

Newsday

Deidre S. Greben Special to Newsday

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'Picture This' Exhibit Celebrates Art of Children's Books



Whimsy is in full view in this illustration for Tim Miller's "Margarash, at the Bottom of the Spring." Credit: Tim Miller

No youngster himself, The New Yorker magazine cartoonist William Steig created his most beloved drawings at 83 years of age — in a 1990 children's picture book called "Shrek!" The success of his anti-fairy tale about an amiable swamp-dwelling green ogre had largely to do with the fact that he never really grew up, the illustrator once admitted, holding onto a world view that was as playful as it was compassionate.

That view is on full display in "Picture This: The Art of Children's Books," an exhibition of original drawings by some 27 popular illustrators at the Nassau County Museum of Art's Manes Family Art and Education Center in Roslyn. From such emerging talents as Long Island's Victoria Cossack, whose "Gus and the Greatest Catch of All" came out this year, to creators of modern classics like Ezra Jack Keats of "A Very Snowy Day" fame, the

show presents a broad swath of outlooks, styles and media.

“We wanted to reflect the dynamic contemporary children’s book climate with true inclusivity, to show that the world of children’s books is a large and welcoming place,” says Isabel Roxas, who is used to “Shaking Things Up”—the title of one of her releases included here—and who guest-curated the charming assemblage of images with “Moo Moo in a Tutu” author and illustrator Tim Miller.

Laura Lynch, the museum’s education director, notes how the selection makes a point of reaching beyond representing holidays celebrated by different cultures to representing their full lives. “They teach how to be human — even if you’re a green-faced monster or a crocodile,” she says.

The exhibition offers young audiences opportunities to hone their visual literacy skills and flex their imaginations beyond the works on view. Visitors are asked to create drawings incorporating disparate words they randomly select from a box and, as directed on nearby labels, to engage in a scavenger hunt of sorts, searching for warm colors like red, yellow, or orange or, perhaps, an elephant eyeing some cupcakes. Another asks viewers to dream up their own stories about the images, noting, of course, that “there are only right answers.”

“By focusing on the tasks at hand, it makes them look longer, discover the details,” says Lynch. “It slows people down a little bit.”

With a number of works also on loan from The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Massachusetts, including memorable pages from Maurice Sendak’s “Where the Wild Things Are” and Leo Lionni’s “An Extraordinary Egg,” the show is also likely to bring people back in time.

“There is something about children’s books, the sensory experience of holding them, that provides an intimacy people are longing for.”

WHAT “Picture This: The Art of Children’s Books”

WHEN | WHERE 11 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday through Jan. 12, Nassau County Museum of Art, 1 Museum Dr., Roslyn Harbor

INFO Free with museum admission; 516-484-9338, nassaumuseum.org

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