The Israel Museum Ben-Yitzhak Award for the Illustration of a Children’s Book, 2008
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About the Award

Book illustrations are the first works of art we encounter as children. The experience of looking at a fine quality illustration encompasses all the elements involved in viewing an outstanding artwork: pleasure, excitement, discovering the message, and identifying the period and the place. The Israel Museum’s Award for the Illustration of a Children’s Book seeks to increase awareness of this art form and encourage outstanding illustrators.

In the 30 years of its existence, the award has been presented every other year to 10 illustrators (a few have been selected more than once); 45 honorable mentions and 3 special honorable mentions have also been conferred, singling out a total of 80 books to date.

In 2005, the Israel Museum published a comprehensive book surveying all the illustrators who had been given the award up to that year: The Big Book of Illustrators.

The Ben-Yitzhak Award is presented in memory of Rivi (Soifer) and Michael Ben-Yitzhak, who were killed in a terrorist attack in Jerusalem’s Zion Square in the summer of 1975, leaving two children.
Award Selection Procedure

The Israel Museum appoints four expert jurors, and they grant the award (gold medal) to the artist who has created the most outstanding illustrations. The jury may also award up to five honorable mentions (silver medals) to other illustrators. They also have the authority to decide not to give out the award or the honorable mentions to any illustrators, if there are no suitable candidates. The award is granted primarily on the basis of the artistic quality of the illustrator’s work, while other aspects of the book are also taken into account: the quality of the text, the connection between the illustrations and the text, suitability to the age group of the intended reader, the design, layout, printing, binding, and the craftsmanship of the book as a whole.

Only books first published in Israel between January 1, 2006, and December 31, 2007, were eligible for this year’s award; the date of publication must appear in the book and it must be printed in Israel.

Entries included 186 books illustrated by 110 artists, which were published by 49 publishing houses.
The Jury

Chairperson: Nurit Shilo-Cohen, Senior Curator-at-Large for Museum Education and Curator of Illustration, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Merav Salomon, Illustrator, Head of the Illustration Program in the Department of Communication in the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem
Dr. Hanna Livnat, Head of the Yemima Center for the Study and Teaching of Children’s Literature, Beit Berl College
Yael Bamberger, Book designer, Publications Department, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

On January 27, 2008, the jury of the Israel Museum Ben-Yitzhak Award for the Illustration of a Children’s Book convened and decided to grant the award (gold medal) to David Polonsky for his illustration of the book A Moonless Night.

The jury also decided to grant five honorable mentions (silver medals) to the following illustrators:

Batia Kolton for the book The Golden Chain: Best Hebrew Poems for Children
Yana Bukler for the book Jojo and Momo
Lena Guberman for the book Gali’s Soap Bubbles
Yaniv Shimony for the book Uncle Leon’s Adventures in the Romanian Steppes
Ofra Amit for the book A Girl from There
David Polonsky's illustrations create a magical atmosphere that helps us decipher the text. This effect is achieved above all by a sparing use of color: blues, blacks, browns, and the dark silvery tones in which the entire book is steeped. Against this background the heroine, Zohar, glows even more intensely with her dense bright curls. Although the book is suffused with mystery and apprehension, and night is a palpable presence throughout, there is no wickedness in it. The plot hinges on a mystery that has to be solved, and, as the heroine embarks on a journey to search for the light, the illustrator draws the observers in and invites them to join him in discovering all the little details that reveal themselves in the dark. The illustrator is omniscient – he can see in the dark, and from behind, too.

Polonsky’s technical virtuosity finds expression in three-dimensional illustrations of great depth, portrayed from unusual angles which thrust the reader in and out of the drawings. The whole book is concerned with perspectives – the little girl’s, the moon’s, and the reader’s. Certain motifs – the curls, the clouds, the trees – are recurrent, and there are powerful contrasts in the depiction of light and shade. The contradictions and illogicalities blend easily into the book, thanks partly to the vein of gentle humor that runs through it.

The verbal and visual aspects of the story are well integrated. Both conduct a dialogue – sometimes open, sometimes allusive – with And There Was Evening, Fania Bergstein’s 1949 classic children’s book illustrated by Haim Hausmann and inspired by Hans Christian Andersen. Here, as in the classic work, the moon and stars have a face, though in this case they are accompanied by personified versions of clouds, trees, cars, and a house.

The book is meticulously produced and the designer’s contribution is clearly evident.
Batia Kolton
The Golden Chain: Best Hebrew Poems for Children
Selected and edited by Nira Harel
Achuzat Bayit, 2007

Batia Kolton’s illustrations give this anthology of poems a sense of unity and enrich it with refreshing interpretations. Despite their retro style, the illustrations propose a fascinating visual reading that endows the works with renewed relevance.

The illustrative approach reflects a great sensitivity to the demands of every single poem, giving each its due in a double spread. The result is a rich and varied display of compositional solutions, in which the illustrations provide both information and interpretation. The approach is simultaneously decorative and classical, and preserves a uniform vocabulary throughout. The wealth of detail creates a complete world around each poem, enriching it and prolonging the time the reader devotes to its scrutiny.

The palette of colors used for the illustrations and for the background of the pages is harmonious, conveying a sense of old-fashionedness.

