



THE 63RD 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's) 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 Erkontalo** (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 by an interview with the great Australian illustrator **Shaun Tan**.

The jury, chaired by Marcella Terrusi, will come together for **"The Reasons behind a Choice. Meeting with the Illustrators Exhibition Jury 2026"** on 15 April, 10.40–11.50am at The Illustrators Café.

Commemorating 60 years of the Exhibition is **"The Illustrators Exhibition Family Album. Celebrating the 60th Anniversary"** (15 April, 3.40–4.20pm, The Illustrators Café), a meeting with some of the protagonists of this incredible story, which has been at the heart of BCBF since 1967: Azul Lopez (illustrator, Mexico); Leonard S. Marcus (children's book historian, author and critic, USA); Elena Pasoli (Director, Bologna Children's Book Fair, Italy); Hedwige Pasquet (President, Gallimard Jeunesse, France); Sydney Smith (illustrator, Canada); Paola Vassalli (children's literature expert, author and editor, Italy) and Riccardo Vecchio.

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



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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. Her work is the focus of the exhibition "The Art of Noushin Sadeghian, winner of the 2025 Grand Prix of the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava and Author of the 2026 Illustrators Annual Cover" (15 April, 1.50–2.30pm, The Illustrators Café).

THE EXHIBITION OF COUNTRY GUEST OF HONOUR, NORWAY

Every year, at the centre of the fair alongside the Illustrators Exhibition, BCBF hosts the exhibition organised by the Country Guest of Honour. 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**.

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 and catalogue.

Some of the better-known artists on display are: Peter Bailey - Justine Brax - Iacopo Bruno - Attilio Cassinelli - Nicoletta Ceccoli - Swarna Chitrakar - Carl 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.

Talking about the exhibition at the fair will be **Lorenzo Mattotti**, Italian master of illustration, and **Nicole Tecchio**, a young artist selected from the contest in the event "**Italian Excellence. Pinocchio's New Clothes - Lorenzo Mattotti and the Young Selected Artist Nicole Tecchio**" (15 April, 1–1.40pm, The Illustrators Café).

THE BRAW AMAZING BOOKSHELF

An important business opportunity for the winning titles and those earning special mentions in the various categories, the Bologna Ragazzi Awards (BRAWs) 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.

Bumi Cha, alongside Beppe Chia (designer, Chialab, Italy) and Alex Weste (designer, Chialab, Germany), will lead a workshop on visual design (14 April, 1.30–3 pm, The Illustrators Survival Corner).

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 project will be the focus of a talk at the fair (14 April, 3–3.50pm, The Illustrators Café) with Maria Haiduk and Teresa Tellechea (editor, Fundación SM, Spain).

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.

The exhibition is the focus of guided tours at the fair and the masterclass **"Presentation – From NYC to Bologna: The Society of Illustrators"** (13 April, 12.30–1.15pm, The Illustrators Survival Corner) with Arabelle Liepold (Executive Director, Society of Illustrators, USA) and Steve Compton (Director of Exhibitions & Collections, Society of Illustrators, USA), Clare Pernice (Children's Programs Creator, Society of Illustrators, USA), Angie Kang (author and illustrator, 2025 Original Art Medalist, USA) and C.G. Esperanza (author and illustrator, 2025 Caldecott Medalist, USA).

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



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BolognaBookPlus to building bridges between international markets and promoting excellence in visual storytelling in the publishing market. The exhibition is accompanied by guided tours and a talk with DJ Stout (Pentagram partner, Art Director, designer, author, USA), Arabelle Liepold and Steve Compton, who together trace the evolution of the Competition, presenting archive images, cover designs, and insights into the application process and selection criteria (13 April, 11–11.45am, Designer Studio). 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 of the renowned artistic duo, the Balbusso Twins.

Anna and Elena Balbusso are the featured speakers at a masterclass dedicated to their artistic project (14 April, 1.45–2.30pm, Designer Studio).

THE BOLOGNABOOKPLUS EXHIBITIONS

In addition to 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.

Agatha Christie is also the subject of the masterclass with Ivan Canu (illustrator and author, Italy), Cecilia Flegenheimer (Art Director, Mondadori, Italy) and Paolo Verri (Director, Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, Italy), who analyse her literary success from a publishing perspective, also focusing on the graphic design of her book covers (14 April, 10.45–11.30am, Designer Studio).

CHINESE EXCELLENCE IN CHILDREN'S ILLUSTRATION

With the aim of promoting the finest 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 series showcasing a selection of works by established and emerging Chinese artists. Each year, the submitted illustrations are assessed by a jury of leading Chinese and international experts. The selected works are then exhibited at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, during which the winners are also announced (13 April, 12–12.50pm, The Illustrators Café), before setting off on an extensive international tour. A bilingual English-Chinese catalogue documents the works of the selected artists, providing the international community with a useful tool for gaining an overview of contemporary Chinese illustration.

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

Co-organised by BolognaFiere/Bologna Children's Book Fair since its inception in 2015, the competition has provided 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. One of the winners, Zheng Feng (illustrator, China), is the focus of “Meet the Winner: Zheng Feng & The Golden Pinwheel Success Story” (15 April, 1.30–2pm, The Illustrators' Survival Corner).

LORENZO MATTOTTI: UNDERTHEBOMBS. UNAVOIDABLE IMAGES

Lorenzo Mattotti presents 31 works brought together under the title **UndertheBombs. Unavoidable images**, exhibited exclusively at the Fair: black-and-white illustrations depicting bodies immersed in situations of conflict. Mattotti describes them thus: “Visions that, without my realising it at first, grow slowly, feeding on my insecurities,



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breathing the air around them, sensing the noises and the news, taking root in layers of images and then developing. Sometimes they take shape as knots in the stomach or a difficulty breathing, night-time anxieties, a sense of dissatisfaction, easy irritability, sudden bouts of depression, feelings of guilt... I wish I could not see them, not feel them. Instead, I wait for them to become more pressing; I want to be sure they are ready, that they truly demand to come to light. I listen. And I can no longer run away. Then they emerge effortlessly. At last, mature, natural signs, vivid, essential marks. Of an almost abstract rawness. Ancient, timeless. And of now, here, in this moment.” Images that tell the story of contemporary wars and, at the same time, of all wars, taking on a universal significance.

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 Montereleggio Paese dei Librai Association and IOB International Organisation of Book Towns, the initiative is sponsored by Ibbly Italia and supported by BPER Banca. The finalists will be announced at the fair (13 April, 2.30–3.20pm, The Content Café)