

Picture Book Pioneer, Leonard Weisgard Introduces Modern Art

by

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Picture Book Pioneer, Leonard Weisgard Introduces Modern Art

Leonard Weisgard and Margaret Wise Brown developed the first contemporary interactive concept books, putting them in the vanguard of innovators in several disciplines who reimagined the picture book for young children. In the Here and Now titles, Weisgard pioneered modern approaches, reflecting such influences as Russian Constructivism, Surrealism, and Cubism. More specifically, Weisgard mirrored the works of E. McKnight Kauffer, Rene Magritte, Stuart Davis, and Henri Matisse.

Weisgard brought modern art to children's books, and Brown was the poetic muse. They benefitted by their associations with Lucy Sprague Mitchell and the progressives at the Bank Street School, collaboration with William R. Scott Publishing Company, and the 1930's avant-garde scene in art, music, and literature, as well as innovations in printing technologies.

Weisgard and Brown became key players in this golden age of the new American picture book, bringing children into the collaboration.

As a curious child himself, Weisgard had been captivated by his sensory world where he was happiest imagining, investigating, inventing. "We were all incredible creatures when we were little. We could see and hear and feel and smell and with easy concentration create things that never were and things that were yet to come." ("Acceptance Paper" 152) He vividly remembers letting paints drip down glass milk bottles in order to watch overlapping colors make interesting patterns and new hues appear. The design and texture of his aunt's Belgian lace curtains intrigued him so much that he cut them apart for further examination. (Carle Exhibit) For Weisgard, a Victorian sofa covered in green fabric became grassy meadows, an old leather glove a brown cow, folds in a blanket the hills of a city, and he longed to draw faces on the front of clocks and to paint shadows behind people and furniture. ("Acceptance Paper" 152, 153) He lit

pieces of paper and tossed them from his window in order to watch the bright lights flutter downward. (Brown 40)

It is not surprising that his keen awareness of sensory details at an early age made a lasting impression and later led him to become an artist and to use his creative gifts to design picture books for children.

In his memoir, “Patchwork Memory,” Weisgard recounts his boyhood days. He was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on December 13, 1916. His parents owned a local grocery store, and his father would often place his son in an apple-filled barrel where the toddler could watch the happenings and stay out of mischief. Some seventy years later, he would still recall the apple smell. He also remembers special outings with his mother to the Schubert Theater, the music, lights, lifelike sets, and costumed actors. It was magic.

His father wanted to introduce his only son to his British relatives, so the American Weisgards set sail for England. Once there, the family divided their year among relatives in Manchester, Liverpool, and London (see fig. 1). It was an extraordinary education for the quiet, reflective child who took in all the sights and sounds of this new country. One special memory was going to pantomime shows produced just for children. The theater of make-believe with its amazing special effects introduced him to folk and fairytales and his favorite, *Jack and the Beanstalk*. As at the Schubert, these experiences taught him about characters, settings, and the visual art of storytelling. For Weisgard, picture books were to be a kind of mini-theater with scenes attuned to page turns.

When the family returned to America, they moved to the Bronx. Young Leonard, then eight or nine, was enrolled in school for the first time. It was a rough transition. With his British



Leonard and Father in London



Leonard with Grandfather, Sam

Fig. 1. Weisgard in England.

manners and accent, and new his eyeglasses, he faced unkind classmates who teased and bullied him. He found solace in books at his local library. This early introduction to libraries and the treasures found in books would have a profound effect on his childhood and also become a very personal connection throughout his life.

During these elementary school days, the sensitive student found another retreat in an after-school art program organized by his favorite teacher. Here he could develop his growing interest in drawing and painting (see fig. 2). Weisgard's enormous talent was recognized by his high school teachers who suggested he apply to the Pratt Institute of Art (see fig. 3). During these Depression years, his parents were not supportive of their son becoming an artist. Weisgard, therefore, entered the teacher-training program at the school, a compromise between parents and son. ("Patchwork Memory" 260)

The subway commute to Pratt was a long one, and Weisgard was invited by fellow student, Margot Tomes, to live with her family in Brooklyn. Tomes, later known for her quaint, often droll drawings in fairytales and historical fiction, and Weisgard decided to create their own picture book. Publishers thought their project charming but too European in style for the American market. Tomes and Weisgard continued their studies at Pratt, and for both, this venture planted the idea of writing and illustrating for children. ("Patchwork Memory" 260)

Weisgard did many odd jobs as part of his scholarship for the program. He also spent time away from class, drawing scenes from the Brooklyn Bridge of boats on the river and cityscapes. These images would later appear in books like *Pelican Here*, *Pelican There* and *Rain Drop Splash*. After two years when funds for his scholarship ran out, Pratt helped Weisgard find a job painting mannequins and murals for Macy's Department Store. He soon made his way to graphic



Fig. 2. School Picture.



Fig. 3. Young Artist.

design work for magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. (Hopkins, 308)

In 1937, *The New Yorker* published Weisgard's first cover, "New England Country Scene" (see fig. 4). He was just twenty-one. Weisgard remembers his excitement upon learning the news and hopping on the subway, getting off at every stop for a glimpse of the magazines on the newsstands. His second cover for *The New Yorker*, "Apartment" (see fig. 5), was published in 1938. (Carle Exhibit, Carle Catalogue 27)

While continuing to work in the commercial art world, Weisgard was still determined to write and illustrate a children's picture book. In 1937, Thomas Nelson and Company published *Suki, the Siamese Pussy* (see fig. 6), the story of a young cat who runs away to New York City. After the publication of his first title, the artist knew that "illustrating, especially in the field of children's books, was where I wanted to be." (Weisgard, "Letter" 3) Weisgard, who grew up reading tales and novels that provided him with adventure, escapism, and comfort and who was blessed with the eye of a genius, clearly wanted to share his love of stories through his art.

Weisgard's best known, most innovative, and honored work did come during the dozen years or so (1938 – 1952) when he collaborated with Margaret Wise Brown. He once said, "My art studies were of value to me, but I also learned how to illustrate books by learning to dance, living, breathing, being with children, with people, being alone, reading, writing, traveling, brooding, beachcombing, and mostly, listening to Margaret Wise Brown." (Hopkins 309) They first met on a late summer afternoon in 1938 at the Scott Publishing Company.

Scott Publishing was an off-shoot of a progressive educational movement headed up by social reformer and researcher Lucy Sprague Mitchell. As a disciple of John Dewey, Mitchell believed that classrooms should have creative curriculums with hands-on activities that matched the

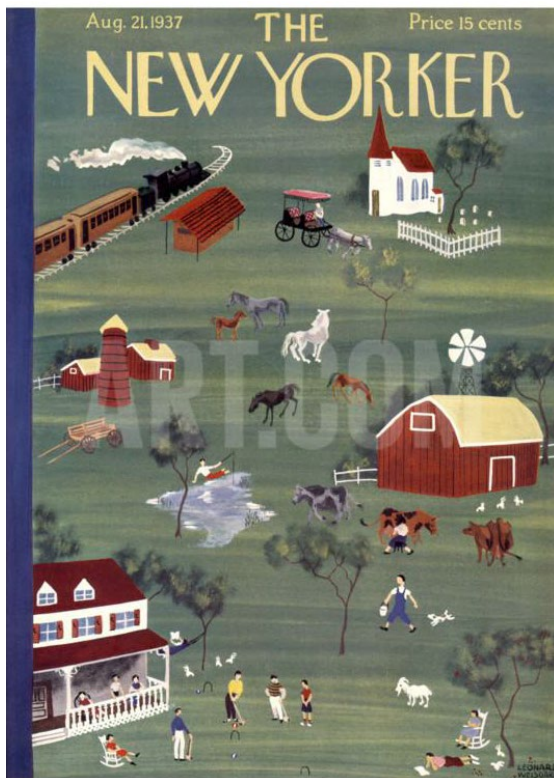


Fig. 4. "New England Country Scene."

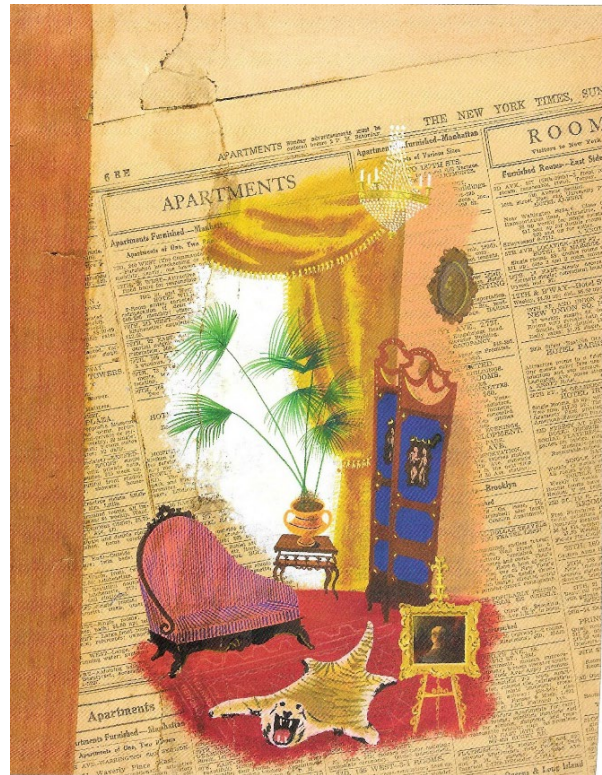


Fig. 5. "Apartment."



