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Russian Book Illustration for Children.

Brief Review

It has been both a challenging and easy task to write a short overview on Russian illustrations for children's books of the last few years. It has been a challenge, because even a very general review, covering the main landmarks, means writing about many things, including the fact that many great animators and masters of motion and communicative design turned to classical illustration and began to create striking and eye-catching illustrative cycles, where the *livre d'artiste* genre does not contradict strict publishing tasks. An example to that is found in two wonderful graphic novels, fairy tales rendered, or better say, re-drawn by **Igor Oleynikov**, awarded with the H.C. Andersen Gold Medal (2018) for his "lasting contribution to children's literature". The artist's versions of *Fox and Hare* («Лиса и заяц») (2017) and *Little House* («Тепемок») (2018, winner in the category "Together with the book we grow up" of the Annual National Competition **Book of the Year**) – both books published by Mann, Ivanov and Ferber House – are an admonition to adults. Oleynikov creates a real film library, alluding to the imagery of the silent screen era, when each frame, i.e. each illustration hand-drawn in a complex mixed technique, can be the beginning of a new story, metaphorically composed like the Hokusai Manga with the endless variety of possible storytelling, or rather almost a documentary presentation of the topic. Such unsparing books, imbued with biblical humour, are a good reason to create a whole library of adventures based on modern day-to-day realia observed by the author. Along with that the graphic storyboards are entertaining and skilfully drawn, the subtle power of observation makes the graphic stories universal and understandable without translation in any country.

The task of searching for the exact imagery, virtually following the "remembrance of death" in this severe life, is also characteristic of the story *The Cow* («Корова») by Andrei Platonov, published in a separate book with the illustrations by **Alexander Petrov** (winner of 2019 Book Image, Vita Nova publishing house). The book is based on the artist's screen adaptation of 1989, and despite such a large time gap between the release of the animated film and the hard copy of the illustrated text, its two-page and full-page frames turn into full and independent scenes, which maintain their authentic screen nature.

The book traditions of creating author's worlds are continued by Russian artists who started to work back in the 1980s and are still passionately devoted to the art of book publishing, presenting annually impressions with considered and customised layouts and a wonderful imagery that never ceases to amaze. **Anastasia Arkhipova's** panoramic and slow-moving illustrations to *Across the River* («Там, за рекой») by **Xiu Tao** (CCPPG, China; series *Tales for Children*, Rech Publishing House, 2018) allow children and their parents to return their urge to deliberate reading and harmonious contemplation of the world.

It should be noted that the profession of illustrator today is highly desirable among students and recent graduates of art colleges, who have set to work insightfully and began to win prizes at major international book competitions – the fact that cannot but give us hope. **Ekaterina Mikhulina** has created a cheerful and very kind series of illustrations to Samuel Marshak's poem *Circus* («Цирк»). The series won the Grand Prix of the illustration competition held at the 2018 BIBF **Ananas** International Illustration Exhibit, Beijing. It brings children back to magic, emerging when the little reader explores a book, and this immersive effect is characteristic of *books with pictures*, where the toy world suddenly turns into a fascinating game for the big and the small, in the light of a circus beam.

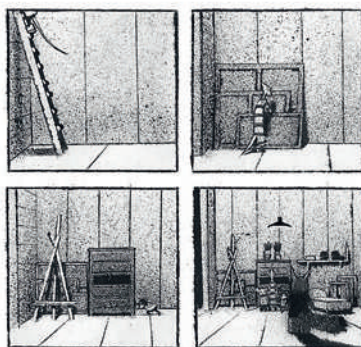
Illustrations by **Olga Ptashnik** to Pavel Kvartalnov's *Journey Above the Earth: Diary of a Swallow* («Путешествие над землей: Дневник ласточки») were recognized as the Best of the Best at the **iJungle** 2019 Illustration Awards. Daringly composed large frames and broad panoramas, opening from the bird's eye view, complex foreshortening of characters, a well-directed movement of birds, animals and people, which becomes more and more dynamical with every two-page opening, have become possible through the combination of different planes, which conveys the spaciousness of a cosmic landscape (allusion to the Dutch painters) and its intricate beauty.

Russian illustrators can also take pride in a good harvest – the Golden Apples of the International Biennale of Illustration in Bratislava in 2017 and 2019. In 2017, the high award was granted to the book *The Story of an Old Flat* («История

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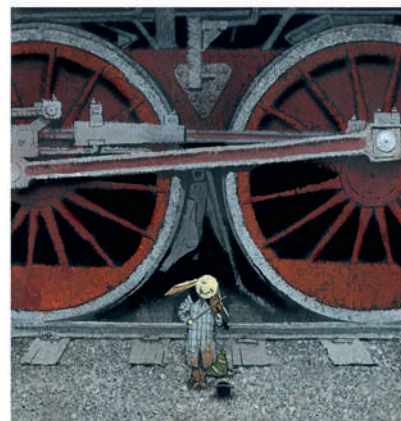


ПРИКОЛМА БЕЛОНКА-ПОТЫГШЕНКА
— КТО, КТО В ТЕМЕ, КТО, КТО В БАГОКО?
— КТО В НАМ КИТЬ.



