

Traces of Art History

Picture book artists work with an awareness of the wide variety of visual languages available to them. These include not only illustration and design traditions within picture book art itself but also visual languages familiar from art history.

Artists borrow representational styles, techniques, and concrete motifs from art works—quoting them, alluding to them, or presenting them in distorted form. Visual languages (such as those of Surrealism, Color Field Painting, Pop Art, and Minimalism) have as a matter of course gained entry into the world of picture books. Older readers might relish recognizing familiar motifs, opening up new fields of interpretation, whereas younger readers can increase their knowledge of visual languages—and thus of this richly varied world in which we live.

Pictorial languages naturally undergo change by this contextual shift from “free” museum art to “restricted” book art. A book’s format and specific materiality, and using representational styles to create stories and characters that appeal to a young public, preclude the selected examples from simply being “replicas” of works and styles. They demonstrate that picture book art can create its own unique visual languages.