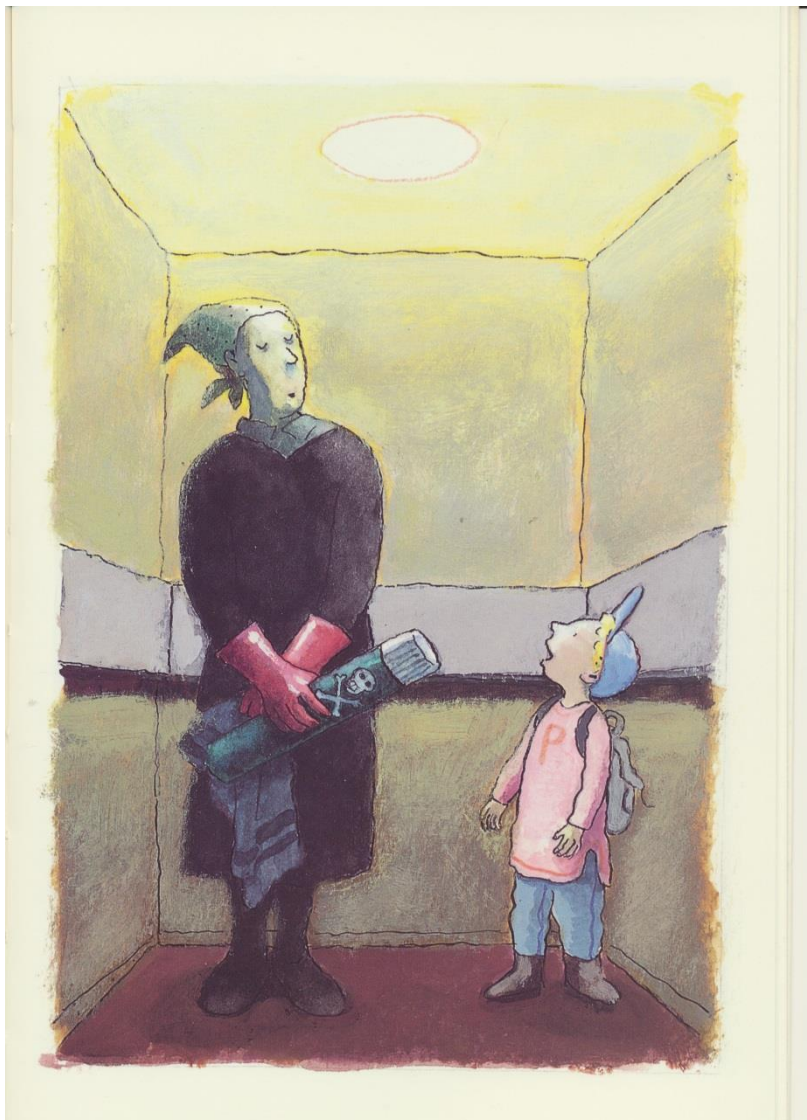


# **Thé Tjong-Khing**

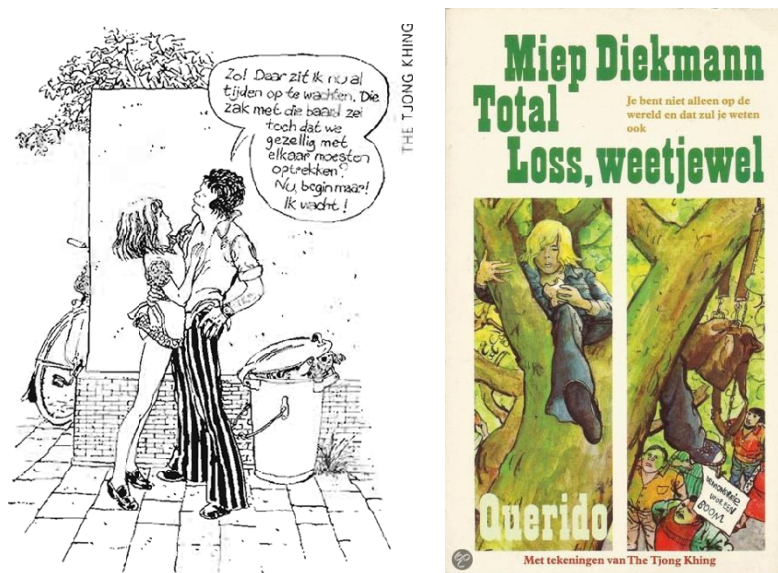
**Nominee for the Hans Chr. Andersen  
Award 2018**

