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Introducing A New Artist from the Far East (China) and the Near West (U.S.) — Ed Young

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Ed Young's father (the dean of engineering at a university in Shanghai) hoped his son's artistic talent would develop in the direction of architecture—close to the father's own field of engineering and construction. When Ed came from China to study architecture at the University of Illinois, he says it took him three years to discover that this field was not all "visual designs and pretty drawings." ("Caldecott Medal Acceptance", Horn Book Magazine July/August, 1990) Winning a university "badge" contest for a homecoming football game, in 1953, gave him the courage to pursue a career as an artist instead of as an architect. An eight-week summer session before starting as a freshman at the Art Center School in Los Angeles, and stiff competition from Korean War veterans forced him to develop the discipline he needed as an artist.

When he graduated, Young went to New York City to do advertising illustrations, but he continued to draw everything that caught his eye. His architectural training made him notice the man-made structures in New York (buildings, subways, streets, cemeteries). His interest in Chinese meditation pushed him to notice and draw rhythms of people and animals. He realized, in retrospect, that all this training had prepared him for the world of children's books. He illustrated what he thought would be his first and last children's book in 1962, The Mean Mouse and Other Mean Stories by Janice Udry (published by Harper); but it won an American Institute of Graphic Arts Award and Young was persuaded to illustrate more books. He continued to win more awards, about which he knew nothing because of having grown up as a foreigner in China. The awards included a Caldecott honor book in 1968 for the illustrations for The Emperor and the Kite by Jane Yolen (Philomel).

Young's style has grown and changed as he has gained insight into himself. Not until Foolish Rabbit's Big Mistake, by Rafe Martin (1985 J.M.Dent and Sons), did Young move to the large fluid images that provide the drama—the fear of the fleeing animals—and the majesty—the king of the jungle, with only a giant claw letting the reader know he is standing at the feet of a royal personage. In 1990, his Chinese Red Riding Hood, Lon PoPo, won the Caldecott. From the glowing eyes of the wolf on the cover, to the half-hidden teeth and shadowy leaping shape, Young captures the menace of the wolf who,
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in this tale, is outwitted by the eldest and cleverest of three sisters. If you have not seen this book, treat yourself to some shivers as you experience the menace of the huge wolf and the triumph when three little girls get the better of him. *Lon PoPo* shows how Young captures fluid motion and power in his images.

His art has the feel of the Orient with the attention to simple shapes, careful attention to design, and the light quality present in his color. His use of color and shape remind me of Oriental paintings because the color is not as heavy as in European oils. The colors seem to have an inner glow to them and the shapes almost seem to move before your eyes because his shapes are never static. He has captured the rhythm of the animal or person so naturally that they look ready to continue moving.

Ed Young's art, however, is not completely Oriental. His use of large shapes that move even beyond the page, pull in images that are not even there. They exist only in the imagination of the viewer, triggered simply by that portion of the image which Young has put on the page. This artist has combined his experiences into his own unique style.

*Cats are Cats*, an anthology of cat poems chosen by Nancy Larrick, gives Ed Young the opportunity to portray—with charcoal and chalk—the many moods and incredible flexibility that are typical of cat movement. We see soulful, sly beggars (for food and petting), moonlit hunters, leaping dancers, mysterious witch cats, playful twosomes, feisty kittens, and the relaxation of sleep that only cats can do with all four legs in the air.

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In the rest of this issue we’ll entertain you with mice taken from Young’s illustrations for Larrick’s anthology of mice poems, *Mice Are Nice*. It seems appropriate to slip pictures of creatures that are expert at skittering, timidly peeping out, and hiding among the pages of our reviews. As a final note, don’t forget to look for Ed Young’s new book in 1993 about ancient China, a story of love and destiny entitled *Red Thread* (Philomel).