

## **BOOK WORLD PRAGUE – A Successful Return after an Involuntary Break**

*Following last year's interruption caused by the pandemic, Book World Prague – international book fair and literary festival – has successfully returned to the delight of both the exhibitors and, perhaps even more importantly, its visitors.*

The 26th annual Book World was held at an unusual September date, but the venue, Prague Exhibition Grounds, remained the same. One new feature required by the anti-pandemic measures was a white tent in front of the Industrial Palace – a visitors' testing centre. The palace itself was only open to people who had been vaccinated or could provide a negative Covid 19 test. Even the book fair's overall floor plan was influenced by the sanitary measures. The Literary Theatre, which in the past was located inside the Industrial Palace, was moved to an outdoor location, and another tent housed the Audiobooks Hall. The venue Gauč ve Stromovce once again played host to performances and debates, with two new spaces being added in the Rychta Studio. Same as in the previous year, the Growing with the Book hall, hosting programmes for children and schools, was located right outside the Palace's gates. The area in front of the Industrial Palace also offered the exhibition tent housing small publishers, as well as traditional refreshment stands. The visitors' comfort and safety were paramount to the organisers.

This year's Book World motto, Language Is My Home, was reflected in numerous debates taking place at the book fair.

France, the guest of honour, introduced visitors to the works of some of its outstanding authors, including Muriel Barbery, Pénélope Bagieu or Jérôme Bonnetto. Book World was also visited by a veritable star of French literature, Laurent Binet, author of the novels *HHhH*, *Civilisations* or *The Seventh Function of Language*. Jacques Rupnik, author much appreciated by the Czech audiences, attended some of the discussions, and focus was given to the works of Milan Kundera, writer who connects Czech Republic with France.

Poland, last year's designated guest of honour, also prepared an extensive programme. Many visitors attended a debate with the journalist Jack Fairweather, author of *The Volunteer*. Witold Szablowski, whose book describing the culinary tastes of dictators has become a bestseller, was also present at Book World, and the Czech-Polish meetings between Václav Cílek and Tomasz Rožek, and Karin Lednická and Martyna Bunda, also proved highly interesting.

Literature As the Voice of Freedom was a section dedicated to authors from Belarus, who described the difficulties authors face in a country standing on a political crossroads. In their fight for freedom some have ended up in jail, while others were forced to emigrate. The Belarusian programme was co-organised by the Embassy of Independent Belarusian Culture, founded here in the Czech Republic last year with the objective of supporting authors in Belarus.

Fans of the bestselling book and namesake film *Cloud Atlas* attended in large numbers the book signing and debate with the amicable David Mitchell, some waiting for over an hour to get the author's autograph. Book World also hosted numerous other authors from abroad, including guests from Hungary, Spain, Slovakia and Scandinavian countries, as well from German-speaking countries as part of the traditional Das Buch project. Both members of the public and the media welcomed the opportunity to meet the Nigerian author and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who lives partly in the US. Her book signing also attracted dozens of visitors. Ardent readers of Italian literature were treated to an encounter with Sandro Veronesi, whose presence heralded Italy's participation next year as the Book World guest of honour. Visitors were also offered debates and readings featuring

almost all leading contemporary Czech authors, including Alena Mornštajnová, Bianca Bellová, Radka Denemarková, Jan Novák or Michal Viewegh.

Book World Prague is a traditional venue for several important awards ceremonies. This year's Jiří Theiner Prize, awarded for significant contribution to the promotion and dissemination of Czech literature abroad, went to the South Korean Czech studies scholar Kyuchin Kim, who could not attend the ceremony because of the pandemic, but thanks to modern technologies could follow the event online. The Miroslav Ivanov Awards for non-fiction literature were also presented, winners of the Jiří Orten Prize read from their works, and "The Rack" anti-awards for last year's botched translations, also found their rightful owners.

Book World international book fair and literary festival stands as a proof that the book market is still alive, that it has outlasted the pandemic and will not give in. The large number of visitors supports this fact. Not only was the capacity of the programme venues quite full, but the exhibiting publishers also reported high revenues, some even exceeding the sales of 2019. We can, therefore, summarise, that Book World Prague has enjoyed a successful return to the international trade fairs map.

Next year, all book enthusiasts should meet again at the traditional date before the summer holidays. Hopefully by then the world (and not just the world of books) will be back on track, liberated from all restrictions.

### **Book World Prague 2021 in Numbers**

Number of exhibitors: 288

Number of expositions: 152

Total area: 2933 m<sup>2</sup>

Literary festival:

Number of performers: 607

Number of programmes: 481

Number of exhibitions: 11

Total number of visitors: 34 000

Number of countries and regions: 27

Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Catalonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom

**Organiser:** Book World Ltd., company of the Association of Czech Booksellers and Publishers

**Financial support:** Czech Republic's Ministry of Culture, City of Prague, Prague 7 City District

**General partner:** ČSOB

**Partners:**, Czech Centres, Czech Literary Centre, DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Gauč at the Prague Exhibition Grounds, Jahoda – Community Centre, Moravian Library, National Gallery, Scandinavian House; Auroton Computer, Grasp, Kosmas, Magnesia

**Main media partner:** Česká televize

**Media partners:** Český rozhlas, Právo, týdeník Echo, Echo 24, Knižní novinky, Host, A2, Deník N, Mladý svět, Náš region, Revue Prostor, Radio1