

# Whitney

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These murals are no less powerful and serve the modern day audience by illustrating ideas and events – storytelling without words.

In fact, these illustrations are like visual poems in that they not only ostensibly “tell” one story, they open us up to “see” many layers of the story. A limitless number of entirely new stories could be crafted from just one image.

DePaola has produced more than 260 books over 50 years – wordless picture books, folk tales, nursery rhymes and chapter books. Known for his warm palette and lively style, he masterfully expresses emotion through nuance, movement, and gesture. Winner of the Caldecott and Newbury Awards and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, dePaola is recognized as a “living treasure” by the state of New Hampshire.

DePaola creates both text and story, treating each story as if it were a stage production – writing the story, casting characters, designing costumes and building the set. He is particularly inspired by human-centric folktales that pass along community tradition, teach a lesson, or inspire action.

While everyone knows dePaola by his inimitable aggressive and charismatic Strega Nona – the grandmotherly witch – featured in at least 20 books, subtlety is the theme in his newest book, *Quiet*. A lively palette of expansive washes of color combined with lots of white space gives the simple story space to breath – paralleling the message a grandfather gives to his grandchildren. With a simple gesture of the hand, close-ups of a dreaming dog or a Buddha-like

frog enthroned on a lily pad, dePaola conveys the message that slowing down, and being quiet and still is a particular gift – a gift that helps us notice the seemingly incidental workings of nature – a swarm of bees, a fox in its den, a rabbit in its hole, a flock of birds, a chorus in the trees.

Krommes began her illustration career as a wood engraver, inspired by masters Nora Unwin and Herbert Waters. I have always loved silhouettes, the art of paper-cutting, any art that boasts a striking contrast between black and white. Hence, for me, woodcuts are somewhat mystical. In fact, two prized possessions that have hung in my office for decades but still give me joy each day – are woodcuts. One is “My Studio” by Herbert Waters.

The other is “Birdwatcher” by Krommes. In this print, a spectacled woman stands on the shore peering through a telescope, her binoculars hanging from her neck, an image framed by a border of parading loons. “Birdwatcher” reminds me of this idea of “seeing” – really seeing, going beneath the layers of what we think is there, what we think is true. I never tire of looking at either print. They foster thought and call me to peel away layers in myself I may not realize are there.

No small miracle of the craft of woodcut – and the less cumbersome but similar medium of scratchboard – is the fact that every image is defined by thousands of individual hashtag lines. Lines shape a cloud, curl the ripples of a puddle, comb the hair of a dog, spike the petals of a flower, convey joy in a child’s eyes, or capture a flock of geese turning the air into feathers.

Upon winning the Caldecott for *The House in the Night* (2009) by Susan Marie Swanson, Krommes said the story was tailor-made for her black and white style because it was all

about light and dark, and “it was a lyrical, inspiring and open-ended story that would be told primarily through the pictures. . . every illustrator’s dream.” But Krommes’ illustrations in *Swirl by Swirl: Spirals in Nature* (2011) by Joyce Sidman takes it one step further – resulting in an exquisite merger between text and illustration.

Perhaps the most amazing illustrations in the exhibit are those of David Carroll, a MacArthur Fellow and winner of the John Burroughs Medal for Nature Writing, avid artist/scientist/conservationist who writes and illustrates the story of Nature itself. I cannot decide whether his watercolor spotted turtle is more remarkable than his pen and ink “wetlands mosaic,” an imaginative “map” that is a montage of wetlands ecosystems, rather than an actual location.

At first, this mosaic looks like something out of Tolkien, an imaginative underworld beneath the earth, a secretive place seen only by the vetted elite and in a way, it is just that because most of us never stop to notice the details as Carroll paints them. What Carroll sees in 1,000 square yards of swamp is truly remarkable – pathways of migrating spotted turtles as they plod through bluejoint reedgrass; the muskrat pool and cattail marsh along the flood plain; the glacial pond and arctic fen; the red maple swamp and the upland forest.

As he writes in *Self-Portrait With Turtles* (2004), “I saw the need for art and a possible place for my work within that need. But I was walking a disappearing landscape and saw the superseding need to try to help reverse that devastation.”

DePaola, Krommes, and Carroll each, in their own way, teach us to notice things like turtles in the grass or geese in the sky or the disappearing landscape in need of protection.