



Why A Picture Book?

Its Fall 2024. It's not that I don't know what to do for a BFA project, but that I have too many things to choose from.

It's been four years and I've been hungry to make so much, comics, zines, digital and tabletop games, editorial illustration, poster design, books and letterpress work. I stalled for some weeks, unsure of which thing would touch on everything I wanted to touch on, which would encapsulate that idea of the *Designer/Illustrator*. (Emphasis on the slash...)

The same semester I enroll in a Childrens Book Illustration class. It's funny, looking back on my undergraduate work, it seems like once a year or more I make something for children. In general my work usually falls into two camps aesthetically, an inky DIY thing or intense whimsy.

I was excited of course at the outset of that class, I was right in my wheelhouse. It was simultaneously everything I expected: a fun, experimental picture puzzle and simultaneously a tremendous challenge. I can a lot of fun. I also struggled. A lot.

I ended that semester with most of a complete picture book that I was proud of. I also ended it acutely aware of everywhere where my work had fallen short of what I knew it could be. I entered the winter with a decision for the BFA, hungry to try again and come back with something better..

Picture books exist in the middle of many things. A venn diagram of elements a designer must contend with. Book design, illustration, print, tactility, sequential imagery, semiotics. Unlike similar mediums, comics for instance, they have typically explicit guidelines. Specific and limited page counts. Specific sizes.

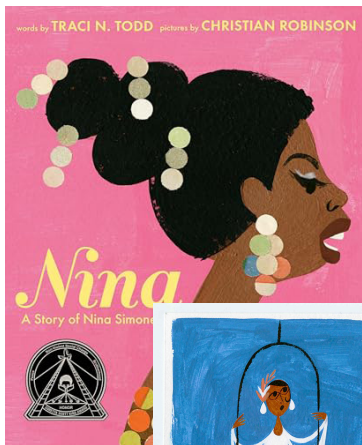
Many projects students choose for this thesis work have some problem, some untapped market, some pain point or niche that a designer or illustrator can approach with a fresh perspective. Pictures books are consistent, there is nothing about them that needs fixing, or even innovation. Yet they are wildly different. Thousands of books can be made within these guidelines and still not be tired after decades. For me, the picture book was the perfect vessel.



Influences

Visual Inspiration

Christian Robinson



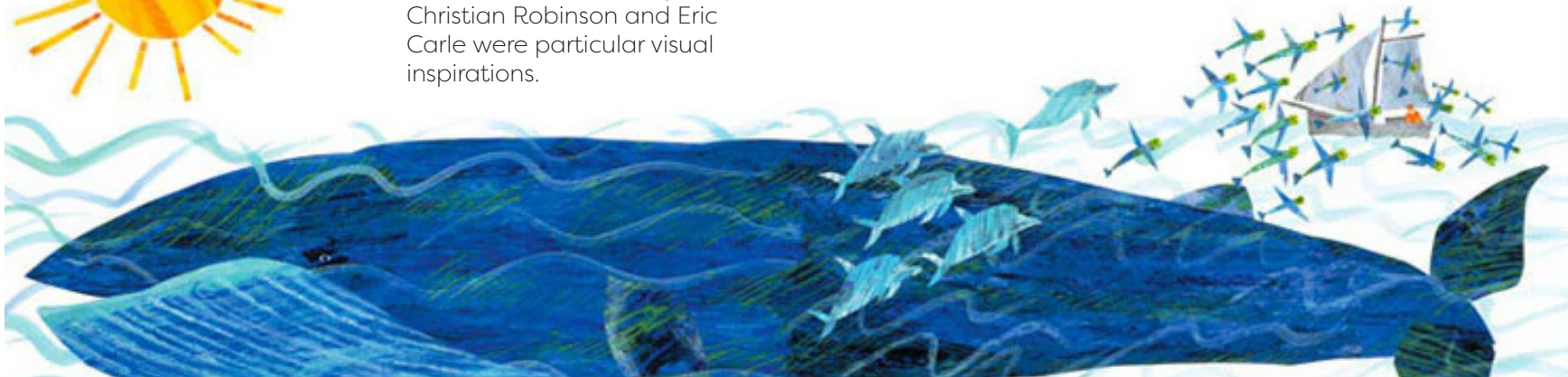
The picture book collage icons, Christian Robinson and Eric Carle were particular visual inspirations.

Eric Carle



Color, and especially texture were huge. I'm a big believer in tactility being central to design, and spent a lot of energy in my work across the last couple of years chasing texture and grit and shadowlines.

Especially in childrens media, tactility is an important factor of a healthy psychology, and a more whimsical day to day too.





