

Publishing News

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MUHAMMAD ALI COMES TO FRANKFURT IN GIANT MEDIA SCRAMBLE

The book's a knock-out!

FORMER world heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali was back in the ring yesterday, thanks to Taschen whose giant *Greatest of All Time: A Tribute to Muhammad Ali*, is certainly the book of the Fair, judging by the crowds who transformed Hall 4 into Madison Square Gardens.

It took little persuading for Ali to duck the ropes once again, and as he did so the applause rang out and the sporting icon, though frail with Parkinson's, managed to raise his fists and give a mock shuffle, just as he did more than 30 years ago when he 'floated like a butterfly, stung like a bee'.

It was an occasion of genuine emotion, made all the more poignant by the presence of his former trainer, 81-year-old Angelo Dundee, and photographers like Howard Bingham who has been taking pictures of the legend since the Sixties.

Also among the audience at the packed press conference

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which preceded Ali's appearance in the ring was Jeremy Robson, to whom Bingham gave a great bear hug. The fighter has a special place in Robson's heart: the publisher has brought out two previous Ali titles, he has taken him on tour in the UK, the pair both have twin daughters of the same age, and Ali has visited Robson's home near Brent Cross.

"He is an extraordinary figure, a beautiful man," he told *PN Frankfurt Daily*. "When we went on tour once I told him that the man who runs the Muhammad Ali Fan Club wouldn't be coming to an event because his mother had died. We were due in Birmingham, but Ali insisted that we drive to see this man first. Another time, when we were en route to Oxford, he said he wanted to meet an academic

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In the ring: Muhammad Ali (centre), with (l to r) photographer Neil Leifert, publisher Benedikt Taschen and longtime friend Howard Bingham

Ali book a knock-out

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to talk about religion, so I hastily arranged for him to see Rabbi Hugo Gryn."

Taschen is printing a 10,000 signed, limited edition of its book. One thousand of these — the so-called 'Champions' edition — will come with four Bingham prints, signed by the photographer and Ali, and also a 'sculpture' by the contemporary US artist Jeff Koons.

The two versions of the book retail at £2,000 for the ordinary edition and £5,000 for the 'Champions'. Taschen's Key Accounts Manager Michael Robb is confident of selling 1,000 of the £2,000 edition in the UK. "We've had an enormous number of enquiries here. This has really kicked it

off. It is superb for the Taschen brand."

Some 5,000 copies have gone to the States already, including 1000 to Amazon. In the UK, Selfridges, Tate Modern, The Art Lounge in Birmingham, Waterstone's in Harrods and Sportspages are all interested.

At the press conference, Publisher Benedikt Taschen was asked how much it had all cost. He ducked that question, as deftly as his hero used to duck punches. Then Ali was asked about his moustache. His wife, Lonnie, answered: "I'll admit, I'm not that keen on it myself, but Muhammad said he wanted a change. He thinks it makes him look like 'Dark' Gable" — which brought laughter and more applause.

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