



ZIG ZAG FESTIVAL
A VISUAL BRIDGE BETWEEN ITALY AND THE U.S.
NEW YORK, JUNE 8 – 12, 2026

A program of events about illustration and comics in honor of the 250th anniversary of the United States.
Organized by the Italian Cultural Institute of New York
Curated by Hamelin, Steven Guarnaccia
in collaboration with the Bologna Children's Book Fair

Illustration is a field through which Italy and New York have engaged with an ongoing and vital exchange of ideas, projects, and relationships among artists, bringing together related, yet distinct, visual imagery and imaginations.

From this common ground, the idea of offering a glimpse into the panorama of Italian illustration in New York was born, fostering a fertile encounter between two cultures at that very crossroads that has welcomed great Italian artists at different times, from Fortunato Depero to Massimo Vignelli, from Leo Lionni to Emiliano Ponzi.

Zig Zag is a festival that aims to highlight this richness by showcasing **the excellence of contemporary Italian illustration** in New York through a program of events at various key locations in the city dedicated to contemporary illustration.

This year's guests include: **Mac Barnett, Debbie Bibo, Nicholas Blechman, Marianna Coppo, Kirsten Hall, Emiliano Ponzi, Cecilia Ruiz, Felicita Sala, and Olimpia Zagnoli.**

The festival is organized by **the Italian Cultural Institute of New York**. The curatorship is by **Steven Guarnaccia**, an award-winning American illustrator and designer whose long creative relationship with Italy includes working with leading publishing and cultural institutions, along with **Hamelin**, which, for the last 20 years, has been one of the most important Italian cultural associations for children's literature, comics, and illustration. An indispensable partner in supporting and collaborating with the development of Zig Zag is the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the world's leading fair dedicated to children's literature and the world of illustration, a meeting point for international publishing, which for years has promoted Italian excellence abroad through projects that focus on New York.

Claudio Pagliara, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute of New York, stated, "The Italian Cultural Institute of New York is proud to have promoted this new festival, a further opportunity for dialogue between the two opposite shores of the Atlantic through an encounter between Italian and American illustrators. Zig Zag is not just a thread that, unraveling through the streets and avenues of New York, unites the five locations involved in the initiative. It is also an image of the way ideas move: along paths that are never straight-forward, always open to discussion, exchange, and new synthesis."

Hamelin and **Steven Guarnaccia** wrote: "The idea of a bridge built of images between Italy and the US originated from the fruitful collaboration between Hamelin and Steven Guarnaccia, along with the Bologna Children's Book Fair, who have worked together for many years to research, showcase, and promote Italian and international illustration. The unprecedented vitality of the visual culture born from the creative and professional exchange between these two countries that is so vibrant and rich in experimentation and collaboration—both artistic and editorial—inspired the idea of Zig Zag: an expression that has the same meaning in Italian and English, intended to emphasize the idea of a dynamic movement, a back-and-forth between two points in space and between the multiple visions of artists' interpretations of illustration in these two countries. It's the perfect name for a festival that aims to be a further opportunity for cultural exchange between Italy and the United States, and which finds its natural center in New York City."



"With Zig Zag, we want to strengthen the role of the cultural bridge that the Bologna Children's Book Fair has always played between Italy and the world, enhancing the historic and profound dialogue between Italy and the US through the universal language of illustration and books. This project stems from the desire to create new opportunities for events and exchanges between publishers, authors, illustrators, and cultural institutions, bringing together diverse visions and sensibilities at one of the great international crossroads of contemporary publishing," concludes Elena Pasoli, director of the Bologna Children's Book Fair.

In addition to the Institute's central role, the festival relies on a rich network of partners who, in the New York area, including strongholds of Italian culture such as the **Rizzoli Bookstore**, an Italian salon and historic Italian bookshop on Broadway, **Sullaluna NYC**, a bistro-bookshop dedicated to illustrated books from Italy and the US, and **Salotto - Casa IED**, a center for research and cultural output in graphics and illustration, managed by Italian creative professionals based in New York and institutions promoting the culture of illustration, such as the **Society of Illustrators**, a sanctuary of American illustration and the oldest and most important institution dedicated to illustration; **SVA School of Visual Arts**, which trains young talent through its **MFA Illustration as Visual Essay Program**;

SCHEDULE

Monday, June 8th

Location: Italian Cultural Institute

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Festival opening with all the protagonists and inauguration of the exhibition

Institutional opening with Claudio Pagliara, director of the Italian Cultural Institute

Two hundred and fifty years of friendship between Italy and the United States are told through the eyes of Italian and American authors (Mac Barnett, Marianna Coppo, Felicita Sala, Riccardo Vecchio, Olimpia Zagnoli). They will engage in dialogue, starting with images emblematic of the relationship between Italy and the USA, to recount the dynamic relationship and ongoing exchange between the two countries. Moderated by Ilaria Tontardini, Hamelin.

An game d'auteur preceded by an introduction by Steven Guarnaccia and a historical introduction by Leonard Marcus.

