Cathi Hepworth: The Illustrator Who Uses Art to Communicate Ideas

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Those who believe they have no talent for drawing should listen to Cathi Hepworth. She says, "Anyone can draw." (Correspondence from Hepworth, December 14, 1994). To her, it is ideas that are important. Actually, she didn’t even know how to draw or paint when she started college. That didn’t bother her because she was a German major. What did bother her were several years of German grammar. "Endless" grammar convinced her to change to a more creative field—one that would always allow her an abundant supply of ideas to find expression. After trying out advertising and graphic design, she found her place in the department of illustration at Brigham Young University. She learned how to draw in order to organize visual designs that would communicate her ideas. That process is what Hepworth finds exciting about the work of an illustrator—not the drawing or rendering aspect, but the "idea and design process." She comments, "You will never see me sitting around sketching for enjoyment...sketching is a means to an end" (Correspondence 12/14/94).

So it seems logical that Hepworth does most of her designing in her head before she puts any sketches on paper. She did a lot of editorial illustration after college, but her real interest was in children’s book writing and illustration.

Her first illustrations were done in 1991 for *While You are Asleep* by Gwynne L. Isaacs. The story centers around people who work at night, but who do so in a neighborhood setting of friends. As might be expected, some of the characters include a police officer, a waitress, a gas attendant, a doctor, a taxi driver and a telephone operator. Hepworth’s people are lumpy with large noses and large heads—a caricature-type of style that intensifies whatever their feelings are. The worried one (with his hand stuck in a cookie jar) looks terribly worried; the happy one has a gigantic toothy smile; the doctor looks supremely confident. Such art works well to bring out the humorous aspects of nighttime events.

Humorous exaggeration suits Hepworth’s second book: *Antics* (1992). The book began as a senior project in an illustration class at BYU. While brainstorming for a topic, she remembered a drawing her brother had done using ants to illustrate the idea of antibodies. Hepworth began to record "ant" words...
every time she heard one. She soon realized there were hundreds of great "ant words" in the English language. She had often used ants as subjects for illustration assignments and found "they make great, great models" (correspondence 12/14/94). She selected eight of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet for her project with "the full intention of eventually completing the series. And the rest is . . . Antiquity!" (correspondence 12/14/94).

The first illustration reproduced in this issue is Antique. Viewers will notice immediately the antique phonograph, chair, windows on the house, wrinkles on the old ants face, the spectacles, and droopy old antennae. The illustration powerfully communicates the idea of "antique."

Later in this issue, "flamboyant" is reproduced. With the gaudy wallpaper; the huge hat piled with fruit, ribbons, curlicues and a feather; the long pearls; the striped overskirt and the cane, this ant struts along looking every bit the part of "flamboyant."

Finally, look for the picture that will be a favorite for anyone closely associated with a two-year-old "tantrum." The head is thrown back showing a mouth in such a huge scream that the tonsils are visible. One can almost hear the indignant howl of the ant child who can’t have her way. After Antics, Hepworth illustrated a book by Toby Speed entitled Hattie Baked a Wedding Cake (1994). A marvelous cake with lots of extras on it (besides the usual fancy decorations) like a kiss and a tune, proves again that ideas can be communicated powerfully through the visual medium.

Readers should try Hepworth’s approach—find "ant" words, or encourage children to illustrate their own words. "Anyone can learn to draw" as Hepworth reminds us, and the idea is the exciting part of the process.
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