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The Frankfurt Book Fair 2024 still had a great appeal, even though only 4,300 exhibitors came compared to 7,450 five years ago. The good news: Young women are reading more again, which the book market is serving with editions for „New Adults“ in a special hall.

The »New Oldsters« like me were represented in all exhibition halls, observed

 **FRANKFURTER
BUCHMESSE**
16 – 20 OCTOBER 2024
GUEST OF HONOUR ITALY

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In the pavilion of guest of honour Italy: architect Stefano Boeri, author and journalist Luigi Macheroni and art historian Giovanni Agosti (from left to right) talk about the realisation of the Book Piazza – right in the middle.



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BUCHMESSE**

16.–20. OKTOBER 2024

Italy – Guest of Honour

Visiting the host country's pavilion

The Model of the Italian pavilion in plain view.

The role of the guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair is linked to the task of designing one of the exhibition halls as a reflection of the respective country's literature. The fair management provides the respective guest country with an area of 2,300 square metres on the first floor of the forum building, near the central entrance. Books in many formats, editions and translations are presented there, which is not nearly as spectacular as the ambience. It is exciting to discover which design the annually changing guest of honour chooses. It was Italy's turn in 2024.

The Italian government had, at short notice, entrusted TV journalist Dr. Mauro Mazza with overall responsibility as *commissario per la fiera del libro di Francoforte* at the suggestion of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni after Franco Levi resigned in 2023 due to a scandal. Italy's book market had a turnover of almost 3.4 billion euros in 2023 and would be the sixth largest



in the world, according to the official Italian publication.

The poster for Italy's guest of honour, which hung everywhere in the city of Frankfurt and on the exhibition grounds, was intended to encourage the reading public to visit the book fair and to draw attention specifically to Italy's literary scene. The poster was designed by the Italian comic artist



Lorenzo Mattotti. The motto of Italy's guest of honor appearance is *Radici nel Futuro*, in English: Rooted in the future.

If you know the language of the Italian fascists, this statement loses all innocence, said Luciano Cheles, art historian and professor of Italian studies at the University of Poitiers, about this motto. Melonis publicly distances herself from the historical fascism of the Mussolini era, but with her

flower, drawn in the childlike scheme, sat a girl holding a book. The flower was rooted in the earth and stretched out in the air with the reader, symbolizing the connection between tradition and the future.

The calla lily motif on the guest of honour poster may be confusing. The flower, which belongs to the Araceae family, is often used as funeral decoration, at least in Germany. In addition, all parts of the plant are poisonous.



The center of the Italian Pavilion is in darkness during the projection of piazza scenes from famous films.

party Fratelli d'Italia she represents a national-conservative God-Fatherland-Family policy and harasses culture and the media. Roberto Saviano, the important mafia investigator, was not included in the list of writers for the guest of honor representation because he is an internet polluter.

For the poster, the illustrator Mattotti designed a stylized white calla flower on the theme of *Radici nel Futuro*, which protruded into the blue sky from a green pointed hat with a reddish-brown rim. On the edge of the

It would therefore not be advisable to have close contact with the calla lily, as the reading girl on the poster had.

The Dark Trap

The Italy fans streamed excitedly up the escalator towards the heart of the Italian presentation. They fell into a dark trap. Quite a few immediately tripped over an edge at the entrance. Was the future root *Radici nel Futuro* lying on the floor?

The room was supposed to evoke the feeling of a bustling piazza, but

with its empty rows of chairs it looked more like an abandoned lecture hall in low-light mode. Tiny LED lights glowed on the black ceiling, probably symbolizing the starry night sky. A raised walkway with columns in various classical styles led around the center. In the dark, there was a risk of falling

were lucky, there was a hostess standing at the landing who would raise her hand to warn you and prevent you from falling. State of the art? In every theater or cinema, the steps are illuminated in the dark.

Star Architect at Work

Stefano Boeri and his team designed the Italian pavilion for Italy's guest of honour appearance at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2024. The architect and international urban planner, born in Milan in 1956, is known for his ecological construction and his green high-rise buildings. The „wooded“ twin towers with 19 and 27 floors in the north of Milan would cost at least 1,500 euros to maintain their Bosco Verticale (vertical forest) for each of the 113 residential units.

