



TOGETHER WE  
ARE BETTER  
SHARING,  
CARING,  
INSPIRING:  
THE MANY FACES  
OF CHILDREN'S  
CONTENT

## THE 63<sup>RD</sup> BOLOGNA CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR

The exhibitions: from scouting for emerging talent to celebrating established illustrators, the fair confirms its role as a global showcase of great international illustration

60 years of the Illustrators Exhibition and 10 years of the Visual Identity Workshop, the exhibition of New York's Society of Illustrators, 200 years of Carlo Collodi with *Pinocchio* and the best of Norwegian illustration

### THE ILLUSTRATORS EXHIBITION

**4,168 illustrators** and a **total of 20,840 illustrations** submitted from **96 countries and regions** around the world: these are the figures for the 2026 edition of the Illustrators Exhibition, the Bologna Children's Book Fair's (BCBF) most historic initiative and one that this year celebrates its **sixtieth anniversary**.

Sixty years during which the exhibition, created in 1967 to unearth and showcase the best international illustration to the book community gathered from all over the world in Bologna, has become a springboard to success and a business opportunity **for generations of emerging artists** and a **crowning achievement for established illustrators**.

This year's selection was conducted by a jury composed of **Sunkyung Cho** (illustrator and author, SI Picture Book School and publisher of Somebooks, South Korea), **Jenni Erkiñtalo** (illustrator, author and publisher of Etana Editions, Finland), **Alīse Nīgale** (co-founder and editorial director of Liels un Mazs, Latvia), **Daniela Olejníková** (illustrator, Slovakia), **Riccardo Vecchio** (illustrator and Chair of MFA Illustration as Visual Essay at the School of Visual Arts in New York, Italy). The exhibition will be on display at the fair from 13 to 16 April and at the end of the fair will embark on an international tour of cultural venues in major cities around the world over the next two years, starting with Japan, Korea and China.

The winners' illustrations are all brought together in the **Illustrators Annual**, the catalogue published by Corraini in Italian and English, in Japan by JBBY - Japanese Board on Books for Young People, in Korea by CCOC and in China by Dandelion Picture Book House. To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Illustrators Exhibition, the 2026 edition of the catalogue will also feature an original insert by Paola Vassalli and an interview to the great Australian illustrator Shaun Tan.

### EXHIBITION OF THE ILLUSTRATORS ANNUAL COVER ARTIST: NOUSHIN SADEGHIAN

The task of designing the cover of the Illustrators Annual is assigned to the winner, in alternative years, of the H.C. Andersen Award and the Grand Prix of the Bratislava Illustration Biennial (BIB). For 2026, the author is the Bratislava winner, Iranian artist **Noushin Sadeghian**. Her work, which is featured in an exhibition of 45 pieces, many of which are unpublished, focuses on storytelling, space and inner experience. Simplicity, composition and creativity are central elements of her art. Her images are based on rhythm, silence and atmosphere, with the aim of evoking feelings rather than describing them directly. Noushin's approach to illustration is closely linked to the world of childhood. She considers the illustrated book to be a space for pause, imagination and emotional experience, where children can relate to images without explanation or judgement. For her, illustration is a silent bridge between child and adult, between thought and feeling.





### THE EXHIBITIONS OF GUEST OF HONOUR COUNTRY, NORWAY

Every year, at the centre of the fair alongside the Illustrators Exhibition, BCBF hosts the exhibition organised by the Guest of Honour Country. This year **What if?** opens its doors to the world of contemporary Norwegian illustration through the works of 49 artists selected by a jury of esteemed illustrators, chaired by **Øyvind Torseter**. Grafill, the Norwegian organisation for visual communication, will also present at the fair the award-winning titles from the 2025 editions of the competitions Most Beautiful Books and Most beautiful Illustrated Books. A total of 52 books will be showcased, offering an outstanding overview of the year's finest Norwegian achievements in book design and illustration.

### ITALIAN EXCELLENCE: PINOCCHIO'S NEW CLOTHES

Among the initiatives being held to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Carlo Collodi's birth is the exhibition **Italian Excellence. Pinocchio's New Clothes** which is putting 50 illustrations on display at the International Bookshop. 25 of these are by established illustrators and 25 by emerging young artists from the international scene, selected from among 600 candidates for the illustration contest held by BCBF and chosen by a jury composed of: Daniela Marcheschi (literary critic, President of the National Edition of the Works of Carlo Lorenzini, Italy), Santo Alligo (illustrator, Italy), Grazia Gotti (Accademia Drosselmeier, curator of the exhibition, Italy) and Silvana Sola (lecturer in History of Illustration at Isia Urbino, Italy). The exhibition is accompanied by a **bilingual catalogue** including contributions from the jury, published by **Giunti** and curated by Accademia Drosselmeier and Bologna Children's Book Fair. After the fair, the exhibition is scheduled to tour various cities around the world. Accademia Drosselmeier is responsible for curating the exhibition.

