

bulgarian
books
for **kids**

Chasing Words

19 Bulgarian Illustrators
of Children's Books





CHASING WORDS

The exhibition *Chasing Words* presents *19 Bulgarian Illustrators of Children's Books* at the 62nd Bologna Children's Book Fair (March 31 – April 3, 2025). It is a kind of continuation and update of the selection from the exhibition *Joy, Sadness and Hope*, part of Bulgaria's national pavilion *Bulgarian Books for Kids* at the Bologna Fair in 2024, organised by The Association for Culture and Literature. Our aim is to create a current, albeit subjective, picture of contemporary Bulgarian illustration. To introduce a

wider audience of professionals and amateurs to its specific characteristics and achievements, focusing on the richness and diversity of artistic styles. The selected artists are representatives of several generations – some of them are well established, while others are still building their careers. We exhibit one illustration each from a specific book and preparatory drawings that lift the curtain on the creative process. Scanning the QR codes leads to the added content on the project website **booksforkids.bg** →

The Exhibition →



1.



2.



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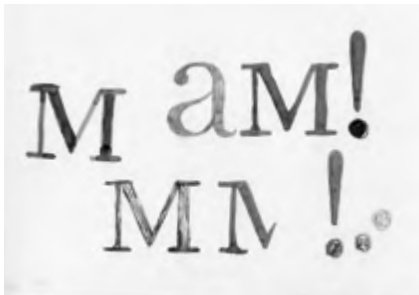
4.

The added content on the website includes a database in a compact format with information about the featured artists and publications. There you will read the curatorial texts; view a gallery of illustrations, preparatory drawings, and details of the published book; and learn more about the authors, getting acquainted with their biographies and other books by them. In the current exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, for convenience we have included the selection from the exhibition *Joy*,

Sadness and Hope from last year. The face of our project in 2024 was the bear (3) by Kiril Zlatkov from the book *When I Want to Keep Silent* (author Zornitsa Hristova) (p. 8). This hypnotic image won many admirers during the Bologna fair, and the subsequent edition in Italian from Orecchio Acerbo, in a translation by Neva Micheva, underwent three printings in a short period of time and continues to enjoy the attention of the public. This year, the bear has “passed the baton” to Svetlyo and his friend Dog



6.



5.



7.

(4), characters from the book *To Put It Mildly* (p. 10) by the beloved Bulgarian classic author Valeri Petrov. Illustrated by Lyuba Haleva, the publication is part of the 2019 *Hristo G. Danov* award-winning series. The current exhibition, *Chasing Words*, also includes *The Sleep Button* (p. 16), illustrated by Maria Nalbantova (5, 6), from the same series, as well as books honored with other Bulgarian and international awards, such as *The Adventures of Pinocchio* with illustrations by Iassen Ghiuselev (p. 34); the debut *Head-Over-Heels*

Hoopie (author Tanya Petkova), illustrated by Katrin Eftimova (p. 18); and books by writer-illustrators – Maria Gulemetova’s *Beyond the Fence* (p. 14) and *Lullabies for Fairies and Monsters* by Sotir Gelev (p. 32). We would like to emphasize that this selection is not a ranking of any sort, nor does it claim to be exhaustive – it is but another step forward in the popularization of Bulgarian children’s books, and more specifically – of their illustration. That is why the exhibition is the center of the *Bulgarian Books for Kids* stand this year.

The Process →



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10.

Children's illustration in Bulgaria has its own tradition, its stronger and weaker periods. Its development has naturally been influenced by historical events and social changes, but also by important absences or presences – such as the iconic books that have reached Bulgarian children in translation. Their illustrations have shaped the taste of generations of readers and artists alike, who in turn influence the style of the younger generations. Art schools and academies also play a role in this cycle,

as undoubtedly do publishers, whose policies and practices influence the look and artistic qualities of illustrated children's publications. But the role of the illustrator is truly pivotal: *a hunter who chases after words, a magical translator into images*. The process from text to image is individual for each artist, but it most often begins with the sketch. For some, the preparation for the illustrations takes many months, as is the case, for example, with Maria Gulemetova in the remarkable book *Beyond the Fence*. She made

More →



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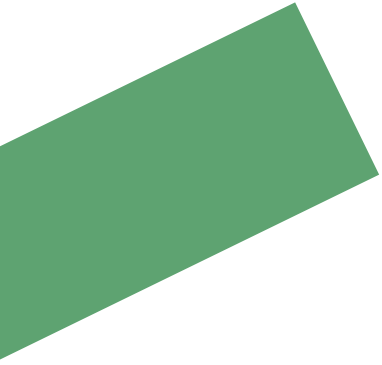
14.

hundreds of pencil, ink, and watercolor drawings before finding the image of the despotic boy and his friend, a tame piglet who longs for freedom (8). Kiril Zlatkov, for his part, draws in a sketchbook with pen and ink, turning emotional states into metaphors (1,2). Lyuba Haleva works on ordinary A4 copy paper in pencil before finally composing her magnificent collages in Photoshop. lassen Ghiuselev's virtuoso drawings for *Pinocchio* (14) seem to decide the final result already at this stage – the composition, characters,

and gestures are as convincing as in the printed book. We are privileged to be able to examine the artist's work up close. And to discover in it that little child who greedily devoured the books of their generation, who supplemented the illustrations and filled out the stories to calibrate them to their own personal magical world.

Anton Staykov
Svoboda Tzekova
Curators

Illustrators →



You will find information
for pictures with numbers
from 1 to 15 and those from
the cover at the end of
the catalogue.



Kiril Zlatkov

Lyuba Haleva

Rositsa Raleva

Maria Gulemetova

Maria Nalbantova

Katrin Eftimova

Kremena Yagodina

Nevena Angelova

Siyana Zaharieva

Yassen Grigorov

Kristina Toujarova

Iva Sasheva

Sotir Gelev

Iassen Ghiuselev

Kapka Kaneva

Damyan Damyanov

Mila Yaneva-Tabakova

Elena Jablyanova

Ina Hristova



Kiril Zlatkov

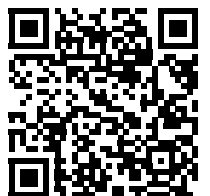
When I Want to Keep Silent

An exceptional book appeared in Bulgaria in 2014, and was later translated into several languages, including Italian, with serious interest from the public and critics. At first glance, this is a book that does not fit into our idea of a bestseller. It tells a laconic and thoughtful story about a different kind of bear, one for whom words are not the strongest way to communicate. In addition to words, it has music, dreams, reverie, contemplation, self-knowledge... The messages of Zornitsa Hristova, author of the text, and Kiril Zlatkov, the illustrator of *When I Want to Keep Silent*, come together somewhere between words and images, accumulating silent experiences, just like with the bear itself. It lies on a white horse, sings its song together with a seagull, and feels the light from between the clouds like a gentle caress. Kiril Zlatkov achieves brevity and silence in the book with compositions saturated with intense strokes, worked at length, in which everything is built with precise attention and mastery. Little pearls of fruit, candies, skies with fluffy clouds, but most of all – the teddy bear, hidden in his fluffy fur, drawn stroke by stroke... As if this density of lines opposes the echoing desire of this extraordinary hero to convey everything to us only with silence. The captivating image of the teddy bear with closed eyes was the face of the Bulgarian stand in Bologna in 2024, where he won many friends.