Fig.6. *Suki, the Siamese Pussy.*

intellect, curiosity, and imaginations of their young students. Mitchell and her colleagues founded the Bureau of Educational Experiments in 1916. This endeavor combined a nursery school and several affiliated primary schools, the Cooperative School for Student Teachers, and the Writers' Laboratory. The Bureau, later known for its Greenwich Village address as "Bank Street," was "an internationally respected center of child development research" where observation and experiment were as much a part of teacher training as was formal learning. In 1935, Margaret Wise Brown joined the program. Although she did some teaching, her real interest was in the writing workshops. (Marcus, *Awakened* 40, 43, 44)

Mitchell recognized that there were very few stories for the youngest children – from two to seven – that presented their here-and-now world of intense sensory awareness in daily experiences. Her realistic views about childhood, language development, and children's literature were in sharp contrast to those idealist beliefs of librarians of the period who regarded myths and fairytales as the best and sole reading choices. Anne Carroll Moore, the New York Public Library's first Superintendent of Work with Children, and her followers strongly opposed Mitchell's theories. (*Awakened* 57) In time, educators and librarians came to realize that toddlers and up need both realism and fantasy in their literature.

Mitchell promoted the writing of Here and Now stories in her Bank Street Laboratory. These could be tried out and edited in nursery classrooms. There, Brown had found her niche.

Mitchell also persuaded two parents, William R. Scott and John McCullough, to start a publishing company with the goal of promoting new book ideas for the very youngest. She encouraged Scott, saying "a chance lay open to him to make a significant contribution to the book world, the education field, and society as a whole." (*Awakened* 88 – 90) Mitchell recommended Brown as editor.

The young protégé “proved to be the most innovative picture book editor of her generation.” Brown charmed skilled illustrators and writers into joining Scott and working with her, and she was always thinking of new book ideas and designs for the nursery set. Brown somehow understood the emotional feelings of the littlest ones and wrote lyrical prose that tapped into their sensitivities. (Marcus, *Minders* 132 – 133) The first Scott catalogue (1938) noted, “In spite of the number of juveniles published every year ... there is little published for the very young child.” (Heins 646) Scott, Brown, and their stable of talented authors and artists aimed to change all that.

Weisgard’s agent suggested he visit Scott where they were interviewing illustrators for *The World Is Round* by Gertrude Stein. Weisgard’s portfolio included pieces that reflected the avant-garde graphics of Russian Constructivism and Cubism. (*Awakened* 109)

Brown met with Weisgard to review his work and remembered that time. “I first met Leonard Weisgard when he came to the dining room office of William R. Scott where I was working as a children’s editor. He was a very young fellow, with a shock of hair on top of his head and the mannerisms of an Englishman rather than those of an American. We liked his work. It had style and originality though the sketches he showed us were too sophisticated as they were. ... As a result of our first conversation I realized that my feelings were those of an author who was looking for an artist who wanted to do something for very young children that had never been done before.” (Brown 40) In Weisgard, she had found her visionary.

And, he fondly remembered her. “The sun was shining into the basement window of the Greenwich Village brownstone house. The editor was seated at her desk with her back to the window. The sunlight gave a golden greenish glow to her hair. Her eyes twinkled with a humorous, mischievous look. She looked at my portfolio, and that mischievous look twinkled all the more.” (“Patchwork Memory” 261) Together, they helped to create the modern picture book.

So on a late summer afternoon in 1938, they began talking about their childhoods, viewpoints on life, books they were reading, and creative ideas. They both welcomed the possibility of shifting the art in children's books away from the drab over sentimentalized Victorian style to a more modern look. (*Awakened* 109)

Over lunch in the days that followed, Weisgard told Brown about an interesting memory from his boyhood when he had ridden around the streets of London with his father and recorded on a phonograph record all the street noises in the big city. Weisgard suggested that, in pictures, shapes could represent sounds. This was the spark. Brown returned to her office and wrote the manuscript for *The Noisy Book*. (Brown 40, 41)

The next day, she visited every classroom in the Bank Street nursery school. The story was about a little dog named Muffin whose eyes had been bandaged at the vet's due to a cinder. He could hear, but he could not see. As he scampers along on sidewalks and streets on his way home, he listens to city sounds. The text was written with a question on every page. Brown was curious about how the question and guessing format would work with different age groups and wondered what suggestions the children might have. She was attuned to the rhythm of the words, the length of the book, and the timing for page turns. She observed her young audiences' awareness and involvement in the story. The children helped her make some necessary edits.

Brown gave the revised manuscript to Weisgard. Several days later, he produced the pictures. They were boldly colorful and contemporary. Weisgard also shared his art with the nursery students. He listened to their spontaneous, honest concerns and critiques and patiently redid illustrations, making them simpler, clearer, more age-appropriate. Brown recalls one little boy pointing to the wheels on a car saying, "Eggs!" The author replied "Wheels." The little boy

protested, “No, a weel is round, a weel is round.” Weisgard revised the oval shaped tires. A class reminded Brown that car horns did not go “honk, honk,” but rather “A WRurrrrra.” (Brown 41)

The Noisy Book was the first picture book of its kind, an interactive, open-ended concept book, a here-and-now story about everyday things in a child’s everyday world. Children were no longer passive listeners, but rather totally engaged and actively participating at story time.

The nursery set (three to five) has a fascination with language and, at this age, has fun with it. They love books with repetition, big new words, musical cadence, sounds they can mimic, a chance to respond aloud to the events, and most of all, surprises and humor. (Ames and Ilg) And Brown got it right. She included all these elements in her rhythmic text. Muffin “heard TICK TOCK TICK TOCK (it was the clock)”// “He heard big noises/ HORSES HOOFS/ Clop clop clop clop”// “He heard little noises .../ Patter patter patter patter/ people’s feet/ Flippity flap flap flap an awning in the wind.” And there is the silliness that sends little ones into gales of laughter. “It began to snow/ But could Muffin hear that?” (*Giggles* “NO!”) And what was that tiny squeaking sound? Was it// a policeman going squeak squeak squeak?/ NO/ Was it// A big fierce lion?/ NO/ Was it// an airplane?/ NO// What do Y O U think it was?”// (*The Noisy Book*) There is much eager anticipation to turn the page and to discover the answer. Brown’s astute attention to the children’s reactions to the pacing and to their participation when reading her manuscript paid off.

And Weisgard’s modern jazzy art compliments Brown’s modern jazzy text. There is real movement and a percussive-like tempo to the strikingly vibrant, angular illustrations. Young children had never seen art like this in their books before. The semi-abstract style with vivid primary colors and large geometric shapes in some ways resembled their own paintings. At four, five, or six, it does not matter if a cat is red or a skyscraper yellow. When painting at this age,

there is an innocence of expression with no constraints or self-doubts. Abstract art is accessible and attainable for them. It is as if Weisgard's modern illustrations in this first here-and-now tale reaffirm theirs. His images are playful and lively, just like story time in a Bank Street classroom. One can only imagine young children totally attentive to the art and enthusiastically chiming in and calling out to help Muffin along the way.

The Noisy Book met with rave reviews from both the nursery set and their parents, who were thrilled to observe their children thoroughly enjoying a book that they could "talk back to." (Bechtel 176) Librarians, in contrast, panned the book as being "sub-literary." Not only was there no real plot, but a book that allowed youngsters to be noisy and moving about was certainly not appropriate behavior for the revered story hour where children were expected to sit quietly, listening to tales from long ago that were often too sophisticated for them. Despite objections from librarians, sales were huge for the Scott Publishing Company, and the public clamored for more. Seven sequels would follow. (*Awakened* 119, 120)

In taking a closer look at the art in *The Noisy Book* (see fig. 7), one is immediately struck by Weisgard's use of shapes to represent sounds. The circle framing the clock makes one "tick tock" around the circular pattern like the hands on a clock would do. And the curvy, swishy shape surrounding the radiator suggests the hissing sound like that of the steam. The jagged hexagon around the vet is the down and up sound of the sneeze "Ker" "Choo." The large star-like polygon framing the fire truck blares out "DIANG" "DIANG" as only a fire engine's siren can. Weisgard once remarked, "Not even the most astute book critic ever caught on to this pictorial trick." ("Patchwork Memory" 262)

Weisgard not only uses bold primary colors in unexpected ways, but he uses black and white contrast to make the colors and images pop. For example, a white pentagon placed on a black

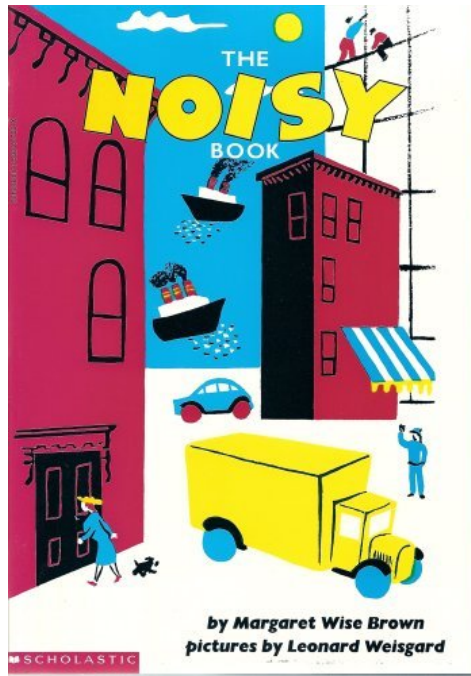


Fig. 7. *The Noisy Book*.

background makes a blue train engine constructed from cube, cylinder, and circles practically chug off the page.

