



The Art of Submitting for BIB

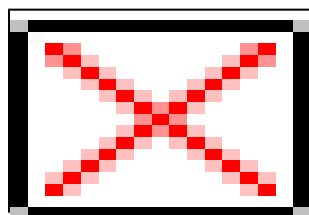
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Piet Grobler on the art of submitting for **BIB, the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava 2107**



Piet Grobler, co-founder of the [International Centre for the Picture Book in Society](#) [3], is one of those responsible for selecting UK illustrators to submit for **BIB**. It's one of the most challenging assignments in children's literature, as he explains.

Kveta Pacovska, the 1992 Czech Laureate of the [Hans Christian Andersen Award](#) [4], once said that a picturebook is the earliest art gallery a child attends. **BIB**, or the **Biennale for Illustration Bratislava**, tends to approach picture book illustration with a similar view, hence its insistence that original illustrations from published picturebooks are entered and exhibited and the high premium it places on the artistic excellence of the winning books.

BIB is one of the oldest and most prestigious, and very likely the largest, open international competition for published picturebook illustration in the world. Proof of its status is that since 1967, it has been organised under the auspices of UNESCO and Ibbby and with the support of the Slovakian Ministry of Culture.

This year **the International Centre for the Picture Book in Society** and [IBBY UK](#) [5] worked together to select UK illustrators for the BIB. Obviously we had to consider the nature of **BIB** when nominating UK illustrators. The international BIB-jury consists of theoreticians of the visual arts, illustrators, publishers and librarians. They come from various cultural environments and with various points of interest in picture books.

Since they are native speakers of various languages, jury members might possibly not fully appreciate books that depend too much on the written text to convey the concept of the book, even with the best of intentions and even though synopses of the books are provided by the entrants. The focus is on the illustrations and their artistic excellence. How well it will be received by a child or how well the illustrations function together with the written text, is respectively a bit speculative or hard to determine in a multi-cultural international competition.

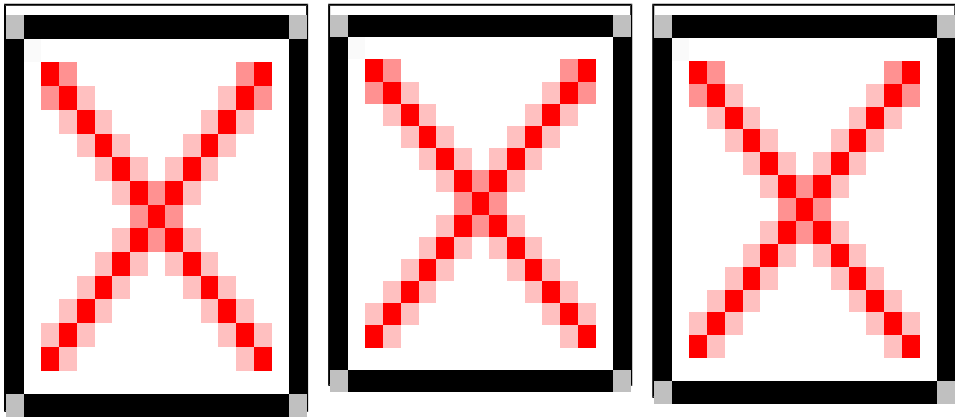
Furthermore, the jury members are chosen because of their excellence in the mentioned fields and will be very well informed with regards to contemporary international trends and developments in picture-book illustration. Our entries have, therefore, to be cutting edge, experimental, and innovative rather than traditional. Mainstream or commercial books, even though they may appeal to large numbers of children in a specific culture, will not make the cut at the Biennale. The agenda differs too from other awards that place a high premium on an illustrator's entire career or lifelong contribution.

It's fair to say that the judging of such a large international competition is closer to a marathon event than a 100 metre sprint. In the course of 50 years of BIB history, and its 25 exhibitions, a total of 7,580 illustrators from 110 countries have presented 59,860 original illustrations and more than 9,500 books. Jury meetings are a dynamic process. In

addition to several stages of democratic voting to compile shortlists, several discussions take place and the skills and personalities of the jury members as well as their interests may all have an influence, despite the obvious dedication of all to objectivity and fairness.

It is helpful to study previous winners to understand what kind of approaches seem to be favoured by juries. A broad variety of visual languages seem to be appreciated, but always with that preference for the unusual and experimental and for technical excellence. Bearing this in mind, **IBBY UK** and the **ICPBS** believe that we have chosen a very strong team of UK representatives that are all, for various reasons, worthy contenders for the 11 spots on the podium: one **Grand Prix** winner; five **BIB Golden Apples** and five **BIB Plaques**.

Here are our choices:

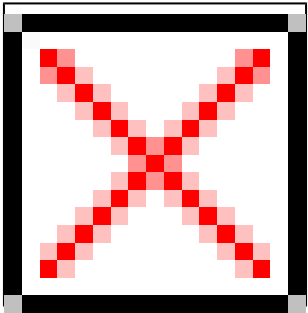


Mehrdokt Amini creates a sense of drama in her work and that, together with her ability to make believable characters, has created the beautiful **Chicken in the Kitchen**, a book that surely has universal appeal.

