
Design Awards for Canadian Publications of 1997

For this, the Society's fifteenth annual presentation of design awards, the undersigned panel of four judges spent April 26, 1997 examining some two hundred fifty books published in Canada during 1996, each entered into competition by its Canadian publisher or designer. Producers (platemakers, printers, binders) are not necessarily Canadian: economic, and formerly also technical, reasons have always taken some production elsewhere. Not every eligible organization submits work to this competition, although each January, the Society makes every effort to locate and notify every Canadian publisher and graphic arts firm known to take book work. Still, those submitted are representative of the quality now expected in the Canadian book industries.

As in the arts of food, drama, etc., excellent content and excellent presentation do not necessarily go hand in hand. This is not the competition for content, but good design reflects a book's content, purpose, and proposed audience. The judges therefore noted these in considering how the visual qualities of each book support its individual purpose and contribute to making it a work of both fine and practical art. The awards itemized and the qualities discussed below celebrate the considerable achievements of 1996, a particularly difficult year for the financing of any endeavour in the Canadian cultural field.

Judging is done in a number of categories so that books presenting similar design challenges can be judged together rather than against totally disparate ones. The categories this year differ somewhat from those of the previous seven years, which were becoming increasingly problematic. Graphic reproduction techniques have changed radically as computer-based methods progressively replace physical ones. One result is greater use of illustration and colour in books of a type once characterized by the use only of type in black-and-white. Even poetry now more often features pictorial content as well as sections set as prose.

Distinguishing whether a book for an adult audience is primarily pictorial, reference/text, or simply prose nonfiction has become especially difficult. The latter category slips ever further in design characteristics from fiction, which alone remains largely unillustrated and is now a separate category. A separate "hobby/cookbook/how-to" category has for years seemed redundant, and these books are now judged in another appropriate category, usually either pictorial or text/reference. A category is specified with each submission, but either the Society's Awards Committee or the judges will move an item from that category to another if they feel it can be more fairly judged there. Yet whatever categories are established, some individual items

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transcend boundaries and the judging can never entirely escape the criticism of comparing apples with peaches.

The 1996 submissions fell into the following categories as newly named:

- 32 Prose Fiction
- 65 Prose Nonfiction
- 25 Pictorial Books
- 28 Poetry
- 35 Text and Reference Books
- 5 Limited Editions
- 57 Children's Books

First, second, and third prizes are available in each category, with ties permitted.

The primary criterion of excellence against which each book is judged is the harmony of all aspects of its materials and design, fashioned as a harmonious whole suitably tuned to the book's intellectual content and intended audience. A book cited for Honourable Mention exhibits some exceptionally noteworthy feature(s), for example a striking and appropriate cover, which brought it, in the eyes of the judges, above the mass even if as a whole it fails to sustain comparison with prize-winners in the category.