When I Want to Keep Silent

Author: Zornitsa Hristova
Illustrator: Kiril Zlatkov
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 32
Format: 21.5 x 24 cm
Publisher: Tochitsa, 2024
ISBN 978-619-717-201-0





Lyuba Haleva

To Put It Mildly

Svetlyo is a boy with a kind heart who helps animals in trouble: for example, a woodpecker someone threw stones at, a turtle that has turned over on its back, and a mole that someone tried to drown. And when he himself gets into trouble, the animals come to his aid. The boy has committed a small sin: he wrote a letter to his grandmother saying that he did not receive the three levs she sent him. And everyone tries to retrieve the letter, led by the Dog – an amazing mongrel who pretends to be a St. Bernard. Valeri Petrov's tale has become a Bulgarian children's classic with the delightful poems embedded in the story, along with cheerful dialogues and vividly depicted characters. Illustrator Lyuba Haleva follows the steps of the story in an extremely poetic and far from literal way. She includes episodes from the story on each page, and she collages fine pencil drawings with details of letters and stamps. In the resizing of the elements relative to each other, small houses and swings alternate, along with enormous leaves, a dog's paw in a mailbox, and a rebus describing children's mischief; typographic elements of particular importance in the text are enlarged to the size of the whole page. The artist's inexhaustible imagination develops the images of the characters in a special spatial system, where the eye looks from above and from the side simultaneously, as they finally return home to finish dreaming. A delightful book.



To Put It Mildly

Author: Valeri Petrov
Illustrator: Lyuba Haleva
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 76
Format: 21 x 21 cm
Publisher: Colibri, 2018
ISBN 978-619-020-319-3





Rositsa Raleva

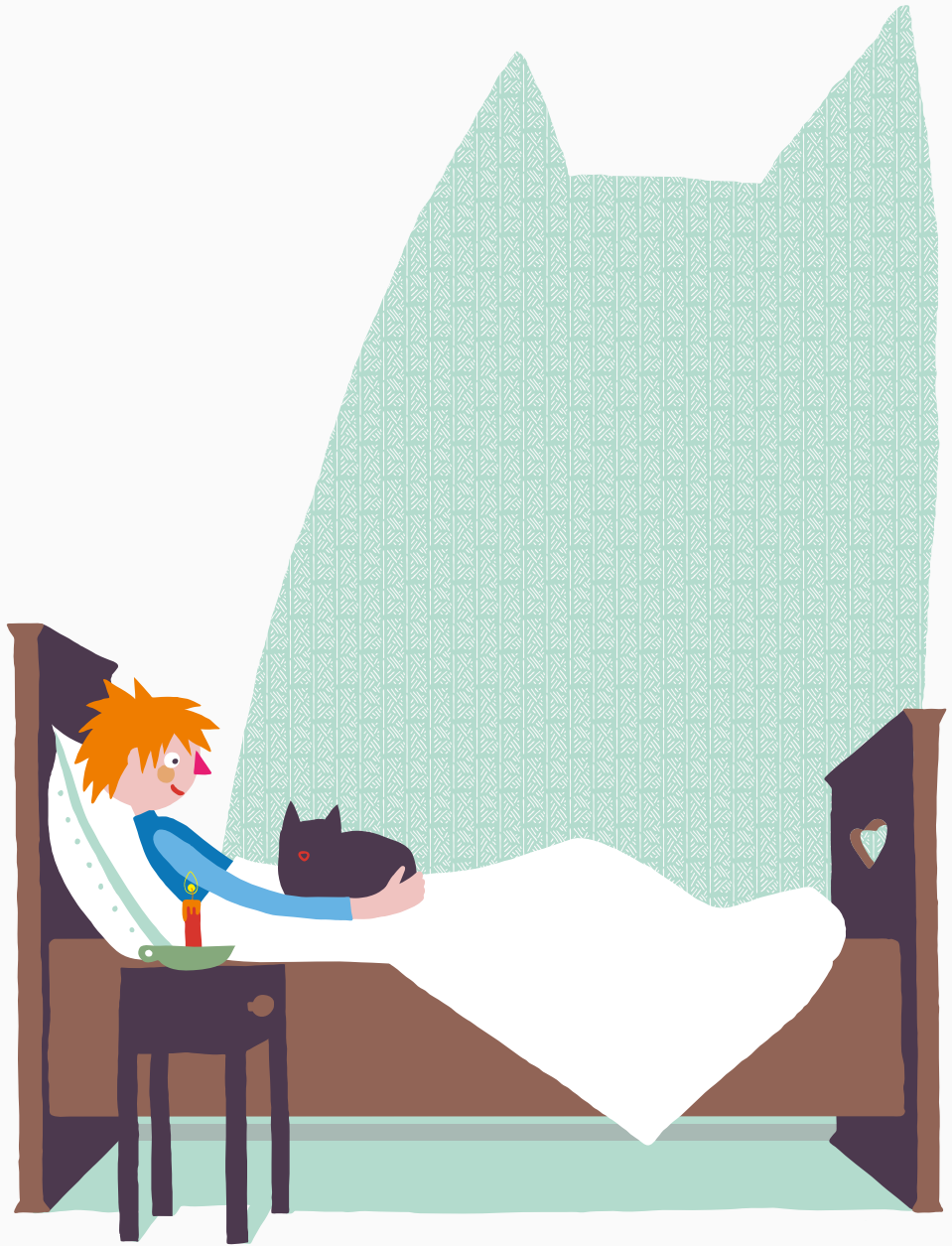
The Colorful Man

The publication of *The Colorful Man* by the poet and playwright Ivan Teofilov is an event in new Bulgarian children's literature. This magnificent large-format hardcover edition contains poems for children and two stagings of fairy tales. The layout and illustrations by Rositsa Raleva are at the level of the text, which easily and skillfully provokes children's imagination. The light vector graphics peer out from the pages, flying when necessary; they occupy the center of the page when attention should be directed to certain images, and they fit delicately into the text of the plays. Secondary details are omitted; the expressive images of children, horses and dogs, mice and swallows "speak" with measured hyperbolizations; the deliberate details add exactly what is needed for the poetic image. The delicate tonalities (with the exception of the flyleaf, which resounds magnificently in a vibrant color scheme) and the refined stylization are somewhat reminiscent of good examples from the 1980s. But in this book, the recognizable voice of Rositsa Raleva enters into a duet with the voice of the great poet, unerringly and in a contemporary way.



The Colorful Man

Author: Ivan Teofilov
Illustrator: Rositsa Raleva
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 144
Format: 20.5 x 28.8 cm
Publisher: Janet 45, 2015
ISBN 978-619-186-138-5

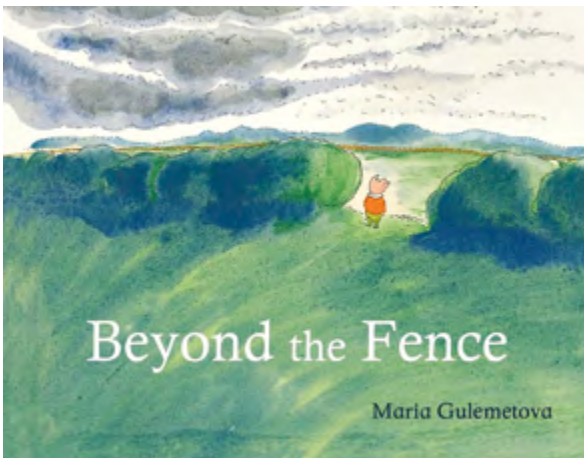




Maria Gulemetova

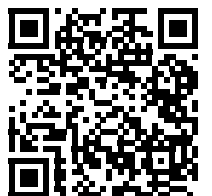
Beyond the Fence

This debut book from 2017 won the *CILIP Kate Greenaway Award* in England, with the jury appreciating its clear message, conveyed unobtrusively through a plot about a child and his toy. A piglet lives in a big house with Thomas. There is a friendship between them, but it follows Thomas's strict rules – Piggy does what the little boy decides. What they will play, what clothes the piglet will wear, whether he will go outside or watch his friend and master's puppet show. One day, while Thomas is playing with his cousin in the big house, Piggy goes for a walk in the field among the green hills and meets a boar. They are immediately connected through their shared desire for freedom. They run together, not watched over by anyone and without any barriers or obstacles. The theme of forced friendship and true friendship, constructed by Maria Gulemetova through the contrast between the big house, full of toys, and nature, which is freedom itself, is expanded upon with more questions – wild vs. domestic, the price of freedom, etc., which children can discuss with their teachers and parents. Of course, the book's inspiration is built mostly on the artist's incredible drawings. With just a few lines and delicate watercolor painting, the characters come to life in rich and complex states. And the different approach in the development of the house, monochrome and geometric, and the world outside, with many shades of green and blue, really makes us soar with the main character.



