Marian Bantjes, graphic artist and author

By Elyse Neufeld.

The keynote presenter on the second day of the 2014 BC Library Conference was Marian Bantjes, a designer, typographer, writer and illustrator. She is also the author of two books, *I Wonder* and *Pretty Pictures,* and a writer on the weblog *Speak Up*. Marian's presentation was saturated with images from her work, as she spoke about the inspiration behind her books and the career path that has shaped her as a writer and graphic artist.

Beginning as a book typesetter in 1984, her path took its first turn when, influenced by the work of Paul Rand, she became interested in graphic design. Rand designed iconic logos for the American Broadcasting Company, IBM and UPS and was seen as the most revered graphic designer of the 1960s to 1980s. After 10 years in strategic graphic design, Marian decided she wanted to pursue new projects close to her heart and was drawn to a more personal type of work she called graphic art.

Fascinated by the concept of wonder, she began developing her ornamental aesthetic. For inspiration, she looked to religion's use of highly detailed, ornate art, such as elaborate patterns and drawings in the margins of religious texts. In contrast to strategic graphic design which focuses on principles of clean simple lines (and clear margins), these examples were complex and detailed, creating a sense of awe. Other examples, such as historical official documents, combined ornament with text. By challenging design rules of scale and clarity, Marian created graphic art that draws viewers in and creates a sense of preciousness and honour. During this time, she also began writing for a blog called *Speak Up*, where she discovered her passion for writing about design.

Imagining an opportunity to embed her writing in graphic design, Marian transformed her posts into the pages of her book *I Wonder*. The book is illustrated using her iconic, ornamental style, and includes precise and detailed patterns made with pasta noodles, reworked photographs of neon signs in Saskatoon, re-imagined IKEA furniture assembly instructions, and old to-do lists her mother had kept for 30 years. Her graphic art is accompanied with text from her blog posts. Marian described the text on a page as a drink in a crystal goblet, where the container doesn't interfere with the taste or appearance of the drink. The page "honours the text by giving it space to breathe." Each page is an experience of wonder.

She described her second book *Pretty Pictures* as her epitaph, a curation of all her work. The book contains 20 years of design, including her work as a book typesetter, graphic designer, and finally as a graphic artist. The book is organized chronologically, including sketches, process pieces, and rejected work.

Her presentation was video recorded and will be archived on the BCLA website (bclaconnect.ca). To learn more about Marian Bantjes and her work, visit her website: www.bantjes.com

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