About the nomination of Akin Duzakın by ÇGYD (Çocuk ve Gençlik Yayınları Derneğini) 
TURKEY

1. Biography

Akin Düzakin (Gaziantep, Turkey, 1961) has spent his childhood and early years in Ankara, in Turkey. In 1985 he graduated from METU (Middle Eastern Technical University, Ankara) Faculty of Architecture, Department of Industrial Design. In 1987, he went to Norway to study Graphic Design and Illustration. After graduating from Applied Fine Arts School in Oslo in 1994, he started working as an independent illustrator. He currently lives and works in Norway as he did since he moved there. He is married and has two grown up children.

Akin Düzakin devoted most of his professional life to picture books, to which he was passionately attached. He has illustrated 52 picture books so far. He wrote the text of three of these in the Norwegian language. 14 of these picture books, were translated into other languages, totaly in to 22 languages. He has worked for publisher in other countries; such as Danmark, Canada and Turkey.

Akin Düzakin took active roles in professional organizations in Norway and held various positions in bodies affiliated to the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

Books illustrated by Akin Düzakin, have been awarded many times over the years in Norway and also received special honorable mentions in international evaluations; including two times in Bologna Children’s Book Fair, and were included in the distinguished books and honors lists on many occasions.
2. Potrait of the candidate; Akin Duzakin
3. A statement describing the candidate's contribution to literature for young people

Akin Düzakin are very interested in exploring the dynamic and collaboration between text and image in picturebooks. He uses every opportunity visual storytelling gives him to enrich the story in dialog with the verbal language. He has always been drawn to picture books that tackle significant themes in a way that makes them accessible for young children, and naturally that includes psychological and political themes.

4. Interviews

Interview by Picturebook makers
Akin Duzakin
TURKEY / NORWAY

Akin Duzakin is an illustrator and children’s book author who studied Industrial Design in Turkey and Illustration at the Royal College of Art in Oslo. He’s illustrated a wide range of children’s books and has received numerous accolades, including the Brage Prize, the Unni Sands Bildebokpris Award, and the Bokkunstprisen Award. In this post, Akin talks about illustrating ‘Hvorfor er jeg her?’ (Why am I here?), which was written by Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen and published by Magikon Forlag. This profound picturebook received a Special Mention in the 2015 BolognaRagazzi Awards.

Visit Akin Duzakin’s website

Akin: It all began with a discussion I had with the author of the book, Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen. We were talking about the tragic terror attacks that had taken place just a few years earlier on the island of Utøya and in Oslo city centre. This terrible incident was motivated by hate for ‘others’ – immigrants who had come to Norway over the course of the past few decades. As a country, Norway stands united, a large, strong family in which everyone condemns this evil deed in the most exemplary manner, collectively grieving our losses. In spite of this, any political debate in the wake of the tragedy was noticeably absent. This has bothered me from the very day the events took place. I’ve always been drawn to picture books that tackle significant themes in a way that makes them accessible for young children, and naturally that often includes political themes. This was something that the author was equally interested in exploring. We talked about creating a politically-charged picture book that might investigate the idea of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, the ‘others’ in society. These ‘others’ are individuals affected by hunger, war and other natural catastrophes. They are individuals forced to flee their homes, poverty-stricken and helpless, individuals who are emigrants or who dream of a better life in which they can successfully keep themselves and their loved ones out of harm’s way.
When I was sent the first draft of the text to read, I was a little surprised by the unusual way the author had chosen to tackle this; the manuscript consisted of a list of questions rather than a traditional narrative. I quickly realised that this was a clever method for incorporating many elements of this comprehensive theme when compared with what might be possible within a traditional children’s story. I was pleased to see a philosophical text that marvelled at the world and which was so deeply connected to topical events that we, both as adults and as children, see playing out every day in the media. The questions in the text were concerned with what our lives might be like if we had been born elsewhere in the world. These were apparently simple yet simultaneously challenging questions relating to a child’s existence, and allowed the author to explore the lives of others in this turbulent day and age.