One is reminded that Weisgard's introduction of the modern was revolutionary for the time. He was on the frontline and shook things up. Dan Yaccarino notes that many Golden Book illustrators followed, but it was Weisgard who showed them the way. (Telephone Interview)

Weisgard was clearly influenced by the art of Stuart Davis, especially his urban scenes. Davis's flattened space and shapes and overlapping, brightly colored geometric forms create buildings and sidewalks that draw the eye in. This form of Cubism can be seen in Weisgard's work as well. Vertical and horizontal rectangles and squares are angled and layered and protrude forward to create patterns that form buildings and streets. The images are certainly recognizable but incomplete. Red and his special blue complement each other, and the use of stark black manipulates and pulls one into the picture. Weisgard purposefully painted the streets white to allow the viewers' eyes a place to rest amid the gaiety of energetic colors and shapes. As in Davis's work, Weisgard's compositions, with linear, diagonal, and curving lines, create movement, and the bright colors make one happy. Cars and trucks are on the go, people bustling, workers hammering, boats tugging, all within the double spread.

It is as if one can hear the swing jazz of Duke Ellington or Count Basie. It is a happening scene. Viewing Davis's *New York Elevated* or *Place Padeloup* next to pages from Weisgard's groundbreaking *Noisy Book* show the similarities and inspiration (see fig. 8). Just as Weisgard believed shapes could evoke the idea of sounds, Davis believed Cubist art was the visual, tangible equivalent to jazz music. (Whiting) One can look at their semi-abstract paintings and feel the rhythm of the music.



Fig. 8. Weisgard's *The Noisy Book* with Stuart Davis's *New York Elevated*, 1930.

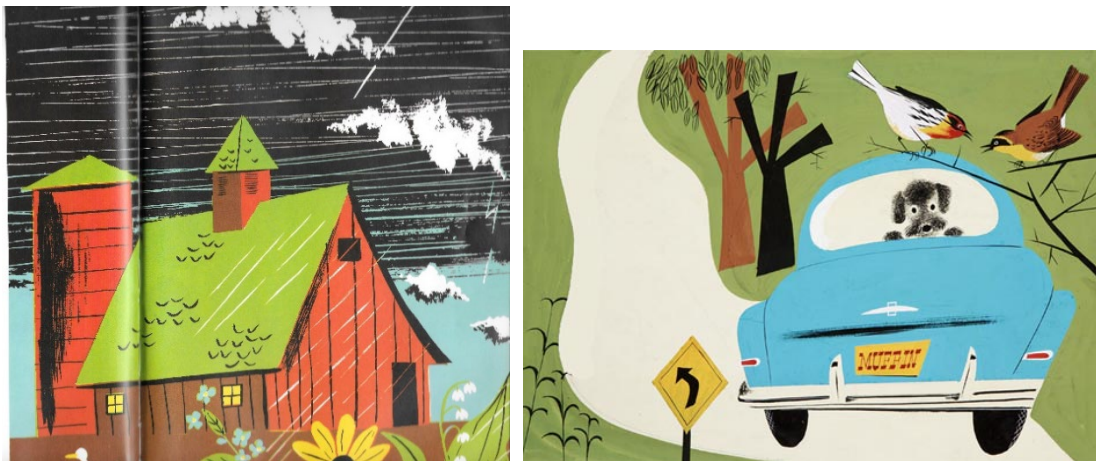


Fig. 9. *The Summer Noisy Book* with *Barn and Muffin*.

In *The Summer Noisy Book*, Muffin is off to the farm. Brown's text plays up all of nature's melodies. "Deep in the/ country as the/ moon shone/ down and the stars pricked the/ dark night sky/ among the dry/ sounds of/ summer and/ the rattle of/ bugs, Muffin/ heard/ peep peep/ jug a rum/ jug a rum/ jug a rum/ What was that?/" (*The Summer Noisy Book*)

Again, Weisgard dramatizes Brown's words in a modern poster-like art style. Basic shapes, simple graphic designs, and a limited palette of bright colors are appealing to young children. The animals and buildings are flat as if they were cut out and glued onto solid, vibrant backgrounds. Weisgard pre-separated colors and used a taping method to achieve clean sharp edges. In one picture, for example, he applied masking tape to form the straight lines for the silo, barn, and pitched roof. In keeping with the contemporary look, Weisgard juxtaposes more realistic images with semi-abstract ones. In another illustration, Muffin looks out from the rear window of the car at lifelike birds, yet the trees in the distance are stylized (see fig. 9).

Elements of texture add interest to the two-dimensional art. Weisgard used a sponging technique for Muffin's fur and the clouds. Crayons mixed with sponged paint create twigs and leaves for the birds' nest. A scraping tool etches lines across the stormy skies. And black paint is blown through a straw to make smoke above the firemen's truck.

Weisgard's modernist look in the Noisy Books reflects not only Stuart Davis's paintings but also the art of E. McKnight Kauffer. Kauffer, who did advertisement and travel posters and jacket design illustrations in the 1930's, was influenced by Russian Constructivism (see Lissitzky fig. 10), an avant-garde style with large, simple structures, bold colors, and strobe-like bands, sometimes with lettering. (Heller) Throughout *The Summer Noisy Book*, there are pages with straight edged bands of space with story text somewhat similar to the beams on a Russian Constructivist poster (see fig. 11). In studying Kauffer's art, one sees generalizations of simple



Fig. 10. Lissitzky, Untitled, 1920.



Fig. 11. *The Summer Noisy Book*.



Fig. 12. Weisgard and E. McKnight Kauffer.

objects. His image of the black rooster advertising *Eno's Fruit Salt* is very reminiscent of Weisgard's full-page black rooster with red comb greeting the morning (see fig.12). And, some of Kauffer's rural landscapes, "Twickham by Tram" and "London Transport Museum," remind one of Weisgard's later folk art scenes.

Another in the series, *The Quiet Noisy Book*, pays homage not only to Kauffer and Constructivism, but also to Henri Matisse and his cut-outs (see figs. 13 and 15). Expressionistic shapes mirror animals' features. Bright fish-like patterns surround a realistic fish. Obtuse triangles point to the sharp hooves and horns of an aproned cow. On the title page, curved flower and feather forms surround the swerving shape of a yellow chicken. And the text is placed within several trapezoids (see figs. 14 and 16).

In addition to the Noisy Book series, Weisgard and Brown teamed up to produce other here-and-now themed books, but the artist varied his modernist style for these new titles. In *Red Light*, *Green Light* and *The Important Book*, for example, there is a surreal quality to both, yet the images could not be more different.

Weisgard and Brown were intrigued watching the Bank Street preschoolers playing "red light, green light" on the playground at recess and developed a story idea in a game-like format. (Carle Catalogue 16) As if lighting the scenes in a play, Weisgard's renderings take the viewer from the first rays of morning light to the movement and action of a stop-and-go day and then back to the quiet arrival of evening. Young children not only appreciate the amusement of the spirited verse of the "stop and go" game, but also the reassuring, slowing down pace of text and pictures as nighttime and bedtime approach.

Unlike the vividly bright, flat colors in the Noisy Books, *Red Light*, *Green Light* is done in subtle tones, lending an ethereal quality to what first appears to be realistic, folk art styled



Fig. 13. Henri Matisse, *The Lagoon*.



Fig. 14. *The Quiet Noisy Book*.



Fig. 15. Matisse, *Portrait of Françoise Gilot* (1947).



Fig. 16. *The Quiet Noisy Book*, title page.

illustrations. The original version was completed in 1944 during World War II when colors and printing were limited. Weisgard met the challenge, working with only black and white gouache and watercolors. The palette ranged in shades of gray with highlights of red and green for the rising sun, rooftops, grass, and traffic lights.

Years later, the originals were lost, and Weisgard had the opportunity to re-do the illustrations (see fig. 17). Dedicated to his art and to achieving the best product for children, he re-thought the color scheme, adding soft browns and ochre. These colors gave a warmth and richness to the paintings and provided more value, more light and shadow. The rolling hills with added brown look earthier, and a muted yellow provides sunlight and that last fading light in the dusky sky. The yellow also illuminates lamps in houses and along the streets, creating a calm, comforting feeling with the coming of nightfall. Weisgard might have used block crayons to give texture to the roads, trees, and hills. To work with limited colors and make something of it takes true talent, and Weisgard was gifted at it.

There is a surreal feeling as the sun is setting. Is it real or is it a fantasy? “Streetlights in the Fog” (see fig. 18) has an other-worldly quality with clouds low to the ground engulfing the landscape and a few lamplights twinkling in the mist.