— Я, МАКА-КРЫКА, ДА ВЕТКА-ВЕЛОСЕТКА, ДА ЛУЧКА-КРАЕНКА, А ТЫ КТО?
— Я — БЕЛОНКА-ПОТЫГШЕНКА.
— КТО В НАМ КИТЬ.

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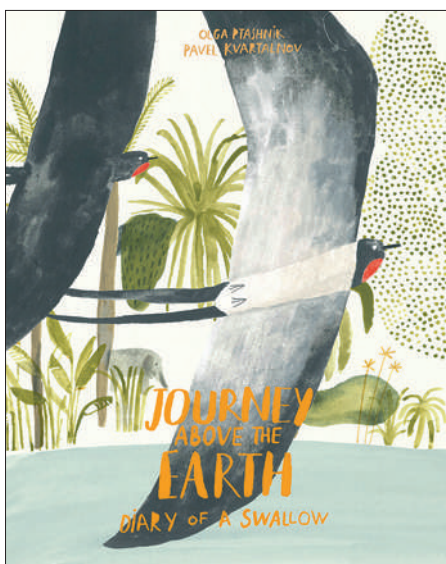
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Igor Oleynikov

Little House. Picture Story. Mann, Ivanov & Ferber Publishing House, 2018

2

Igor Oleynikov

Fox and Hare. Author's Interpretation. Picture Novel. Mann, Ivanov and Ferber Publishing House, 2017

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Anna Desnitskaya

Cover and a two-page spread of the picture book *The Story of an Old Flat*,

prepared together with Alexandra Litvinova. Samokat Publishing House, 2018

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Maria Krasnova-Shabaeva

Houses and Huts in the Bermuda Triangle. Samokat Publishing House, 2019

6

Olga Ptashnik

Illustration to *Journey Above the Earth: Diary of a Swallow* by Pavel Kvartalnov, 2019 (the book in preparation for publishing)

старой квартиры») by **Alexandra Litvina** and **Anna Desnitskaya** (Samokat Publishing House, 2018). Meticulously collected bits of family stories of several generations and a carefully re-created life of the Moscow *kommunalka* (multiple-family flats) of the 1920s, 30s, 40s, 50s and all through the 20th century, are magically projected into our times. The authors of this best-selling book have managed to tell the story of their country without being afraid of the tragedy and bitter truth of “what really happened” and without losing the deep personal touch of their visual narrative.

The 2019 Golden Apple was awarded to **Anton Lomaev** for his book *Lullaby for a Little Pirate* («Колыбельная для маленького пирата», Azbuka-Attikus Publishing House, 2018). The text followed the imagery, dissolving in it and turning into a detailed story about ship gear, unusual fishes, bizarre customs of conquerors of the sea. The unstoppable, rich, baroque fantasy of the illustrator splashes beyond the book layout and calls for a performance or animated film.

The creative success of illustrators is all the more impressive as the readership has become very demanding and selective with the quality of books and independently determines their favourite authors and artists, encouraging them by instantly sold-out print runs. This readers’ freedom allows many good illustrators to work in the genre of a picture book, devising the whole graphic story: the text, the pictures, the layout, and even SMM campaign informing about work progress, – and sell the print run through the Internet, regardless policies of publishing houses and pitfalls of Russian book distribution.

Such preparedness of readers to perception of well thought through and perfectly made book is explained by numerous open book competitions. **The Book of the Year** National Competition (established by the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications (FAPMC)) is in demand and held annually, as well as the **Image of the Book** International Book Illustration and Design Competition (Association of Book Illustrators

and Designers at the Union of Artists of Moscow). Remarkable finds are on the top list of books for children presented by the International Fair of Intellectual Literature Non/fiction[®]. The Garage Art Book Fair, the Russian State Library and the German Book Office Moscow – Frankfurter Buchmesse in Russia, as well as the School of Design of the Higher School of Economics, should be commended for their support and revival of the **Hit Book** National Book Design Competition («Жап-книга»), once initiated by young tutors of the Polygraphic University. The contest offers a venue for students’ works that present concepts of future books and, separately, for already commercially published books.