In my role as illustrator, the text proved particularly challenging. Since the book was intended to be a fictional picture book, I was keen to add a certain narrative structure that might weave together all of these questions in a way that made sense. This wasn’t only important for ensuring the book would fit within its intended genre, but also for the young people who would experience it. I felt that a sense of narrative would capture the interest of young readers and inspire greater empathy and engagement. The protagonist posing these questions should live, experience and participate in the text’s tragic events. For this reason, I decided to depict a journey in which the protagonist moves from a safe haven to various other locations in the text’s brutal world.

But this is in no way a realistic journey. Instead, this idea of movement acted as an allegory for the protagonist’s conscious voyage. Constance immediately recognised that this imagined journey created fluency between the various scenes and encouraged me to continue. After giving it some thought, I decided to employ water, an element of beauty and of mystery. Endless rivers, lakes and oceans serve to divide us just as much as they might connect us to others.

After this I drew an island as the child’s home. The water surrounding the island is reminiscent of a mythological flood. The island seems cold and the child is lonely. At this point I required one more visual element: a boat to set the tale in motion, which ought to be as practical as it would be metaphorical, and which the protagonist would require in order to escape their loneliness. This would be a small boat, in other words. I made the appearance of this boat as simple as possible, almost along the lines of an archetype. This little boat would carry her to distant lands and different people. The water became a useful pathway of sorts, binding these various places and events. On occasions it even carried the protagonist to places where there was no water at all. In this way, each of the questions in the book formed a part of the story within the illustration that could be read both as a very concrete voyage, yet also as an entirely imaginary journey.

I spent considerable time and effort working on the protagonist’s appearance. I didn’t want to draw a child that looked typically Scandinavian, but instead wanted to create a character that would be less easy to define, both ethnically and in terms of gender. For that reason the protagonist is androgynous, with characteristics that suggest she...
could be from several different countries. I hope this might make it possible for children from many different places in the world to identify with the child asking the questions. Norwegian society is growing steadily more ethnically diverse. It would be madness if the protagonist designed to represent ‘us’ in the book were too easily associated with one particular group, and this would ultimately have gone against the book’s intentions.

Just to confuse the readers a little, I gave into temptation and drew an exotic animal – a lemur – that the protagonist meets during her journey. When we see that this animal is also with the child on the island, it appears that all that is depicted in the text may not be a flight of fancy after all. This little element was something that I really liked and is one that I use whenever I have the opportunity; I like the idea that something that exists within our thoughts might materialise in reality, and the way that the boundary between the real world and imagination becomes slightly obliterated. This little additional component in the story is useful in another sense: it shows us that our protagonist hasn’t simply been a passive spectator as tragic events have unfolded around her, but has stepped in and done something useful and concrete, saving lives. In other words, I wanted to show that the child was able to take responsibility and action.

It was no simple task to create particular scenes in the book, as the media conveys extremely powerful images of difficult and moving events and social conditions on an almost daily basis. It was a challenge to compete with these images in a picture book for children, and required a subtle balance, combining a convincing depiction of tragedy with an appropriate visual aesthetic. I hope that I succeeded in depicting the gravity of the situation within the book without making this either too ugly or too beautiful.

I used a mixed technique of soft pastels and coloured pencils, followed by digital touch-ups. I used soft pastels to apply the base tones to large sections of the illustrations. I roughly created shape in pastel tones and defined the areas of light. After that I used coloured pencils to add detail and to illustrate objects more precisely. I also used coloured pencils to draw different structures that define and divide the different surfaces, and eventually I added shades of colour to the entire scene or large sections of the illustration using Photoshop. Occasionally I added finishing touches to a few small details digitally before adding some additional colour.

https://blog.picturebookmakers.com/post/132927505946/akin-duzakin
Interview by Shhhbooks

“While I am making narrative pictures, I give great importance to what is visual, to meet the style of the story. In other words, in the dialog of the visual and the verbal; It is important to pay attention to ‘tone’. This partnership could be built on either harmony or on contrast.”

This week we chat with Akın Düzakın, an artist / illustrator and children’s book author of Turkish origin living in Norway with valuable contributions to children’s literature. Düzakın has completed 50 picture book projects so far. Artist, whose books have been translated into more than 20 languages; He has received many awards, including the Brage and Unni Sands Bildebokpris Award, and has been nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

With Düzakın, we talked about his entry into the children’s books field, how he approaches book projects and the current state of the illustration profession.

