



The Art of Free to Be...You and Me

A TRAVELING EXHIBITION

Organized by

The ERIC CARLE MUSEUM OF PICTURE BOOK ART

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION



The Art of Free to Be...You and Me explores the profound societal impact and enduring legacy of the groundbreaking 1972 record and 1974 book, as well as the multifaceted project's evolution through subsequent picture books and TV specials.

Organized by guest curator Margi Hofer, the exhibition celebrates actress Marlo Thomas's radical project. Among the approximately 60 objects on view are original artworks, first edition books, the classic album cover, period photographs, audio recordings, magazine articles, and other ephemera.

The exhibition features 26 original artworks by 15 artists across all three books, including original art from the 1974 publication by Bascombe and Arnold Lobel; original illustrations from *Free to Be...a Family* (1987) by Leo and Diane Dillon, Susan Jeffers, Jerry Pinkney, and John Steptoe; and art from the 35th anniversary book by Tony DiTerlizzi, LeUyen Pham, and Peter Reynolds.



Exhibition Highlights

The Art of Free to Be...You and Me opens with the cultural context of the early 1970s, when Marlo Thomas was dismayed to discover that many books available for her young niece reinforced sexist gender stereotypes. On view is one such book, *I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl!* (1970) by Whitney Darrow, Jr., which presented strict binaries such as "Boys can eat. Girls can cook." Determined to create a record album that would inspire girls and boys to become their best selves, Thomas enlisted the help of feminist friends including Gloria Steinem and Letty Cottin Pogrebin at *Ms.* magazine.

The first non-sexist record for kids, *Free to Be...You and Me* revolutionized children's entertainment. With its iconic bright pink cover, the album featured catchy songs and amusing stories performed by Thomas and her celebrity friends that invited kids into a world free of gender and racial stereotypes and encouraged them to embrace their individuality and celebrate diversity. Visitors to the exhibition are invited to listen to songs from the 1972 album, including the title track as well as "When We Grow Up" and "It's All Right to Cry."



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Building upon the record's runaway success, the bestselling 1974 book featured stories, poems, and songs illustrated by leading children's book artists. Original artworks on view from the

book include Bascombe's bold woodcut for the story of Atalanta, a feminist retelling of a Greek myth that celebrates female athleticism, intellectual curiosity, and independence; and Arnold Lobel's pencil drawing for *Dudley Pippin and the Principal*, about a frustrated boy who is encouraged by a kindly school principal to express his emotions.

Visitors can enjoy highlights from the 1974 ABC Television special, which encountered initial pushback. When Thomas screened the TV special for ABC network executives, one told her that the song "William's Doll" – in which a boy yearns for a doll to love and care for – would "turn every boy in America into a sissy." The exhibition features vivid animation cels exhibited for the first time, including examples from "William's Doll" and "Ladies First," an adaptation of Shel Silverstein's cautionary tale that challenges outmoded ideals of femininity.

A decade after the publication of *Free to Be... You and Me*, its creators began planning a sequel that would challenge preconceived notions of family. *Free to Be... a Family* was published in 1987, and an album and TV special debuted the following year. On view in the exhibition is a project planning document from 1984, heavily annotated by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, which offers a window into the team's brainstorming session. Artworks from the sequel include an original watercolor illustration by Jerry Pinkney for Lucille Clifton's poem "We" and "They", imagining a world of unity and cooperation, with children under a hopeful rainbow.



TOP LEFT: Bascombe, Illustration for *Free to Be... You and Me* by Marlo Thomas & Friends (Running Press), 1974. Collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum. © 1974 Bascombe.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Jerry Pinkney, Illustration for *Free to be... a Family: A Book about All Kinds of Belonging* (Running Press). Collection of Gloria Pinkney. Courtesy of R. Michelson Galleries, Northampton. © 1987 Jerry Pinkney.

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION cont.



In 2008, Marlo Thomas and her collaborators released a 35th anniversary edition of the book with all new illustrations for the next generation of children. The exhibition features Joe Mathieu's artwork for "Boy Meets Girl" and LeUyen Pham's illustrations for "William's Doll," showing William being taunted by his peers as he hugs his baby doll. The exhibition concludes with

a consideration of *Free to Be's* impact and legacy. Fan letters written to Marlo Thomas vividly attest to the powerful influence it had on children across the country. A newly commissioned illustration by non-binary artist Audrey Helen Weber reflects on *Free to Be's* legacy and advocates for acceptance of the full spectrum of gender identities.