Perhaps the most inventive and modernistic of the Weisgard/Brown collaborations was *The Important Book*. Although Brown’s Gertrude Stein-like poem may seem finite, the author is actually inviting open-ended discussions from young listeners. “The important thing/ about grass is that it is green./ It grows, and is tender,/ with a sweet grassy smell./ But the important thing about grass/ is that it is green.” Oh, but it is so much more, and the conversation begins, and observations and individual experiences are shared.



Fig. 17. *Red Light, Green Light*, redone.



Fig. 18. "Streetlights in the Fog."

Weisgard's illustrations also invite heartfelt, thoughtful discussions and wonderings, and his images captivate and compliment Brown's verse. Weisgard once said he was not introducing the modern into picture books just for the sake of trying out a new art form, but rather he hoped it would allow children the opportunity to "experience and interpret" and to use their imaginations. (Carle Catalogue 15, 16) Young children had never experienced surreal paintings like this in picture books before.

Surrealism in art brings up questions about what one is actually seeing. Is it real, or is it an illusion? Objects look real, but are they? At first, when studying the illustration with the apples on a table, it appears one is looking out the window towards a tree and barrel in the distance. However, on closer examination, could it be a window casing or a picture frame with a painting of a tree and a barrel? The frame seems to be floating, as a corner touches the apple giving a more dreamlike effect (see fig. 19).

The element of texture in the book makes objects appear real, but the overall image has an other-worldly quality. On the cover, for example, the translucent glass, the wood grain of the sill, the fabric of the shade, the sheen on the apple give a three-dimensional effect, a sense of reality as if one can touch them. Yet the buildings out the window appear to hang in mid-air, leaving the viewer to wonder, is it all a dream? Again, Weisgard's use of color, line, and shading, and the brilliance of his brushstrokes convincingly create different textures throughout (see fig. 20).

Many illustrations, on closer inspection, have a feeling of mystery. In the poem about snow, for example, all looks merry and bright until one studies more carefully, and the magpie in the tree gives a sense of foreboding. The shades of green grass look lush, but then, words on the jagged board and the thickness of the growth create an enigmatic mood. What lies waiting? Especially haunting and lonely is the back cover with eyes peering out from the partially open

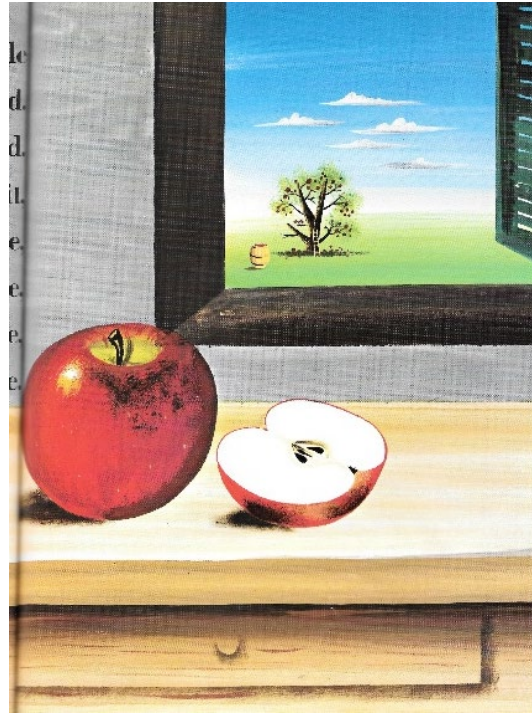


Fig. 19. "Apples and Window."

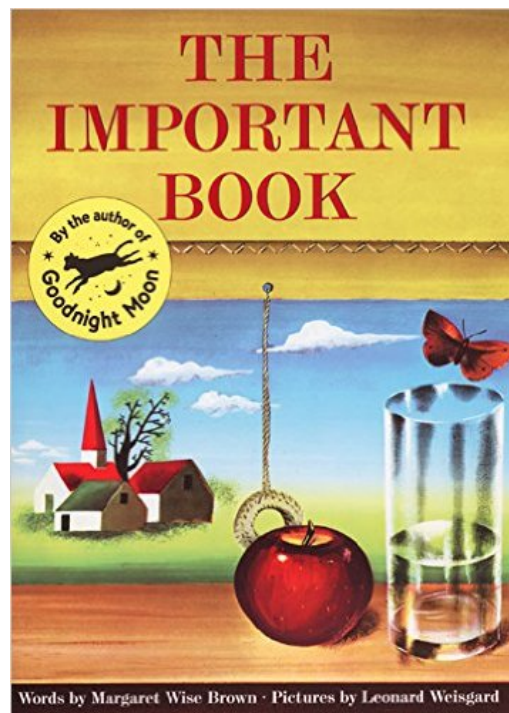


Fig. 20. *The Important Book*.

shade. Perhaps, it is only the disappointment of a rainy day. It is the mystery of these images that underscores the surrealism and encourages one to imagine (see fig. 21).

When working on *The Important Book*, Weisgard drew inspiration from Rene Magritte and his surrealistic art. Magritte's obscure, nonsensical paintings that delve into the subconscious are similar in composition, color, and motif to many of Weisgard's. Apples, windows looking out, and clouds are motifs that both artists use to convey simultaneously a real and fantastical state of mind. Side by side, pages from *The Important Book* echo *The Listening Room*, *The Apple*, and *The False Mirror* (see figs. 22, 23, and 24).

Not only was Weisgard part of the avant-garde art scene in the late 30's and 40's, but he was also inspired by the original verse of Margaret Wise Brown. Yaccarino observed, "Their work was fresh and modern, and they leaned on each other. Weisgard was the visual version of Margaret Wise Brown, breaking down her words and the overall feel of them into shape and color. They were a perfect match." (Telephone Interview)

Weisgard recognized, "Each book assignment makes different demands. Different demands require different approaches and techniques." ("Influences and Applications" 87) He understood how important it is for the art to suit the text's needs. Weisgard's modern work had range and matched the tempo of Brown's prose. They were both poets at heart who had similar visions about bringing contemporary stories and illustrations to the youngest ages. And in the process of developing plots, they loved to challenge each other. Weisgard observed, "A curious excitement of shared creative thoughts and ideas, new concepts for books started to flow that went on for years and so many books were born." ("Patchwork Memory" 261)

Brown wrote her poems, songs, and stories quickly and continuously recorded them on scraps of paper, receipts, and old envelopes. She often dreamt a story and woke to scribble it in her



Fig. 21. "Children Looking Out."



Fig. 22. Rene Magritte, *The Listening Room*, 1952.



Fig. 23. *The Important Book*.

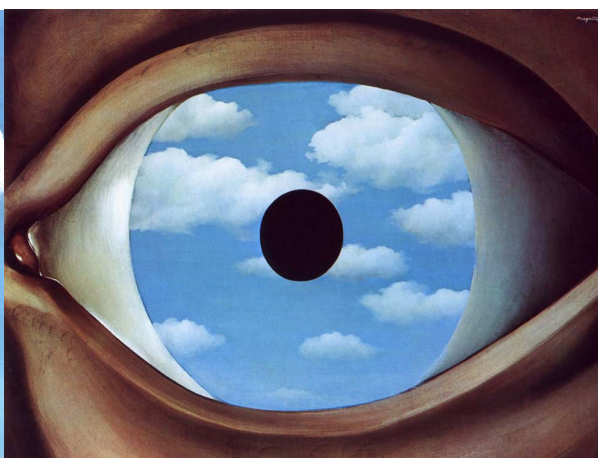


Fig. 24. Magritte, *The False Mirror*, 1928.

notebook. Routines and structure were meaningless to the author. She worked at any hour whenever she felt creative, and then ideas just flowed. Weisgard once said, “Sometimes illustrating one of Margaret’s books was much like a very precious form of madness not yet clinically identified.” (Hopkins 309)

The author visualized her stories as picture books and was eager to see the picture part completed. Since she had an overall image of the look and mood of the book, she was an integral part of the planning, working closely with artist, editor, and printer on layout, typeset, illustrations, and other bookmaking details. She was the director of the play. She mapped out a book in a blank dummy, drawing sketches, adding placement of text, and notes of instructions about illustration details and perspectives. (“Patchwork Memory” 270)

Weisgard admits that Brown was the most challenging author to work with, perhaps because she was a frustrated artist who could express in words her concept for the book but could not actually execute it herself. In this sense, she could be demanding but never imposed her ideas as a pronouncement or criticism but as thoughts to enhance the imagined vision of a book. (“Letter” 3)

From Brown’s perspective, Weisgard would “brood” around for a week or two before ever drawing the first picture. But all the while, the book was “painting itself in his head.” Once the story was set in his mind’s eye, the actual work of painting was done with “fierce intensity and speed.” Of their numerous projects, Brown said, “What delights me about him as an artist is that he is always eager and game to try to do something that has not been done before.” (42)

Weisgard and Brown were kindred spirits who worked and played and traveled together. “Our relationship did seem like that of Gilbert and Sullivan producing their works.” (Patchwork

Memory” 262) One of the best examples of their collaboration was *The Little Island*, which won the Caldecott Award in 1947 (see fig. 25).

Brown had bought an old house on Vinalhaven Island off the coast from Rockland, Maine. She had summered in Rockland with her family as a child and now found contentment and renewal on Vinalhaven, naming her retreat the Only House. The author found peace and solitude but also a place to socialize with friends who came to holiday. Weisgard often spent summers there.