Beyond the Fence

Author: Maria Gulemetova
Illustrator: Maria Gulemetova
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 40
Format: 28 x 22 cm
Publisher: Child's Play, 2018
ISBN 978-184-643-931-5





Maria Nalbantova

Sleep Button

As in other books by Valeri Petrov, his prose here also opens up space for beautiful and cheerful poems that create a story within a story. There is a cunning worm that twists like a hook so that the fish won't eat it, a cat as long as from here to the store, and all sorts of other tricks that Oggy's grandfather comes up with to put him to sleep faster. The last story is about a grandfather kangaroo who doesn't put the baby kangaroo in his pouch because it's full of books, and so it runs all the way to Australia. In the space created by illustrator Maria Nalbantova, we see the house from the outside and the bedroom with the grandfather and Oggy from the inside in one image. The toys from the song about the circus seem to be alive, and at the beginning of the final scene, the bespectacled grandfather kangaroo and a little baby kangaroo are already sitting in the bedroom. The artist uses visual metaphors skillfully – Oggy is sleeping in his bed on the clouds; the sleep button, which can put you to sleep when you turn it clockwise, pierces a tunnel of magical light, which all of the characters from the bedtime story slip into. At the same time, the alternation of close-ups and panoramic compositions with many elements creates a richness and density in the illustrations and helps to divide the book into smaller parts. On entire pages we see a whale, a cat, a funny doll with a two-pointed fool's cap, all beautifully stylized, and the fine contouring of the large portrait of Oggy in a starry pajamas makes us come to like him very much indeed.



Sleep Button

Author: Valeri Petrov
Illustrator: Maria Nalbantova
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 56
Format: 21 x 21 cm
Publisher: Colibri, 2018
ISBN 978-619-020-274-5





Katrin Eftimova

Head-Over-Heels Hoopie and the World of Abundance

The main protagonist of the book *Head-Over-Heels Hoopie* is a *domovik* – in other words, a little house spirit or brownie who meticulously sees to order in the house and that every single object is in good condition. The author Tanya Petkova touches on both the topic of ecology and the maintenance of ordinary objects in every home, as well as donation as a cause. The artist Katrin Evtimova has created a charming image of the house spirit, who resembles a miraculous bird. Hoopie appears in a variety of angles among piles of boxes, stuffed toys, and household utensils, and she evokes empathy with her actions. Throughout the entire book, the illustrator maintains her individual style, which is characterized by distinct outlining and shading, the role of which is the creation of form, not light. The selected points of view from the height of the tiny Hoopie create the feeling of partnership. The attention and care with which everything depicted bears the character of the subject is respectful of the curiosity of children. The variety of perspectives, from extreme close-ups to wide shots, as well as the pages with vignettes and the panoramas of the city make reading unobtrusive and interesting. With the addition of the convincing characters of the family and the children's images, the book gains wholeness and integrity, ready to take its place among children's favorite readings.



Head-Over-Heels Hoopie and the World of Abundance

Author: Tanya Petkova
Illustrator: Katrin Eftimova
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 52
Format: 23.4 x 23.3 cm
Publisher: Yasna Kniga, 2023
ISBN 978-619-920-036-0





Kremena Yagodina

Mousy's Week

In Katya Antonova's series *Mousy's Week*, the tiny protagonist opens his eyes each morning and decides what to do during the day – to cook, play sports, get dressed up, or repair broken things at home. Sunday is a fun day, and Mousy invites his friends for “playing together.” Kremena Yagodina has a large contribution in the set of seven books becoming a favorite go-to reading for the little ones. In these full-color compositions, the characters appear with a dance step, roll around, bounce, or fly off the pages. The mouse's point of view allows all objects to be observed in extreme close-up. In this way, distance is overcome and the child can jump fully into the world of small animals and experience all the activities from the weekly program with them. Enormous cups of tea with lemon and cookies, a fountain that turns into a bathtub on dress-up day, big books about distant journey – the artist unleashes herself in a flying universe of characters and objects in free scale and proportions. At first we miss the mouse, separated by a clear outline and different colors, but then we see that this is a sought-after effect: the mice are completely immersed in the environment and become part of it, and in places they even have to be searched for, as in a puzzle, and this is part of the game. “What awaits me in the new day? Something wonderful – it all depends on me!”



Mousy's Week **(7 books)**

Author: Katya Antonova
Illustrator: Kremena Yagodina
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 7 books 18 pages each
Format: 15 x 15 cm
Publisher: Ribka, 2018
ISBN 978-619-713-149-9





Nevena Angelova

This Is Totally Outrageous

In the 48 poems by the famous Bulgarian poet Victor Samuilov, children will read about a variety of things that happen to them every day. The child becomes terribly tall when he is on his father's shoulders. Or he makes mistakes and stumbles over the "punctuation" marks in chats. Or he asks for medicine to cure laziness. Or he argues with his grandparents and parents over various topics connected with getting to know world. Illustrator Nevena Angelova has immersed herself in these poems with great love. In the book's layout, some of them are found on larger pages, which fold into the main body of the book and create an additional playful moment. In the mixed technique, the artist works combines assemblages with clothespins, pieces of fabric, newspapers, papers of different textures, and collages in several layers. Added to the entire wealth of expressive media are drawings with pencil, tempera, and watercolor, made with special care and an eye for the characteristics of children's perception. Special attention is paid to working with the text – the drawn letters, words, and whole sentences take on a life of their own. "Silence!" struggles against "shush!" and "nothing" against "something." It is a fabulous and wonderfully illustrated book about children's everyday life and fantasies.



