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Guadalajara's FIL Forefronts Digital, Germany, and Translation

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By Edward Nawotka

The FIL, the Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara, is in full swing. And while several foreign visitors — many from Germany, which is serving as Guest of Honor this year — expressed reservations at traveling to the city following reports last weekend of 26 headless bodies being discovered at an intersection close to the Expo where the event takes place, it appears that ardor for the event is undiminished.



Herta Mueller: Dictatorships undermine a population's creativity. (Photo: AP)

One German guest, Nobel Prize-winner Herta Müller, has been highly visible and accessible throughout the fairgrounds. She made a strong impression during one of her speeches when describing her concern over the lingering persistence of political dictatorships in Cuba and Venezuela, which continue to undermine the ability of the citizens of those nations to think freely and creative.

As this is my second time attending the event, it's intriguing to see digital issues rise to the forefront of the conversation at this year's Fair, which is also Latin America's largest showcase for new books, authors, and conversations about publishing. "A couple years ago e-books were barely mentioned, but this year everyone is talking about them — they require no introduction," observed Joe Schick, digital media services and business development director for Baker & Taylor, who is here showcasing his company's BLIO distribution platform.

As with any fair, FIL is also about rights and translations. Frankfurt-based agent Nicole Witt, whose agency specializes in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking writers, said she anticipates unearthing several new authors. "The range of authors and new books we have here at Guadalajara is often untapped by publishers overseas, but there is an impressive pool of talent waiting to be exploited," she said.

Something that should have pushed things along has been the announcement of two new translation support programs by the governments of Mexico and Colombia, with funding going to support publishing houses.

In addition, several Mexican publishing houses are presenting long-form journalism projects covering the social and political aspects of Mexican life. This new trends sees publishing houses playing a traditional role that would otherwise be served by newspapers, which have found themselves prevented from reporting on several sensitive issues as a result of outside pressure.