Some of the better-known artists on display are: Peter Bailey - Justine Brax - Iacopo Bruno - Attilio Cassinelli - Nicoletta Ceccoli - Swarna Chitrakar - Carll Cneut - Vittoria Facchini - Sara Fanelli - Alberto Gamón - Philip Giordano - Robert Ingpen - Marcello Jori - Kęstutis Kasparavičius - Emanuele Luzzati - Lorenzo Mattotti - Chris Mcewan - Mike Mignola - Minalima - Gabriel Pacheco - Ferenc Pintér - Alessandro Sanna - Guido Scarabottolo - Chrudoš Valoušek - Tony Wolf - Wolfango - Ed Young.

### THE BRAW AMAZING BOOKSHELF

An important business opportunity for the winning titles and those earning special mentions in the various categories, the BolognaRagazzi Awards promote the sale of the rights to the award-winning books thanks to the visibility they enjoy in front of the world's publishers gathered at BCBF, and the important promotional activity carried out by the fair. Thanks to the high esteem that the awards have earned among the international publishing community over the years, and in light of the large number of worthy entries received each year, BCBF has decided to extend this opportunity for visibility to a wide selection of the best books submitted to the competition: over **150 titles** in various categories have therefore been chosen for presentation at the fair in the book exhibition **The BRAW Amazing Bookshelf**, offering a unique insight into the award.

### THE BCBF VISUAL IDENTITY WORKSHOP: BUMI CHA AND 10 YEARS OF THE PROJECT

The Visual Identity Workshop is run by Chialab Design, which each year guides an illustrator chosen from among the youngest finalists of the Illustrators Exhibition in the creation of the visual identity that will accompany the next edition of the Bologna Children's Book Fair. The **BCBF Visual Identity Workshop 2026** exhibition displays working materials – sketches, research, layout simulations, drafts and mock-ups – thus recreating the entire creative process through which **Bumi Cha**, the young Korean illustrator selected in 2025, brought to life the unique and intense





characters that accompany visitors to this edition of BCBF. The theme for 2026 is permeated with faces, features and portraits: Bumi's delicate and intriguing ambiguity conveys the diversity of the faces that attend BCBF. In her drawings, the boundaries that define shapes play dynamically between what is outside and what is inside: from the forehead to the chin, a space in which to build a dense and intense relationship between gazes.

Launched in 2017, the project celebrates its first **ten years** in 2026, marked at BCBF with a dedicated **exhibition telling the story of the Visual Identity Workshop** and highlighting the career paths and publishing successes of the young illustrators it has supported over the years.

### EXHIBITION OF THE BCBF - FUNDACIÓN SM INTERNATIONAL ILLUSTRATION AWARD: MARIA HAIDUK

Now in its 15th edition, the **Bologna Children's Book Fair – Fundación SM International Illustration Award** was created with the aim of supporting and promoting young illustration talent. The award is open to illustrators under the age of 35 participating in the Illustrators Exhibition, with the winner receiving a grant to create an illustrated book that will be published by the Spanish publishing house SM during the following year. The original illustrations from the book are then presented in a solo exhibition at the next edition of the Bologna Children's Book Fair. The 2026 edition features Ukrainian artist **Maria Haiduk**, who, at 19, is the youngest winner in the history of the award, confirming BCBF's commitment to nurturing emerging talent. The author worked on a book entitled ***El señor Kotsky (Mr. Kotsky or Pan Kots'kyy)***, a popular Ukrainian fairy tale in which an old cat is abandoned by his owner in a forest, where he meets a fox and tells her that he is Mr. Kotsky. The fox takes him to live in her den, telling everyone that the old cat is ferocious and dangerous. The rumour spreads through the forest and some animals, intrigued, want to meet Mr. Kotsky, so they invite him to a banquet, but hide for fear that he will attack them. A fun story for children about deception, survival and the ability to see reality through a lens distorted by our expectations and desires.

### THE SOCIETY OF ILLUSTRATORS EXHIBITION

The collaboration between BCBF and the Society of Illustrators in New York continues in 2026 with a new chapter. Featuring in Bologna for the second consecutive year is ***The Original Art***, the annual exhibition showcasing illustrations from the year's best children's books published in the United States. Since 1990, the exhibition has been based at the Society of Illustrators in New York, where the works are selected by a jury of illustrators, art directors and children's book publishers.