**IBBY-The Netherlands**

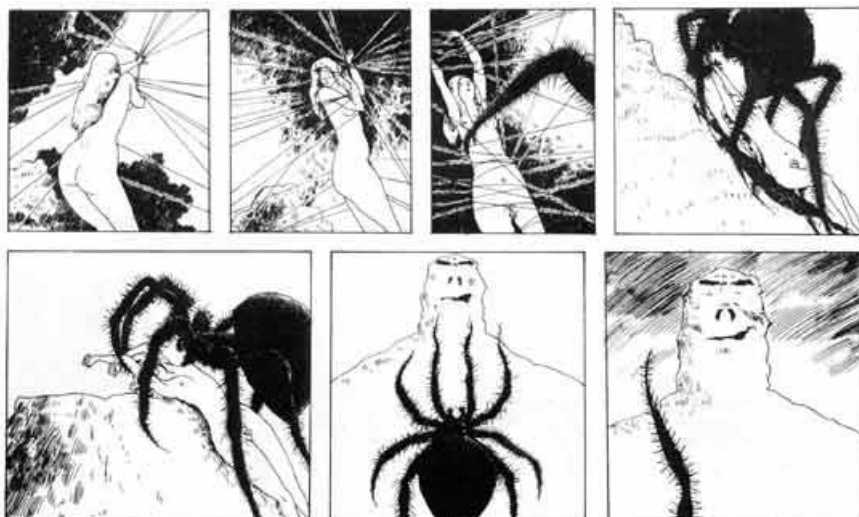


## Biography

Thé Tjong-Khing was born on August 4, 1933 in Purworedjo in Indonesia in a Chinese Indonesian family. As a child, he was a fan of the Tarzan comic strips of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Thé went to the *Seni Rupa* (arts) institute in Bandung and came to the Netherlands to continue his studies in 1956. In the Netherlands he started to work at Toonder Studio's as a draftsman, where he drew comic strips. He also contributed to various children's magazines. In 1970 he illustrated his first children's book, written by Miep Diekmann (*Total loss, you know / Total loss, weet je wel*). Ever since, he has been a well-known and much sought after illustrator of children's books. He worked with famous Dutch children's books authors such as Guus Kuijer, Els Pelgrom, Sylvia Vanden Heede en Dolf Verroen.



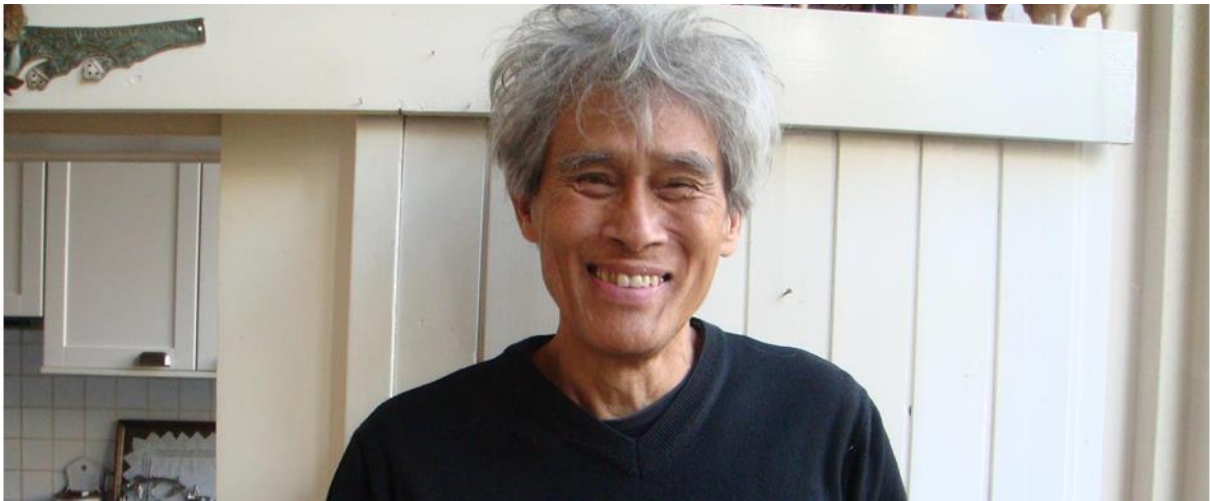
Between 1967 and 1968 he drew the science-fiction strip "Iris", with Lo Hartog writing the texts. They also created the cartoon strip Arman and Ilva for various provincial newspapers.