LeUyen Pham, Illustration for *Free to Be... You and Me* (35th Anniversary Edition) by Marlo Thomas & Friends (Running Press). Collection of the artist. © 2008 LeUyen Pham.



FREE TO BE... YOU AND ME

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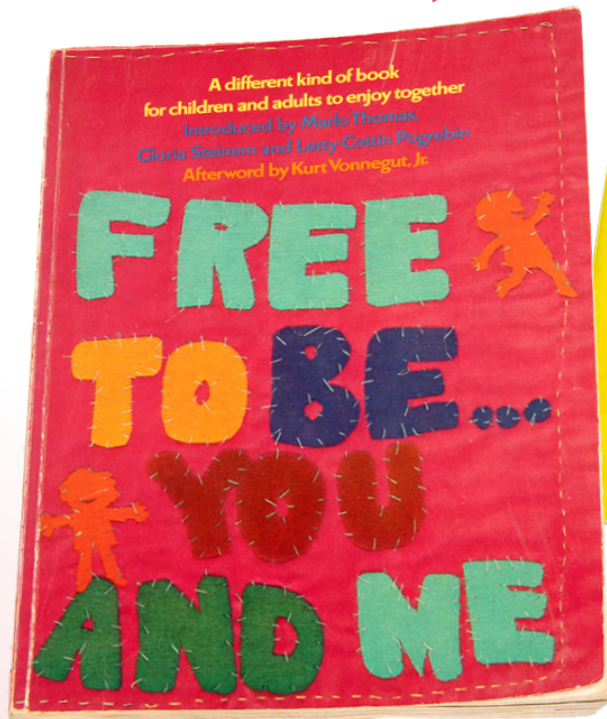
ABOUT THE ERIC CARLE MUSEUM



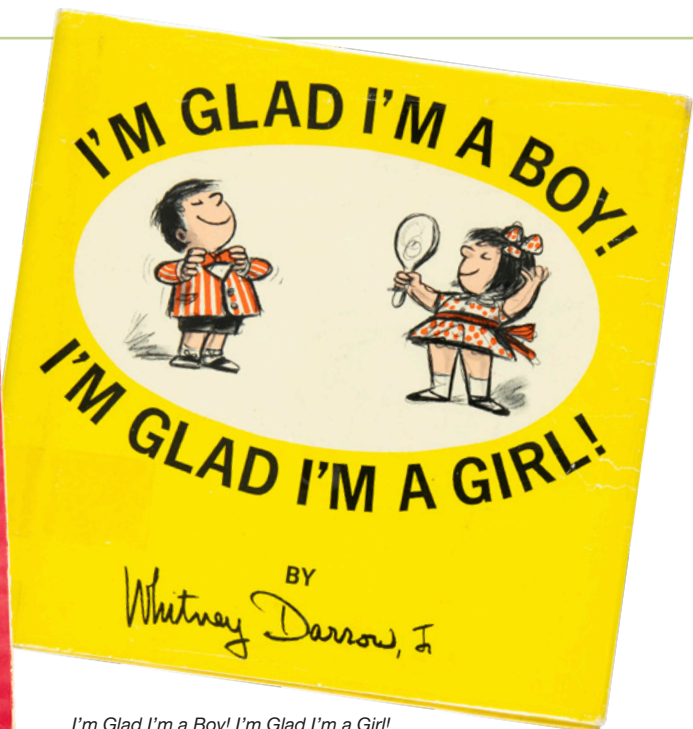
Founded in 2002, **The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art** is the international champion of picture book art. Situated on 7.5 acres in Amherst, Massachusetts, The Carle houses a rich and deep collection of art of more than 300 picture book artists, including Eric Carle (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*), and illuminates its collection through exhibitions, education, programming, and art-making—making it a critical resource for picture book artists and authors, and

art-loving communities locally, nationally, and abroad. The Carle's mission is to elevate picture book art and inspire a love of art, art creation, and reading. Since opening its doors more than 20 years ago, The Carle has welcomed more than one million visitors—plus more than four million additional museumgoers who have enjoyed its touring exhibitions around the world. **Learn more at www.carlemuseum.org.**

Featured Art and Objects



Free to Be... You and Me by Marlo Thomas & Friends.
© 1974 Free to be Foundation, Inc.



I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl!
by Whitney Darrow, Jr. Courtesy of The Eric Carle
Museum of Picture Book Art. © 1970 Whitney Darrow, Jr.



