



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN JEWISH
HISTORY

A Smithsonian Institution Affiliate

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 7, 2015

Media Contacts:

Yael Eytan
215.923.5978
773.551.6956 (c)
yeytan@nmajh.org

Ilana Blumenthal
215.391.4662
267.294.8425 (c)
iblumenthal@nmajh.org

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY PRESENTS NEW
EXHIBITION FOR THE YOUNG AND YOUNG-AT-HEART:
LYLE, LYLE, CROCODILE AND FRIENDS: THE ART OF BERNARD WABER



The National Museum of American Jewish History is pleased to announce that its newest special exhibition, *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber*, will be on view from **August 27 through Nov. 1**.

The exhibition, named after Waber's best known children's series, is the first major exhibition to explore the life and career of children's book writer and illustrator Bernard Waber (1921-2013). Through more than 90 original illustrations and preliminary sketches, dummy books, art supplies, and other memorabilia, the exhibition celebrates the exuberant creativity and artistic range Bernard Waber brought to the creation of his whimsical and emotionally resonant books. In addition to the iconic Lyle himself, the

exhibition explores Waber's fantastical world of cats and mice and very real children's issues, like first sleepovers and jealousy, through a cast of characters in stories such as *A Lion Named Shirley Williamson*, *Ira Sleeps Over*, *Do You See a Mouse?*, and *Courage*. The exhibition also includes Waber's fables and satires in which the author crafted deceptively simple tales that reward readers with their nutshell wisdom.

"The exhibition celebrates Bernard Waber's work and spirit, a fitting honor in the author's hometown of Philadelphia," states Dr. Josh Perelman, the Museum's chief curator and director of exhibitions and collections. "To tell the story of an author who has touched so many lives reflects our ongoing commitment to offering unique opportunities for visitors of all ages to engage with art, culture, and history."

Bernard Waber's career had its roots in his Philadelphia childhood, where the joy of books, drawing, and movies brought welcome respite to a family struggling through the Depression. But it was

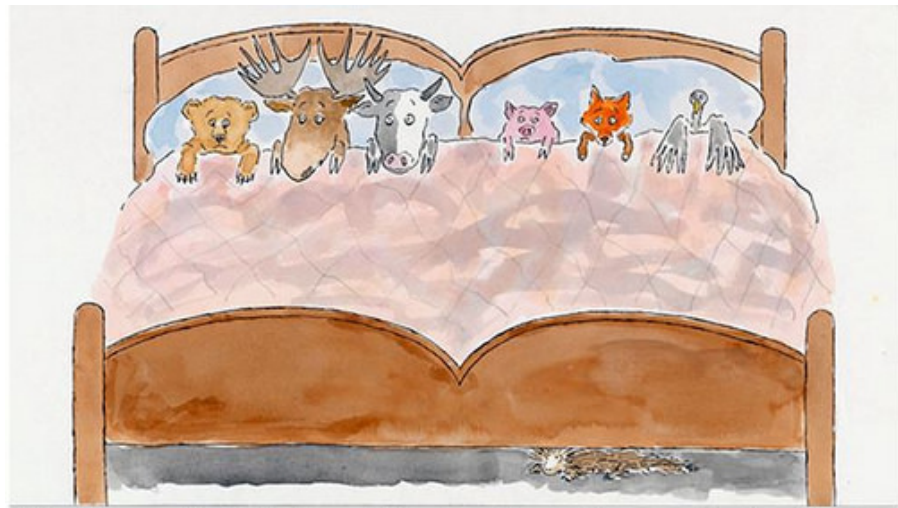


Illustration copyright 1997 by Bernard Waber. The author and illustrator enjoyed creating all sorts of animals, some of which are shown in the image above.

the extended bedtime reading sessions with his own three young children that ultimately led Waber to his life's calling. "Hearing the sound and rhythm of words, marveling at the creations of master illustrators, and struck by gleeful anticipation of embarking on journeys of imagination ignited in me a powerful need to write and illustrate picture books," said Waber. The result was a collection of now classic picture books whose characters, in the words of the show's curator, children's book historian Leonard S. Marcus, "go a long way toward defining what it means to be human."

Waber, the son of Eastern European immigrants, grew up in an observant Jewish home, spoke Yiddish, and considered Jewishness central to his identity. He studied at the Wharton Business School before changing directions after WWII and enrolling as a commercial-art major at the Philadelphia Museum School of Art (now University of the Arts). For most of his adult life, Waber worked in New York City, initially as a designer for Condé Nast and then at Time, Inc., where he worked on publications such as *Life* and *People*. Encouraged by an art director who saw the potential in his whimsical drawings,