We should mention initiatives of publishing houses, which treat all Russian and foreign book competitions with high level of responsibility and make sure to participate in them, and also launch their own competition programmes. For example, the Samokat Publishing House and its competition **Book Inside** («Книга внутри») encourages young authors and artists to walk the path from a sketch to the embodiment of a bright artistic idea and, if the project wins, to have it printed and participate with this hard-copy book in the Bologna Children’s Book Fair. The Grand Prix for the *Graphic Novel 2018* was awarded to **Tatyana Ukhova** for her author’s book *Grasshopper* («Кузнечик») with its very expressive drawings, handwritten lettering and calligraphy. The book tells about the beautiful summer world of children, grass, sunshine, sky and insects that can become your mates for the season. This form of a plein-air journal-book or a sketchbook is of high demand in the international publishing practice.

Another event that unites the professional community is the annual All-Russian Children’s Book Week hosted by the Russian State Children’s Library. It makes it possible to all publishers of books for children and young people find a permanent venue for presenting their book novelties, created with great love. Master classes, workshops, lectures, round-table discussions, get together of writers, poets and artists with the readers, and a large educational programme ensures that all the most interesting things are told and presented. The **Morse** International Festival of Book Illustration and Visual Literature is becoming more and more recognisable with each passing year. The annual **Artist and Book** exhibition on the Kuznetsky Most Street (organized by the Moscow Union of Artists) and creative initiatives of the **Magic Saw** Association of Illustrators are also important.

Drawn Worlds: 1001 Outstanding International Picturebooks in Moscow was a high-profile event, a professional festival and a powerful incentive to personal creative growth. The exhibition was curated by Grazia Gotti and Silvana Sola within the 2019 Moscow International Book Fair. Sixteen Russian illustrated books were engaged, with *Circus Alphabet* («Цирковая азбука») by Mikhail Yasnov and drawn by **Tatyana Borisova** (Ad Marginem, A + A, 2019) among them. The book can withstand comparison with the most thought out and flawlessly made books



Bologna Book Fair 2019.
Graphic Identity by Maria Titova



На оранжевом закате,
В час вечерний в синей бухте,
Словно буря разразилась,
Грохот, гам и тарарам!

Что там в таинстве случилось?
Может быть, вулкан проснулся?
Иль базар торжует игривый
В этот вечер у воды?

Или это львы морские
Выходят с бандой капитанов,
В пене грозных волн прибрежных
Испуская дикий рев?

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1
Anton Lomaev

Lullyby for a Little Pirate.
Azbuka-Attikus Publishing
House, 2018

2
Anastasia Arkhipova

Illustration to the tale *Across
the River* by Xiu Tao. CCPPG,
China; Rech Publishing House,
Tales for Children series, 2018

3
Victoria Semykina

Illustration to *Real Shiplet*
by Marina Aromshtam. Mann,
Ivanov & Ferber Publishing
House, 2019

4
Victoria Semykina

Illustration to *Crosswalk*,
stories by Artur Givargizov.
Leo Publishing House
(Egmont), 2018



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from Poland and the Czech Republic; it is witty in its pro-paedeutic graphics, combining the legendary compositional experiments of Vladimir Lebedev and the Suprematist art of Kazimir Malevich.

The *Crosswalk* («Переход») by Artur Givargizov, drawn by **Victoria Semykina** (Antolini), is another Russian book (Leo (Egmont) Publishing House, 2018), included in the exhibition by the curators. Very lyrical and emotional colourful drawings help children to learn how to discover a fairy tale and beauty in the ordinary world, which can be saved through this quiet and seemingly everyday beauty. The *Real Shiplet* («Настоящий кораблик») by Marina Aromshtam (Mann, Ivanov & Ferber Publishing House), with illustrations by the same Victoria, deserves the category of the Most Beautiful Books and was awarded a Special Prize at the prestigious Klaus Flugge 2018 competition. Large two-page pictures with fine style of drawing, grotesque and sophisticated, present the story of school of life and overcoming challenges with attractiveness against the background of the unembraceable world.

Early learning and developmental books have become incredibly popular. One of them, included in the honourable Italian list of 1001 outstanding international books, is *Houses and Huts in the Bermuda Triangle* («Дома и домики в Бермудском треугольнике») by **Maria Krasnova-Shabaeva** (Samokat Publishing House, 2019). A colourful cover, special title pages and two-page illustrations along with black-and-white drawings turn the book into a tool for would-be architects who learn not only about types of houses, but about their different functionality. Well-illustrated educational book that visualizes its content can be a not less important guide to the development of logic and imagination than boring school reading books.

