

To "delight, entertain, surprise, and educate" . . .

# THE ERIC CARLE MUSEUM



*I have long dreamt of a museum for children and families, educators and scholars – for everyone interested in the art of the picture book. Our hope is that this museum will be a celebration of creativity, a place for learning and enjoyment, and a salute to picture book art from around the world –  
Eric Carle*

*Eric and Barbara Carle at the Opening*

**L**ike Topsy, the idea just “grewed”. The initial, modest proposal to house a permanent exhibition of Eric Carle’s work in a room adjoining his studio has expanded – gloriously – into a 40,000 square foot centre for changing exhibitions of the work of distinguished American and international guest artists. And the three inaugural exhibitions – of the work of Eric Carle (the first of a rotating series of exhibits) and guests Maurice Sendak and the Australian artist Robert Ingpen – set an immediate and irrefutably awesome benchmark. Following these, displays of work by Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Mitsumasa Anno and Leo Lionni will complete the first year’s programme of exhibitions.

Besides the three roomy galleries which form the museum’s natural centrepiece, the building houses a bright and comfortable library for reading and storytelling, and a 130-seat auditorium for performances, films and lectures. In addition, there is a hands-on art studio, a sizeable café, a research centre, and a well-stocked gift shop selling books and everything from postcards to Hungry Caterpillar pyjamas.

“Our mission is to assure people that they

can’t flunk museum-going,” says H. Nichols B. Clark (Nick), the ebullient, tireless and seemingly ubiquitous Founding Director of the Museum. “We look forward to welcoming young or first-time museum-goers, to expand their appreciation of art from other cultures and develop their own processes of



*The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art © Jim Gipe*

creative thinking. Every visitor will find something of meaning and will experience familiar and cherished books in a new way.”

Whilst the Museum, as Nick emphasised, is intended for visitors of all ages, considerations about the comfort of the youngest have been at the forefront of the

planning and design – from the child-sized worktables and chairs in the art studio to the accessible viewing level of the art in the galleries. And an immediate sense of inclusiveness, of this being an involving, welcoming environment, is established from the moment the visitor sets foot inside the Museum. Directly ahead is the central promenade with its 20-foot windows and - displayed on startlingly white walls – four specially executed works of art by Eric Carle, each 8 x 16 feet, one in red, one in green, one in blue, one in yellow. The effect is of “walking into one of his books”.

Appropriately, the cool, crisp Carle influence is apparent throughout – from the T-shirt and carrier bag logos to the inset tiles (familiar characters from the Eric Carle bestiary) in the well-

appointed loos. Even the building itself, a low-slung, geometric, gleaming white stucco exterior (situated in an apple orchard adjacent to the Hampshire College campus in Amherst, MA), has been inspired by the contrast between the whiteness of the page and the bright colours of the collages so characteristic of Carle’s artwork.

# OF PICTURE BOOK ART

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art has been made possible by the commitment, tenacity and vision of Eric and Barbara (known as 'Bobbie') Carle. It has been financed from a "leadership fund" provided by the Eric and Barbara Carle Foundation, plus contributions from publishers and over 600 individual gifts. It was created by the Massachusetts architectural firm Juster Pope Frazier LLP (Norton Juster of *The Phantom Tollbooth* fame is the retired partner). It was constructed in sixteen months, on time and under budget, and opened its doors on 22 November 2002.

Besides providing the public with its first, long-anticipated view of the galleries, the opening weekend of festivities included a varied and extensive programme of music, dance, theatre, storytelling and art activities. (Plus an extra treat on Sunday morning: Breakfast served by as classy and as suitably hatted a trio of auxiliary chefs as you could wish to find – the distinguished illustrator Barry Moser, Norton Juster, and Eric Carle himself, doling out pancakes, sausages and maple syrup as though to the manner born.)

"This is a grand moment," said Nick, at the start of a 'Dedication' ceremony notable for its dignified informality and its freedom from pomp (and pomposity)



*Walking into a book...one of the giant wall panels*



*Three Chefs – L to R, Barry Moser, Eric Carle, Norton Juster*

of any kind. The upsurge of cheering and applause from the large and devoted audience of adults and children at this announcement was as open and heartfelt as the spontaneous outpouring of affection and gratitude that had greeted the arrival of Eric and Bobbie a few moments earlier. "This museum," Nick continued, "is a profound gift to the nation and to the world. And running it is like getting paid to go to recess," he added.

When it was Eric Carle's turn on the platform, quietly and with a customary sparkle in his eye, he related a fable-like tale of the origin of museums, concluding with a haunting image: "One person showing something beautiful to another person . . . and there you have the first museum."

Then all that remained was for him, closely attended by Bobbie, to cut the red tape, and for the excited crowds to file through the doors and witness the fulfilment of their expectations.

It was just over a decade ago in Japan that Eric and Bobbie first encountered a picture book museum. Now there are over twenty there, and one in the United States.

And Britain? Well, yes, there is a scheme for a gallery that, if it can be brought to fruition, will have elements in common with the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. Its initial basis will be Quentin Blake's archive, which comprises the original illustrations of about 200 books, as well as individual published drawings. Quentin Blake writes, in *Laureate's Progress*:

*...such a gallery would be about not simply my books or children's books, but the art of illustration in all its forms. It could provide a home for exhibitions of young illustrators, foreign illustrators, illustrators from the past, and*

*open a lot of other portfolios and archives that we rarely see.*

Quentin has promised to keep *Carousel* in touch with all developments. So, fingers crossed.

*Chris Stephenson*

*Below: The Very Hungry Caterpillar*

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The address of  
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PICTURE BOOK ART** is:  
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For more information and details  
of forthcoming events and  
exhibitions visit the website at  
**[www.picturebookart.org](http://www.picturebookart.org)**