



# THE ERIC CARLE MUSEUM OF PICTURE BOOK ART

BY NAIDEN STOYANOV

As fall slowly asserts itself around us and school gets into full swing, take a breather during one of the upcoming school holidays and take your kids on a one-day family field trip adventure, appropriate for toddlers, preschoolers and even young elementary school students - the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. Yes, that Eric Carle, with the Very Hungry Caterpillar. We visited the museum this summer as part of our online weekly field trip adventure series. I recruited both of our kids, ages 5 and 3, to come along on this reconnaissance mission - to unknowingly test the place and provide insight into its viability as a day trip destination. Here is our slightly modified (for relevancy and timing) report from this trip.

It's a very hungry caterpillar. And this year it turns 50. But that's nothing compared to its creator who this summer counted 90 candles on his birthday cake.

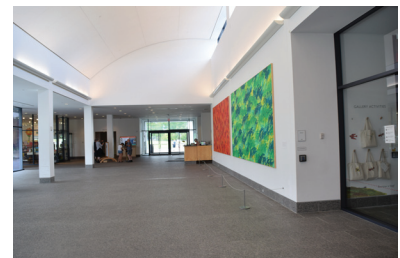
Eric Carle is a legend in the picture book category. And if for some reason you don't know his name you almost certainly are well acquainted with his most famous creation - The Very Hungry Caterpillar. It's a book that every kid under, say 50 or so, would recognize it in a heartbeat.

A fairly new creation in the Carle world, though, only 16 years young, is the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art - a must-visit for everyone, especially if hailing from our neck of the woods, which happens to be at a very sensible distance, even for toddlers, about two-hours or less by car.

Situated in a quiet corner of Amherst, MA, the museum is the creation of Eric Carle's vision of embracing and celebrating picture book art and inspiring kids' imagination in the process. Founded by Eric and the now late wife Barbara

"Bobbie" Carle in 2002, the museum features not only the works of Eric Carle himself, including original drawings, book mockups and other artifacts from Carle's portfolio, but also displays exhibitions of works by other big names in the picture book genre. The museum boasts a collection of 11,000 objects, including 7,300 permanent illustrations from artists from the likes of Ashley Bryan, Leo Lionni, William Steig and Mo Willems.

And while all this is certainly impressive, and by itself a reason to trek up to Amherst, it is the atmosphere and creative resources that make the museum a destination for a family field trip.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CANAIDEN MEDIA



The building is a modern one-story spacious edifice with clean lines inside and out. The very spacious main lobby is the connection between the galleries, the auditorium, the library and the art studio, where your kids can spend hours creating amazing paper sculptures and other visual masterpieces. The library is a quiet corner with a selection of picture books and other children's classics, to the count of 5,000 or so volumes. The gallery space is split into three rooms, one of which is dedicated to Eric Carle and the other two showcase select picture book artists on scheduled basis. On the other end of the museum, the art studio always has staff available to tend to the young creators and provide help when necessary.

This summer, the West Gallery's space, dedicated to Eric Carle's art featured the exhibition *The Art of Making A Book*, which explored the stories that have inspired Carle and the process of making and publishing them. From September 7, 2019 until March 1, 2020 it will be replaced by a new exhibit called *Under the Sea with Eric Carle* which will



explore the under water creatures from Carle's books.

50 Years of *Silvester and the Magic Pebble* is featured in the intimate setting of the Central Gallery and offers kids a chance to play with a life-size version of the rock from William Steig's famous picture book. This exhibition will be on view until December 1.

In the East Gallery, kids and adults alike can travel on the remarkable jour-

ney offered by the meticulously detailed drawings of Peter Sis, on view until October 27.

Regularly scheduled programs during the day include story times at the library, movies and other educational exercises. Special events are also held frequently.

A major entertainment, designed to make you and your kids move about the entire space while having fun and noticing things you otherwise probably wouldn't, are the two scavenger hunts available at the museum. One of them was confined to the West Gallery, where the Eric Carle's exhibition resides, and



compelled the kids to carefully examine all the works around the room. Did you know about the ants that carry leaves? The other scavenger hunt will make you comb through the entire museum looking for the rubber duckies plastered on the wall in different rooms of the place. I challenge you to find the ducky in the library in one minute or less.

The self-serve cafeteria space offers free coffee and a vending machine with snacks, but you can bring your own lunch and choose to either sit inside or enjoy the day on the outdoor patio.

You might also want to try the lush meadow outside which is a perfect place for a quiet picnic enhanced by the number of available objects designed to inspire and entertain your kids. Bobbie's Meadow, named after Eric Carle's late wife who passed away in 2015, was opened last year and features a tranquil space with musical instruments, blocks and *The Very Little Library* complete with a number of picture books. During the summer the museum offers outdoor storytimes, creative movement and art-making.

The museum's media kit explains the science that goes behind their exhibitions, flow and events, including the Visual Thinking Strategies and



the Reggio Emilia approach to early education - "approaches designed to foster critical and creative thinking and personal connection with the world of art and expressive languages." But for most of us only one thing would matter. And, at least my kids, unbeknownst to them playing the role of museum critics, had a great time and loved it.

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art is open daily Tuesday-Friday from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., Saturday - 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Sunday - 12 p.m. - 5 p.m. The museum is closed on Monday. Admission is \$9 for adults and \$6 for kids. It is located at 125 West Bay Road, Amherst, MA. For more information you can call them at (413) 559-6300

or go to [www.carlemuseum.org](http://www.carlemuseum.org)  
Happy Birthday Eric Carle!■

**BONUS STOP:** For added excitement, if your kids aren't too tired after hours of fun at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, a few miles down the road, as you head back home, you might want to stop by the Skinner Museum (33 Woodbridge St, South Hadley, MA), which features about 5,000 objects of any kind - from pebbles to medieval knight armor, a real size single-log-carved canoe and everything in between. Don't miss the large collection of eggs of all sizes and the fossils that all kids seem to love. And don't go out without asking for details on the large Japanese temple replica, apparently made by the Quakers after they tore down the real deal in Japan. Every object has a story, only there are so many objects there that some stories are lost forever—their true origin and history forever relinquished to time. Yet, if you are into history and folklore you will find this place a lot of fun. You will feel like you are in an episode of History Channel's *American Pickers*, only nothing is for sale. Which is probably a good thing.

