

8. Interview with the illustrator Gianluca Foli

How did you start your career in illustration?

Well..since I were a child! We had a lot of illustrated books at home, some of them were so old I couldn't even touch them, others were newer and resistant to my little hands. I still carry inside the sensations I felt touching those pages and looking at those beautiful drawings lulled by the voice of my mother. Surely my love for paper and the desire to create fantastic things came out from those moments and never stopped.

Maybe my deeper and more important aim, as an illustrator, is being able to become part of the memories of those looking at my drawings.

How is illustrating a children's book different from your usual work providing illustrations in magazines and newspapers?

Generally I like everything I do but I love working on children's books. When I was a child I remember I loved to turn over the pages of Andersen fairy tales, with their magical northern illustrations. We had such a lot of those books in the house, some so old I couldn't even touch, I've got those feelings still alive in me, those colours, my mother voice reading of magical places, sitting by the bed.. feeding my dreams.

My love for paper and my desire to create fantastic images were born on those days and I'm truly inspired by knowing that some child in the world could feel the same way by reading my books.

Last but not least, books are more free and request more interpretation than a magazine or any advertisement work, they really bring your style to surface, that's why you have to be confident in what you do.

What art materials and tools did you use to create the illustrations in *The Bear with the Sword*?

Very simple materials: watercolours, inks, pencils and spray. To make the sun, for example, I used the bottom of a glass dirty with colour and to make trees I sprayed hundreds of spots on a test sheet and then I chose the best ones.

The right paper was rather more difficult to find, due to the different techniques I used. At the end my choice was a 310g watercolor paper specially made by an ancient Italian paper factory.

What techniques did you use in the pictures? For example: how did you create the cuts made by the bear's sword?

Each line was born from an intuition, from tranquillity, from a strong emotion or a challenge with myself, from a pleasure, even from a need.

Everything can become sign and design, that's why I chose simple techniques, such as pencil and watercolours, to tell the adventure of this funny bear.

The "cuts" intuition was kinda automatic; I thought about how I would have liked to see cut objects if I'd had a sharp sword, and so I did: A clean cut to the real drawing, an empty space created by the bear's sword. Children go crazy when they see it!

What kind of collaboration did you have with the author, Davide Cali?

Our relationship was born in an almost casual and fun way but it was immediately established on the basis of friendship and respect.

Just to say a little anecdote; I knew Davide's work as an author and illustrator, but he didn't know mine. When Zoolibri wrote him to tell they had found the right illustrator for his bear book, he immediately went to see my site.

Five minutes later he wrote back to them saying "What has this man got to do with my book?"

Then we met, we began to really know each other and although he didn't follow the precise stages of the "making of", at the end he said he totally understood the reason of their choice.

There are a lot of unusual details in the illustrations, such as the bear having his own teddy, speech bubbles for the animals and so on. Whose idea were these?

They came along the way, speaking with Cristiana Valentini (my editor) and also following ZOOlibri guideline which is "telling with pictures what the text hides between the lines". Some were simple intuitions, like the balloons; clear and effective for narration. Others were a little more reasoned just like the bear's own teddy bear or like his bag closed with acorn buttons, something to have fun with while reading.

Which illustrators do you admire most? Who inspires you?

I didn't have a proper classical education, if we exclude high school studies attending my own town School Of Art. I've grown up over the years with various experiences, not always strictly in the field of illustration. I found myself having to decide what value Drawing had to have to me and what I had to search in it. And then I just looked around, freely, starting from cave paintings, and through Renaissance, Expressionism and Modern Age, up to the most popular comics and to those more intellectuals in Italy, France and Japan. I didn't want to resemble anyone in particular and then I began my journey.

Will you illustrate more children's books? What are you working on next?

Sure! This book is just the beginning :)

I've spent most of my time, lately, working on another children's book which took me almost a year. It's only the second one for me and I considered it a great challenge. By the way, I didn't miss working on commercial and on my personal portfolio, sketching my old Moleskine diary.

My future plans are all addressed to create more project as an author and these are the right occasions to catch.