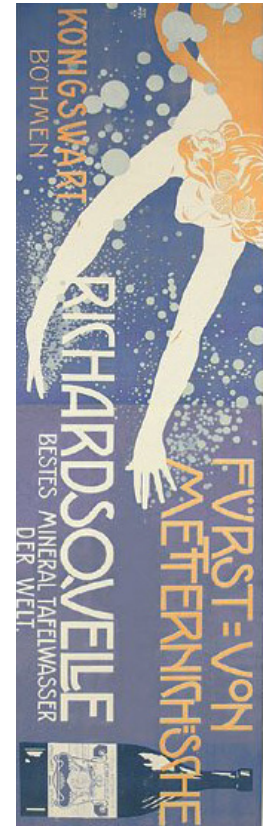
DESIGN AND LETTERING
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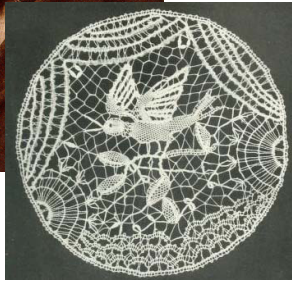


The work of the Vienna Werkstatte was another explicit inspiration. Through the semseter, *Die Flache*, a reproduction of the work from that period, was always about a foot away.

It all has a slightly *Nemo In Slumberland* feeling, strange color palattes, odd anfiles and proportions. It's a weird middleground between deco and neuvou that's really appealing to me. I didn't want to mimic the style exactly, but there was a feeling, and ambiance I was really moved by.

In terms of collage theres a flatness in the work that doesnt sacrifice depth of feeling or composition.

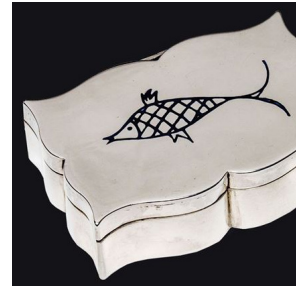




Boxes disguised as birds, lace scene of strange people, oddly cute and sophisticated patterns.

There's a folkloric quality present in his work that is somewhat absent from his peers, and as somewhat of a homage, many patterns used in the books are partial recreations of Peche (and some of his contemporaries) work.

Within the Werkstatte, a particular artist, Dagobert Peche became my central inspiration. My mouse's namesake, Peche was an industrial artist, textile artist, designer and illustrator. Everything he produced was beautiful, magical, and mysterious.



Narrative Inspiration

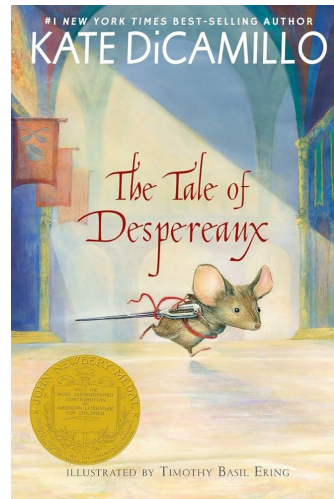
The book is deeply inspired by mythology, and flood myths in particular. Across cultures there are countless flood myths, many of which include symbols like a vessel that carries people to safety, and a surveyor bird that scouts ahead for when the flood has quelled. I took many of these common aspects and worked them into my own manuscript.

In a more general note, there's an undeniable influence from many properties from my childhood. Stories like *The Tale of Despereaux* and Mr. Rogers' segments in particular showed up in this project in ways I didn't expect. I quickly realized that I was drawing from stories like *Despereaux* that have a palpable sense of danger, misfortune, and unfairness.

I didn't want to exclude these things, just as many myths are

the earliest stories we're told and often the most frightening, I didn't want to make something absent of symbolism or danger or metaphor.

There were moments writing that first draft where I was tempted to eliminate danger. Should it really be scary? Should it be more fun? But often childhood is instead scary. In fact, it is usually good and sweet and awful all at once.