Cocktails to follow

Tuesday, June 9th

Location: Society of Illustrators

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Picture Books in Transition. A Decade of Creative Evolution Between North America and Italy

Keynote video message by Claudio Pagliara, director of the Italian Cultural Institute

with Elena Pasoli (Bologna Children's Book Fair), Debbie Bibo (Debbie Bibo Agency), Kirsten Hall (Catbird Agency), Tara Walker (Tundra Books), and Giulia Rizzo (Terre di Mezzo), Maddalena Lucarelli (Fatatrac).

Moderated by Maria Russo

Wednesday, June 10th

Location: Rizzoli

In collaboration with SVA

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Visual Storytelling in Picture Books

Keynote video message by Claudio Pagliara, director of the Italian Cultural Institute

with Felicita Sala and Mac Barnett

Moderated by Ilaria Tontardini, Hamelin

Followed by a presentation of "The Secret Door / Make Believe" with Mac Barnett, Giulia Rizzo (Terre di Mezzo), Sally Kim (Little Brown and Company), and a book signing.



On the occasion of ZIG ZAG Color me Italian – Window Art by Alison Spring, promoted by Rizzoli NYC and the MFA Illustration as Visual Essay Program of the School of Visual Arts.

Thursday, June 11th

Location: SALOTTO - CASA IED

Time: 6:00 p. .

Beyond the Page: Other Forms of Illustration

Keynote video message by Claudio Pagliara, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute

Olimpia Zagnoli and Emiliano Ponzi

Moderated by Nicholas Blechman (The New Yorker)

Introduction by Emilio Varrà, Hamelin

Friday, June 12th

Location: SullaLuna

6:30 p.m,

Pictures with Wings

Introduction by Claudio Pagliara, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute

with Marianna Coppo and Cecilia Ruiz

Moderated by Steven Guarnaccia

Italian Cultural Institute of New York

The Italian Cultural Institute of New York is the Italian government agency responsible for promoting and disseminating the Italian language and culture in the United States. Located in the heart of Manhattan, the Institute serves as a hub for cultural dialogue between Italy and the United States, fostering the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences among artists, scholars, professionals, and the international public. The Institute organizes conferences, exhibitions, concerts, film screenings, book presentations, meetings with authors, and educational activities that highlight Italian excellence in art, literature, music, film, design, architecture, science, and innovation. The Institute also serves as a platform for collaboration between American and Italian cultural institutions, universities, museums, and organizations, helping to strengthen cultural ties between the two countries and promote the contemporary and dynamic understanding of Italy around the world.

Curators

Steven Guarnaccia is an author and illustrator; he was the an director at *The New York Times*, director of the Illustration program at Parsons School of Design (where he worked on visual storytelling, the illustrated book, and the book as an object), and is an award-winning illustrator and book cover designer. He has written and illustrated books for adults and children, and, as an illustrator, has collaborated with the *New York Times*, *Abitare*, and other internationally recognized magazines. His illustrations have been exhibited at MOMA. He has designed watches for Swatch, rugs, and other design objects in the United States and abroad. He is also the author of numerous books on design and popular culture. In collaboration with the Bologna Children's Book Fair, he created *Talking Pictures* with Hamelin, a project launched in 2018 dedicated to the visual book in all its forms and declinations.

Hamelin

Hamelin is a Bologna-based organization specializing in children's literature, illustration, and comics in Italy and internationally. They have collaborated with the Bologna Children's Book Fair for over a decade, curating exhibitions of major international authors, presentations, and illustration events. In collaboration with the Fair, they also created *Talking Pictures* with Steven Guarnaccia, a project launched in 2018 dedicated to the visual book in all its forms and declinations. For 15 years, they curated the international comic book festival BiBOI-Bul, one of the most important international events dedicated to comics and graphic novels, and now curates *A occhi aperti*, a festival of comics and contemporary experimental illustration. Hamelin edits critical publications, exhibition catalogs, and a quarterly magazine. Some of its members are also professors at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna.



Bologna Children's Book Fair

Bologna Children's Book Fair (BCBF) is the world's most important professional fair dedicated to children's publishing, children's and young adult content, and the international exchange of publishing rights. Since its inception, BCBF has continuously invested in promoting illustration as a central language of contemporary children's storytelling. The historic Illustrators Exhibition, founded in 1967 and celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2026, today represents one of the most prestigious international platforms for the discovery and promotion of new talent in illustration.

Among BCBF's most successful initiatives is the Illustrators Survival Corner, a project created with Mimaster Illustrazione that engages over 6,000 young illustrators each year through portfolio reviews, masterclasses, and professional meetings with international publishers and art directors. Originally created in Bologna, the format is now also regularly presented at the China Shanghai International Children's Book Fair and the Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara, and will debut at the end of June 2026 at MIFA in Annecy.

In collaboration with Mimaster Illustrazione, BCBF also launched the new Designer Studio in 2026, within BolognaBookPlus (BCBF's area dedicated to generalist publishing). This professional space focuses entirely on book design, editorial planning, and the new visual languages of contemporary illustrated books.