The real little island that inspired the poetry and illustrations for the book could be seen across Hurricane Sound from the Only House. Brown had named it Starfish Island. Weisgard remembers one morning at the cottage when Brown was knocking at his door. “Leonard! Quickly, look out your window!” And there, he saw the first morning light. “The little island seemed brushed by gold. Even the sea was golden. This effect did not last long. Clouds billowed past, and the sun’s light changed.” (“Patchwork Memory” 269)

Brown recalls Weisgard staying on Vinalhaven by himself for a week. When she returned she found him sunning on a rock. He had no paintings to show her. (42) But during that week of reflection, the artist had watched the little island changing from dawn to dusk as the tides rolled in and out. He rowed over and saw the wildlife. Weisgard said, “Everything is fast and fleeting around the little island, the sea is never still, the clouds fly quickly into different shapes, the colors change from sunlight to mist light, the trees are always moving and the birds are always flying and screaming. The active little island was an elusive subject. The easy thing for me as an illustrator was to put as much as possible into wherever it is I store things. I took it home to Connecticut and remembered it in my own way.” (“Acceptance Paper” 156) Once he had visualized the entire story, he was ready to paint.

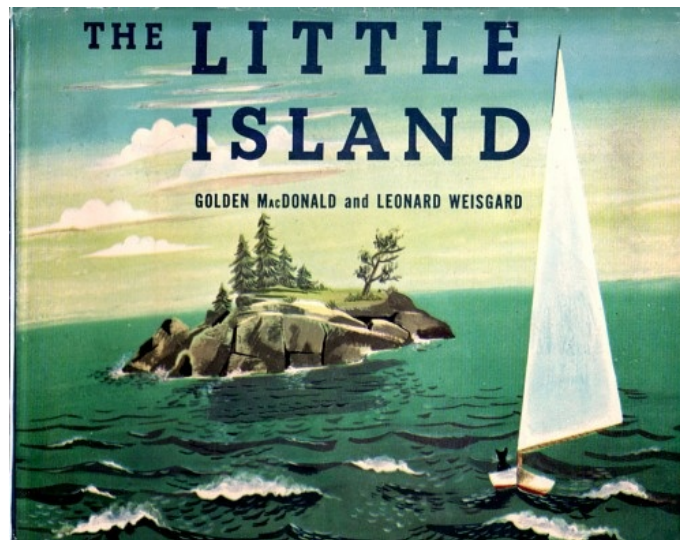


Fig. 25. *The Little Island.*



Fig. 26. "Kitten in the Air."

Interestingly, in the middle of Brown's exquisite ode to the island and its changing seasons and creatures great and small, the poet gets muddled as to her intention. She inserts a kitten, and the island, which can now talk, begins a philosophical discussion. The naïve kitten responds, "Maybe I am a little Island, too ... a little fur island in the air." Weisgard interprets this surreal scene with the kitten floating in the sky, looking down on the island (see fig. 26). In collaborating with Brown, illustrating could prove difficult. "Her words could sometimes be enigmatical." ("Patchwork Memory" 269)

Another book inspired by their summers together on Vinalhaven was *The Golden Egg Book*. Over lunch one day with the author and the artist, their friend and publisher John McCullough shared a joke about a surprise within a mystery egg. Brown and Weisgard looked at each other and immediately knew they had an idea for a story. ("Patchwork Memory" 276) Brown wanted this book to introduce children, especially city children, to the spectacular varieties of wildflowers. Weisgard, who always enjoyed trying something new, went beyond the literal text to celebrated nature in all its glory. (Carle Exhibit)

Weisgard ventured out into the fields around his Connecticut house to pick armloads of wildflowers. He brought these back to his studio and started painting background pages in the style of Japanese watercolors and Monet gardens. Unfortunately, he had an allergic reaction to the flowers, and his doctor had to make a house call. "A week later when he could see out of his eyes again and hold the paintbrush without sneezing it out of his hand, he put all the flowers on the window sill outside the window pane in front of his desk and painted on and on until he had painted fields and flowers for his book." (Brown 42)

Weisgard's illustrations of springtime scenes once again demonstrate his versatility in style and attention to the story's theme and intended audience (see fig. 27). Golden Book publishers



Fig. 27. *The Golden Egg Book*.



Fig. 28. FAO Schwarz Window Display, *The Golden Egg Book*.

Simon and Schuster allowed Weisgard five colors plus gold during a time of very limited palettes in publishing. (“Patchwork Memory” 276) And in 1948, the book cost only one dollar! (Hurds, “Leonard” 163)

Egg stories have always intrigued young children. What’s in the egg? Where is its mother and how did it roll away from its nest? In Brown’s cadenced telling, little ones want to predict and are desirous to know what happens next. And, it is especially important for them to have a sense of ownership. “He [the little bunny] could hear something moving inside the egg. “What was it? A boy?” “No!” “Another bunny?” “No!” “Maybe an elephant?”

The Golden Egg Book is humorous and engaging, a tale of being alone and finding a friend. More than six decades later, this picture book is still regularly checked out from libraries and read aloud by teachers and librarians. It is a perfect match of story and art.

With the popularity of *The Golden Egg Book*, Weisgard created huge three-dimensional scenes from the book for the windows of the famous Fifth Avenue toy store, F.A.O. Schwarz (see fig. 28). The window-display assistant at the time was twenty-eight year old Maurice Sendak. He showed Weisgard his tiny sketchbooks, and the renowned illustrator immediately recognized his talent. (“Patchwork Memory” 277)

Weisgard saw a lot of himself in Sendak. Both were self-formed, eager to get away from home and into the business at a young age, and each published early and made a big splash. (Marcus, Telephone Interview)

In his 2003 Arbuthnot Lecture, Sendak recalls, “The celebrated illustrator and writer Leonard Weisgard [who] took me under his wing and taught me the technique for making pre-separated color illustrations. ... I needed this skill because, astonishingly, Leonard had decided to turn over one of his book illustration projects to me.” (18) *Good Shabbos Everybody*, printed in two colors

and published by the United Synagogue of America in 1951, was Sendak's first picture book. On the title page it reads, "Leonard Weisgard as art consultant." (Carle Exhibit)

Weisgard also introduced Sendak to his and Brown's editor at Harper Brothers, the legendary and forward thinking Ursula Nordstrom. She, too, understood the genius of Sendak and mentored the young protégé for many years to come. ("Patchwork Memory" 277) As Sendak said, "My life had begun." (18)

The two artists remained friends. In the spring of 1963, Sendak visited Weisgard at his Roxbury home. At the time, Sendak was struggling with the art concept for *Where the Wild Things Are* (see fig. 29). He was captivated by a mural Weisgard had painted on the bedroom walls for his five-year-old son Ethan. It was "a jungle scene populated with wild but friendly creatures intended to induce fright-free dreams." (Carle Catalogue 21) Weisgard's daughter Abby, then ten, remembers the mural was painted in the style of Edward Hicks' *The Peaceable Kingdom*. She also recalls a return visit when Sendak shared his completed artwork for *Where the Wild Things Are* with the Weisgard children to get their reactions. "We all loved it and Maurice, too!" (Abigail Weisgard email) Weisgard later reproduced the jungle scene for his daughter Chrissy's kindergarten classroom in Denmark (see fig. 30).

Weisgard inspired Sendak and has influenced other artists over the years, among them several contemporary illustrators. Peter Brown observed that the style of the mid-century modernists, including Weisgard, have certainly impacted his work. (peterbrownstudio.com) Brown's *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild* is the story of an urbane tiger who returns to the wildness of his true animal nature. In turning the pages of this fable, there are some definite links to Weisgard's illustrations. Brown uses limited hues of muted browns and grays with only bright orange for Mr. Tiger and pale greens for vegetation. This reminds one of the color palettes in *Red Light*, *Green Light* and



Fig. 29. From Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*.



Fig 30. Weisgard's Mural for Chrissy's Kindergarten.

The Clean Pig. As in Weisgard's modern or folk art styles, Brown layers rectangles upon rectangles to create buildings and trees and uses tools, possibly sponges and toothbrushes, to texture treetops, grass, and splashing water.

Lane Smith, who grew up with Weisgard's books, regards him as a hero. Like Weisgard, Smith varies his style depending on the text. "My favorites are the ones with lots of textures. Books like *Nibble Nibble* or *When I Go to the Moon* ... boy you could put those side by side with *There Is a Tribe of Kids* or *Grandpa Green* or *The Stinky Cheese Man* and see our shared love of grit and surface." (Smith email) (see fig. 31)

Jon Klassen is another huge admirer of Weisgard's art. (Marcus, Telephone Interview) The whimsy of his woodland scenes in *House Held up by Trees* or the jacket cover of *Pax* is quite similar to the illustrations in *Nibble, Nibble* and *Where Does the Butterfly Go When It Rains?*. Klassen chose sepia tones and Weisgard variations of greens, but the translucency of leaves, tree bark, and plants and soft texturing of subtle washes has a familiar feel. Klassen's winsome animals (squirrel and fox) remind one of Weisgard's chipmunk, field mouse, and bunny (see fig. 32).

