first decade of the millennium, and finally the interesting and courageous graphic and narrative challenges of recent years. The examination of the award winning books from the Children's Book Fair over the last fifty years represents a kind of historical reconstruction of the period using the imagination as the key to interpreting social and cultural phenomena.

From a total of six hundred books that have won prizes at the Fair during these fifty years, around one hundred and fifty books were selected for their quality, the originality of the stories, graphic creativity, geographical provenance and historical significance. The selection, therefore, represents a meaningful picture of the best examples of children's literature but also a plurality of voices and types of thought from all over the world. The exhibition also highlights some well-established authors, illustrators, graphic designers and publishers, in addition to lesser-known schools of art and publishing houses that are small but innovative, audacious and original, based in emerging countries or countries in which the sector is in the process of establishing itself. The Children's Book Fair has always been a hothouse for new discoveries and surprising developments in the sector of children's literature and publishing, which is currently one of the liveliest and most creative cultural spheres. Finally, this book includes photographs of the covers of many books and illustrated comics that have been chosen to represent quality children's publishing.

The photographed editions belong to a special archive in the Biblioteca Salaborsa Ragazzi di Bologna, which conserves copies of the prize-winning books. Many photographs show the covers of the books complete with price tags from the bookstores, signs of use or the yellowing effects of age. These apparent defects demonstrate that the prize-winning books are "alive", passed from hand to hand, their pages thumbed by young and older readers. The photographs portray real copies that "live" each day beneath the gaze of their readers: this should be the destiny of all books.

The Magic Showcase. 150 years of the Bologna Ragazzi Awards, Publishers and Children's books, does not aim to represent a catalogue of quality publishing, it offers an itinerary of books, stories and illustrations that, for half a century, have fed the imagination of young generations: it is hoped that by telling the stories of some of these wonderful books, more people can be encouraged to rediscover the joy of reading.