

PICTURE PERFECT

Newbolds provide a kid-friendly tour of art history

BY STEPHEN DOW

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SHERIDAN — *What if?*

It's one of the great questions of children's literature. What if you gave a mouse a cookie? What if a cat in a hat showed up on your doorstep and wanted to play? What if you could sail away to where the wild things are?

One day while visiting the Musee Picasso in Paris with her sisters, another irresistible "what if" question came into the mind of Utah-based author Amy Newbold. "I said 'I wonder what it would look like if Picasso painted a snowman,'" Amy Newbold recalled. "And my sister said 'That's a picture book.'"

Indeed, it was. In fact, that one "what if" question paved the way for a series of three books, answering questions ranging from how Leonardo Da Vinci would paint a dinosaur to how Claude Monet would paint a monster. And Greg Newbold, Amy's husband and illustrator, helped her answer those questions. Now, Greg's art is being displayed at The Brinton Museum as part of its annual illustrator show spotlighting art from picture books.

According to Barbara McNab, curator of exhibitions at The Brinton, Greg Newbold's art was an easy choice for this year's exhibit — because it's delightful on its own merit and because it provides an opportunity to introduce Sheridan County students to some of the greatest artists of all time.

"What's great about the work of Greg and Amy is it provides this fun way to talk about art history," McNab said. "There's a mini art history lecture behind every picture, and as a museum dedicated to introducing the next generation to art, I couldn't think of a better subject for a show."

Greg Newbold said he was honored to have his work displayed at The Brinton, but when his wife first brought up the idea for "If Picasso Painted a Snowman," he initially struggled with how to pay homage to some of the greatest artists of all time.

"It absolutely was intimidating at first," Greg Newbold said. "The first time Amy told me about the idea, I didn't even see how I could make it work. But I really took some time to dig in and understand how each artist created their pieces. I learned more about their techniques and their processes and identified the fingerprints of each artist's individual style. I didn't necessarily want to copy them, but to create an homage — something that feels like it could have been created by them."

Once he understood the works he was paying homage to, Greg



COURTESY PHOTO | GREG NEWBOLD

The husband-wife team of Greg and Amy Newbold have written a series of three picture books introducing kids to great artists by imagining subjects like dinosaurs, snowmen and monsters drawn in their art styles.



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A piece from Amy and Greg Newbold's "If Monet Painted a Monster" imagines what monsters would look like if drawn by French painter Henri Rousseau.

Newbold was able to let loose and have fun. He describes one of the paintings in the snowman book — imagining what a snowman painted by Jackson Pollock would look like — as "maybe the most fun I've had as an illustrator." Pollock was known for his drip technique of pouring or splashing paint onto a canvas.

"I put my canvas on the ground and walked around it as I flipped paint," Greg Newbold said. "It was just a fun process to paint like Jackson Pollock. There were people who actually thought it was a Jackson Pollock so I know I got it pretty close."

Amy Newbold said writing and illustrating picture books is special because "your book might be the first experience a child has with your subject matter." She said she hoped her books sparked children's interest in art history but also showed them there is no one right way to create art.

"What I wanted was to show kids a lot of different artistic styles and let them know there are so many different ways you can create," Amy Newbold said. "There is value in learning the rules of art, and all of the artists we reference in these books mastered those. But they also pushed further and developed their own voice and style. I want kids to know that they can create in their own style and that's totally valid."

Greg Newbold agreed.

"I've watched so many kids get to a certain point in school or life when someone told them they weren't doing it right, and they quit creating because they didn't feel successful," Greg Newbold said. "I want to give these kids permission to just create because there are no right or wrong answers when it comes to creating. You can create a new way of painting and that's entirely fine... At the end of our presentations to kids, I give the kids their own artistic license with an air high five. It's me giving them permission to create their art however they want because there is no wrong way. I think that's empowering for kids to hear."

Greg Newbold's art will be displayed at The Brinton through March 27. The Newbolds will be in residence at The Brinton from March 15-17. In addition to giving presentations to local schools, the Newbolds will hold a meet-and-greet reception March 17 at 4:30 p.m.

The reception is free and open to the public.