Christopher Corr's work, presented with a colourful happiness, makes **Deep in the Woods** a book that must be noted. **Maisie Paradise Shearring's The Happy Prince**, though in subtler tones, seem to be equally underpinned by a nod to folk art and the naïve. It is well-contextualised in contemporary image making and is very elegant.

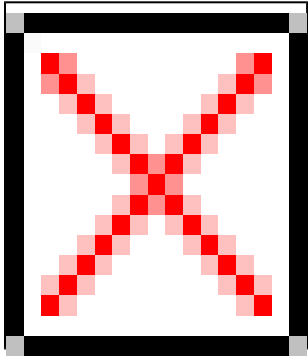
Alexis Deacon and **William Grill** have both have created monumental books that are very likely to become classics. Both have extraordinary drawing ability and work with either comic or comic/picture book hybrid formats that give them a contemporary and experimental edge

Daisy Hirst and **Katherina Manolessou** have created playful and quirky narratives in screen print and, at a time of revived interest in print techniques (not only in the UK but internationally), should catch the eye with friendly books that are very likely to appeal to young readers. Neal Layton's **The Tree** and **Stanley's Stick** are also informal, playful and child friendly.



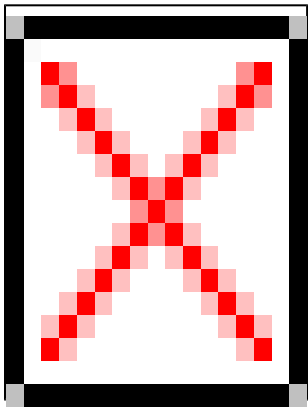
There is always, amongst the winners, an illustrator who works in technique that clearly refers to observational drawing and an understanding of naturalistic form and appearance ? for lack of a better terminology ? realism, or forms of it, as their visual language. **Jackie Morris** and **Jane Ray** work in such a classical manner. They create parallel universes of an old-worldly, lyrical kind: a place of ?once upon a time.?

Emily Hughes's *The Little Gardener* and Victoria Turnbull's *The Sea Tiger* and *Pandora* also remind us of visual



storytelling from yesteryear. Detailed, 'retro' illustrations, in palettes that were carefully chosen to create worlds reminiscent of the earlier years of picturebook-making, comfort the reader with their familiarity. At the same time, they surprise and excite within their contemporary contexts.

Science and non-fiction has become a sexy and popular topic again. Gone are the endless and often unimaginative factual books using photography to convey information; several brilliant and beautiful books have been competing for old and emerging prizes the last five years or so on the international picture book scene. More and more beautiful information books like Yuval Zommer's **The Big Book Of Beasts** and **The Big Book Of Bugs** and Harriet Russell's **Animasaurus** and **This Book Thinks You're a Scientist** are included on the lists of leading publishing houses and win major prizes.



Factual-fiction hybrids (faction?), like **Diary of a Time Traveller** by Nicholas Stevenson are also emerging. His work is characterized by colourful and textural experiments in exciting storytelling that conveys information without the reader even realizing.

Fingers crossed that the UK will be able to repeat some of the successes of 2015 when [Laura Carlin](#) [6] was awarded the **Grand Prix** and [Levi Pinfold](#) [7] a **BIB Plaque**. The competition is tough as we are competing in a field much wider than the Anglophone picture-book environment we know. The opportunities and advantages for participants are evident. All entries will be included in a lovely exhibition catalogue that is widely circulated and the work is displayed in an exhibition in Bratislava from 8 September to 29 October 2017.

Piet Grobler is an illustrator, visiting professor at the University of Worcester and co-founder of the **International Centre for the Picture Book in Society**. Piet himself was an award winner at **Bratislava** in 2003 and 2009.

Books mentioned:

Chicken in the Kitchen, Merdokht Amini, Lantana

[Deep in the Woods](#) [8], Christopher Corr, Frances Lincoln

[Geis: A Matter of Life and Death](#) [9], Alexis Deacon, Nobrow

[Shackleton's Journey](#) [10] and [The Wolves of Currampaw](#) [11], William Grill, Flying Eye

[The Girl with the Parrot on her Head](#) [12], Daisy Hirst, Walker

The Little Gardener, Emily Hughes

[The Tree](#) [13] and **Stanley's Stick**, Neal Layton

Mummy and Me and **T-Veg: The Story of a Carrot Crunching Dinosaur**, Katherina Manolessou

One Cheetah, One Cherry and **The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow**, Jackie Morris

[Ahmed and the Feather Girl](#) [14] and **The Little Mermaid**, Jane Ray

Animasaurus and **This Book Thinks You're a Scientist**, Harriet Russell

The Happy Prince, Maisie Paradise Shearring

Diary of a Time Traveller, Nicholas Stevenson, Wide Eyed

The Sea Tiger and **Pandora**, Victoria Turnbull

The Big Book of Beasts and **The Big Book of Bugs**, Yuval Zommer

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[3] <https://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/international-centre-for-the-picture-book-in-society.html>

[4] <http://www.ibby.org/awards-activities/awards/hans-christian-andersen-awards/>

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[14] <http://reviewwww.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/186/childrens-books/reviews/ahmed-and-the-feather-girl>