



Creative Citizens ***Cittadini Creativi***

Today's urban planners believe that a good city should first and foremost look after its citizens, take their differences and needs into account, and foster meetings and creativity. A city is a place where one feels safe and satisfied; a city accepts its kaleidoscope of residents just the way they are.

A good city doesn't develop in a void, and neither do illustrations in books. Pictures exist in books partly to support the text, though stories can also be told without them. Powerful visuals can convey emotions and hidden messages, conjure an atmosphere, and even communicate ideas or events that aren't put into words. It's hard to overvalue the importance of pictures in books and all around us. We can imagine the lives a book's characters might live if they were to escape its covers, can't we? Would they create their own city, form a community on a modern-day spaceship, or perhaps lounge on the lawn in a peaceful suburb to their heart's content?

Cittadini Creativi is a group of creative characters from the diverse works of creative Estonian citizens, a.k.a. illustrators, who have momentarily slipped away from their roots – books. The characters squat in central Bologna without writing's support and invite visitors to get to know them without any background information – starting from a blank slate, so to say. As you can see, some are seeking inspiration or love, others are bathing in imaginary sunlight, a few are chasing their youth or fluff, and several haven't made up their minds yet whether they want to dance or nap. One resident is a rabbit, another a Gothamite, a third a famous composer.

In Estonia, children's literature and book illustration are strong traditions that have withstood the tests of time. For decades, Estonian artists were forced to march to the beat of realism's canon under an occupying power. Nevertheless, children's literature was precisely where creators dared to experiment more thanks to looser Soviet censorship. That audacity still exists today. Estonian illustration is just as motley as a living, contemporary city. While still holding on to stories' words and conceptual spaces, Estonian illustrators can explore on their own, experiment, and add more layers and interpretations to the text. Alongside the pencils and paints on their desks are now digital

tools, with which several of the stories and characters in this exhibition have transformed into animations as well. Of course, Estonian illustration also possesses our characteristic sharp wit and appreciation for the absurd.

Cittadini Creativi encourages visitors to bring pictures to life; to see and create fantastical stories around us, as stories and characters are the very things that make our inner and outer galaxies exponentially richer.

The *Cittadini Creativi* exhibition is part of the Bologna Children's Book Fair, at which Estonia is this year's Guest of Honour.

Featured Estonian illustrators include: Katrin Ehrlich, Heiki Ernits, Anu Kalm, Kristi Kangilaski, Tiiu Kitsik, Karel Korp, Liisa Kruusmägi, Kadri-Maria Külaots, Madli Lavin, Regina Lukk-Toompere, Lumimari, Viive Noor, Sirly Oder, Eiko Ojala, Triin Paumer, Anne Pikkov, Marja-Liisa Plats, Priit Pärn, Piret Raud, Jaan Rõõmus, Ulla Saar, Pamela Samel, Elina Sildre, Joonas Sildre, Kertu Sillaste, Marju Tammik, Reda Tomingas, Kristina Tort, and Catherine Zarip.

The animators are: Liisi Grünberg, Jaakop Ivask, Lyza Järvis, Uku Jürgenson, Rebeka Kruus, Elise Kruusel, Ida Lepparu, Kaimar Lomp, Cristo Madissoo, Eiko Ojala, Rael Pikkol, Piret Potter, Maria Rakitina, Lilli-Krõõt Repnau, Mia Rulli, Stella Salumaa, Kadi Sink, Kelly Tõnurist, Elli Zahradnikova.

Curator: Bianka Soe

Exhibition design: Karin Tõugu, Triin Vaino (b210)

Graphic design: Stúdio Stúdio

Technical Production: Enno Innos, Hannes Kadak, Taivo Tökke, Oskar Pruus

Producers: Estonian Children's Literature Centre, Estonian Publishers' Association

Supporters: Ministry of Culture of Estonia, Estonian Embassy in Rome, Bologna Children's Book Fair, Municipality of Bologna, Hamelin

Thank you: Lilli-Krõõt Repnau and Telliskivi Creative City

The urban exhibition will be displayed from **March 29th to April 13th, 2025**, in the **Sala d'Ercole at Palazzo d'Accursio** in central Bologna.