This Is Totally Outrageous

Author: Victor Samuilov
Illustrator: Nevena Angelova
Binding: softcover
Number of Pages: 48
Format: 22 x 21.5 cm
Publisher: Janet 45, 2023
ISBN 978-619-186-862-9





Siyana Zaharieva

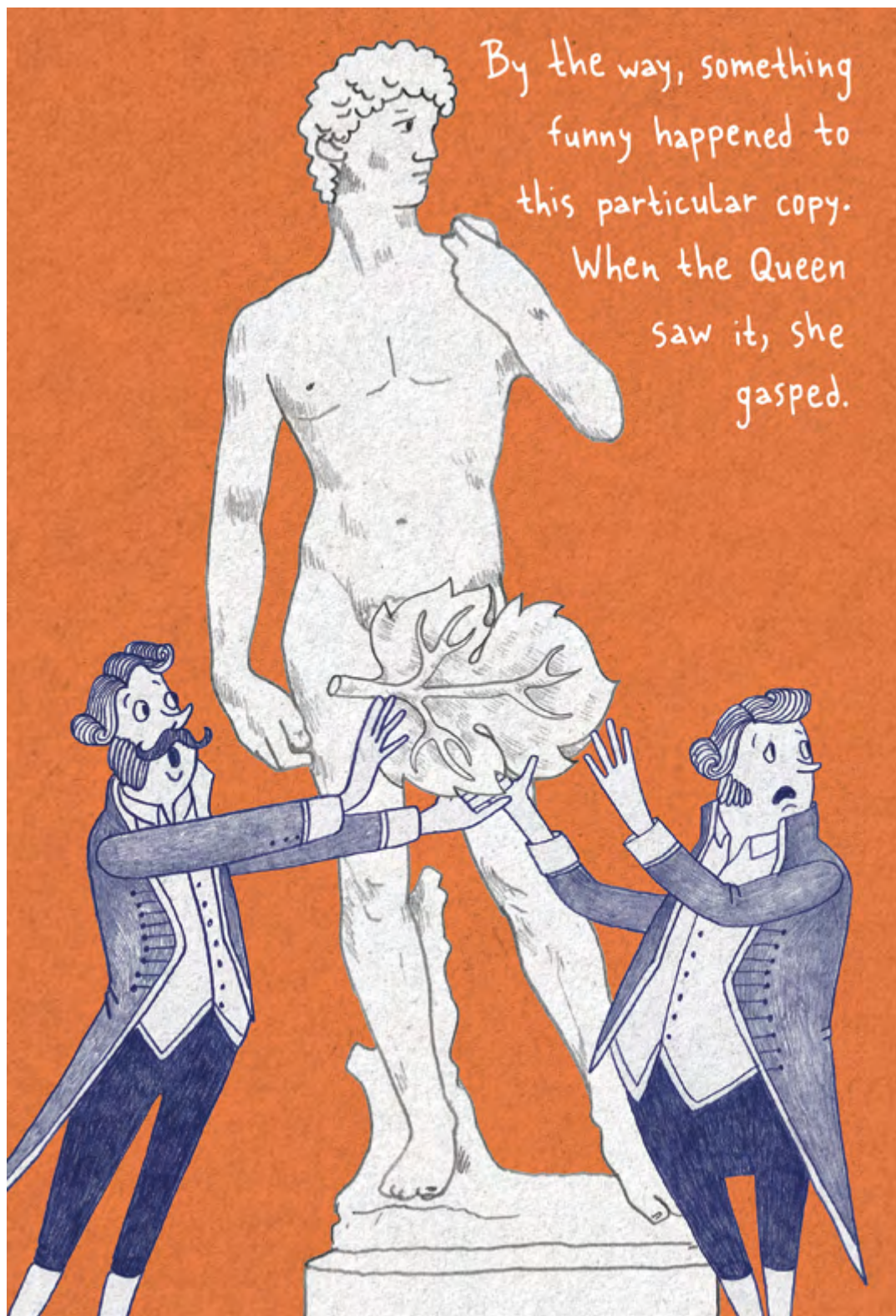
Put Some Pants on These Paintings!

This small book is a great educational resource, published in collaboration with the city art gallery in Kazanlak – a beautiful town in Bulgaria’s Rose Valley. The goal is to poke fun at the puritanical attitude towards art from past eras, and even today, through the prism of satire. Why were royals, popes, and high-ranking church officials – and many ordinary people as well – outraged by the nudity of people depicted in paintings, to the point that they even ordered the figures to “get dressed”? The text, written by Zornitsa Hristova, as well as the illustrations by Siyana Zaharieva are bursting with humor. The artist draws with a confident and lively line, economically using only black, to which she adds two colors to enhance the impact of the satirical ideas in the drawings. It’s easy to identify Queen Victoria and her entourage, the famous artists and their equally famous models Venus de Milo, David, and The Thinker, even as they are outrageously hyperbolized – because the great creators of art were also ordinary people. From the pages of the book, Michelangelo and Leonardo, Delacroix and Rodin make their case for freedom in art, and more specifically, for their reluctance to draw pants, which spoil everything.



***Put Some Pants
on These Paintings!***

Author: Zornitsa Hristova
Illustrator: Siyana Zaharieva
Binding: softcover
Number of Pages: 24
Format: 11.5 x 17 cm
Publisher: Tochitsa, 2024
ISBN 978-619-717-253-9





Yassen Grigorov

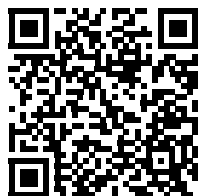
The Bear's Speech

This children's tale by the famous writer Julio Cortázar is a text that has always been published with the original illustrations; here, it is illustrated by a new artist for the first time. It is fortunate that this poetic book fell into the hands of a sensitive artist like Yassen Grigorov, who masterfully makes use of the language of metaphor, quotation, the richness of textures, and spatial hierarchy and cross-sections, thus ensuring a fantastic communication of the drawing with the text. In the form of a square book, the artist builds panoramas on each folio, developing an impressive architecture of the images, and especially the close-ups. The bear crawls through the pipes of the buildings and peeks out from the residents' fountains with a wet muzzle, "stroking their cheeks and licking their noses." When he is happy, he does a dance, a reference to the painting by the French artist Matisse. And when he leaves satisfied, knowing that he has done the right thing, he flies up with the stars into the galaxy. Yassen Grigorov is a virtuoso in every small detail, without flaunting his ability to depict literally every object and situation. Everything is subordinated to the small pieces of text on each page, until the very end. The digital technology is perceived very naturally; the artist uses technological capabilities to build a realistic masterful texture, as if it had been accomplished through analogue means.



The Bear's Speech

Author: Julio Cortázar
Illustrator: Yassen Grigorov
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 40
Format: 21.5 x 21.5 cm
Publisher: List, 2025
ISBN 978-619-772-241-3





Kristina Toujarova

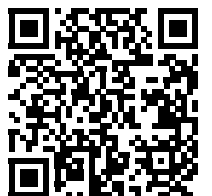
Shtarkelov. The King of Watercolour

This is the third in a series of books about artists aimed at children. The author of the text, Kristina Toujarova, is also its illustrator, which is fortunate. She has found the right tone, suitable for children, by presenting them with the difficult fate of the famous Bulgarian artist Konstantin Shtarkelov in an accessible way, with plenty of humor, even supplementing what is not said in prose with verses in rhyme. The illustrations themselves are inspired by Shtarkelov's original watercolors and are painted lightly and airily. In this difficult technique, the illustrator has created compositions with an impressive number of characters and events with documentary authenticity – the artist on an outing with his friends, members of the royal family, visitors at exhibitions... Shtarkelov himself is the main character in a large number of the illustrations – from his travels in Germany, Paris, Egypt, and especially in the Bulgarian mountains, we learn about his love for nature and travel, as well as about his gentle soul, devoted to his great love – watercolor. And the sincere interest in the series among children proves that Kristina Toujarova has managed to reach their hearts with this new genre for Bulgaria.