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Featured Art and Objects



Free to Be... You and Me record album with illustrations by Laurie Glick © 1972, Free To Be Foundation, Inc. Used by permission.



Ms. Magazine, March 1974. Photograph of Marlo Thomas and Dominic Cusk by Mary Ellen Mark. Courtesy of The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art.



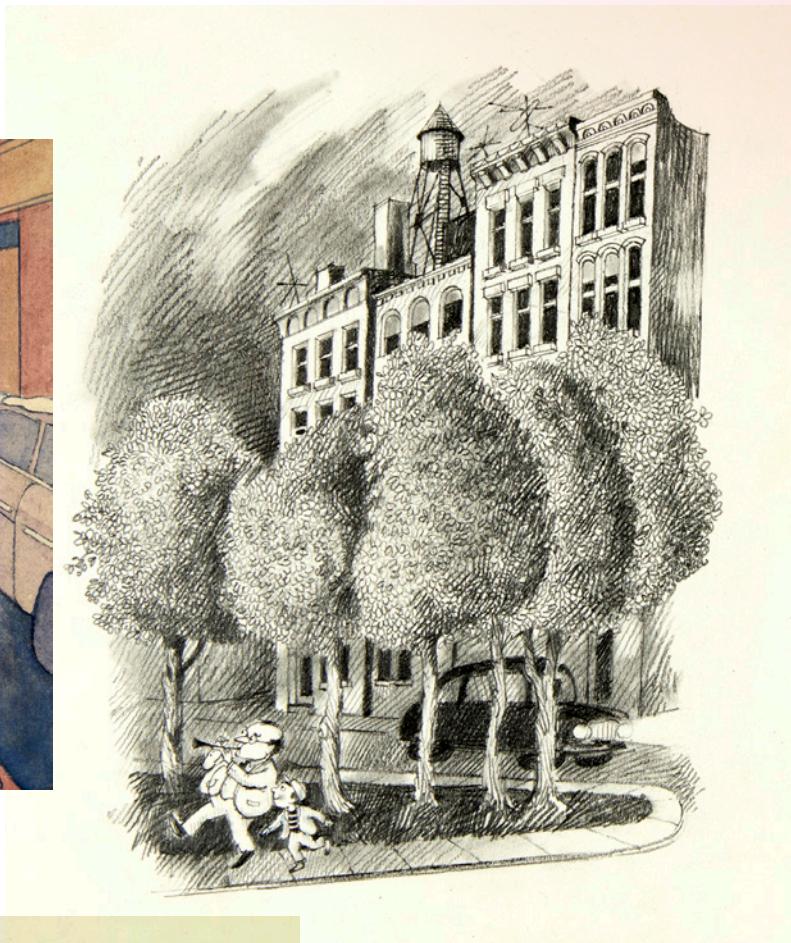
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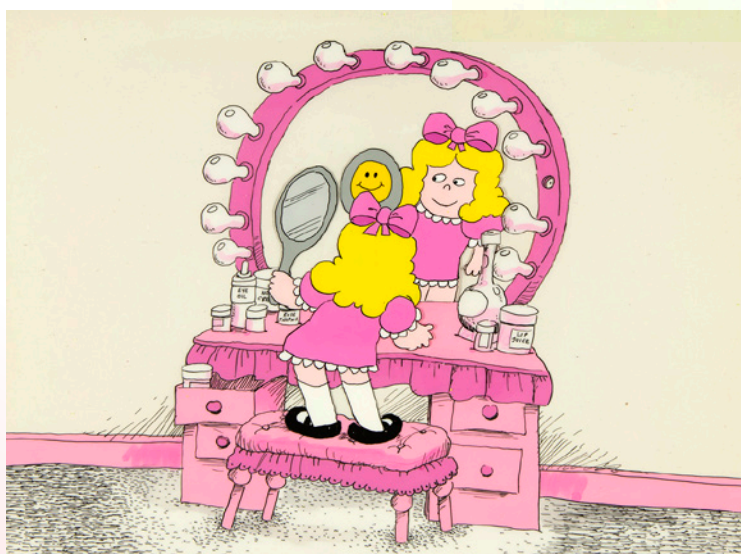
Featured Art and Objects



Bascombe, Illustration for *Free to Be... You and Me* by Marlo Thomas & Friends (Running Press). Collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum. © 1974 Bascombe.



