

Illustrators annual 2012



La Course: from Bologna to Bologna...

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The story of the illustrated book *La Course* by Eun-Young Cho is a gratifying one, intrinsically bound up with the Bologna Book Fair. One of the book projects on display in Bologna at the Korean stand in 2009, it now returns to the 2012 edition as the winner of the 2011 Bratislava Biennial Grand Prix. This is how it all happened.

Korea's group stand has always been one of the most exciting displays of talent at the Fair. Here professionals the world over find alongside the big publishing houses a wealth of extraordinary creative and singularly original books, sometimes still in the embryonic stage. Nowhere else does one come into such direct contact with the buzz of creative drawing and painting talents, many of whom also author their illustrations. The 2011 June edition of the French National Library's book review of children's books, *La Joie par les livres*, focused largely on Korean children's picture books. The overview gave a comprehensive account of a flourishing illustrated book tradition that melts popular art traditions with Korean Manga.

We had already published the artist Gyong Sook Goh thanks to Jaimimage, the small yet highly creative Korean publishing house presented to us many years ago by Elisabeth Lortic of the French *Trois Ourses* association. But it was at the 2009 Bologna Children's Book Fair that I first came across *La Course* and met with Jiwone Lee, art historian and teacher at Seoul University (UOS). Together with the university and the Korean Publishers' Association, Jiwone had co-organised a display of picture book projects of her illustration students. The department in question is a highly selective unit offering a two year course for only about ten students taught by a faculty of six. About twenty mock-ups and a brief résumé of their author were displayed on a series of rudimentary shelves. Here was the very essence of a fair like Bologna: allowing new talents to come to the notice of professionals whose job it is to recognise and publish them. And these professionals are hungry for new opportunities to discover the artists of future illustrated books for children.

I was struck by two mock-ups: *Un Jour* by Yoo Ju-Yeon and *La Course* by Eun-Young Cho. *Un Jour* is a very modern, courageous take on the traditional Korean inkwash technique. This was the project we decided to publish first. It is now part of MeMo Editions' collection of picture books by young, first-time female Korean artists. In some cases this has led to subsequent publication in their own country. The most recent of these *La Soupe de Maman Baleine* by Yana Lee was released in 2012.

Although impressed by its powerful impact, *La Course* left me somewhat disconcerted and hesitant to publish on account of the subject matter and its singular approach. Quite out of the ordinary, the book tells the story of a little girl who is taken by her grandfather to the races. Enchanted by the beauty of the horses, she falls in love with one of them in particular only to discover that the punters are interested simply in making money. *La Course* is a story about the loss of childhood innocence and a young girl's first encounter with the pitiful games of adults. In the end, however, she retains her love of horses, transferring it to the soft toy she is shown clutching in the last, melancholic yet tender, image of the book.

I came across Eun-Young and her project once more in May 2009 when Editions MeMo was invited by curator Jiwone Lee to the Book Art section of Seoul's Book Fair. She had laid out all the components of her book in a small room. They were anything but classic illustrations! Together, all the various elements fitted together like a puzzle. Some illustrations had been painted on paper, others were overlays of several images on tracing paper, a technique that conveyed to great effect the agitated movement of the

horses and the explosion of colours of *La Course*. The gallery of portraits of the spectators and bookmakers in the stands was no less striking: bloated wino faces, especially the men, showed a keenly observant eye and an unusual take on the Korean man in the street, far from some of the more classical adaptations of traditional Korean tales. Eun-Young was fascinated by the race course scene and had drawn horses and bookmakers there for some five years.

I have seen many a book project in the nearly twenty years of the life of our small publishing house created with Yves Mestrallet. Yet it is rare to see an illustrator shake off so completely the conventional approach to children's books. It is nonetheless a book for children. The story echoes all the initiations into the adult world that children are bound to encounter. A child's naive gaze on the preliminaries of the race, her enthusiasm for these magnificent creatures, and wild excitement before searing disappointment are all strong emotions. They have been conveyed alternating broad brush-stroke painting using violent colours and charcoal portraits reminiscent of the graphic novel.

We published *La Course* in 2010. On the jacket, an illustration from Eun-Young's sketch book of horses. It was noticed and supported by bookstores and many librarians. It also met the admiration of illustrated book experts. Sales, however, never were outstanding. So it is with real pleasure that we received the news of its acclaim by the Bratislava Biennial and now by the Bologna Book Fair. It further confirms to us that, despite all our years in the profession, there is no way of knowing how a picture book will fare on the market and how the mysterious alchemy works between the book and those who choose, pick out or simply love books for children.

Christine Morault February 2012