New for 2026, and on display outside the United States for the first time, will be a selection of the gold and silver medal winners in the "books" section for the 2022-2026 period of the prestigious **Annual Illustrators Competition**, organised by the Society of Illustrators. On display at The Designer Studio in a world premiere, the exhibition features prominent artists such as Pablo Amargo, Edel Rodriguez and Victo Ngai, underlining the commitment of BolognaBookPlus to building bridges between international markets and promoting excellence in visual storytelling in the publishing market. The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of activities, including meetings and guided tours. Finally, there will be a preview of the exhibition ***Balbusso Twins: Illustrating with Two Souls***, curated by the Society of Illustrators in collaboration with Pentagram, which will debut in New York a few days after the fair. A selection of illustrations, artwork and design pieces recount the 25-year career by the Italian artistic duo Anna and Elena Balbusso, also known as the Balbusso Twins.

### THE BOLOGNABOOKPLUS EXHIBITIONS

In addition to the exhibition of the **Annual Illustrators Competition** and ***Balbusso Twins: Illustrating with Two Souls***, BBPlus is hosting the sixth edition of the ***Jackets Off!*** exhibition, which this year explores different





international interpretations of the covers of books by the “Queen of Crime”, **Agatha Christie**, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of her death. The exhibition also features a curated selection of covers created by Italian-Hungarian artist Ferenc Pintér, offering a unique perspective on the visual reinterpretation of one of the world’s most published authors.

### CHINESE EXCELLENCE IN CHILDREN’S ILLUSTRATION

When in 2018 China was the Guest of Honour Country at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair, it marked a turning point: not only because of the increase in Chinese participation that followed, but also because of the perception that a new cultural dialogue was taking shape, built through stories and images for young readers. Since then, that dialogue has grown steadily, becoming part of the Fair’s identity. Today, this relationship also involves a tangible commitment: the Bologna Children’s Book Fair is a partner in the organisation of the China Shanghai International Children’s Book Fair, thereby bolstering a bridge that is not only logistical or commercial, but also cultural, offering the international children’s publishing community a shared space for dialogue and growth. A clear indicator of this evolution is the BolognaRagazzi Award, an important barometer of global publishing trends. Prior to 2018, the presence of Chinese books among the candidates was sporadic. However, in 2026, China ranks ninth among the 73 participating countries in terms of the number of publishers. Even more significant is the quality of the works in competition: Chinese books are increasingly distinguished by their editorial care, narrative strength and visual originality. With the aim of promoting the best contemporary Chinese illustrators, in 2023 BCBF/BolognaFiere, China South Publishing & Media Group and Sidee Cultural Communication launched *Chinese Excellence in Children’s Illustration*, an annual exhibition format presenting a selection of works by established and emerging Chinese artists. Each year, the illustrations are chosen by a jury of leading Chinese and international experts. The selected works are then exhibited at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair, where a winner is announced, before the works embark on a long international tour. The members of the jury for the third edition of Chinese Excellence are: **Øyvind Torseter** (illustrator, Norway), **Elodie Bourgeois** (Editorial Juventud, Spain), **Grazia Gotti** (Accademia Drosselmeier, Italy), **Cai Gao** (artist, finalist for the H.C. Andersen Award 2026, China), **Jiang Xun** (scholar and writer, Taiwan, China), **Tian Zhongli** (President of the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, China) and **Chen Hui** (PhD, professor of Chinese literature at Beijing Normal University, China). A bilingual English-Chinese catalogue documents the works of the selected artists, providing the international community with a useful tool that offers an overview of contemporary Chinese illustration and a deeper understanding of this country’s immense cultural heritage.

### THE GOLDEN PINWHEEL. FROM SHANGHAI TO BOLOGNA, A JOURNEY OF TALENT

As co-organizer of the China Shanghai International Children’s Book Fair, BolognaFiere/Bologna Children’s Book Fair collaborates on The Golden Pinwheel Young Illustrators Competition, historic award of the Chinese book fair that, since its establishment in 2015, has represented a unique opportunity for emerging illustrators from around the world to showcase their talent to specialist publishers, thereby breathing new life into the Chinese children’s book industry. In 2025 the competition received a record number of entries: 2,828 artists from 78 countries and territories across five continents.

### SILENT BOOK CONTEST – GIANNI DE CONNO AWARD

As per tradition, space at BCBF has also been allocated to the books selected for the **Silent Book Contest - Gianni De Conno Award**, dedicated to the famous Italian illustrator and now in its **13th edition**. Over the years, the international award has played a crucial role in the development and dissemination of silent books, stories told





exclusively through images capable of overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers. Organised by Carthusia Edizioni in collaboration with the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the Turin International Book Fair, the Municipality of Mulazzo, the Montereccio Paese dei Librai Association and IOB International Organisation of Book Towns, the initiative is sponsored by Ibbly Italia and supported by BPER Banca.