Arnold Lobel, Illustration for *Free to Be... You and Me* by Marlo Thomas & Friends (Running Press), 1974. Arnold Lobel Papers, Children's Literature Research Collections. University of Minnesota Libraries. © 1965 Arnold Lobel.



Murakami-Wolf Productions, Animation cel for "Ladies First," *Free to Be... You and Me* television special (ABC, 1974). Courtesy of the Free to Be Foundation. © Murakami-Wolf Productions.

FREE TO BE... YOU AND ME

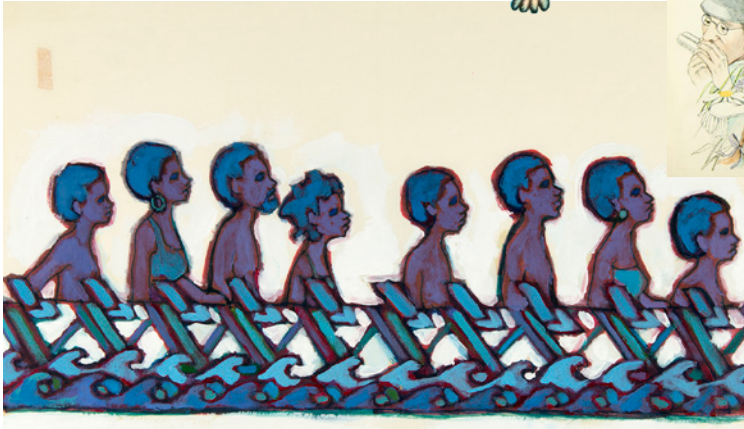
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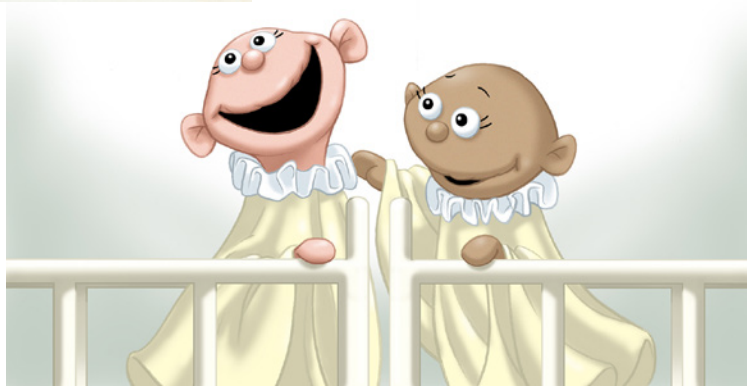
Featured Art and Objects



Susan Jeffers, Illustration for *Free to be...a Family: A Book about All Kinds of Belonging* (Running Press). Courtesy of R. Michelson Galleries, Northampton. © 1987 Susan Jeffers.



John Steptoe, Illustration for *Free to be...a Family: A Book about All Kinds of Belonging* (Running Press). Collection of Bweela Steptoe. © 1987 John Steptoe.



Joe Mathieu, Illustration for *Free to Be... You and Me* (35th Anniversary Edition) by Marlo Thomas & Friends (Running Press). Courtesy of the artist. © 2008 Joe Mathieu.



Audrey Helen Weber, *Dress Up*, 2024. Collection of the artist. © Audrey Helen Weber.



Free to Be... You and Me Learning Module (McGraw-Hill Films). Free to Be Foundation Archives. © 1975 Free to Be Foundation Inc.

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Installation Images



EXHIBITION CONTENTS



The exhibition comprises 26 original works of art as well as first edition books, the original record album, and related ephemera. All artwork is professionally framed and includes hanging hardware and security plates for installation. Exhibition text is provided as a Word document; it is the borrower's responsibility to print labels and exhibition graphics. Gallery cases are not included, though object mounts can be sent on request.

Organizer: The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art

Curator: Margi Hofer

Shipping and Insurance: All artwork must travel crated via a fine arts shipper approved by The Carle. A Carle courier may be required to oversee unpacking, condition checks, installation, and lighting. It is the borrowing institutions' responsibility to cover all transportation and insurance costs (insurance values will be provided). A certificate of insurance is required.

Gallery Requirements: Borrowing institutions must send an AAM Standard Facility Report and meet the following requirements: ability to control and maintain a stable gallery environment

(temperature of 70 degrees F +/- 2, relative humidity of 50% +/- 5%); ability to control and maintain light levels at five-to-seven-foot candles; and 24-hour security monitoring. Ideal gallery size is 1,000 square feet, or approximately 100 linear feet.

