



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Viviane Schwarz

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

My mother read books with me when I was tiny. My strongest memories are of "Grover and the Everything in the World Museum", a Sesame Street book in which Grover visits a museum that contains the whole world. There was an underwater room that impressed me, and a tickling room that made me laugh uncontrollably. She later said she couldn't work out why I found this book funny every time, and what I enjoyed about it all, but she still agreed to read it over and over because I laughed so much I know exactly why I loved that book. An Everything in the World Museum.. that's one definition of what a book can be. This book taught me that I could hold the whole world in my hands, as small as I was, that my curiosity mattered, that there was a place of satisfaction.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

I don't remember a time in which I did not want to make books, I hardly remember a time where I wasn't making books. As soon as I could make traces on paper, I started folding that paper in half, stacking it up. It's what I do.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

A book or illustration is successful if it communicates a message This could be information to teach you something, or it could be a question to make you think. It could be an invitation for action, or a story that evokes a memory, an emotion. An interesting question is whether this needs to be the message that the author intended, or if a book can be seen as successful by the reader in the same way that any experience they sought out and found meaningful is a success to them. It depends on perspective, and I think about it differently depending on whether I am

reading the message or making it. A lot of books that will successfully communicate to many other people may be not very meaningful to me. I might make a picture or a story that is only meaningful to a few people, and if that's what I meant to do, it's a successful work for me. I do usually aim to communicate successfully to enough people to make rent, and I try to communicate things that I believe in. I think it's easier to spot what makes an unsuccessful work: if you show it so the target audience and they don't get it when you wanted them to get it. That's all.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

Mostly children and their adults. I like the books to be meaningful to a child reading alone, and to encourage a good performance in an adult reading it to a child.

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

I think they serve different needs, although there is an overlap. I enjoy seeing when people become aware of the physicality of a book and make use of it, paying more attention to paper stock and bindings, designing endpapers, considering how the book will be used in the world. I feel that the rise of the ebook has given physical book design a boost.

Electronic books are great for distribution and accessibility where paper books are not available as easily or cannot even be produced. They are a great way of sharing small publications, and I like the idea of remixing books. I don't think they will completely replace paper books soon. If and when they do, the form they will have taken by then will be one that fully satisfies our needs of aesthetics, interaction and tactile experience, they will hold a history of craft as paper books do now, and it will be time for the paper to go.

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

I have a book collection. I don't have that much space, and I believe that things become more important the fewer I have of them. I go through my collection every now and then and give away everything I don't feel I need to own any more. It fills about two Billy bookcases right now, much of it is natural history and science. I would love to own the Folio edition of *The Worst Journey in the World*, it's a beautiful book and I have memories of listening to the audiobook during heat waves, on days where one couldn't even move around midday.