

Almost Nothing

What do artists have in mind when they thwart our expectations of what a picture book should be and, instead of presenting colored images of the world, in extreme cases confront us with “empty” black or white pages?

Limiting the use of painterly resources leads—possibly after initial irritation—to a greater sensitive awareness. Only on close observation does the uniquely fine surface texture of the paper become apparent. Are those fleeting clouds, “trapped,” so to speak, in superimposed layers of paper? Or is that “White Riding Hood” (*Cappuccetto Bianco*), hiding before our very eyes in the snow? How much our imagination can be stimulated by restricting artistic intervention may be seen in the very special case of the “Black Book of Colors” (*El libro negro de los colores*). The less the eye is allowed to see—the book’s pages are all completely black—the more all of our other senses, supported by a poetic text, are inspired to imagine bright colors.

In bringing the special qualities of elemental natural phenomena such as rain, clouds, water, and wind to life in picture books, simple strategies often suffice. Keeping to a single color (for instance the blue of the sea and the sky) or to a single design concept (the rain that “cuts through” the paper in a range of different patterns) creates an intense aesthetic experience: time seems to stand still; spaces seem to open up into infinity.

But picture books can—in the tradition of Minimal Art or Concept Art—also generate philosophical questions: how do we perceive the world? How do we conceive of it in pictorial terms? What is reality? Reducing painterly resources to their most elementary forms, such as lines and surfaces, demonstrates how the world can be portrayed in fundamental terms.