Shtarkelov.
The King of Watercolour

Author: Kristina Toujarova
Illustrator: Kristina Toujarova
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 88
Format: 21.5 x 25.8 cm
Publisher: Amateurs Books, 2024
ISBN 978-619-918-682-4





Iva Sasheva

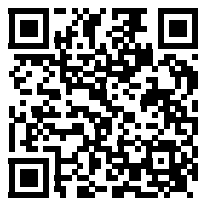
Enchanted Garden

Enchanted Garden is another book by the successful tandem of poet Nikolai Grozni and artist Iva Sasheva. "Charily, I wait, a sometime-mouse, a sometime-cat." "I raise a plush hand to lift the veil of night." The poetic book, in a small format, uses a minimalist approach: text on the left-hand page, illustration on the right. After reading the poems, the illustrations can be interpreted independently as surrealistic paintings with messages of their own. They are reminiscent of alternating scenes from a small-cast play. The leaves, branches, and shadows appear to be in constant motion. The characters seem to be connected by invisible strings, noticeably attracting or repelling each other like magnets changing polarities. The grayish silvery color palette is pierced by accents in golden ocher and red. The illustrator's watercolor technique is delicate and controlled, and the characters have clear silhouettes to visually convey a squirrel in a top hat and jacket, fallen apples that look like snails, a sky like an expanse of velvet, stars cut out of paper... Music has seeped into all the illustrations, giving a special aura to this extraordinary book.



Enchanted Garden

Author: Ivan Grozni
Illustrator: Iva Sasheva
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 44
Format: 15.5 x 20.5 cm
Publisher: Begemot, 2024
ISBN 978-619-928-461-2





Sotir Gelev

Lullabies for Fairies and Monsters

This unusual book gives us accurate notice from its very title – the book is for fearless children and parents. In fact, what is needed most of all are brave parents who, before bedtime, will happily read poems about goblins, water spirits, werewolves, stone eaters, vampires, and many other creatures that are rarely given roles as lullaby heroes. To challenge his readers – both big and little – even more, the author has included a song about the sock eaters who live under the bed and never sleep. The poems are long and swirl masterfully in elegant rhymes. There is no pampering in the texts – the “fears” are laid bare one by one, without looking for a strategy to go easy on the children. But as if to compensate, Sotir Gelev draws the creatures not quite so scary as they are in the poems. There is something carnivalesque, something make-believe in them. These are creatures playing the role of scarecrows, as if especially for the children. To a large extent, this unscary effect is due to the neutral background on which he depicts the characters – who, among other things, are also static. The special axonometric way in which they are drawn creates the feeling that these are almost very beautiful designs for monster costumes. The muzzles, fur, hats, clothing, and shoes are depicted with a fabulous decorative beauty. The special charm of this book lies in this duality of scary and make-believe.



Lullabies for Fairies and Monsters

Author: Sotir Gelev
Illustrator: Sotir Gelev
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 32
Format: 21.5 x 28.5 cm
Publisher: Enthusiast, 2020, 2022
ISBN 978-619-164-372-1





Iassen Ghiuselev

The Adventures of Pinocchio

There are books that are a cornerstone in children's literature, and only experienced illustrators trained for marathon running should tackle them. One such book is Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*. Its 36 chapters contain numerous adventures that take place in different environments – from Geppetto's workshop, through Mangiafuoco's puppet theater, to the throat of the whale, and many others. The artist Iassen Ghiuselev approaches it with his characteristic thoroughness – he conducts research on the material environment, constructs the characters analytically, and structures the book with alternating black-and-white and color images. For him, there are no insignificant components in the work process, but one of the definitive decisions is the stylistic construction of the compositions in the book. The exquisite chapter headings and endings are spatial compositions inscribed into the pages of the book like woodcuts. The color illustrations also obey this particular angularity, remaining within the boundaries of the rectangle and square. It is as if each illustration came out of someone's magical chisel and was then masterfully colored in. The incredible chiaroscuro construction, combined with distinct silhouettes, along with the wealth of textures, but most of all the dramatic construction and the overall concept turn this illustrator's reading into a true masterpiece. After its appearance in 1997, the book was published in several languages and was distinguished with numerous awards.



The Adventures of Pinocchio

Author: Carlo Collodi
Illustrator: Iassen Ghiuselev
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 165
Format: 19 x 30 cm
Publisher: Helikon, 2015
ISBN 978-954-298-407-8





Kapka Kaneva

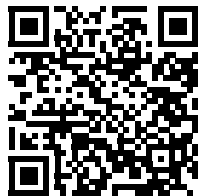
The Iron Man

This book by Ted Hughes, published in 1968, is still relevant today. It touches on issues of ecology, global politics, and most of all, maintaining peace. The Iron Man emerges from the sea in pieces and rebuilds himself with his own strength. People see him as a threat, as he steals and eats any iron he comes across, even swallowing whole machines. After setting traps for him, with the help of a child, they convince him to go live at the scrap metal dump. But the real enemy comes from the sky – an enormous dragon, as big as Australia. The Iron Man fights him with cunning, making him warm himself on the sun. The dragon becomes peaceful – it begins to circle the Earth, singing songs, and peace is established among humankind. Kapka Kaneva's illustrations adeptly reflect this utopian fantasy. The technique she uses is original and effective. She cuts the individual elements of the illustration out of paper, composes them in a kind of action scene, then directs the light and takes photographs. The result is a voluminous, multi-layered illustration in which the created three-dimensional world comes back to life in its two-dimensional form on the pages of the book. In addition to the qualities of the illustrations, it is important that the children are introduced to a new technique for pictures with which they can experiment.



The Iron Man

Author: Ted Hughes
Illustrator: Kapka Kaneva
Binding: softcover
Number of Pages: 84
Format: 21.5 x 21.5 cm
Publisher: List, 2019
ISBN 978-619-7350-50-0





Damyan Damyanov

How Koleto Pankin Flew to Brazil...

Daniil Kharms had a difficult destiny in both his literature and his life. Avant-garde in his prose, he was one of the first absurdists in Soviet literary history. Since his texts for adults were not published, he began writing stories for children, the most popular of which is from 1928 and tells about the make-believe trip to Brazil by two boys, friends from Moscow. In the dialogues/arguments between them are elements that look to be borrowed from the Russian folklore tradition. The visible and the fantastically distant are constantly mixed, which increases the tension and creates a particularly spiral narrative. Damyan Damyanov has chosen a mixed technique to illustrate this unusual text – drawing in pencil and partial watercolor painting of individual characters and elements. This visual method also raises doubt – is that which is depicted true, or only contingently possible? The Brazilian flora and fauna are studied in detail in pencil, but the images of the friends are in color in their real-life dispute. The pilot who helps with the trip to Brazil flies the two boys a short distance to a nearby field with a magical device – a color airplane over the pencil-sketched landscape. The exaggerations and stylizations of the characters are quite in the nature of the book. The overall feeling is that the illustrator shows a very good analytical insight into the author's ideas.



How Koleto Pankin Flew to Brazil, and Petya Ershov Didn't Believe a Thing

Author: Daniil Kharms
Illustrator: Damyan Damyanov
Binding: softcover
Number of Pages: 48
Format: 21.5 x 21.5 cm
Publisher: List, 2019
ISBN 978-619-7350-50-0





Mila Yaneva-Tabakova

Tea from Paraguay

Children's poetry collections have a special place in Bulgarian literature. Following a long tradition that began in the 1920s, they are richly illustrated, and such is the case with the collection *Tea from Paraguay*, by Zoya Vasileva. The themes related to natural cycles – the changing of seasons, day and night – gradually and effortlessly enrich children's knowledge about the world around them. A favorite technique of hers is word games, already hinted at in the title (which forms a rhyme in Bulgarian). And the adorable children's excuses – five minutes of play become two hours, and the work that awaits can wait until tomorrow – create a dialogic style that is maintained until the end of the book. Illustrator Mila Yaneva-Tabakova finds an efficient key to the reading of this poetry with a free and lively acrylic ink technique. She inventively illustrates every two-poem folio with a picture that brings new meanings. Bees, bugs, and crickets inhabit the plant-filled environment. And the most charming are the dynamic images of the children, which are gushing with joy. The expressive silhouettes, the alternation of close and distant perspectives, and the different points of view are part of the artist's artistic arsenal. She composes the text on each page precisely, so that it is as readable as possible. The result is a stylish and optimistic illustrator's reading, aimed squarely at the target – the audience of children.