The pavilion was ideally modelled on a piazza. Traditional and modern architecture integrated columns, cabinets and hanging gardens. One end wall of the hall was covered with a light screen, onto which texts, photos and films were projected in dazzling brightness here and there. If you looked at it when entering, you ran the risk of falling down the unlit steps. According to the plan, the white steps were to be used by visitors as a casual place to sit.

On the opening day, Stefano Boeri gesticulated animatedly as he explained his concept for the guest of honour pavilion, while an almost eerie silence reigned on his constructed piazza. The sound was transmitted exclusively via headphones. A device was placed on all chairs to receive the original language as well as the German or English translation..

Art historian Giovanni Agosti philosophized with the star architect



Black adhesive tape
is intended to make the dangerous steps around the piazza safer.

if you tried to walk from one side of the hall to the other. The steps were difficult to see and prevented you from strolling casually - not to mention the wheelchair access. There were no ramps for barrier-free access, nor were there any handrails on the steps. If you

about how the spatial concept of the piazza shaped the Italian self-image of openness and democratic feeling. The spacious piazza is a place where children can play football and people can come together in a relaxed atmosphere. The book pavilion should exude this flair.

During the interview, characteristic market place scenes from famous Italian films from Venice, Rome, Milan and other cities were projected in an endless loop, including the minute-long credits in white lettering on a black background. There was no piazza flair there!

Note: The day after the opening, on October 17, 2024, the Italian pavilion was much brighter lit. In addition, Italian hostesses tried to make the dangerous steps more visible with black tape. Not only had the star architect Boeri failed to make it suitable for everyday use, the safety approval of the trade fair company had also failed.

Into the Past

The Italian Ministry of Culture had curated the exhibition „Under the Skies of Antiquity“ in neighboring cabinets around the piazza. The most important ancient works of art from Italian state museums were on display. Selected, original frescoes from the Odyssey cycle from Pompeii impressed with their bright colors and good state of preservation. Other exhibits illustrated the influence of the Frankfurt native, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who sparked the Germans' heartfelt longing for Italy. Machiavelli's book *Il Principe* was on display in a variety of formats and countless translations in a demonic-looking red-lined cabinet. The idea here was to stimulate thought about political power.

Print pioneers

Another cabinet paid tribute to the invention of the „pocket book“ in Venice. The printer and publisher Aldus Manutius (1499 - 1515, Italian



Aldo Pio Manuzio) himself said: „I made my books so small that you can hold them in one hand and take them with you on trips.“

Johann Gensfleisch Gutenberg had successfully practiced printing with movable type a few decades earlier in Mainz. Now it was possible to produce identical copies almost in a factory. However, Gutenberg wanted his work to appear equal to medieval manuscripts in terms of form, size and appearance. His 42-line Latin Bible, completed in 1454, testifies to the „weighty and great“ art of printing. The Gutenberg Museum in Mainz has two complete copies: weighing several kilograms, in two volumes with 1,282 pages, measuring approximately 43 x 31 centimeters. The printed *nova forma scribendi* Bible (in the new form of writing) resembled traditional manuscripts, which greatly promoted the acceptance of the black art.

Museum pieces: „Under the Skies of Antiquity“ is the name of the exhibition in the cabinet of the Italian Pavilion.



From Venice: The logo »Festina lente« by publisher and printer Aldus Manutius is depicted as a signet with anchor and dolphin.

Manutius chose the small octavo format for his products. It was created by folding the standard Roman parchment sheet eight times, resulting in a spine height of around 18 to 20 centimeters. This book format made reading a handy pleasure. Manuzio designed the book as we know it today: with a title page, punctuation marks, page numbering and table of contents. His publishing logo, *festina lente* (make haste slowly), with the publisher's signet, anchor and dolphin, guaranteed the highest quality and granted - at least for the Venetian sphere of influence - an early form of copyright. Manuzio printed the first books in Greek letters. He had new fonts developed for Latin and Italian editions, which are still valued today for their good legibility.

The printer Aldus Manutius was given a late honor in the computer age: In 1985, the software company Aldus Corporation launched the layout program »PageMaker« for the Apple Macintosh. This program for desktop publishing contained almost all the features for sophisticated printed products and did honor to the Venetian namesake Aldus. □

The early **qualitalk** issues (from 1995 on) were created using PageMaker 2.0 from Aldus, then taken to the printers on diskette and printed on both sides on a B6 sheet (which makes six A4 pages when folded); they were sent by snail mail.



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