“I live on the edge of a coastal town in Norway, in a countryside solitude, with nature. As long as I have internet in my ears and coffee in my cup; I draw and paint all day, not noticing the hours. I add and remove. I change it and fix it. Very enjoyable. Sometimes... If the pictures are as what I want, complete happiness. If the weather of the north permits, I have lunch with squirrels in the garden. Sometimes gazelles also want seeds, and they come too. Perhaps this is their thousands-year-old route. I don’t know... In this remote, calm and clean corner of the world; my routes are rather digital. When the blessings of technology and nature combine, life is more wonderful.”

When did you decide to take up this profession and devote your life to illustration? Have you been dreaming of being an illustrator since childhood?

I can say that I was very interested in everything visual since I was very young. Those days, there was no television yet and we could go to the movies only very rarely. Picture books were also very few, so were the pictures in books. So every little illustration in our life was worth just so much more. In fact, he had a kind of hunger for painting and visual expression. We even got acquainted with shadow play through the radio. In my childhood, I was very interested in cinema. This is still the case, but I used to go to the movies at that time, eager to be a director. Cinema is a really difficult art. Aside from its artistic complexity, since it costs a lot of money; the control of the process must always be with others. That’s why; It was impossible for me not to care for the freedom and independence of people who express themselves with a paper and a pencil. Both writers and illustrators have such an opportunity. This is a very democratic opportunity. And over time, I steered my interest in storytelling and painting into a medium that I could do on my own as a profession. I used to be interested in illustration since my first days at university. For example, making posters was a joyful and honorable thing back then. I’m talking about the end of the 70’s and the beginning of the 80’s. Those years, I was studying Industrial Design at ODTÜ (METU Middle East Technical University). As the industry that would hire us after
graduation had not yet developed, as we were the first graduates; we were scattered all over and starting doing pretty much everything. I started studying again. This time I was at the Royal Academy of Applied Fine Arts in Norway. The 90’s… I studied graphic design and illustration, but I still had dreams of becoming a filmmaker even though I knew it would never happen. Therefore, illustration being essentially “storytelling”; was like a remedy to me. Because they combine both drawing and storytelling, I turned to comics and picture books. This later became more than a profession for me, it became a passion that defines me. Being a book illustrator usually requires working as a team. Words and drawings come from two separate minds, join on the pages of a book and collaborate. But sometimes there are people who both write and draw. As a matter of fact, this is taken up rapidly; by more artists. Of the 50 picture books I have worked on; I wrote the text for 3 of them myself. Although I do not see myself as a writer; I’m designing new books that I can complete on my own. In my own books, pictures tell the story rather. Words assist pictures just a little. On the other hand, recently, I am also interested in silent books. That is, it has no verbal content; books where the story is told only in pictures. I think maybe one day I can try this difficult but attractive format too.

Your book “Why Am I Here?” was awarded Special Mention at the 2015 Bologna Awards, could you tell us about its creation processes?
Actually, the creation of that book is based on a very tragic event. On July 22, 2011; It was one of the very, very rare terrorist incidents in Norway’s history, and it was perhaps one of the greatest tragedies the world had ever seen. An extreme right terrorist; killed 77 people in two different places that day. He was xenophobic and accused his own state of opening the country’s doors to foreigners. Even today, we still feel the trauma of this event. Authors and illustrators, like everyone else, were overwhelmed with emotion. We wanted to express ourselves, to raise our voices against the atrocity. The man was convicted, yet the mentality behind this terror had not been given a complete response. I also wanted to write or draw something on this subject. I relayed this intention to a fellow writer, Constance (Constance Ø. Nilssen). As a follow up to the same conversation, this book was formed. It’s a story based on a child’s solidarity and empathy with all children in the world. It’s actually a series of questions rather than a story. The book begins;

Why am I here?
Right here.
What if I lived somewhere else?
Somewhere way different.
Maybe; somewhere across on the other side of the world.
There also many people live
More than here
If I lived there, would I be someone else?
Some one asking ‘why am I here’.
What if I lived in a large city full of millions of people?
All Alone
There is a kid that lives like that. Alone...
In the streets, under the bridges...
Yes; only then, I would dream to be somewhere else.
This book, I am happy to say, has been translated into many languages including Turkish.
How did you discover your own style?