Tea from Paraguay

Author: Zoya Vasileva
Illustrator: Mila Yaneva-Tabakova
Binding: softcover
Number of Pages: 48
Format: 20 x 26 cm
Publisher: Janet 45, 2024
ISBN 978-619-186-827-8





Elena Jablyanova

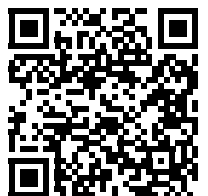
The Dog Rose Bush and the Wind

In the first thematic cycle of this poetry collection, the author is inspired by nature and ecology, afforestation, and autumn plowing. He sees an image of a ship in the clouds, is impressed by the dandelion and the dog rose bush's struggle with the wind, discovers metaphorical turns for creating a poem in the tiny bee and snail. The frost and fog, the bare winter trees, the changing of the seasons become an occasion for short poetic impressions. The second thematic cycle is dedicated to today's children and their problems: a D in math for a child who copies; a little girl who cannot manage to learn poems by heart and has her phone and tablet taken away; two grandmothers who brag that their grandchildren know English, but wonder if they will also learn Bulgarian. Illustrator Elena Jablyanova has approached the poems expressively and freely: a charming image of a child with an umbrella enjoying the rain; various kinds of hikers on a forest train in convincing perspectives. Woodpeckers and sparrows, dogs and chickens – they are all authentic and cheerfully drawn, while the anthropomorphized squirrel and hedgehog from the fable at the end do not lose their charm as animals. The dusk in the forest is genuine, with deep shadows on the trees. The tones change according to the nature of the different subjects. And the artist's ability to draw children, animals, and nature leaves the impression of a homogeneous and mature style.



The Dog Rose Bush and the Wind

Author: Mihail Kaldaramov
Illustrator: Elena Jablyanova
Binding: softcover
Number of Pages: 40
Format: 20 x 28 cm
Publisher: Janet 45, 2024
ISBN 978-619-186-937-4





Ina Hristova

The Ear of the World

The text by author Violeta Hristova was created with a didactic purpose – to introduce children to the solfège alphabet of music notes in an entertaining way. In the most sonorous country in the world, Music, the notes look like children dressed in bright colors. The ear of the world is the green valley in which this country is located and where all the notes live. In this fantastic world, anything is possible – for example, there could be a lion beneath the piano lid. Illustrator Ina Hristova has taken advantage of the full potential of the text to create a fantastic, colorful world. Each note has its own story, character, and fairy-tale environment in which magic happens. Blazing fireworks shoot from the trumpet of the red-haired DOMinik; the green FABio plays the French horn, sitting on a large leaf in the middle of a green lake with green fish; and SOLedad and LAura are twins who play the cello. Despite the seemingly schematic structure of the book, the compositions are very diverse, with different layouts; some are deliberately static, while in others, the movement is whirling. Harmoniously combined technical devices are used, creating a richness in the texture of the illustrations. The little notes are cleanly drawn on the fluid gradations that build the environment, with clear outlines and multi-layered saturated shapes.

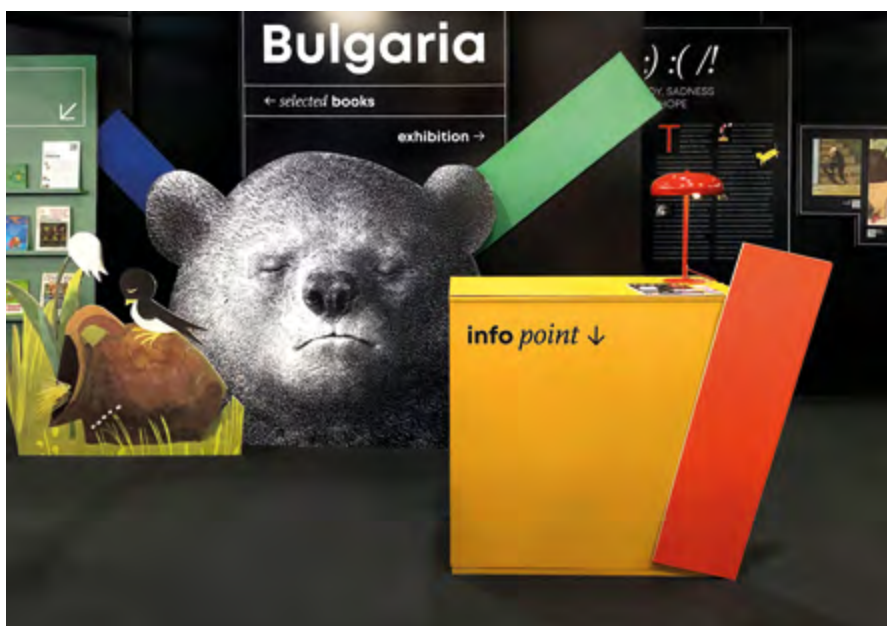


The Ear of the World

Author: Violeta Hristova
Illustrator: Ina Hristova
Binding: hardcover
Number of Pages: 48
Format: 21.5 x 25.5 cm
Publisher: Buboleche, 2024
ISBN 978-619-920-894-6



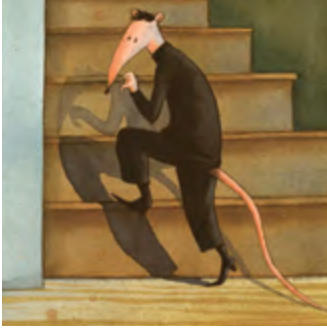
Exhibition 2024 →





The exhibition *Joy, Sadness and Hope* was part of Bulgaria's presentation *Bulgarian Books for Kids* at the 61st Bologna Children's Book Fair (April 8–11, 2024), organised by Association for Culture and Literature. *The 25 selected contemporary Bulgarian children's book illustrators* are from different generations and have a diverse array of professional experience. The goal of this selection was to draw the attention of the audience and professionals to specific qualities and aspects of the artists' work and to shed light

on their approach to the literary text, their choice of technique, and their compositional and narrative techniques. Each of the selected artists was represented with a fragment from an illustration for a specific book and a QR code leading to the added content on the project website **booksforkids.bg**. After its presentation in Bologna, the life of the exhibition continued as it traveled on to several Bulgarian cities, reaching a large audience and receiving excellent media coverage. You can view the selection and scan the QR codes on the following pages. →



Iva Sasheva

Of Books and Long Tails

A bookstore on Chicago's North Side, a veritable labyrinth of books, connects the main characters – Eloise the mouse and Percival the rat. Eloise is constantly reading, sitting on Ray Bradbury's sofa. She chooses books according to the day and her mood: children's books, books about the stars and the universe, or human anatomy. In the attic....



Ina Hristova

A Child's Christmas in Wales

Dylan Thomas's poetic text, originally written for reading on the radio, evokes tactile images from childhood that are as personal as they are universal. Ina Hristova transports us into the atmosphere of this "wool-white bell-tongued ball of holidays" with pictures of frozen moments that stretch out in time, the same way they do when we remember...



Kiril Zlatkov

The Mice Go to the Opera

The Mice Go to the Opera is a poem for children. This is a classic genre, known in Bulgaria since the interwar period and influenced by European models. Opera is not exactly in vogue among today's children, but when a group of lovable and smartly dressed mice become enthralled with it, there is a serious likelihood that will change. "Opera is beautiful!" we are assured by both...