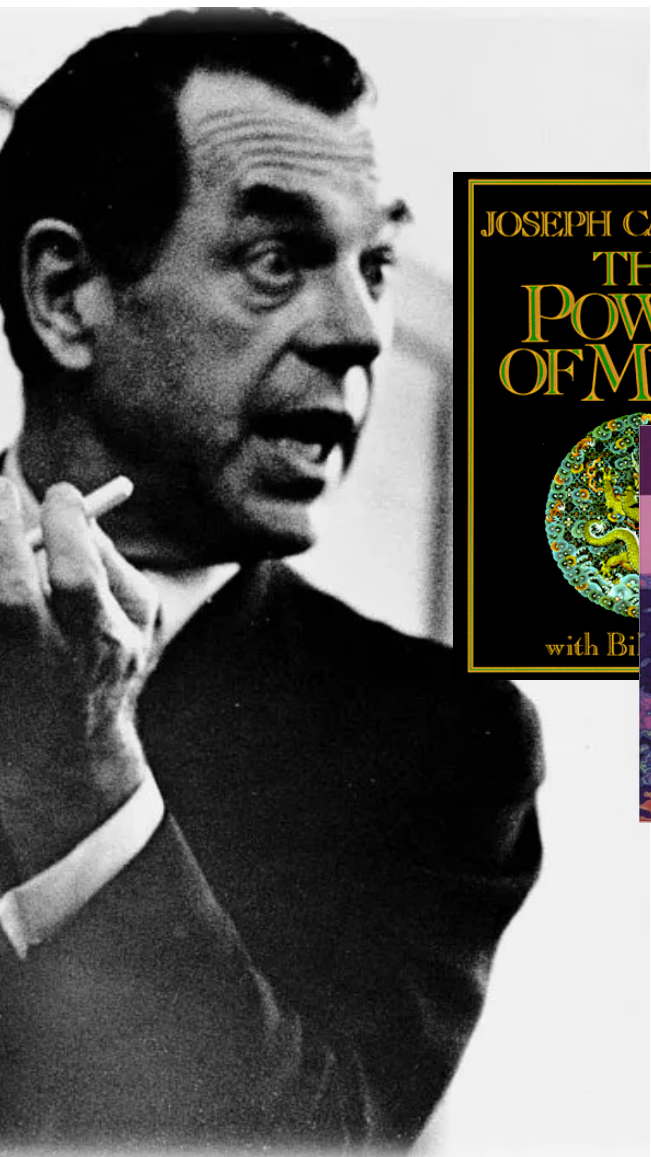
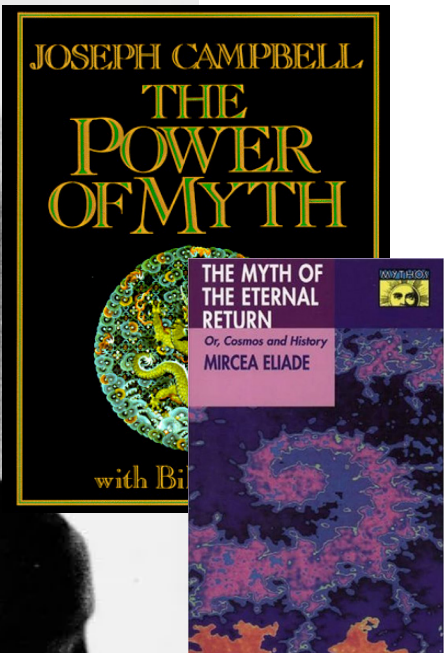


Mythology in Childrens Literature

I am about to make a gross generalization. It is that as I grow older, the picture books I see on the shelf tend to be more and more literal with their story content. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Many of these books are some of the best pieces of childrens media I've read as an adult, and have a valuable place on that shelf.

That being said, I can't help but wonder where the fantasy, where the fiction of it all went? Why the Symbolism is so on the nose? I suppose that's just the way the pendulum swung, but I think it's true too that symbol is an incredibly effective way of communicating all of those same lessons, morals, and comforts.

What I'm talking about is myth. It is not the first time I've mentioned it here, but it deserves attention. Myth has been the storytelling medium for centuries. We are our myths. Preferentially, it's what I would want on my shelf.



So...Who is Dagobert?

There was a point in the fall semester when a professor asked what the BFA would be about. I hadn't come up with any narrative ideas yet, so I said the first thing that came to mind—

“I'm thinking a mouse that survives a flood event”

I didn't like anything I came up with after that nearly as much.

Back in California for the holidays, I wrote the initial manuscript in about a week over winter break. I wrote him sitting on the floor of my mother's pink bathroom next to the clawfoot tub. I wanted to be his height.

Dagobert is the story of a mouse, who essentially, purely, is lonely. He wants friends. He emulated the behavior of the people in his house to make this happen, and steals things to mimic their parties.

He steals an oyster (I will have no comments about the Freudian implications of this, they don't exist...) and hopes to find a pearl. Instead an ocean falls out. I'm not sure the metaphor needs much explaining, but at its heart Dagobert is a very Nietzschean thing. Embracing suffering, paradise always at your fingertips. Bleak as it may seem, it may be the fairytale itself, in some strange way.



The Making

Materials

Anyone who stopped by my desk
this semester saw it at it's worst. A
Complete whirlwind of pencils and
paper scraps shredded to lace. I
made my book with...

X-Acto

Tablesalt

Watercolor Pencil

Guache

Black Paper

Brushes

Nori Paste

String

Acrylic Ink

Toothpicks

Sharpener

The artists sustained only
one minor knife injury, by
the grace of god.

Material & Character Studies

Pattern Studies & Pattern Process

Collage Process

All patterns were hand cut and glued onto black or white sheets as separate assets

Physical pieces, like string and toothpick parts, were glued and scanned separately from characters and objects.

They were cut and scanned in sometimes in order of page and sometimes in order of asset. (page by page, or at times, the water assets for three pages cut at once.

Physical to Digital

Analog assets were scanned at high dpi into photoshop where they were seperated into their own transparent layers.

Even water ripples werer their own seperate assets.

They were arranged, adjusted for color/contrast and exported into indesign, where type was added.

The Cover

The cover was created last, using the same methods. This was the most heavily proofed part of the book as the dustjacket has odd and specific measurements for fold and trim.

The Book

The final book was printed with Mixam. The dustjacket and inserts were printed and added to the main book block in house.