Apart from working as a cartoonist and book illustrator, Thé taught at the Rietveld Academy. In 1971, he was awarded for his work at the Belgian science-fiction convention. Thé has illustrated some 150 children's books. To the question: "Do you still find it a challenge and where do you get your ideas from?" he replied: "It depends a lot on the story you're illustrating, of course. Sometimes you can only draw what's there, which isn't too inspiring. Some texts can be far more suggestive. If I have to draw a child, for instance, then I use pictures of what I see around me, but many early memories as well. I've retained all of them. It's like this, when you're an actor you've only got one part, but as an illustrator you actually direct all of the parts. That's very appealing".

Next to his career in children's literature, Thé is also a film expert and has won many quizzes and contests over the years. Nowadays, Thé lives in Haarlem.

**Portrait**



## Contribution to children's and young adult's literature

The work of Thé Tjong-Khing, this modest artist, who sees himself as a craftsman rather than an artist, occupies a special place in the Dutch art of illustration.

Right from his arrival in the Netherlands in 1956, Thé worked as a cartoon artist. In 1966, he designed the cover and the illustrations for *Micky en de vreemde rovers* (Micky and the strange robbers) by Thea Beckman and then he gradually turned from being a cartoon artist into a children's book illustrator, sometimes clinging strongly to other drawing styles, like a chameleon, and at other times flirting with them, whereby the work, despite this or because of this, always comes across as recognizably Thé in its totality.



His illustrations in the book *Wie had gelijk, Mary Rose?* (Who was right, Mary Rose?; Marilyn Sachs) clearly demonstrate his admiration for work by artists like Audrey Beardsley (1872-1898), and Arthur Rackham (1867-1939) who continued along the same lines and Rie Cramer (1887-1977). It is not surprising he feels strongly attached to this trend, considering his Asiatic background. After all, the artists of this so-called "Art Nouveau" or "Jugendstil" period developed their new, graphic composition also through the startling introduction to the Eastern art of printing, the Japanese woodcut. Their partiality to a combination of taut lines and smooth plains we also encounter to some extent in the drawings by Thé. In his early work he used a special Chinese brush and East Indian ink, with which he drew

both the finest lines and the biggest plains. Another example is *Total Loss, weet je wel* (Miep Diekmann)

Later, this brush was replaced by the pen, with which he with care and virtuosity manages to record the world of the teenager. Also because of this extremely precise and often clever rendition of their own world, this age-group feels very attracted to his work. A clear datedness in clothing and surroundings is one of the most striking characteristics of these illustrations.

From around 1975, Thé Tjong-Khing visibly searched for a new manner of composition. He stopped striving for even greater naturalistic perfection - whereby technical skills dominate - but an attempt is made to draw with a subtle "anti-cleverness, to bring it closer to the way a child draws.

Thé's style has developed quite drastically over time. At first, before 1975, his drawings are filmic and comic like. His style becomes more realistic and naturalistic, clearly influenced by comic books. After 1975 – when Thé stops making comics – his illustrations become more sober. He starts to draw in a more imaginative, naive style with less details, that fits children's

perceptions of the world. Next to drawing a lot with pen and ink, he also starts to work more and more with pencils in time.

Thé is mostly interested in illustrating characters; he is less interested in drawing things that are not alive, such as buildings. Dolf Verroen, one of the many famous authors Thé has worked with, once said that Thé not only pictures the appearance of the characters, but he also expresses what they feel with their body language and their looks.

Verroen says about the cover of *Maak dat je wegkomt* [Get out of here] (1978), on which an angry man with a pointing arm is pictured: "That arm lives, it shakes, it does. You can see that the man is angry. Khing told me once that he tried thirty times to picture the arm before it looked good on paper. That he eventually stood in front of the mirror himself to see what an angry arm looks like."