Kalina Muhova

Upside Down Diana

Kalina Muhova has created a comic book about a mischievous city girl who goes to visit her grandparents. There, in the Bulgarian Rose Valley, she learns from her grandmother what ingredients are used to make pancakes, and from her grandfather – what the secret of the "fragrant boulder" is. Things grow complicated...

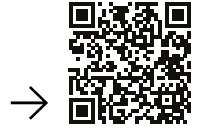




Youlian Tabakov

Sketchbook № 4

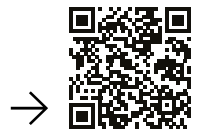
The title of the book is a play on words. Sketchbook [Blok] No. 4 is the name of a children's drawing pad popular in Bulgaria. But this is also the numbered apartment block (judging by the illustrations, from the time of socialism) in which the main character, Mitko, lives. "The kind of apartment blocks no one draws in a drawing class, because most people...



Miglena Papazova

A Boy or a Guinea Pig

"Oh, no," said the Dodo. "This is already too much. An evil gentleman, a talking cat, a tiger, a parrot, and now a dwarf." This little book full of big adventures is part of the Story Seekers series. Its creators are the writer Julia Spiridonova and the artist Miglena Papazova. The publication is aimed at beginning readers, and the ratio between text...



Martin Stanev

The Planet in a Pickle Jar

This is the first book for which Martin Stanev has written the text. It is in the picture book genre and has been very well received since its debut, already having been published in several languages. The plot was inspired by the author's not-so-distant childhood and by the timely topic of environmental protection. A brother and sister find out that their...

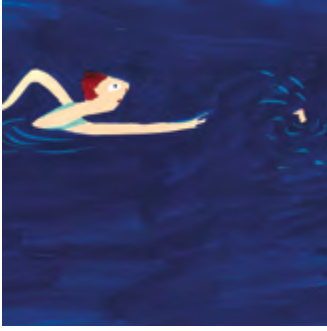


Lyuba Haleva

Merry Tickling Laughter. Part II

There are children's books that people want to own their whole life, to give to their children with the wish that they might in turn pass them on to their children. The Bulgarian playwright and writer Margarit Minkov's Merry Tickling Laughter, illustrated by the artist Lyuba Haleva, is just this sort. And luckily, it has two parts. When a text written with talent reaches the heart...





Mila Yaneva-Tabakova

The First Five

"It's safe at home. It wasn't so scary before outside, either... Then you showed up." Mila Yaneva leads us to the edge of the pool, where she begins a story of the dramatic contrasts of motherhood. Experienced, sincere, revealing. Her authored picture book has so little text that it borders on the silent book genre. But the text is thoughtful and precisely dosed to...



Sofia Popiordanova

The Snow Princess

The fairy tales of the writer Fani Psycheva are from the 1980s. With a poetic tone, written in rich, somewhat archaic language, they are reminiscent of folk tales. *The Snow Princess* is the mistress of winter and the guardian of nature. The plots, as in most fairy tales, thematize the struggle between good and evil, affirming traditional sensitive...



Mira Miroslavova

Grimm's Fairy Tales

Mira Miroslavova belongs to that type of illustrator captivated by decoration. Her affinity for beautiful details, ornamentation, and a noble colour palette is visible in all of her illustrations, and these for the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm are no exception. The stylized characters and motifs are arranged in...



Katina Peeva

The Stranger Child

E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Stranger Child* was a key book of the Romantic era. Almost two centuries later, this is its first edition in Bulgaria. This temporal distance is clearly felt in Katina Peeva's illustrations, which were created with digital technology. But at the same time, they are grounded in layers of tradition in fine art, using...

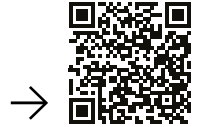




Sotir Gelev

How Lora Learned to Count to Ten

"Lora could only count to one. 'That's enough for me,' she told herself. 'I can count every single thing I see.'" But the artist and writer Sotir Gelev seems to say: No, children, that's not enough – it's good to be able to do much more! The main plot is simple – accompanied by her cat, the main character, Lora, meets dwarves, a monster, a robber... and fairies...



Penko Gelev

Ladybug, Spotty Bug

Dora Gabe is a classic Bulgarian poet from the last century. Even by the late 1920s, her poems were known by heart by parents and children alike; they were published in textbooks and anthologies, and songs were written about them. She also had her favourite illustrators, the most famous of whom was the Bulgarian classic Iliya Beshkov. This selection...



Vyara Boyadjieva

My Sofia and Other Images

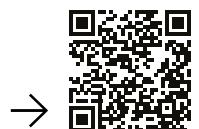
"You go, you come back" is the first sentence in this graphic novel dedicated to the city of Sofia. In it, the artist goes back through her childhood memories of trips with her grandfather to the last stops of the public transport just "for pleasure." Sofia has many different faces, and years later, Vyara Boyadzhieva experiences them with the eyes of an artist...



Stella Dreis

Was macht die Nacht (What the Night Does)

A father is putting his child to sleep. "...But... Dad? / Yes? / What actually happens while I'm sleeping? / Oh, the strangest things! I'll tell you." This is much more than a good night book – it's a night book. And much more happens at night than we imagine. Dirk Gieselmann's remarkable text meets a masterful translation with Stella Dreis's illustrations...

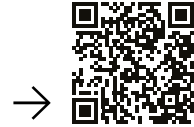




Yassen Grigorov

*Dear House Mosquito**

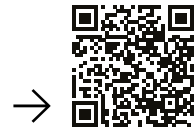
“Everyone wants a canary, or a Dalmatian kitten, but who wants a mosquito for a pet?” Thus begins the book that illustrator Yassen Grigorov is currently working on. The main character – a mosquito – is looking for a master, an employer, or just a friend. The author Zornitsa Hristova truly had fun while writing these rhythmic, buzzing...



Vesselin Pramatarov

On Strings– 1968. A True Story

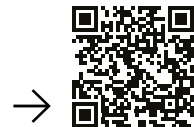
A personal story from the fateful year of 1968 was the documentary basis for the script and drawings of this graphic novel. A first of its kind in Bulgaria, it is already translated into Czech as well. In it, the author and artist Vesselin Pramatarov empathizes with the fate of three Bulgarian students who, after the tragic Prague Spring, dared to express...



Alya Markova

A Cookbook for Big Children

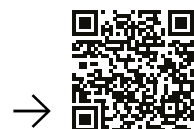
Drawing recipes is Alya Markova’s way of showing her joy in the cooking process. Her style is expressive and cheerful, with a quick playful touch. In *A Cookbook for Big Children*, the colours are fresh and the open compositions spin in mad motion. The texts are written/drawn in different sizes and colours, the exclamations...



Antonia Mechkueva

The Adventures of Courage Forage...

The artist had the difficult task of creating 40 different characters with human personas to correspond to their funny names, ingeniously constructed on puns on the names of various vegetables, sweets, and all kinds of other foods (an undisguised homage by the Bulgarian writer Ivan Radenkov to Gianni Rodari). The compositions are...

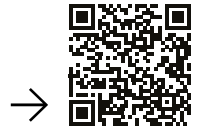




Siyana Zaharieva

Victor and the Magical Fairy

Looking at us from the cover of *Victor and the Magical Fairy* is the princess of the bees. It looks like a Renaissance portrait painted in oils. This is the first book illustrated by Siyana Zaharieva, published back in 2011. A story with a happy ending. The main character, Victor, is a child who scowls at everything. The milk, the apples, even the...