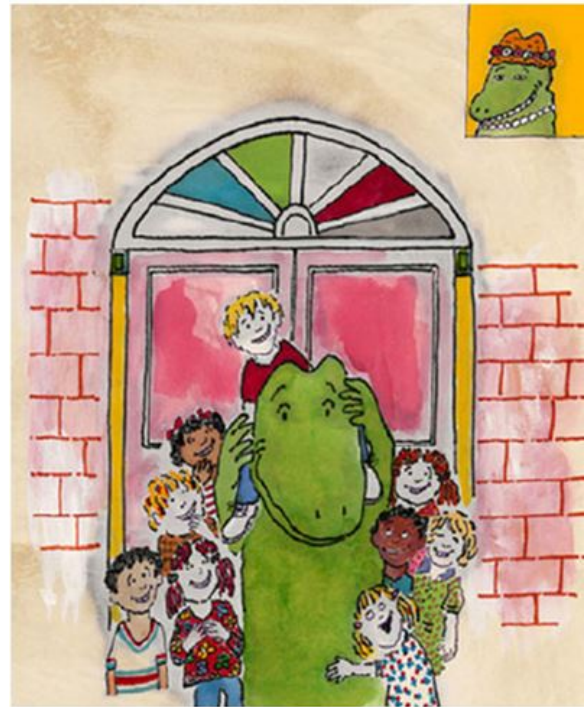


Illustration copyright 1987 by Bernard Waber.

Waber began to develop and submit his own story ideas to publishing houses. Eventually Houghton Mifflin (now Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) offered him a two book contract for *Lorenzo and the House on East 88th Street* – the first book in the Lyle series. Over his 50-year career, Waber created more than 30 picture books which sold over 1.75 million copies.

Bernard Waber's best-known character, the entertaining and endearing New Yorker Lyle the Crocodile, was originally inspired by art school sketching trips to the Philadelphia Zoo. Of those trips Waber wrote, "Oddly perhaps, I loved crocodiles. I loved drawing them. Their infinite bumps and ridges." Lyle's adventures extended into eight sequels, including *Lyle Walks the Dogs*, illustrated by the author's daughter, Paulis Waber.

Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber originated at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. The exhibition at the National Museum of American Jewish History adds several previously undiscovered illustrations from Waber's earliest works, including the first Lyle book, *The House on East 88th Street*. In the catalogue, the

exhibitions curator, Leonard S. Marcus writes, “The funny thing about Bernard Waber...was that, for the first thirty-eight years of his life, people warned him constantly against daydreaming. ‘Wake up!’ they would scold. ‘Snap out of it!...[Daydreaming] is...bad, bad, bad.’ Then Waber published his first children’s books and people began urging him to daydream *more*.”

Visitors to ***Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber*** and its related programming will be able to enjoy the plentiful fruits of Waber’s daydreams and pay him tribute in his home town of Philadelphia.

Related Programs:

Grandparents Day

Sunday, September 13

10 am – 3 pm

The Museum is open and FREE from 10 am – 3 pm.

(The Museum will close early for Rosh Hashanah.)

Grandparents are invited to bring their grandkids for Second Sunday at the Museum where they can explore *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber*, engage in the Museum’s interactive and family-friendly core exhibition, read a story together in a cozy spot, or release their creative spirits with *Lyle*-themed arts and crafts.

Second Sunday: Croctober

Sunday, October 11

The Museum is open from 10 am – 5:30 pm.

On this special Second Sunday, kids can join the Museum and our friends from the Please Touch Museum and jkidphilly to get their faces painted, explore *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber*, and find their inner crocodiles with *Lyle*-themed arts and crafts. Families can also take a journey through time in the

Museum's interactive, family-friendly permanent exhibition, and read stories together in a cozy spot. More details to come on NMAJH.org.

In partnership with Old City Fest and jkidphilly, a program of the Jewish Learning Venture.

Lyle, Lyle Curator and Friends: A Conversation

Sunday, October 25 at 2 pm

\$8/Free for Members

Featuring **Leonard S. Marcus**, curator of *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber*, and leading writer about children's books and the people who create them; **Patrick Rodgers**, curator at The Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia and former curator of the Maurice Sendak Collection; and illustrator **Paulis Waber**, Bernard Waber's daughter.

In partnership with The Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia

Further information on Bernard Waber's life and a complete listing of his books, including the most recent, *Ask Me* (published posthumously), is available on his website, bernardwaber.com.

Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends: The Art of Bernard Waber is organized by The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, Amherst, Massachusetts. Support for the organization of this exhibition has been generously provided by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Major support for this exhibition at NMAJH has been provided by Hallee and David Adelman, Jen Mendel and Fred Fox, the Louis and Bessie Stein Foundation Fund #2 Audrey Merves, Trustee, and the Solomon and Sylvia Bronstein Foundation. Additional support by Lee Meyerhoff Hendler, Elaine L. Lindy, and The Rittenhouse Foundation.

###

The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the 350-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Tuesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. NMAJH is closed most Mondays, including federal holidays and some Jewish holidays. Museum admission is \$12.00 for adults, \$11.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID. On Wednesdays from Memorial Day through Labor Day, the Museum will stay open until 8:00 pm. Admission after 5:00 PM is pay-what-you-wish. For more information, visit NMAJH.org or call 215.923.3811.

