

**Antje Damm:**

## **The Visit**

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### **Translation of the Review by Susanna Wengeler, Buchmarkt**



### **“We have Always Built Houses”**

**For her new picture book, Antje Damm has worked three-dimensional . The story of a woman whose life regains colour with the help of a small boy's paper aeroplane took shape while building the model – and it makes the observer happy, too**

Elise keeps her house neat and clean and never ventures out. The woman with the pinned-up hair is too fearful. Everything in her kitchen-cum-living room is entirely grey, just like in her heart. This is the point of departure of Antje Damm's new picture book "The Visit" (Moritz Verlag). And not much more than this was certain when the artist embarked on her new project - "I only knew that that there had to be something in this grey, almost menacing room and that something had to happen with colour. The story then came into existence in the course of the work process", Antje Damm explains.

This time, the author and illustrator of books such as "Ask me!" or "Granddad's Sandwiches" has worked three-dimensional: the room in which the story takes place was built from a cardboard box, the figures cut out. The deal boards were painted on, the door can be opened and there is an opening at the top of the staircase, through which lighting effects could be produced with the help of a torch.

Scene by scene was then photographed. This carried a risk: because the room changes through the course of the book, it absorbs colour. The artist, however, applied the colour onto the model, it was not generated through Photoshop. The consequence is clear: "If the photos of one scene had not worked out, the entire book would



have been ruined.", explains Antje Damm.

One day, Elise finds a paper aeroplane on the floor. It has flown in through the open window, which she had briefly opened to air the room. It is blue and an intrusion – solitary Elise burns the speck of colour in her oven. During the night she suffers a nightmare – the entire room is filled with paper aeroplanes, the frightened woman sits on the edge of her bed and the viewer feels with her.

This is a double page spread cost Antje Damm nerves, too: she had hung up the small folded air planes on thin threads and they had to move slightly in order to achieve a certain blur in the photograph. If you look closely, you can discover one thread, because the artist has retouched only very little with Photoshop: "The work process is supposed to remain visible."

During her building project the illustrator benefited from her studies of architecture in Darmstadt and Florence as well as her work for an architect's office in Berlin. She remembers that she already enjoyed building models then. And in doing handicraft work with her daughters, they created doll's houses, a picture of one of these can be seen in "Ask me!". "We have always built houses", she laughs.

The next day, a little boy called Emil knocks on the door – despite the "Please do not disturb" sign, which he is probably not able to read yet. He's missing his airplane and he also needs the toilet. Elise is taken by surprise and lets him in and in his wake things are turning more colourful and joyful. Emil asks the woman to read an entire fairy tale book to him, they play hide-and-seek and before he leaves, he gets a sandwich. "It has been nice", he says when leaving, not realising that he has brought beauty into the grey house.

While Antje Damm photographed every single scene with a daylight-lamp and additional light sources, she actually took the model outside for the farewell scene, because she wanted to use sunlight. And the sun and the heart soar: Elise is no longer slightly bent over, but leaning towards her visitor. In the evening she builds a light-blue paper air plane, remembering the unexpected happiness and joyfully expecting the future. Once emerged from her snail's house, she will probably venture outside her house and enjoy freedom one day.

"It is nice to try out new things", says Antje Damm, who has carried out a second project with the same technique. The format of the book corresponds to the scale of the model. One could ask if the point of view is too grown-up only to reject that thought in an instant. Elise has very girlish traits and every child knows what it feels like if you don't want anything to do with anyone. Antje Damm has been making books since 2001. In her home office in her house near Gießen she is already tinkering with new projects. Leo Leonni has inspired her. To this day, "Frederick" has "probably the nicest ending of a picture book, it touches me every time". A book such as F.K. Waechter's "Opa Huckes Mitmachkabinett" is important to her, because the author shows that you can make many things simply yourself, with scissors, pen and paper.

And as we know after reading "The Visit", sometimes it needs no more than a single piece of paper to make a person happy – and many, many readers.

The article was written by Susanna Wengeler and published in "Buchmarkt", March 2015

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