Elitsa Sarbinova

Impatience in a Box

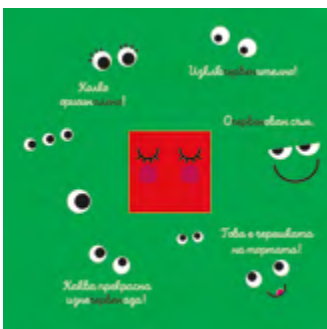
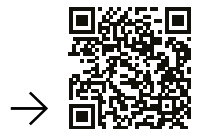
A few little stars beckon us from the milky blue endpaper of *Impatience in a Box*. “Three snowflakes for a title is a good start” – begins the first poem. White, golden ochre, fresh green, and crocus purple. The light illustrations, drawn alla prima in a predominantly pastel range, at first glance act as decorative elements around the...



Liliana Dvoryanova

The Little Elephant Who Wanted to Fly

The title of the book is a play on words. Sketchbook [Blok] No. 4 is the name of a children’s drawing pad popular in Bulgaria. But this is also the numbered apartment block (judging by the illustrations, from the time of socialism) in which the main character, Mitko, lives. “The kind of apartment blocks no one draws in a drawing class, because most people...



Denitza Mineva

Allgreens

Denitza Mineva is the author and illustrator of her books. In *Allgreens*, in which there is a “war between colours,” she uses the language of symbols. Two primary colours represent “good and evil.” The artist is very inventive in this clear semiotic pattern. The green and red squares have been transformed into little people through the addition of minimalist...



The Curators

Anton Staykov (1962) is an artist, journalist, researcher, PhD in advertising semiotics, teacher, and lecturer. He is the author of the award-winning books *A Brief History of Bulgarian Comics* (2013) and *The Bulgarian Primer. 200 Years in First Grade* (2015), as well as host of the segment *The Book as Art* broadcast on Bulgarian National Television (2017–2019) and a screenwriter of documentaries. He curates exhibitions in the fields of comics, illustration, and visual arts.

Svoboda Tzekova (1974) is a graphic designer and illustrator. She is engaged in visual research and works for causes related to children's rights. With her studio format.bg, she creates numerous projects in the field of print and digital media. She is the curator, author, and designer of award-winning books and exhibitions, including the A'Design Award (2015) and the Sofia Award for outstanding achievements in the field of culture (2021).

The Organizer

Association for Culture and Literature is a non-profit organization, specializing in holding book fairs. The association creates, supports, and organizes cultural events in the field of literature, visual arts, and book publishing. Its mission is to improve access to cultural products and to foster the quality dialogue about modern Bulgarian cultural achievements. The organization cooperates with a wide range of professionals from various fields.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone who participated, collaborated, and helped to realize this project. To the artists – for the illustrations provided, for the conversations and shared experiences. To all the publishers who trusted us and sent us materials and books for the exhibition in Bologna. Thanks to the Ministry of Culture and the Sofia Culture Program; to the Executive Agency for the Promotion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises; to Studio X, for the wonderful project website; to FontFabric, for the Mont and Audela fonts, in which all the visual materials were set; and to our partners from the Children's Books Foundation for their trust and support. We also extend our gratitude to our media partners, Bulgarian National Television and Bulgarian National Radio, and to the Bivalvia printing house. We express special thanks to Yana Genova, Gergana Pancheva, Gergana Georgieva, Yulia Rafailovich, Zornitsa Hristova, Nadezhda Radulova, Stefan Gadzhovski, Bozhan Vutov, Kristina Tuzharova, Neva Micheva, George Spadoni, Kiril Zlatkov, Nikol Karapeeva, Georgi Linkov, Ivana Paseva, Rumen Chaushev, Emil Markov, Maya Bobeva-Atanasova, and Val Stoeva.

organizer



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books
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REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
Ministry of Culture



Sofia Municipality
Culture Programme

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the Ministry of Culture of Bulgaria and
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portrait photographs

Phelia Baruh; (p. 8, Kiril Zlatkov); Lyuba Haleva (p. 10, Lyuba Haleva); Gergana Terzieva (p. 12, Rositsa Ralev); Rumi Paskalev (p. 14, Maria Gulemetova); Yana Lozeva (p. 16, Maria Nalbantova); Katrin Eftimova (p. 18, Katrin Eftimova); Kremena Yagodina (p. 20, Kremena Yagodina); Hristo Angelov (p. 22, Nevena Angelova); Assen Ganey (p. 24, Siyana Zaharieva); Temelko Temelkov (p. 26, Yassen Grigorov); Dobrinka Boeva (p. 28, Kristina Toujrova); Nikolay Grozni (p. 30, Iva Sasheva); Svoboda Tzekova (p. 32, Sotir Gelev); Antonio Hadzhihristov (p. 34, Iassen Ghiuselev); Nadya Andreeva (p. 36, Kapka Kaneva); Nely Staneva (p. 38, Damyan Damyanov); Daniel Dimitrov (p. 40, Mila Yaneva-Tabakova); Magdalena Jablianova (p. 42, Elena Jablianova); Joan X. Vázquez (p. 44, Ina Hristova). All photographs were provided by the authors.

illustrations

Introductory text: p. 2–3 (1., 2.) Kiril Zlatkov, preparatory drawings for *When I Want to Keep Silent*, author Zornitsa Hristova, pub. Tochitsa, 2014; (3.) Kiril Zlatkov, detail from *When I Want to Keep Silent*, author Zornitsa Hristova, pub. Tochitsa, 2014; (4.) Lyuba Haleva, detail from *To Put It Mildly*, author Valeri Petrov, pub. Colibri, 2018; (5., 6.) Maria Nalbantov, preparatory drawings for *The Sleep Button*, author Valeri Petrov, pub. Colibri, 2018; (7.) Maria Gulemetova, preparatory drawing for *Beyond the Fence*, pub. Child's Play, 2018; p. 4–5 (8.) preparatory drawings for *Beyond the Fence*, pub. Child's Play, 2018; (9.) Sotir Gelev, detail from *Lullabies for Fairies and Monsters*, pub. Enthusiast, 2020; (10.) Nevena Angelova, preparatory drawing for *This Is Totally Outrageous*, author Victor Samuilov, pub. Janet 45, 2023; (11., 12.) Lyuba Haleva, detail and preparatory drawing for *To Put It Mildly*, author Valeri Petrov, pub. Colibri, 2018; (13.) Katrin Eftimova, preparatory drawing for *Head-Over-Heels Hoopie*, author Tanya Petkova, pub. Yasna Kniga, 2023; (14.) Iassen Ghiuselev, preparatory drawing for *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, author Carlo Collodi, pub. Helikon, 2015; p. 7 (15.) preparatory drawing for *To Put It Mildly*, author Valeri Petrov, pub. Colibri, 2018

cover: Lyuba Haleva, detail from *To Put It Mildly*, author Valeri Petrov, pub. Colibri, 2018; Katrin Eftimova, detail from *Head-Over-Heels Hoopie*, author Tanya Petkova, pub. Yasna Kniga, 2023; Maria Gulemetova, detail from *Beyond the Fence*, pub. Child's Play, 2018

Chasing Words

19 Bulgarian Children's Book Illustrators

catalogue

selection and texts *Anton Staykov, Svoboda Tzekova*

design *Svoboda Tzekova*

pre-production *format.bg*

editor *Nina Dzhumaliyska*

proofreader *Nina Dzhumaliyska*

translation *Traci Speed*

producers *Venka Ragina, Elena Georgieva*

organiser *Association for Culture and Literature*

media and communication *Denitza Miteva*

typography *Mont and Audela, FontFabric*

website *studio X*

31 March — 3 April 2025
Bologna Children's
Book Fair

Curators: Anton Staykov & Svoboda Tzekova



booksforkids.bg



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