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## **What a Circus! The Art of Etienne Delessert**

### **Internationally Acclaimed Swiss-American Artist Comes to The Carle**

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Massachusetts is pleased to announce a major exhibition; *What a Circus! The Art of Etienne Delessert*. This exhibition was organized by The National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature in Abilene, Texas, as a celebration of the internationally acclaimed Swiss artist's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It opens here at The Carle on February 8, 2011 and will remain on view until June 5, 2011. The exhibition is sponsored in part by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia.

Etienne Delessert is a painter, graphic artist, illustrator, and publisher who has created an exemplary and very personal body of work. His books, which have been translated into more than 15 languages, have influenced his contemporaries and inspired children for decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, along with other titans of the genre such as Maurice Sendak, Leo Lionni, Eric Carle, and William Steig, Delessert emerged as a key figure in the vital children's book renewal that swept Europe and the United States.

The exhibition will span from Delessert's earliest book, *The Endless Party* (1967), to his most recent work, *Spartacus The Spider* (2010), showing the breadth and depth of his artistic vision. In conjunction with the exhibition, the museum will produce a 40-page, profusely illustrated catalogue with an essay by artist David Macaulay, a statement by Delessert himself, and an interview with Emmanuelle Martinat-Dupré, the French curator of a recent exhibition of Delessert's work in Moulins, France.

"Etienne's conviction that there are few limits to a child's perception, his faculty to assimilate, and his aesthetic sensibility continues to refresh the ever-changing world of children's books," according to Carle Chief Curator H. Nichols B. Clark.

Delessert first and foremost wants “to interest and entertain” children. He has been able to understand preschool-age children’s experiences by using the research and experiments of the Swiss developmental psychologist, Jean Piaget. Delessert’s intention “to interest and entertain,” as modest as it appears, fits perfectly into the goals of Piaget, which were founded on the ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau: One should use events or games to arouse the natural curiosity, interest, and thirst for knowledge that all children have. Piaget explains, “...Etienne Delessert gives the impression of a highly intelligent and skillful adult who has managed to retain the principal traits of a child’s mind with all its fantasy and unpredictable imagination and also its faculty for sharp observation applied when least expected...”

Delessert was the first picture book artist to put some distance between text and images; his illustrations of the stories grounded in the theater of the absurd by Eugène Ionesco are testament to that. This new way of telling a story allowed children to play with concepts that went beyond an objective truth and allowed children to grasp a deeper interpretation of reality. Today, Etienne Delessert continues to expand his unique universe. Serious yet humorous, questioning yet playful, his work is a testimony to his understanding of children’s conflicts and emotions. Many of his books are already classics in children’s literature, and serve as references in the current history of international illustration. In the words of Ionesco: “...*To me the most important thing is this: he [Delessert] presents the world as he first saw it, setting aside the social and the habitual aspects. He has not forgotten how to see things with the critical, authentic eye of a child. That is why he is a great artist....*”

Through this extraordinary body of work, the museum not only honors Delessert’s remarkable talent, but also intends to instill in the visitor, young and old, the importance of fostering the imagination and looking at the world with a subjective yet critical eye.

### **Related Programming:**

**Opening Reception** for What a Circus! The Art of Etienne Delessert

Saturday, February 19, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. [Members Event. Media are welcome to attend]

*We thank the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York for the generous support to the opening reception.*

**Gallery Tour and Book Signing** by Etienne Delessert

Sunday, February 20, 1:00 p.m.

**Master Art Class taught by Etienne Delessert**

Sunday, April 17, 11:00 a.m. followed by a gallery tour and book signing.

**Public Art Program: Circle Circus**

Tuesday, March 1 – April 27, 2011

**Just So Stories by CactusHead Puppets**

Monday, April 18 – Friday April 22  
1:00pm – every day

**Yok-Yok and other films**

Daily, Spring 2011

**Roger Sutton and Martha Parravano, Editors, The Horn Book**

Saturday, May 21, 3:00 p.m.

**Etienne Delessert Biography:**

Etienne Delessert was born in 1941 in Switzerland and now, for more than thirty years, this self-taught artist has been translating his and the world's ideas, passions, fantasies and nightmares into the visual language of books, magazine illustrations, posters, animated films, paintings and sculptures. He reaches both children and adults with his imaginary creatures and landscapes, juxtaposing the familiar with the fantastic to clarify this world and create new and lasting universes.

Delessert has illustrated more than eighty books, some translated in 14 languages, with millions of copies sold worldwide. From his groundbreaking *The Endless Party* (1967) along with his influential collaborations with Eugene Ionesco (*Contes 1, 2, 3, 4*) in French, and Jean Piaget (*How The Mouse...*), to his more recent award-winning *A Long Long Song, Ashes Ashes, Dance!, The Seven Dwarfs, Who Killed Cock Robin?, Humpty Dumpty, Big and Bad, Full Color, Moon Theater* and *Spartacus the Spider*. He is considered as one of the fathers of modern children's picture books. His illustrations have appeared in leading magazines and newspapers such as *The Atlantic Monthly, Le Monde* and *The New York Times*. His animated films include the adventures of the endearing Yok-Yok and creations for *Sesame Street*.

He is the recipient of thirteen gold and twelve silver medals of the American Society of Illustrators as well as the 1996 Hamilton King Award, and recently a finalist for the 2010 Hans Christian Andersen Award. In addition, twice the Premio Grafico at the Bologna World Children's Book Fair has honored him.

Throughout his career Delessert's work has won acclaim around the world. In 1975 his one-man retrospective hung at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, in the Louvre. A second retrospective, originated in 1991 by the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, travelled to Switzerland, France, Canada and five American cities, before heading to the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. The Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland initiated another retrospective in 1997, which travelled first to France and then to the School of Visual Arts Museum in New York.

Etienne currently lives in Lakeville, Connecticut, with his wife Rita Marshall and their son Adrien.

**About the Museum:**

Together with his wife Barbara, Eric Carle, the renowned author and illustrator of more than 70 books, including the 1969 classic *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, founded The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art as the first full-scale museum in this country devoted to national and international picture book art, conceived and built with the aim of celebrating the art that we are first exposed to

as children. Through the exploration of images that are familiar and beloved, it is The Museum's goal to provide an enriching, dynamic, and supportive context for the development of literacy and to foster in visitors of all ages and backgrounds the confidence to appreciate and enjoy art of every kind.

The Museum—which houses three galleries dedicated to rotating exhibitions of picture book art, a hands-on Art Studio, a Reading Library, an Auditorium, a Café, and a Museum Shop—is located at 125 West Bay Road, Amherst, MA. Museum hours are Tuesday through Friday 10 am to 4 pm, Saturday 10 am to 5 pm, and Sunday 12 noon to 5 pm. Admission is \$9 for adults, \$6 for children under 18, and \$22.50 for a family of four. For further information and directions, call 413-658-1100 or visit The Museum's website at [www.carlemuseum.org](http://www.carlemuseum.org).

**IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE FOR REPRODUCTION**

For additional press information and/or images,  
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