Actually, I do not see myself as an illustrator with a unique style. I think this must be because I don’t have a very personal voice of my own. But of course, inevitably, from the complexity of all the things I could and could not do; Naturally, I have a personal style arising from the technique and tools I use. This is inevitable. I have never specifically tried to create this. While I was learning to paint, with the effect of the themes and stories I worked on; I can say that it occurred spontaneously and slowly. As the techniques and tools I used changed, so did my style. I can say that even in the books I work on parallely; I am having to draw in slightly different styles. Whatever it is that maybe my style, may change again over time. Of course, I have no objection to that. I can even say that I want and expect this. I think the thing called style should not be a branding element that will always be done / used for a lifetime.

While creating your drawings, what are the most important points you consider?

I am a storyteller. I always try to bring together the elements and needs of the story with my artistic talents and opportunities. All the elements of the painting are important here; color, composition, content, craftsmanship, technique and texture. When I paint narrative, I attach great importance to the visuals and the style of the story coming together. In other words, in the verbal dialog of the visual; It is important to pay attention to the “tone”. This partnership can be built on harmony or on contrast. That is; funny, philosophical, tragic, conceptual or absurd cannot be told with the same stroke.

What do you pay attention to when choosing the text you will illustrate?

I think only one thing matters, and that is the quality of the text. What it is, is difficult to define, but a trained mind immediately sees what will stand out from the multitude and substantiate itself. I prefer to leave this to others who know this work and this quality well, namely the publishers. So I say – let the text choose, that me better -. Sometimes, when a text I never expected finds me, I go; hooray! I’m glad, something exciting will definitely come out of here, and immediately roll up my sleeves. Then I tell myself, as Pippi Longstocking also says, “I’ve never done this before, so I’ll definitely succeed!” Selecting every theme and book on one’s own can at worst destroy surprises, wonder and curiosity, perhaps audacity. I have never complained that a book project that arrives on my desk drags me that way or this way; constantly I push to improve myself. I see this more as an opportunity. I’d like to give an example, I think it’s been twenty years or so… One day, an offer came from a publishing house. They wanted me to picture a story as a picture book. When I initially read the text, I first thought there was something wrong with it. How could a picture book come out of this? There was only one person in the story and that person turned invisible on page three. This man is invisible; he was very surprised and very upset about this situation, and he was looking for himself everywhere throughout the whole story. He was not in the book, but he was the only character in the book. I pondered a little and phoned the editor with joy, and this strange but wonderful story, I said I would paint with great enthusiasm. I didn’t know what to do, but I liked the challenge here. This book has been amongst the most enjoyable I have ever worked on.
How interested are children in contemporary illustration books?

I’m sure it’s a little different in every country. Books have a very difficult struggle with new technology, and that has been going on for a long time. Let’s see how much longer the books will survive this war. In my childhood, the book was a rare luxury. Now books are cheap and they are everywhere, but they are dissipating in the face of moving and audio media. As children grow up, I want them to never break away from picture books. Of course, for this to be possible, picture books also need to grow up with the child; but that’s another matter. Rather, this is happening: Children are growing rapidly, leaving picture books to “little ones” and shifting to computer games. Therefore, it looks like a generation with poor literacy will soon arrive. But on the other hand, there is a shift from verbal language to visual language. This is actually a consolation for visual artists like me. The world of picture books for the very young is still the safest and most sheltered. This is the first place where they meet and get introduced to art. As the books proliferate, so does the variety. Contemporary children’s books exist everywhere and for everyone. As if they can offer something for almost any subject. You know, we get the feeling that “there is everything on the internet”, children’s books have been a bit like that lately.

What do you think of the children’s books market today? Are the themes so different from what you have worked on earlier?