Some of Bob Staake's stylized art, especially his Golden Books *The Red Lemon* and *I'm a Truck* with crooked cityscapes and sleek ships (see fig. 33), is reminiscent of the original *Noisy Book* and *Pelican Here, Pelican There* (see figs. 34 and 35). Staake's boldly vibrant colors, big overlapping geometric shapes, and minimal details can be compared to Weisgard's early modern look. Even Staake's Gumby-armed characters resemble the marching band in *The Summer Noisy Book* or the busy people jauntily walking about the streets in scenes from *The Noisy Book*. On Weisgard's art in general, Staake said, "Leonard's work in particular had a marvelous painterly quality to it, and I love seeing how he would create a tree, a mountain, or even the sky with



Fig. 31. From Weisgard's *Nibble Nibble* and From Smith's *Grandpa Green*.



Fig. 32. From Klassen, *House Held Up by Trees* and Weisgard's *Nibble Nibble*, cover.



Fig. 33. From Staake, *The Red Lemon*.



Fig. 34. Weisgard's *The Noisy Book*.

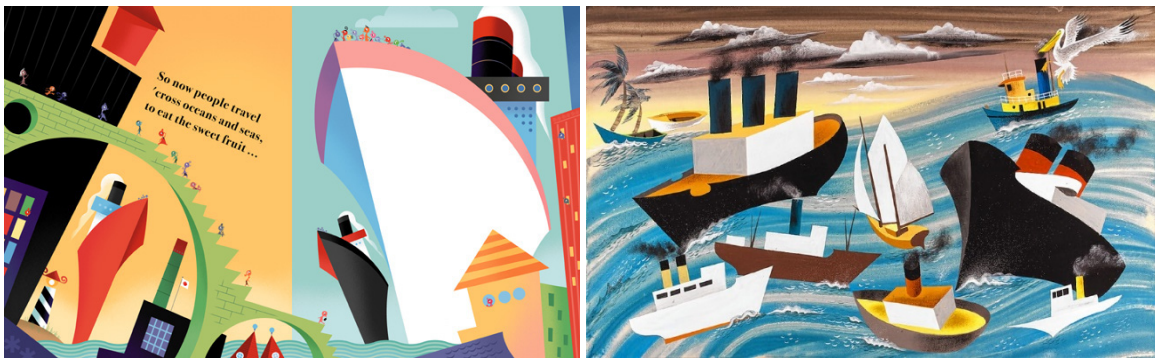


Fig. 35. Weisgard's *Pelican Here, Pelican There*.

nothing more than a simple stroke of his brush. I still have many of his books in my library and cherish each and every one.” (Staake email)

In the late 30’s and 40’s, many illustrators made their way from commercial design to juvenile publishing and illustration. It was a relatively new field and many just fell into it. Some made their mark, but few made as significant and lasting a contribution as Leonard Weisgard and Margaret Wise Brown who developed the interactive concept books. During his half-century career, Weisgard continually experimented with various styles, approaches, mediums, and tools, being fearless and staying fresh and in the game, but it was his introduction of modern art that so influenced the look of picture book art and continues even today to inspire contemporary artists.



Roxbury Studio with Ship's Hull Ceiling



At Work in Denmark

Bibliographic Essay

Introduction

My journey through thesis land began in 2015 with Leonard Marcus' *The Golden Legacy*, a comprehensive history of The Little Golden Books. For me, as for so many in my generation, these books hold treasured memories. These were the books that helped me learn to read and introduced me to bright and playful illustrations for the first time. I had never experienced this in books before. And, they were my very own.

As I studied *The Golden Legacy*, I realized that many prominent authors and illustrators in the field of children's literature contributed to the series. And most prolific among them was Margaret Wise Brown. With the Hollins connection, I was intrigued. I had read Brown's biography, *Awakened by the Moon* (Marcus), and was fascinated by the stable of artists who collaborated with her.

As luck would have it, many of these renowned illustrators were included in "The Golden Legacy: Original Art from 65 Years of Golden Books," an exhibit sponsored by The National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature. It was showing at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in Hagerstown, Maryland, so a trip was planned. One artist whose work captivated my attention was Leonard Weisgard.

Then, in another stroke of good fortune, in the spring of 2016, the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Massachusetts, hosted "Magician of the Modern: The Art of Leonard Weisgard" with over ninety of his original works. A New England trip was mapped out that included a visit to the Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut where Weisgard's archival materials are housed.

At the Carle, a real highlight was meeting chief curator, Ellen Keiter, who spent part of an afternoon touring the collection with me and explaining Weisgard's various techniques,

influences, and backstories. She also helped me to make a connection with the Weisgard children, Abby, Chrissie, and Ethan, who graciously shared memories of their father and photographs from his childhood, his working years in Roxbury, Connecticut, and later in Denmark. Abby put me in touch with Leonard Marcus, and a telephone interview followed, which led me to contact illustrators Jon Klassen, Lane Smith, Bob Staake, and Dan Yaccarino.

In addition to Weisgard's exceptional art, I was also drawn to his work, especially with Brown, because of their affiliation with The Bank Street School and its progressive efforts in education. As a primary grade teacher for more than thirty years, I identified with the Bank Street philosophy and their projects in language development and creating new and innovative children's literature for young readers.

So, it came together ... a deep appreciation for picture books, Weisgard's captivating art and his place in the history of illustration, a love of teaching, and an interest in the story of Bank Street where Weisgard got his start.

Global Referencing to Children's Picture Books and Illustration

Once I decided to focus on the modern art of Weisgard and his collaboration with Brown, I began to read widely about the subject of picture book illustration. This research provided the continuum needed to place the artist and author along the timeline both historically and culturally, and more specifically, within the world of publishing literature for juvenile audiences.

Of course, there are volumes on the topic of children's literature and chapters dedicated to the era of Weisgard and Brown. Of special interest are *Children and Books* (Arbuthnot), *A Critical History of Children's Literature* (Meigs, et al), and *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (Huck, et al).

More specifically to this paper are the anthologies about the history of picture books, the art, and artists. Barbara Bader's *Noah's Ark to the Beast Within* is perhaps the definitive text, as she recounts the development of American picture books from the turn of the century to the early 1970's. The chapters on William R. Scott, Incorporated, Margaret Wise Brown, and the Golden Books give detailed information about Leonard Weisgard and his introduction of modern art to storybooks.

Equally informative and fascinating is *Myth, Magic, and Mystery: One Hundred Years of American Children's Book Illustration*. This compilation chronicles picture book art from those 18th century pioneers in Europe to the American scene of the 19th and 20th centuries, from the Golden Age before the War to the Baby Boom generation.

This survey presents an overview and foundation for anyone interested in picture book art and design and the interconnectedness between story and illustration. Michael Hearn, Trinkett Clark, and H. Nichols Clark provide the backdrop of the cultural milieu of the time, the advancements in printing technology through the decades, a short summary of each landmark book, and analysis, not only of the styles and mediums used by the illustrators, but also the emotional impact of the art as related to the story, and the influence of and reference to the masters in art history on each work considered.

The authors organize the essays by genre to include "From Mother Goose to Dr. Seuss," "Here and Now, Then and There: Stories for Young Readers," "High Adventure and Fantasy," and "Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Fable, and Myths."

This wide ranging discussion is an excellent springboard to more specific books and articles on picture book illustration. For example, Lee Kingman edited two volumes, *Illustrators of Children's Books* and *The Illustrator's Notebook* with articles by renowned artists about process

and technique. Ezra Jack Keats writes about collage, Evaline Ness on woodcuts, Barbara Cooney about scratchboard, and Adrienne Adams on color processing. Essays by artists share their viewpoints on illustration for children's books along with reviews of benchmark titles. The volumes also include biographical summaries. Although these books were published several decades ago, the expertise and perspectives of extraordinary artists are unparalleled. Weisgard himself wrote two of the essays, "Influences and Applications" and "Contemporary Art and Children's Book Illustration."

In researching the story of Weisgard and Brown, *Awakened by the Moon* is a must read. Leonard Marcus presents not only a comprehensive and captivating portrait of the talented poet and author for the very young, but he also includes interesting vignettes about the various and accomplished illustrators with whom Brown worked, most especially Leonard Weisgard.

For this biography, Marcus owes much to Weisgard. The artist, who rarely gave interviews, invited Marcus to his home in Traellose, Denmark, in the early 80's where the biographer spent eleven days. Weisgard shared insights about Brown, the relatively new publishing industry of children's picture books, amusing anecdotes, and remembrances of how the two imagined and created the now classic Here and Now series.

Marcus recalls that, without the help of Weisgard, "I doubt I would have found the material needed to write my book." (Weisgard website) In addition to the Denmark interviews, Weisgard put Marcus in touch with other significant players in the story. The oral histories with Ursula Nordstrom, Esphyr Slobodkina, Bruce Bliven, Clement and Edith Hurd, William R. Scott, now all deceased, recorded personal accounts not only of Brown's life but also reflections of an exceptional time in children's literature and publishing.

By starting with *Awakened by the Moon* and its extensive bibliography, I was able to find those critical primary sources. Weisgard's own "Patchwork Memory" describes the many different events and people in his remarkable life. His in-depth memoir also reveals his philosophy about art, the approaches, techniques, and tools used for different manuscripts, and those individuals and eras which influenced his work. This essay is frequently cited in secondary pieces about remembrances of Weisgard.

