



But Through the Ruckus the Littlest Troll Spied the Bear

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *The World of Jan Brett*
Where: International Museum of Art & Science, 1900 Nolana
When: Through Aug 29. Hours: Tues.-Wed., 9am-3pm; Thurs., 9am-8pm, Fri., 9am-5pm; Sat. 10am-5pm; Sun., 1-5pm
Contact: 956-682-0123 or www.imasonline.org. General admission is charged.

Illustrated Journeys

The World of Jan Brett presents selected illustrations from several of Brett's 35 published books. From biblical interpretations and old folk tales to Arctic igloos, these illustrations depict different places and cultures, taking visitors on a journey around the world and then some. Brett has found inspiration for images that offer the young child's imagination numerous delightful adventures. Along with each group of illustrations from a specific book, the author/artist has prepared an illustrated fact sheet that offers background information about the story and images.

Illustrations in books add clarity and enhance written communication. Both text and image need to go well together in order to tell the story the way it deserves to be told and to help readers to better understand its message. With Brett's children's picture books, a child can get used to cultural diversity and be introduced to world environments. Her books/illustrations also help the young learn about their own culture, and when children see pictures of the stories, they discover similarities and differences with the world they had imagined. The stories become more real for them. But even with all this potential in its favor, illustration is an art form that usually doesn't make it into the art museum. The special quality of Brett's illustrations makes the exception.

The storyline for the books is uncomplicated; the drawings are not, but instead are teeming with details that bring the written action to life. From the story "Daisy Comes Home," not only is the child treated to an engaging story, but also gets a look at rural Chinese culture. There are several levels of information embedded in Brett's illustrations. When a location is determined for a new story, she travels to that locale.

“Sometimes I will take a story and set it in a foreign country, for instance the troll story set in Sweden,” she explained. “I’ll have in my mind a list of items I would like to see, so I can draw them for the book. I would like to see the very oldest clothes that can be found in a museum of the indigenous people; I’d like to see an old-fashioned farmhouse before electricity. I’d like to find out what kind of food the people ate.” Then she relies on her imagination to fill in gaps. Her beautiful illustration of the sleeping ice bear and the troll from “Who’s that Knocking on Christmas Eve?” takes us right into this old Norwegian folk tale.

This admired children’s author/illustrator decided as a child that she wanted to be an illustrator. “I remember the special quiet of rainy days, when I felt that I could enter the pages of beautiful picture books,” she reminisced. Now, Brett tries to re-create that feeling in her own stories. “A picture is never finished until I feel I can walk into a page,” she mused.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, UTRGV, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgv.rr.com