Zina and Philip Surov designed an entertaining series for the youngest kids – *Two Merry Lines for Son and Daughter. Games*

and Activities (Mann, Ivanov & Ferber Publishing House, 2019), which was also on the honorary *Bologna List for MIBF*. Small size books with clearly arranged and perfectly drawn pictures teach kids a lot through the game, whereas short rhymed funny stories, jokes and counting-out rhymes help them master reading and counting easily and with joy.

2019 Bologna Children’s Book Fair’s brand identity was authored by the Russian graphic artist and designer **Maria Titova**. Her mastery of printing techniques and skills in storytelling helped the artist to achieve the impression of spontaneity of quick drawing and vivacious sketches of various fantastic plants and creatures in colour printed forms, which perfectly fitted the character of the best international fair of *picture books*.

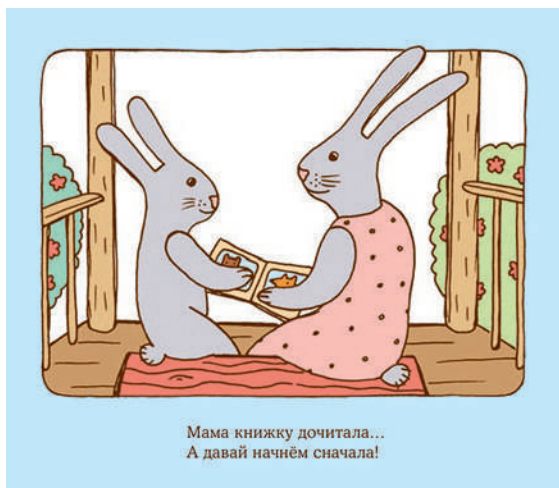
Every year brings more and more interesting books to Russia, illustrated with talent, even without serious subsidy support. Valiant efforts of Russian publishers and artists have preserved a lively interest to the book among readers of all age groups. The variety of artistic and illustration techniques, as well as authors’ interpretations of texts impresses. It is necessary to set up a library of monographs about the best Russian artists-illustrators of the second half of the 20th century. The task too challenging for one person awaits its volunteers. Many books should be referred to the “Keep in Perpetuity” category, and it is time to think about a public museum of books and illustrations, which would not collect rarities, but rather compile the modern material, that needs to be studied. Much work is to be done. And that gives hope.

In 2020, Russia will be represented by two young illustrators in Bologna, **Ekaterina Voronina** and **Elena Repetur**, who are known for their quick eye and grotesque illustrations.

Elena Rymshina, lecturer, researcher at the State Tretyakov Gallery, curator of the Book DNA Illustrators’ Programme at the International Fair of Intellectual Literature NonfictionNº

	International Awards to Russian Illustrators, 2017–2019	
	2017	Anna Desnitskaya, Golden Apple, International Biennale of Illustration in Bratislava, Slovakia
	2017	Victoria Semykina, prize winner of Tapirulan Illustrators Contest, Italy
	2018	Ekaterina Mikhulina, Grand Prix, BIBF Ananas International Illustration Exhibition, Beijing, China
	2018	Victoria Semykina, Klaus Flugge prize, Highly Commended, London, Great Britain
	2018	Igor Oleynikov, H.C. Andersen Gold Medal
	2019	Maria Titova, Graphic Identity, Bologna Book Fair
	2019	Olga Ptashik, Gold Medal, iJungle Illustration Awards
	2019	Natalya Averyanova, Roman Belyaev, Tatiana Borisova, Anna Desnitskaya, Olesya Gonserovskaya, Ekaterina Gorelik, Maria Krasnova-Shabaeva, Nina Kuzmina, Polina Plavinskaya, Varvara Polyakova, Victoria Semykina, Zina and Philip Surov, Natalya Yaskina, ESH Group – participants of the Drawn Worlds: 1001 Outstanding International Picturebooks in Moscow (curated by Grazia Gotti and Silvana Sola) within Moscow International Book Fair
	2019	Anton Lomaev, Golden Apple, International Biennale of Illustration in Bratislava, Slovakia
	2019	Victoria Semykina, Grand Jury Prize, Beijing International Book Fair (BIBF), China

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1
**Zina Surova,
Philip Surov**

*Two Merry Lines for
Son and Daughter.
Games and Activities.*
Mann, Ivanov
& Ferber Publishing
House, 2019

2
Alexander Petrov

Illustration to *The Cow*
by Andrei Platonov.
Vita Nova, 2019

3
Tatyana Ukhova

Grasshopper. The Book
Inside competition
(2018). Samokat
Publishing House,
2019

4
**Tatiana
Borisova**

Illustration to *Circus
Alphabet* by Mikhail
Yasnov. Ad Marginem,
A + A, 2019

5
**Ekaterina
Mikhalina**

Illustration to the
poem *Circus* by
Samuel Marshak, 2018
(in preparation for
publication by Malysh
Publishing House)