Another key reference is Brown's article for *Publisher's Weekly*, "Leonard Weisgard Wins the Caldecott Medal." In Brown's own voice, one learns of their personal relationship and collaboration. Her perspective on how Weisgard worked and backstories about how books were conceived is invaluable. This is a rare resource. There are few articles written by Brown, and this may be the only one that shares her reflections about her friend and colleague.

Secondary sources that offered a closer look at Weisgard's work and personality include essays by friends Edith and Clement Hurd, Maurice Sendak, and Ken Chowder. Also articles by Louise Seaman Bechtel and Bruce Bliven provided additional information about what it was like to collaborate with Brown.

Nexus

It was at Bank Street that Leonard Weisgard first worked with Brown, and it was in that environment that they developed their Here and Now books with their colorful, modern look. Joyce Antler's *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* is a compelling biography of Mitchell, founder of the Bureau of Educational Experiments. Specifically, in "69 Bank Street," Antler explains Mitchell's philosophy and organization of the teacher training program and the nursery school, both housed at 69 Bank Street from the late 30's to the mid-

50's. This is a valuable overview of the student teaching courses (language development, child psychology, sociology studies, as well as expressive classes in painting, dance, drama, and music), urban and rural research projects, and the experimental collaboration between the nursery school and training program. There is also a discussion of Mitchell's efforts to influence the kind of juvenile books being written in the Writers' Laboratory. She advocated stories that focused on the familiar everyday world of the youngest audiences and encouraged her students to strive for "literary merit and suitability for children." It was here that many children's authors got their start, including Margaret Wise Brown and Posey Thacher Hurd.

It is important to note that Mitchell herself had developed her concepts and published her own Here and Now stories in the 1920s. Antler discusses this in the chapter "Children and the Here and Now." Mitchell's child-centered literature grew out of her observations of the ages and stages of children's play and language development. She believed the rhythmic patterns of children's language should be reproduced in their stories. Her research and publications were innovative and laid the groundwork for the here-and-now approach of writing introduced to Brown and her colleagues over a decade later.

Significantly, Mitchell's progressive philosophy and efforts ran counter to the views of Anne Carroll Moore, the New York Public Library's first Superintendent of Work with Children. The differences in concept are discussed in Marcus' *Awakened by the Moon* ("Bank Street and Beyond"), *Minders of Make Believe* ("Sisters in Conflict and Crisis"), and Bader's article for *The Horn Book Magazine*, "Only the Best: The Hits and Misses of Anne Carroll Moore."

The biography on Anne Carroll Moore by her protégé, Frances Clarke Sayers, does not mention Mitchell or the Here and Now books.

William R. Scott was another central figure in the Bank Street story. With the encouragement of Mitchell, he started a publishing company that produced books for the youngest ages. Many of these texts were written by members of the Writers' Laboratory.

In "Designed for Children" from *Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*, Bader lays out the history of Scott Publishing, including the role of its first editor, Margaret Wise Brown. Bader writes about the talented group of authors (Tresselt, Thacher, Brown) and illustrators (Hurd, Charlot, Slobodkina) who joined Scott. Much of the chapter is devoted to Weisgard and his introduction of modern art in picture books. Bader analyzes Weisgard's contemporary style and the influence of avant-garde artists E. McKnight Kauffer and Stuart Davis. She also describes how Brown and Weisgard developed and tried out their ideas for the first Noisy Book in the Bank Street nursery classrooms.

There are countless sources on child psychology, specifically language development, that further explain the stages that Mitchell observed and wrote about. Louise Bates Ames, PhD and Dr. Frances Ilg's Gessel Institute books (*Your Three-Year-Old: Friend or Enemy*; *Your Four-Year-Old: Wild and Wonderful*; *Your Five-Year-Old: Sunny and Serene*) are a highly thought of series for parents and educators that are comprehensive and relatively easy to understand.

The Modern

It was also necessary to be somewhat knowledgeable about the art and artists that influenced Weisgard's modern look, especially those cited in sources read. In order to study the Cubist, Constructivist, and Surreal movements of the 1930's, and specifically the paintings of artists Stuart Davis, E. McKnight Kauffer, and Rene Magritte, I visited the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to research this avant-garde period. Their reference library offered multiple sources and

images. Especially informative were the articles from Oxford Art Online, Lodder and Benus on Constructivism, Whiting on Davis, and Wijnbeek on Magritte. The conversations with and guidance from the VMFA librarians, along with touring the early 20th century modern art gallery, helped me to analyze and admire these forms of contemporary art that so inspired Weisgard's early work.

Stuart Davis: In Full Swing, the catalogue, is a colorful and detailed accompaniment to the retrospective organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the National Gallery of Art.

Specials

If one is writing about any aspect of Weisgard's prolific career, time at the Northeast Children's Literature Collection located at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at The University of Connecticut in Storrs is essential.

In 2008, the Weisgard children, with the counsel and recommendation of Maurice Sendak, Leonard Marcus, H. Nichols Clark, and Dr. Billie M. Levy, donated the majority of their father's expansive collection to the Dodd Center. This included illustrations, sketches, personal and professional correspondence, manuscripts, first edition books, and photographs. These materials had been stored in thirteen steamer trunks in the Weisgard's Denmark barn. More information about the organization of these archival materials can be found on the Weisgard website, and the staff is also most helpful and knowledgeable.

My research at the Dodd led to discovery and some disappointments. There were no letters between or photographs of Weisgard and Brown. (I later learned from Marcus that Brown did not like to have her picture taken, and he knew of no photographs of the two.)

In trying to find further proof of their collaboration and friendship, I read through many folders in several topic-related file boxes. I did come upon Marcus' letters to Weisgard chronicling the Denmark trip and interviews, photographs of the FAO Schwarz *Golden Egg* windows, and the congratulatory letter from the American Library Association to Weisgard on winning the Caldecott for *The Little Island* and runner-up honor for *Rain Drop Splash*. I read manuscripts typed on onion skin paper and turned the pages of first edition books illustrated by Weisgard.

In addition to the Weisgard collection, many other children's illustrators' and authors' works are housed at the Center, including Barbara Cooney, Eleanor Estes, Trina Schart Hyman, Ruth Krauss, James Marshall, Richard Scarry, Marc Simont, and Esphyr Slobodkina. After a conversation with head archivist Kristin Eschelman about the Northeast Collection, she retrieved two boxes with Slobodkina's original collage pages for *The Little Fireman* and *Sleepy ABC*, both by Brown. What a special treat. One should plan on several days of investigating at the Dodd.

Although the lion's share of the Weisgard materials are inventoried at the Northeast Children's Literature Collection, much of the illustrator's original art, 145 pieces, was bequeathed to the Eric Carle Museum. Amherst is fifty miles north of Storrs, a short drive to the only museum in the country dedicated to the art and reading of picture books. The Carle has a collection of over 10,000 books, three galleries with rotating exhibits, an art studio and library for children, and a scholarly library for research.

One can arrange an appointment with a staff member to visit the vault to view the original works of some of the world's leading picture book illustrators. It is here that the paintings from the Weisgard exhibit are kept. As Executive Director Alexandra Kennedy observed, "There is

something especially intimate about seeing a drawing pulled straight from the storage box where it can be examined in its barest form.” (“Magician of the Modern” catalogue 4)

If one is writing about the work of an illustrator, it is important to see the original art, to analyze, to be amazed, and to understand all the book information one has read. For me, to stand in a gallery filled with Weisgard’s brilliant and stylistically wide-ranging art was a breathtaking experience. To study up close the brushstrokes, design, and color palettes from *The Noisy Books*, *The Important Book*, and *Red Light, Green Light* allowed me to appreciate Weisgard’s techniques and contemporary approach. It was viewing these originals that inspired my writing in the months that followed.

And the visit to the Carle set in motion a chain of connections. Many thanks to Abby Weisgard who forwarded my name on to Leonard Marcus, whom she regards as a brother. With this link, I was able to schedule an hour-long telephone interview with the children’s literature scholar and historian. In my research, Marcus’ books have been the most relevant reading as related to the focus of the thesis. In addition to *Awakened by the Moon*, *Minders of Make Believe*, and *Show Me a Story: Why Picture Books Matter*, his essays in catalogues for the Carle, *Magician of the Modern: The Art of Leonard Weisgard* and *The Picture Book Made New: Margaret Wise Brown and Her Illustrators* are especially pertinent.

During our conversation, Marcus discussed the visual language of folk art that appealed to Weisgard’s modern art, the illustrator as friend and mentor to Sendak, and the time Marcus spent in Denmark. He noted, “Leonard Weisgard was one of the best read people I have ever met. He was constantly curious and absorbing things.” This reinforced my belief from all my research that Weisgard truly was a Renaissance Man.

Marcus also suggested that I contact several current illustrators who he was sure had been influenced by Weisgard's work. Staake, Smith, and Yaccarino all shared their admiration for Weisgard's art and memories of his books growing up.

Of special interest was my interview with Yaccarino who said he is a fan of Weisgard's modern period, the flat, simple graphics. He said that the art in the Noisy Books is deceptively simple looking, but actually a very sophisticated form of art. And the fact that Weisgard visualized and executed the painting without sketching or working out the color palette was part of his genius.

