

Artist Statement

I make books, picture books. And every book I've made has been, in one way or another, an exploration of perspective.

I am interested in process, in mistakes, and in the relationship between the practice of mindfulness and art making. And I'm fascinated by how an improvisational practice (that I first learned from the world of dance improvisation) can influence visual and linguistic storytelling. I'm also interested in questions— questions of sight, questions of perception, and questions of connection. Questions such as— *What are the assumptions we carry with us, that might not be true?*

Picture books as an art form can surprise, subvert, soothe, explore, delight, and nourish. They can upend our sense of ourselves and the world. They can deepen our sense of belonging. They can ask big questions. They can point out small delights. They can make us cry and they can make us laugh. And in so doing, they can complicate and expand our view of the world.

With every turn of the page in a picture book, the visual artist has a choice: to support and mimic, or to complicate and contrast the text. Because of this, picture books are uniquely suited to the exploration of perception.

Which means picture books are also uniquely suited to the exploration of misperception. Misperceptions about the world, ourselves, and each other. I am interested in this— the way picture books can spark new ways of seeing, by telling stories that reframe or question our assumptions about the world.

Because I am interested in reframing and shifting perspective, many of my books are about uncomfortable or difficult themes— mistakes, sadness, loneliness, cruelty, teasing, loss, awkwardness, and conflict. With each of these topics I am interested in the discomfort. At the same time, I am curious— could a shift in perspective allow us to see the situation differently?

Sometimes this change in perspective means zooming out to reframe the entire story (*The Book of Mistakes*); sometimes it means hiding a different story or perspective in plain sight (*Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have A Horse, my heart, ABC and you and me*). Other times a perspective shift can mean alternating perspectives (*Patchwork, In The Dark, Nothing In Common*) or zooming inward (*the tree in me*) so that we see what is inside or underneath the visible world.

Because I love to play with perception in this way, my books are also about connection. If you look deeply enough at any single thing, you will discover ways in which it is connected to everything else in the world. These connections and interconnections are something I love to explore.

Once, I was making an ink drawing of a lady. She had thick, dark, arching eyebrows. I thought the ink was dry— but it wasn't. When I went to add more detail to the drawing, my hand rubbed over her face, making a huge streak across her forehead. My first thought was "oh no!" but my second thought was "hmm," and my third thought was "what can I do with this?" And so I turned that streak and those dark, arching eyebrows into dark, arching glasses.

For me, a large part of creative work is this—retraining myself, changing the way I think, and in turn, the way I see.

Many of my books also end with a question for the reader. There is a pattern to these questions that has to do with perception. They are questions about ways of seeing: *How do you see yourself? How do you see other people— do you see their imperfections, their mistakes? Do you see their possibility? And— Can you see both, simultaneously?*

I am also interested in how picture books, as an art form that is meant to be shared, can turn a question into an invitation. For a parent and child reading together, the words "Do you see..." might lead to *What do you see?* They might also lead to *What are we NOT seeing?* or *What do I see now, that I didn't see before?*

These questions lead to even more questions— *How do we change how we see? How do we move from making a mistake to a vision for what could come next? How do we learn to see potential in other people, in the world, and in ourselves?*

And finally— *Can that change in perception be shared? Can it be learned? Can it be taught?* For me, these are interesting questions.

They are the questions I ask myself with every book that I make.

-Corinna Luyken, 2023