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A Look at MoMA's Children's List



(From l.): Eliza Harrison, Christopher Hudson, Hannah Kim, and Charles Kim.

There are certain advantages to having your publishing offices housed a few paces from one of the most exquisite collections of art in the world. "I don't know of another children's publisher with 55 paintings by Picasso in its collection," joked Charles Kim, associate publisher of MoMA Books. Yet, despite the uniqueness of this enterprise, as with other children's publishers, it's around a conference table where much of the work takes place. Around said conference table, PW met with MoMA Books staffers to learn more about its children's line of books and the role it plays within the greater context of The Museum of Modern Art. Staffers were: Elizabeth Margulies, director of family programs and resources, education; Sarah Suzuki, curator, drawings and prints; Cerise Fontaine, coordinator, publications; Eliza Harrison, intern, publications; Christopher Hudson, publisher; Hannah Kim, marketing and production manager, Publications; and Charles Kim, associate publisher.

MoMA Publications has been a vital component of the institution since its founding in 1929. Though children's books have been included in the catalogue over the years, in 2014, the publisher launched a separate children's book division. Margulies explained that the enterprise came about through the desire to draw upon MoMA's "history of progressive museum arts education" and to further expand and develop the "incredibly robust educational component" already at work within the museum.

With so many tributaries of art, culture, and ideas flowing through the museum, there's certainly no lack of potential concepts for children's books. But how, within the vast world of images, artists, and ideas housed in the walls of the museum, does the team find just the right stories to tell?

MoMA's children's titles have come from both within the museum's internal networks and from outside: "there's not one formula," said Margulies. In addition to having access to the museum's catalogue, the staffers work with two editorial boards and a kids' book committee to come up with ideas for new publishing projects. The team feels that the books they publish should be able to stand alone from exhibitions and be appreciated by readers on their own terms, however, "when we can, we tie into other museum programming," said Margulies. Suzuki

added that the books MoMA publishes have the benefit for readers of “previewing and extending” the experience of visiting the museum. Currently, the children’s division is averaging three books a year, with four titles planned for 2017.

Matisse’s Garden by Samantha Friedman was published in conjunction with the 2015 special exhibition “Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs.” Friedman, assistant curator in MoMA’s department of drawings and prints, curated the exhibition and brought her expertise to the book. Beyond the material available through the exhibition, however, there were critical choices to be made about the book’s narrative and aesthetic. That was specifically the case when it came to finding an illustrator, Hudson explained. The art needed to strike a balance between serving as homage to Matisse and serving another artist’s original vision. “The challenge was getting an illustrator to approach the material in a way that works with the original,” Hudson said. The final product, featuring cut-out illustrations by Italian artist Cristina Amodeo, and fold-outs for the original Matisse tableaus, succeeds in creating “a beautiful distinction” between Matisse’s work and Amodeo’s, Hudson believes.



(From l.): Elizabeth Margulies, Sarah Suzuki, Cerise Fontaine, and Eliza Harrison.

Friedman also curated the MoMA exhibition “Degas: A Strange New Beauty,” which ran earlier this year, and drawing from that curatorial experience came *What Degas Saw*. It’s this staple of knowledge and the body of material available that the staffers feel truly sets the museum’s publishing program apart from others; “we bring to bear all of the research we do here,” said Suzuki. Hudson stated that “what we bring to the books is a museum perspective,” while Margulies added that, at their core, the books are concerned with “telling a historically accurate story.” Of course, the children’s titles also carefully take their intended audience into consideration.

In Frank Viva’s *Young Frank, Architect*, the eponymous protagonist accompanies his grandfather – Old Frank (also an architect) – to MoMA, where they see the works of famous architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and Frank Gehry. Margulies described the story as being about “kids and creativity as seen through another child’s eyes.” Also from Frank Viva is *Young Charlotte, Film Maker*, which features an aspiring film maker who gleans inspiration from a visit to the museum as well. And In *Jake Makes a World: Jacob Lawrence, A Young Artist in Harlem*, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts imagines Jacob Lawrence as a youth in New York City. The book is illustrated by New York City native Christopher Myers.

In addition to historical verisimilitude and teaching about art through a child’s point of view, MoMA’s books share the international focus of the museum itself. Charles Kim calls the museum a “global brand,” evidenced by the fact that 45% of its visitors are international. The museum also holds multiple worldwide partnerships with museums and other organizations – partnerships that sometimes lead to books. For example, *Magritte’s Apple*, which visually references 50 Magritte works, was commissioned by the Centre Pompidou in Paris in conjunction with its exhibition on the artist there. Kim said he’d love to see more collaborations like this one, in the future.

When it comes to reaching an international audience, MoMA works with numerous dedicated foreign language partners: Diogenes (German); Ediciones SM (Spanish); Fatatrac/Giunti (Italian); Nishimura (Japanese); Random House Korea (Korean, Chinese); and Melissa Books (Greek). Hudson described how, as the titles are highly visual and many “have relatively little text” to translate, that they have been able to “extend the trade market” with a degree of ease.

Going Forward

The team at MoMA Publications has numerous projects in the works for 2017 and beyond, with a strong focus on more culturally and ethnically diverse representations and “more living artists,” said Margulies. This fall, Daniel Handler and Maira Kalman have created *Weather, Weather*, third in a series of books featuring original art from Kalman, prose by Handler, and photographs from the MoMA archives. Coming in summer 2017 is a book about one of the founders of abstraction, Sonia Delaunay, called *Sonia Delaunay: Art Is Life* by Cara Manes, as well as a book about Massimo Vignelli’s iconic map for the New York City subway, called *The Great NYC Subway Map* by Emiliano Ponzi. A book about Pakistani-born artist Shahzia Sikander, *Shahzia Sikander: My Life as an Artist*, also releases in 2017. Kim spoke about how Sikander’s “unorthodox upbringing in Pakistan” and her identity as a Pakistani-American Muslim will provide “readers in the U.S. with a more nuanced picture of Muslim art, culture, and history.”

Looking ahead to 2018, MoMA is creating a series of books about African-American artists and working in conjunction with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. In the near future, the publisher is also potentially looking to expand into the longer form with more titles geared at older readers.

Out and About in the Museum

From their offices, it’s just a short jaunt to the outdoor sculpture garden and then into the museum, filled as always with diverse crowds of school and tourist groups, families, and solo museum regulars. Charles Kim, Margulies, and Hannah Kim provided a tour of the museum’s current Art Lab, an educational space geared toward young visitors that features revolving themes reflecting back upon the exhibitions and permanent collections. MoMA’s Art Labs offer a bridge for young visitors to take what they have learned in the hallways of the museum and “test out ideas” of their own, said Margulies. The theme of “Process” is the current theme at play, inviting guests to explore art-making, different materials, and their own creativity. It’s evident from the artwork on the walls that children have done just that.



Books on display in MoMA's interactive Art Lab space.

And here also, are MoMA’s children’s books on display for visitors to peruse before potentially picking up their own copies at the MoMA Design and Bookstore. It’s a reminder of the integral role of MoMA’s publishing programs within the museum. The goal for visitors, said Margulies, is that they “make connections with art, with each other, and with the exhibitions.” The museum can be crowded, and perhaps a bit overwhelming; perhaps taking home a book to read and reflect upon can be just the key to fostering an enduring love of art between museum visits.