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A Bezael event looks at how local children's book illustrating is evolving

• By BARRY DAVIS

It is probably safe to say that when parents think about visual influences on their children, the first item on the list is TV or the Internet. But then there are also are books with illustrations that may very well convey the proverbial thousand words.

The latter is the subject of an innovative conference at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, which will take place at the Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus on May 5 and goes by the title "And This Illustrator Is Me – Illustrating Children's Books in Israel."

The Visual Communications Department event will address a range of relevant topics, including talks on "How to Illustrate a Street," featuring author Nurit Zarhi; "Women Illustrator-Writers" with award-winning septuagenarian artist Alona Frankel chief among the speakers; and "Visual Reading" with a panel that includes illustrat-

ed children's literature researcher Dr. Tor Gonnen, author and founder of the School of Visual Theater Marit Ben-Yisrael, and author-illustrator Rutu Modan, who is also a lecturer in the Visual Communications Department.

The Visual Reading session sounds intriguing. For a start, the mixed sensory implication of the title offers all sorts of possibilities. Modan is enthused about the upcoming event and will, no doubt, offer her listeners some of the insights she has gained during her two decades in the profession. "I studied graphic design at Bezalel with an emphasis on illustration," she says. "I always loved drawing and texts and stories, so illustrating books, for me, was the perfect combination."

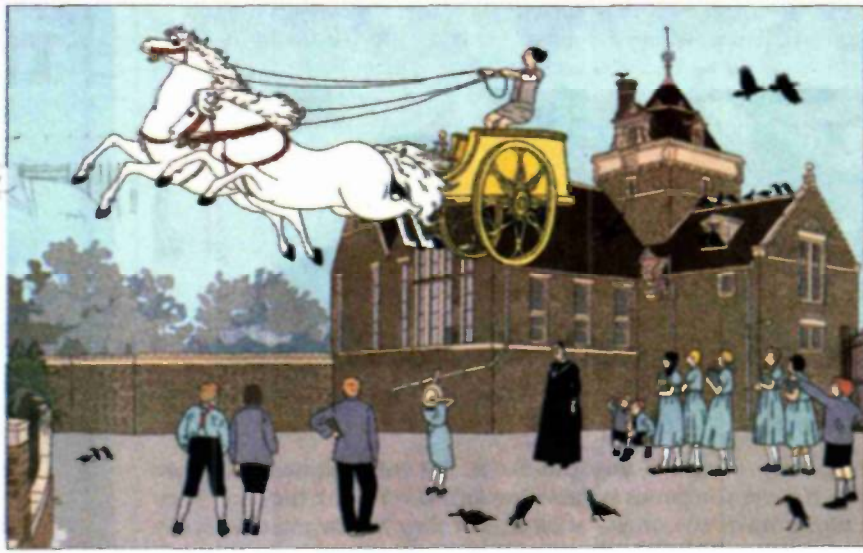
Naturally there have been changes in the field since Modan started out. "A lot has changed in children's book illustration," she states. "In those days the whole thing was very conservative. There were things you couldn't put in your drawings. It was all about blond kids and

conventional families."

Psychology, it seems, was an important factor in laying the guidelines for the permissible and the unacceptable. "I wasn't allowed to draw teeth," Modan recalls. "That was considered to be too frightening for young children. But today things are far more open and accessible, and techniques and materials have improved a lot."

The field was even more strictly regulated when Modan herself was a kid, although she had a parental escape route. "I was always interested in comics and caricatures. My parents spent a few years in the United States in the 1960s, and my mom built up a sizable collection of comics and caricatures. So I read things like *Peanuts*, *Popeye* and *Dennis the Menace*. But when I went to Beit Ariela [library], I was embarrassed to ask for *Peanuts* and other comic books for myself – I was already in my teens – so I'd say it was for my kid sister."

When discussing children's literature, there generally



'Nurit Zarhi's Big Book.'