Media: The Carle will provide 10-12 high resolution images with cleared permissions to use for publicity and exhibition graphics.

Ephemera, letters from children to Marlo Thomas and other documentation connected to the project is available.

A Fisher Price record player also is included.

Dates: The exhibition is on view at The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art through April 6, 2025 and is available to travel beginning May 2025.

Participation Fee: \$30,000 for three-month venue. Crating, shipping, insurance, and courier expenses are separate from the Participation Fee.

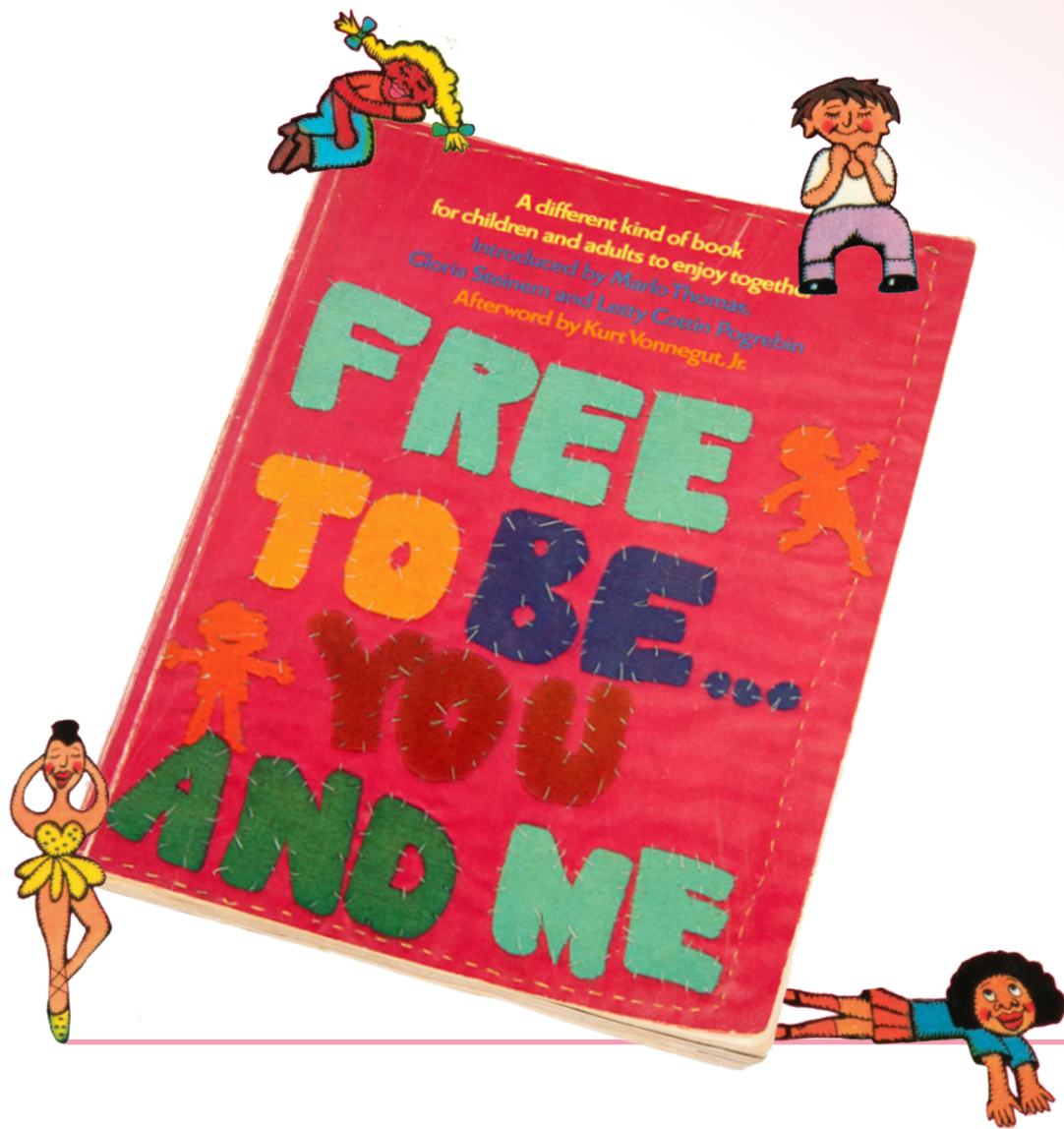
Contact: Jennifer Schantz,
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