This topic is quite related to the previous question. I do not know how accurately I can make a determination. Like a researcher, one has to look at it from high above and then dive deep and think. When I look from the corner where I stand, the themes and general trends of children’s books are changing colorfully, being influenced by the past decades. The state of the world is also reflected in children’s books. It is as if the issues of “war” and “immigrants” have become more important in the books of recent years. Of course, “environmental awareness” has become a frequent issue. In fact, we can say that there is no subject that cannot be mentioned in children’s books. The important thing is to bring things within reach of children. When viewed from a somewhat long term perspective, the differences seen can be more obvious and meaningful. While in the past, when children were educated by and shaped in books, this slowly evolved, and now the stories of more competent, more skilled children are told more often. My impression is that; it is mostly desired that children should cope with the difficulties they face, themselves. In other words, children are now viewed as more independent and more competent individuals. They too, maybe due to this reason; are becoming more independent and competent individuals. I do not know exactly, we have to contemplate, debate. Some time ago, a critic wrote this, about children’s books:

“In the past, adults used to educate children, now I’m seeing, in new books children try to educate their parents.” I especially felt that he was referring to a book I had illustrated. In that book; a girl stood on the table, complaining… “I don’t understand these adults at all. Because I’m naughty, they love me less than my stupid brother who is always well behaved and sits still!” This injustice should not be read as an invitation for the child to behave, on the contrary; we have to read the book like a stick intended for grownups. What do you mean to love less? How can a child agree to this? It has become more important lately to be able to look at the world from a child’s perspective, to see from her level and to put the child’s emotional world at the
center. As some books deal with more complex themes, they have become products that siblings of different ages and even parents can enjoy together. It is very nice for families to have such books they can associate collectively; of course.

It was an absolute pleasure to chat with you, thank you!


5. List of awards and other distinctions

Prizes:
Brage-prize- in category for book for children and youth, 1997 / ”Tvillingssøster”
Prize for the best non-fiction picture book, by The Ministry of Culture, 1995 /”Noa”
Special Mention in the 1997 BolognaRagazzi Awards forTvillingbror,
(Twin Brother) Liv Marie Austrem, Samlaget,
Unni Sands prize for picture books, 1998 / ”Over jordet”
Silver - “Most beatutiful book of the year” by Grafill – 2000 / Book illustration
Prize of Ministry of Culture of Norway for picture books, 2001 /
”Min storebror apen”
Silver -Visuelt, by Grafill– 2001 / CD cover
Silver - Visuelt, by Grafill– 2002 / Illustration
Gold - Visuelt, by Grafill – 2002 / Book cover
Prize for BookArt – “Bokkunstprisen”, by Grafill 2006
Silver - Most beautiful book of the year, Grafill 2013/ Picture book
Special Mention in the 2014 BolognaRagazzi Awards, ‘Hvorfor er jeg her’
(Why am I here, Constance Ørbeck Nilsen)
6. Complete bibliography of the books for children and young people

List of picture books:

1. Vått og Svart, Jon Fosse, Samlaget, 1994
2. Tvillingbror, Liv Marie Austrem, Samlaget, 1995
4. Herr Siml prøver å finne seg selv, Kjell Erik Johnsen, Cappelen, 1997
5. Noa, Tor Åge Bringsvær, Gyldendal Tiden, 1997
6. Over jordet, Oddmund Hagen, Samlaget 1998
7. Elefantevangeliet, Hans Sande, Gyldendal Tiden, 1999
8. Pinocchios nye liv, Unni Lindel, Familievennen Forlag, 1999
9. Rund jordet, Oddmund Hagen, Samlaget, 2000
10. Guds Klovn, Tor Åge Bringsvær, Gyldendal Tiden, 2000
11. Fars ansikt, Cecilie Løveid, Gyldendal Tiden, 2000
12. Om dagen kan ein flyge, Rønnaug Kleiva, Samlaget, 2001
15. Bort frå jordet, Oddmund Hagen, Samlaget, 2003
17. Vi sees kanskje der, Tone Lie, Cappelen, 2004
18. Skavanken, Liv Marie Austrem, Samlaget, 2004
19. Kant, Jon Fosse, Samlaget, 2005
20. Mika blir gått ifrå, Heikki Grøhn, Samlaget, 2005
21. Like langt hjemmefra, Thorborg Rebolledo Meisingset, Aschehoug, 2006
22. Da jesusbarnet kom til prærien, Tor Åge Bringsvær, IKO forlag, 2006
23. Knute, Oddmund Hagen, Samlaget, 2007
25. Lukas bygger olabil, Akin Duzakin, Samlaget, 2008
27. Ikke helt alene, Constance K. Ørbeck- Nilssen, Magikon 2009
28. Vilja på Handletur, Lene Westeras, Margbok, 2010
29. Mika Gjør feil, Heikki Grøhn, Omnipax, 2010
30. Brevet fra havet, Erna Osland, Mangschou, 2010
31. Jeg er jo her, Constance K. Ørbeck- Nilssen, Magikon, 2011
32. Det spørs, Jostein Gaarder, Aschehoug, 2012
33. Sindre og kråka, Erlend E. Moe, Aschehoug, 2012
34. Hvem er Wilhelm, Constance Ørbeck- Nilssen, Magikon, 2012
35. Lyset skinner i mørket, Håvard Syvertsen, Aschehoug, 2013
36. Sky, Thorborg Rebolledo Meisingset, Magikon, 2014
37. Anton og Jonatan, Jostein Gaarder, Aschehoug, 2014
38. Hvorfor er jeg her, Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen, Magikon, 2014
40. Bomulv, Njord Svendsen, Samlaget, 2016
41. Dikt og udkit, Torgeir Rebolledo Pedersen, Cappelen Damm 2016
42. Den vesle blå hai, Øyvind Vågnes, Skald, 2016
43. Epletreet, Mahmona Khan, Ena, 2017
44. Flyg ut kom tilbake, Anne Karin Fonneland, Wigestrand, 2017
45. Fargene som forsvant, Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen, Ena, 2017
46. Kjempen, Akin Duzakin, Ena, 2018
47. Büyük Sevbeni, Siirsel Tas, Redhous Kidz, 2019
48. Nina tør alt, Mette Hegnhøj, Gyldendal Danmark, 2019
49. På garden og i skogen, Oddmund Hagen, Wigstrand, 2019
50. Ylva og villgeitene, Hilde Myklebust, Samlaget, 2020
51. What the Kite Saw, Anne Laurel Carter,
   Groundwood Books / House of Anansi Press, 2021
52. Tom Verdens Konge, Anne Ellingsen, wowbok, 2021

7. List of translated editions and their languages

These titles are translated in to 22 different languages, totally.

1. Rund Jordet, Oddmund Hagen, Samlaget, 2000
2. Fars ansikt, Cecilie Løveid, Gyldendal Tiden, 2000
4. Ikke helt alene, Constance K. Ørbeck-Nilssen, Magikon 2009
5. Jeg er jo her, Constance K. Ørbeck-Nilssen, Magikon, 2011
10. Hvorfor er jeg her, Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen, Magikon, 2014
11. Epletreet, Mahmona Khan, Ena, 2017
12. Fargene som forsvant, Constance Ørbeck-Nilssen, Ena, 2017
13. Ylva og villgeitene, Hilde Myklebust, Samlaget, 2020
14. What the Kite Saw, Anne Laurel Carter,
   Groundwood Books / House of Anansi Press, 2021
8. List of translated editions and their languages

1. Tvillingbror, Liv Marie Austrem, Samlaget, 1995
2. Over jordet, Oddmund Hagen, Samlaget 1998
3. Ikke helt alene, Constance K. Ørbeck- Nilssen, Magikon 2009
5. Hvorfor er jeg her, Constance Ørbeck- Nilssen, Magikon, 2014
6. Fargene som forsvant, Constance Ørbeck- Nilssen, Ena, 2017
7. Kjempen, Akin Duzakin, Ena, 2018
8. Büyük Seybeni, Siirsel Tas, Redhous Kidz, 2019
9. Ylva og villgeitene, Hilde Myklebust, Samlaget, 2020
10. What the Kite Saw, Anne Laurel Carter, Groundwood Books / House of Anansi Press, 2021
9. List of the five representative books sent to the jurors

1. Det spørs, Question Asked, Jostein Gaarder, Aschehoug 2012
Kjempen, The Giant, Akin Duzakin, Ena, 2018
4. Büyük Sevbeni, (Ilex Hairstreak) Siirsel Tas, Redhous Kidz, 2019

5. What the Kite Saw, Anne Laurel Carter,