Session 2


April 1, 2001

Art Libraries Society of North America 29th Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA

Moderators:

Ross Day, Associate Museum Librarian, Robert Goldwater Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art
Shannon Van Kirk, Head, Wertz Art & Architecture Library, Miami University (Ohio)

Speakers:

Michael Cart, formerly Director, Beverly Hills Public Library, lecturer, and national expert on children’s literature, “Art History as Inspiration, Influence, and Presence in Children’s Picture’s Books”

Susan Patron, Senior Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library, “Museums in Our Laps: Art for Babies, Preschoolers, and Young Children in Illustrated Books”

Erica Silverman, author, Gittel’s Hands (1996)
Deborah Nourse Lattimore, illustrator, Gittel’s Hands (1996)

Ross Day opened the session by talking about children’s books as a voyage of discovery and the boosts of self-esteem that children receive on reading and viewing an illustrated book.

Shannon Van Kirk introduced the session as an analysis of a child’s introduction to art through the seduction of books.

Michael Cart gave a whirlwind tour through the history illustrated books, children, and children’s books. Beginning with the cave-paintings, described as the first impulse to illustrate, he entertained us by working his way through the pre-16th century, when children were thought of as miniature grownups, past horn-books and chap-books, to the birth of pocket-books, where the pictures were specifically intended to go with the text, to modern children books (describing Kate Greenaway, as the first superstar of illustration). He defined and described two types of books: storybooks (words with pictures) and picture books (pictures with words). He concluded his talk with an array of images from children’s books illustrated by well-known artists.

Susan Patron, in her enlightening talk, began by introducing the 8-page board book, filled with high-contrast pictures, enjoyed by children as young as 2 months and then moved to the standard 32-page picture book. She described a child’s transition from rhyming books, where children demonstrate their growing linguistic competence, to ABC’s, where the child moved from the oral to the written world, to the multifold world of illustrated books. She concluded by pointing out what hard work a seemingly simple picture book is: it must be a marriage of Sound, Story, and Character in 32 pages, working as a seamless whole, and changing scenes, either verbally or pictorially, every 10 words, as the pages are turned.

Erica Silverman and Deborah Nourse Lattimore, then described their process of actually creating a children’s book. It was extremely interesting to hear their thoughts on approaching the same project, their book Gittel’s Hand--one as a person who works with words and the other as a person who works with images. Lattimore, the illustrator, laced her talk with amusing vignettes and the acting out of her life as she came to illustration as a profession.

The session was a rousing success—entertaining, informative and eye-opening.

Submitted by Kitty Chibnik, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University