Conversations and correspondence with these contemporary illustrators was a privilege and underscored the importance and innovation of Weisgard's art. He captivates and invites one into his illustrations. Just as he had experienced the joy of books as a young boy on his frequent visits to his neighborhood library, Weisgard has passed that joy on to generations of children. And, he was truly a "shape shifter" in the history of American picture books. Throughout the years, he continually stayed fresh, changed styles, tried different and unconventional approaches, introduced young audiences to new kinds of art, and served as model and mentor to other artists. His legacy lives on.

Notes from Telephone Conversations

These are my notes from the conversations. They were not recorded.

Leonard Marcus Telephone Interview, October 17, 2016

Abby Weisgard, who said Leonard Marcus is like her brother, helped to make the connection for this conversation.

Mr. Marcus was gracious enough to spend an hour sharing reflections and answering questions about the art and life of Leonard Weisgard.

In comparing Mr. Weisgard's art to some contemporary illustrators, Marcus said he could see the connections I had made. However, he did point out that "influence" is a tricky thing to talk about. "Creativity is the opposite of reductive work," he said. When editing *The Annotated Phantom Tollbooth*, he asked Norton Juster which authors had influenced him. Mr. Juster said all sources in life influence ones work.

Even though Marcus was cautioning against attributing "influence," he did know from conversations with Jon Klassen and Lane Smith that both are great admirers of Weisgard's work. He suggested that I contact these illustrators along with Dan Yaccarino to get their thoughts.

We also discussed the relationship between Weisgard and Maurice Sendak. Marcus said, "Maurice Sendak was a sponge to Leonard Weisgard." And Weisgard saw himself in Sendak, a young artist who didn't like formal training, was self-taught, eager to leave home and get into publishing early. Neither really needed to be looking at anyone else's work. Each was self-formed and each made a big splash.

Marcus was not aware of the second jungle mural that Weisgard painted for his daughter Chrissie's kindergarten class. He was intrigued, knowing the original was lost forever. I later forwarded the images to him.

Marcus also discussed the times in which Weisgard was living in New York City – the era of the moderns in dance and art, Martha Graham and Jackson Pollack, along with the famous Broadway musicals of the 1940's and 50's. This was Weisgard's world.

I asked about the similarities between the modern art and folk art, the simplicity of both. "Yes, exactly," Marcus said, "and for the mid-century illustrators, folk art was the visual language of the period." Many were collectors.

Children are also in touch with the primitive and the modern. Think about children's art compared to Picasso's cubist paintings and the resemblances.

I wondered if the "mid-century milieu" shared and encouraged each other. Marcus said some were friends, but they did not hang out at the water cooler at the Simon and Schuster offices. In fact, the publisher of the Golden Books didn't really want the authors and illustrators socializing, as they would compare contracts and realize how little they were getting. If they did hang out, it would probably have been through parties hosted by Margaret Wise Brown and associations at

Harpers. Marcus did note that Mary Blair and Phyllis Weisgard were very good friends through their work as textile designers.

I asked if Simon and Schuster allowed Weisgard a wider range of colors in books like *The Golden Egg*, *The Golden Bunny*, and *Pussy Willow* because he was such an accomplished artist. Marcus said yes. Western Printing, which was known for its color work, partnered with Simon and Schuster. The publisher put a lot of money into *The Golden Egg Book*, a deluxe edition that was oversized and printed on heavy paper. Many artists chose to illustrate for Golden Books because Western Printing was known for its color work.

I asked Mr. Marcus if he had ever seen a photograph of Leonard Weisgard with Margaret Wise Brown. He said no he never had, probably because Brown did not like to have her photograph taken.

Marcus was pleased that I had made it to the Carle and had enjoyed “The Magician of the Modern: The Art of Leonard Weisgard.” Marcus said that Weisgard was one of the best read people he had ever met and he was constantly absorbing things. This observation confirmed my research that Leonard Weisgard truly was a Renaissance Man.

Dan Yaccarino Telephone Interview, October 27, 2016

Nearing the completion of my paper, I had the wonderful opportunity to talk with illustrator Dan Yaccarino about Leonard Weisgard.

Mr. Yaccarino grew up collecting Golden Book titles and said Weisgard has been a huge influence on his work. Being a fan of flat, simple graphics, he gravitates to Weisgard's modern period. As an example, he discussed the rendering of Muffin in the car with flat road, abstract trees (he wondered if these were collaged), and realistic birds. Mr. Yaccarino's observations confirmed how I had analyzed this image in the paper. That was most reassuring. I have been on the right track!

Although Weisgard used only three colors in the original *Noisy Book*, he was definitely pre-separating colors. Mr. Yaccarino noted that the art in *The Noisy Book* series is deceptively simple looking, but is actually very sophisticated art. The fact that Weisgard visualized and executed the painting without sketching or working out the color palette ahead of time is part of his genius.

Mr. Yaccarino also paid tribute to Margaret Wise Brown and Leonard Weisgard as a brilliant pair. "Their work was fresh and modern, and they leaned on each other. Weisgard was the visual version of Margaret Wise Brown, breaking down her words and the overall feel of them into shape and color. They were a perfect match."

Mr. Yaccarino said that Leonard Weisgard's modern art was revolutionary. He was on the frontline and shook things up. Many of the Golden Book artists (Miller, Scarry, Provensens) followed, but it was Weisgard who opened the way.

We also discussed how very young children respond to color and shape and how they interpret visual text. Mr. Yaccarino uses bold primary colors and shapes when illustrating his board books. There are few words, so the image needs to be prominent, it needs to pop. In *Five Little Pumpkins*, for example, orange is the dominant color with deep blues for the solid background. This makes the pumpkins recognizable and clear. At ages three to five, simplicity of color and shape is key to children's visual development. With his picture books for older audiences, Mr. Yaccarino widens his spectrum of colors and details because this age group can visually appreciate primary and secondary palettes and more intricate design. We both wondered if Leonard Weisgard purposefully chose primary colors because he spent time observing the Bank Street nursery classrooms and understood developmentally this was the best choice.

It was a privilege to talk with Mr. Yaccarino and to get the perspective of an artist. His reflections on Leonard Weisgard's work were most informative and reaffirmed my research and thinking.

**Books Illustrated by Leonard Weisgard Read for This Paper
By Date of Initial Publication**

Books Written and Illustrated:

Suki, the Siamese Pussy 1937

Cinderella (retold by Weisgard) 1939

Down Huckleberry Hill 1947

Pelican Here, Pelican There 1948

The Funny Bunny Factory (pseudonym Adam Green) 1950

Who Dreams of Cheese? 1950

Mr. Peaceable Paints 1956

The Athenians in the Classical Period 1963

The Plymouth Thanksgiving 1967

Books Illustrated:

The Noisy Book (Brown) 1939

The Country Noisy Book (Brown) 1940

Under the Greenwood Tree (Reynolds) 1940

The Seashore Noisy Book (Brown) 1951

The Indoor Noisy Book (Brown) 1942

Little Chicken (Brown) 1943

Red Light, Green Light (pseudonym Golden MacDonald) 1944

Timid Timothy: The Kitten Who Learned to Be Brave (Williams) 1944

Little Lost Lamb (pseudonym Golden MacDonald) 1945

The City Noisy Book (Brown) 1946

Mrs. Mallard's Ducklings (Delafield) 1946

The Little Island (pseudonym Golden MacDonald) 1946

Rain Drop Splash (Tresselt) 1946

The Golden Egg Book (Brown) 1947

The Important Book (Brown) 1949

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Carroll) 1949 (studied illustrations only)
The Dark Wood of the Golden Birds (Brown) 1950 (studied illustrations only)
The Quiet Noisy Book (Brown) 1950
Pussy Willow (Brown) 1951
The Summer Noisy Book (Brown) 1951
The Golden Bunny and Seventeen Other Stories and Poems (Brown) 1953
Little Frightened Tiger (pseudonym Golden MacDonald) 1953
The Courage of Sarah Noble (Dalglish) 1954
The Secret River (Rawlings) 1955
Whistle for the Train (pseudonym Golden MacDonald) 1956
The Rabbit Story (Tresselt) 1957
Willa: The Story of Willa Cather's Growing Up (Franchere) 1958 (studied illustrations only)
Nibble Nibble: Poems for Children (Brown) 1959
The Valentine Cat (Bulla) 1959
Adam and the Golden Cock (Dalglish) 1959
Where Does the Butterfly Go When It Rains? (Garelick) 1961
Favorite Fairy Tales Told in Norway (Haviland, editor) 1961
Baby Elephant's Trunk (Joslin) 1961
Hailstones and Halibut Bones: Adventure in Color (O'Neill) 1961
Watch That Watch (Colman) 1962
Penguin's Way (Johnston) 1962
Baby Elephant Goes to China (Joslin) 1963
The Beloved Friend (Vance) 1963 (studied illustrations only)
The French Are Coming (Hays) 1965 (studied illustrations only)
A Wreath of Christmas Legends (McGinley) 1967
The Elephant's Child (Kipling) 1970
The Golden Birthday Book (Brown) 1989

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