The brief biographies of the poets at the end of the book provide the reader with valuable additional information, and are accompanied by portraits drawn in the style of the rest of the illustrations in the book.
Yana Bukler's illustrations provide an aesthetic and visual experience of a different kind, and evince the sense of sheer pleasure with which they were created. The dialogue they conduct with children’s drawings on the one hand and comic-book illustrations on the other invites multiple readings and second looks. The illustrations range from depictions of familiar objects in the everyday local urban environment (the apartment block, the street, the neighborhood, air conditioners, trash cans, a pizza place) to fanciful characters (a goat, a hen, and a donkey at the windows), which generate a different atmosphere and provide a refreshing way of looking at the experience of life in a common urban neighborhood.

The illustrated pages play with the relationship between inside and outside: the windows that let us look in are also the illustrated panels of a comic strip, with the characters’ dialogue tucked inside balloons. The visual story is rich in detail, and the longer one looks at it, the more details emerge, both in the full-page illustrations and in the vignettes scattered throughout the text. The rich colors serve as a complement to the flat, delicate, deliberately spare style of the drawings. The two main characters are portrayed in strong contrasting colors that work well together, reflecting the way they bond in spite of – or perhaps because of – the differences between them.

The special aesthetic qualities of the book are appropriate to its concern with social issues and friendship. It deals with stereotypes without actually portraying them, and the language of illustration provides a successful alternative for confronting prejudices.

The book’s endpapers are covered with photographs and drawings of windows printed in Duotone, which depict external details of the facade of an apartment block, while themselves echoing the construction of an apartment block or the panels of a comic book.
Lena Guberman

Gali’s Soap Bubbles

Written by Avirama Golan
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2006

Lena Guberman’s illustrations are the driving force behind the book’s plot. The pictures are executed with a combination of intelligence and subtle humor, and the artist’s personal style is evident in the lines of the drawings and the stylistic vocabulary. The very precise depictions of local scenes provide convincing and captivating representations of the urban environment of present-day Tel Aviv (air conditioners, laundry, solar water heaters, and television antennas on the roofs of high-rises, and, on the horizon, a thin strip of sea), all of which combine into a hymn of praise to the city of Tel Aviv.

The bubbles that Gali blows on the roof envelop the few concise words of the story and carry it along to meet the characters they come across. The depiction of the individual in an urban public space is emphasized, and the bubbles form a direct link between Gali and the other characters. The whole story feels as if it might have been written as an excuse to portray the bubbles, which are big, juicy, shiny, and full of personality. The round form of the bubbles is echoed in other elements in almost every double spread in the book (the ball, the lampshade, the traffic lights, the hamburger, the lifebelt, the pattern on Gali’s shirt). The bubble, which always contains a strong element of light, represents a wish for something abstract, and an interesting dialogue is created between this distant fantasy and the detail-rich, tangible visual reality.

The illustrations are characterized by unconventional perspectives, and there is an interesting use of the frame to crop the edges of the figures. The opening and closing pictures depicting the apartment block are similar, though different in detail, and could be used to play “Spot the Difference.” Every double spread contains details that attract a child’s eye and tempt it to linger. The book is dynamic and full of movement, with an interplay of expectation and fulfillment. Clues are scattered throughout as to what is about to happen, and at the end all expectations are fulfilled.
Yaniv Shimony

Uncle Leon’s Adventures in the Romanian Steppes

Written by Yannets Levi
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2007

Yaniv Shimony successfully meets the challenge of illustrating a book that is composed mainly of text, of the kind that usually has only black-and-white illustrations or none at all. The book is divided into chapters, and some of the illustrations take the form of vignettes slotted into the text, while others are full-page pictures, always outlined in a color other than black, which gives them a softer and more sophisticated air. The illustrations that depict the main characters and their surroundings display the artist’s interesting ability to construct a composition as he skillfully manipulates the interplay of light and shade, makes playful use of color and humor, and indulges in wonderful flights of fancy.

The illustrations are energetic, with slight overtones of caricature, but nonetheless responsible and precise in their rendering of the periods described. The illustrator has a light touch, which gives the book dynamic virtuosity, and he moves easily between anthropomorphized cockroaches and accurate realistic depictions.

The illustrator makes reference to the classics – for example, to illustrator Walter Trier and heroes Niels Holgerson and Gulliver – but does so by means of a modern stylistic interpretation, thus appealing to a wide range of ages.
Illustrator Ofra Amit conducts an interesting dialogue with the texts in this unique book, though both text and illustrations could stand on their own. The associative dialogue between illustrations and text expresses an emotional stance rather than serving as a means of representation or interpretation. The pictures are there to enrich the text and give faces to the characters, and they rely on such deeply embedded cultural images as the face of the Madonna. The depth added by the illustrations helps us deal with the charged content of the book.

The deliberately small format makes the book very personal and intimate, and the illustrator makes use of this in her constant dialogue with issues of scale and composition. As one leafs through the book there is a regular alternation between dense illustrations that occupy the entire page, sometimes overflowing beyond its limits, and others in which a single object is depicted in the center of the page, against the light plywood background. Throughout the book there is an interplay between presence and absence, empty and full, dark and light, text and illustration, and the figures themselves are simultaneously there and not there.

The gray, orange, and brown tints lend an air of restraint and constriction appropriate to the emotional atmosphere. The pictures are painted on a wooden surface whose grain is visible through the layers of color, expressing symbolic iconic connotations as well as the physical presence of the materials – the plywood surface and the acrylic brushstrokes.

The book is beautifully put together, and the cover design, choice of format, paper quality, and color are all meticulously conceived. Although designed as a book for young adults, it could suit an older readership, too.