

Lucca Comics & Games

...when comic strip and fantasy characters come to life, playing in the streets of an ancient Tuscan city.

Lucia Maffei, photos by Lucia Maffei and Riccardo Bonuccelli

At the beginning of November, when the trees atop the Walls of Lucca announce the coming of winter, the city is inundated by a merry, colorful, playful flood of over 155,000 people, visitors to Lucca Comics and Games, the Festival that - for importance and size - ranks after the Tokyo and Angoulême, France, festivals as the third most important global appointment, even exceeding the numbers of the International Exhibition of San Diego (USA). And an animated, surreal world comes to life. In the name of their favorite paper and film heroes, thousands of fans of every age invade the streets of the city's historic center - peacefully and in orderly fashion - stopping at every step to take pictures or to be photographed. And thanks to them, for a few days the composed and quiet Lucca turns into a lively, vivacious city, becoming not only the capital of games and comics, but also the meeting place for the thousands of Cosplayers who arrive here from every part of Italy and from abroad to be admired in their motley colored costumes. And it is actually they - the Cosplayers - who make this Tuscan city unique, enchanting and magical.

BUT WHO EXACTLY ARE THE COSPLAYERS? Their name comes from the abbreviation of the two words costume and play and indicates groups of youngsters who dress like comic strip characters or like the protagonists of the most popular videogames and animated or fantasy films. Being a Cosplayer is a veritable philosophy, a state of mind and does not mean just wearing a costume and related make-up: it is something deeper because it entails actually becoming that character. It means moving like it, thinking, walking and gesticulating like it.

A total identification for a metamorphosis into one's favorite character that takes place completely. An articulated and complex way of rendering that character a live, flesh and blood person.

This very unusual phenomenon was present in Japan between the 1980 and 1990s and the term "kosupure" was coined. Today, its diffusion on a worldwide scale is huge. Many are the appointments scheduled in every corner of the world, and Lucca is doubtlessly one of the most renowned and important.

"It's a hard life for a Cosplayer" goes the Italian song that opens the most awaited contest, the one that proclaims the most beautiful Cosplayer of the year. The song tells of the feats, passions, friendships, hatreds and jealousies of the world of the Cosplayers; sleepless nights to finish the much yearned-for costume, the health risks incurred in going around half-naked in the dead of winter. It sings about a world comprised of unsuspectable neighbors who, in the associations and exhibitions that call them together, turn into their favorite heroes, competing in the beauty and perfection of their costumes. Indeed, to be acknowledged as a real Cosplayer, the rules to follow are rigid; the most important is the one that states that "the costume must be totally made from scratch in full respect of the spirit and philosophy of cosplay", explains Massimiliano Poggi, 2010 first-prize winner with the character of Jareth, the Goblin King, interpreted by David Bowie in the film "Labyrinth".

"THE STUDY AND DESIGN OF THE COSTUME AND OF THE CHARACTER, THE RESEARCH FOR THE MATERIAL, THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MINUTEST DETAIL can require even a full year of work and exhausting trials. But the emotion of "being" him, of bringing the character to life, is the best reward: an incredible emotion that repays all the effort". If the Cosplayer tradition is born in Japan and makes reference to the wonderful culture of the comic strip that comes from the "Land of the Rising Sun", it is not by chance that, for the Lucca exhibition, an entire palazzo - the former Real Collegio - for 5 days becomes the Japan Palace, and that the Japanese Embassy in Italy has chosen Lucca

to promote its country's traditions and culture. And indeed, Japan was one of the major protagonists in the latest editions of the Lucca event, calling illustrators, authors and artists to the city, animating the different locations with anime and manga.

IN LUCCA, AMONG THE APPOINTMENTS SCHEDULED FOR THE 2011 EDITION, THE EXHIBITION "L'UOMO CHE RACCONTA" BY RENOWNED ARTIST JIRO TANIGUCHI at Palazzo Ducale and the exhibitions by the Tokyo Dolores, straight from Japan. With their Pole Dancing Spot Live, they certainly did not go unnoticed: a performing arts show characterized by the use of aerial dance, visual effects and original music that constituted the exciting prologue of the night of the Oscars of Lucca Comics and Games.

An appointment not to be missed because also the 2012 program for Lucca, that is celebrating its 40th edition, offers a visual and cultural experience of rare beauty, a unique show whose numbers speak for themselves: 20,000 square meters of exhibition area disseminated throughout the city's historic piazza, in the halls of ancient palazzos, Renaissance courtyards and the fascinating open-air, tree-lined locations of the urban Walls, organized to welcome the over 500 exhibitors coming from the entire world; 600 events, meetings and concerts; eight international exhibitions and much, much more, difficult to describe but that must be experienced by strolling through the streets of the city between November 1st and November 4th. •

Info: www.luccacomicsandgames.com/