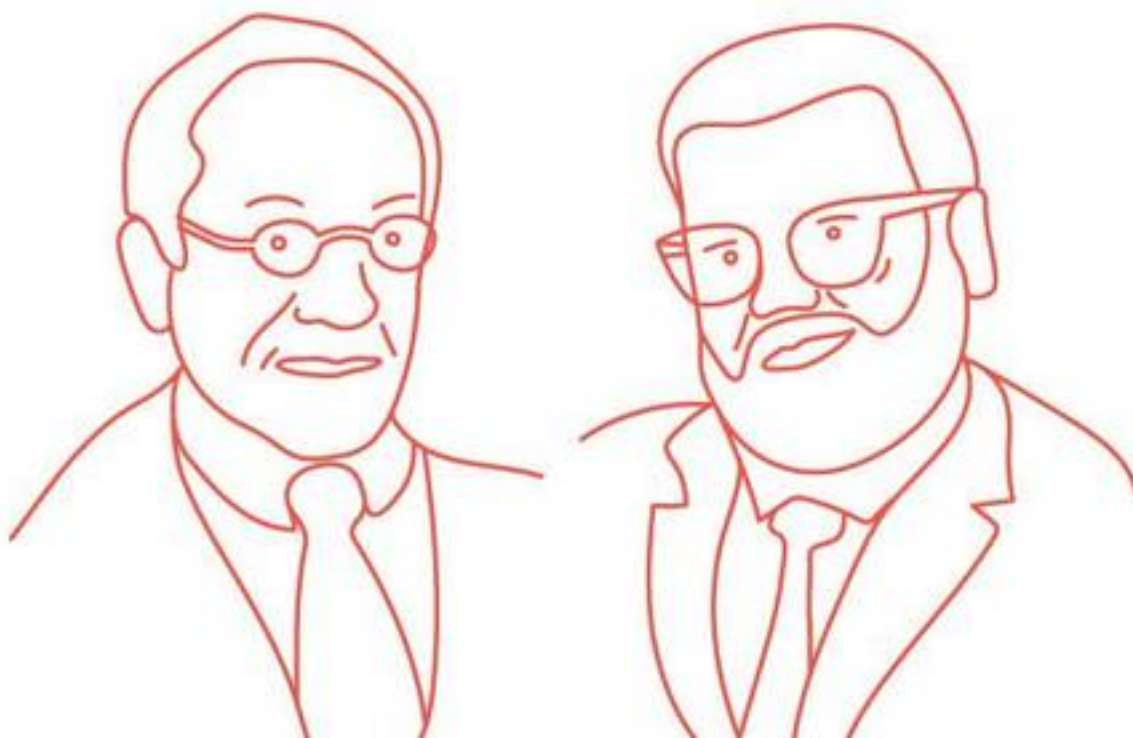


Salis and Guarnaccia on Illustration

Joelle Grosso (October 19, 2016)

L'Illustrazione in prima pagina Una conversazione con Stefano Salis e Steven Guarnaccia



Monday night, Stefano Salis and Steven Guarnaccia met up at the Italian Cultural Institute in NYC to talk about digitalization as well as its influence on book covers and illustration.

Stefano Salis, an expert in the fields of illustration and graphic design, teamed up with [Steven](#)



[Guarnaccia](#) [2], a Professor of Graphic Design at the Parsons New School, to discuss how book covers have transformed over time, the new challenges illustrators face, and the innovativeness of Italian publishing houses.

Professor Guarnaccia started off the evening by analyzing how books covers are physically treated and how our relationship with them has drastically changed throughout the years. He explained how we used to have a fairly intimate connection with book covers and that we are quickly losing this special bond with the ever increasing number of readers now turning to e-books instead. He went as far as comparing the removal of the cover before reading to that of undressing a lover. Because of the era of digitalization, Guarnaccia believes that a crucial part of the reading experience is missing because usually when you open up a book on Kindle, the story begins immediately on page one. If you want to take a look at the cover in its entirety, you must go out of your way to find it which takes away from the overall experience. The novel and its cover go hand and hand, so without one the reader is left incomplete.

Salis, who writes a weekly newspaper column about book covers, added to Guarnaccia's idea by saying that not only has the reader's experience changed but that of the illustrator as well. Given the new demands of the digitalized world, the illustrator must work solely to meet the needs of the consumer. Instead of being inspired by the writing itself and creating a work of art, the illustrator must now take into consideration how the book will look as a thumbnail on Amazon and decide whether it's eye-catching enough as a tiny square on a website. Salis makes this point by noting the difference between the younger illustrators of today like [Emiliano Ponzi](#) [3] and [Olimpia Zagnoli](#) [4] with those of the older generation. Their works are currently on display at the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [5] so it is quite obvious to see that the illustrations of Ponzi and Zagnoli are extremely bold both in color and subject while those of [Guido Scarabottolo](#) [6] for example are much more subtle and subdued. Without a doubt, the book covers of the younger generation stand out more and are therefore more attractive to the audience who will then decide to purchase them.

The two also discussed the huge differences between publishing houses in Italy and United States. In the United States, publishing houses are not very well known and they definitely have no influence over the readers. Meanwhile in Italy, certain publishing houses are extremely popular so much so that an audience member on Monday night even told the crowd that he would always look to see the new books Einaudi was releasing. In the last decade, the Italian publishing house Guanda revolutionized the illustration game by standardizing their covers by using just a few illustrators to make all their graphics. In a way, this allows each publisher to brand themselves and compete, it lets them create and maintain a certain image that everyone can immediately recognize. This marketing strategy is not the case in the United States given that publishing houses do not hold much importance here.

Despite all the differences and changes that are currently taking place in illustration and graphic design especially in regards to book covers and publishing, both Stefano Guarnaccia and Stefano Salis believe that book covers are works of art and should remain that way. They are not only beautiful to look at but they are an essential part of the reading experience and are needed in order to complete the story.

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[6] <http://www.scarabottolo.com/>