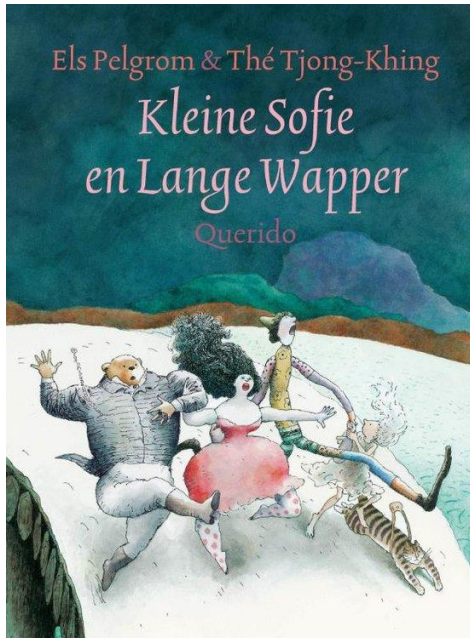


Next to illustrating characters, Thé enjoys making ominous and frightening illustrations. This fascination Thé has had since childhood: he preferred dark and scary things, where danger is always closeby. His simplification was especially visible when turning to the young child in the books by Dolf Verroen and in the toddler picture book *Wiele wiele stap* (Wheel wheel step) for which Miep Diekmann was awarded a Gouden Griffel (a Golden Slate Pen) and Thé his first Gouden Penseel (Golden Brush, the annual prize for the best illustrations in a children's book by a Dutchman) for his illustrations in 1978. Just as in his illustrations in books for teenagers, here too it is the detail from the toddler world which has been so cleverly interwoven in the drawing. The book of Miep Diekmann is a real special volume of poetry. The poems deal with the life of today's children. All those common, daily recurring things like eating, looking out of the apartment window, taking a bath, feeding ducks, going up in the escalator and lots, lots more, she's caught in simply worded verses, following the child's train

of thought, and Thé Tjong-Khing has illustrated them in complete harmony with this process.

From this book it is clear to see that authoress Miep Diekmann and Thé worked together on this with a great amount of pleasure and from a conscious formula. Thé knows how to set down a phase of the child's life in a witty, modern and direct fashion. "I never thought I could, but when Miep Diekmann finally persuaded me to illustrate this text I noticed that I like

drawing for young children best of all up till now", says Thé. From the jury report: "Thé Tjong Khing has once more shown he is a virtuoso in drawing the most simple and every situations. He needs only few lines and little space to record the life of a small child in a recognizable and humorous fashion. In *Wiele wiele stap*, text and drawing are equals, constantly complete each other in humor and ingenuity. And none of this in a complicated or labored manner, but from a continuous clarity and simplicity".



In 1985, *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper* was awarded both the Gouden Penseel (Golden Slate Pen) for the text by Els Pelgrom, and the Gouden Penseel (Golden Brush) for the illustrations.

According to the jury a "particularly beautifully constructed and moving story that because of its theme and narration technique contains all the elements to make it a classic". Sophie, a dangerously ill young girl, would like to know What Life Is All About and also that which is to follow. A quest for the sense of life. The choices a person has to make, render life, however difficult, worthwhile. The writer and the artist must have worked together intensively to make such a philosophical notion accessible.



The drawings are dreamy, almost magical in terms of atmosphere, also because of the poetical shading, convincing in the division of light and darkness and the spatial planning. For a large extent, they determine the accessibility of the story and again and again invite the reader to keep looking and discovering. The book has been beautifully made. Drawings and text form a visual unity, due to careful typography and a balanced mise-en-page.

In *Eend voor eend* (duck by duck from Guus Kuijer) shows us life as it is in the world of ducks. The sharp observations of ducks have been transposed in a witty and concerned manner into creative language. The gossamer, graphic, magnificent ducks of Thé Tjong-Khing demonstrate the same alliance with nature as the author.



For *'Het woordenboek van Vos en Haas'* (2002) (The dictionary of Fox and Hare) he got in 2003 his third Golden Brush, unique in the history of this important award. His illustrations by the books of Fox and Hare are very famous.

In recent years, Thé has gained publicity for his imaginative, colourful fairytales, in which costumes and drama play big roles. Since 2004, Thé is also publishing picture books – the Cake-series – without words. These books contain a lot of details. Only the patient viewer will discover all the hidden storylines and its small jokes.

In 2005 Thé Tjong-Khing received the Woutertje Pieterse Award for the best juvenile book. Normally this award honours the work of an illustrator in combination with the contribution of a writer. This year, the award went to an illustrator on his own: Thé Tjong-Khing, for the book *Waar is de taart?* (Where is the cake?). According to the jury, it is a book that 'can be read without text, the words are never missed'.

Thé Tjong-Khing's illustrations are found in many books for all kinds of different ages and of different genres, both in black and white and in colour. Thé's body of work can be seen both as comprehensive – spanning a career of more than 50 years – and varied, showing drastic developments of his drawing style over the years.

### **Inspiration**

Thé is inspired by the art of painting and various painters, who can also be subjects of his books – as is the case with Jheronimus Bosch in *Bosch: the weird story of Jeroen, his hat, his bag and the ball* (*Bosch: het vreemde verhaal van Jeroen, zijn pet, zijn tas en de bal*). This picture book is also an example of Thé's own, wordless picture books he creates solely, next to his



illustrations of children's books written by wellknown authors.

In a lot of his other books, Thé subtly refers to work of other artists as little jokes. In one of his books about Fox and Hare, there are a Warhol and a Gauguin behind the fridge, for example. He also imitates work of other artists in his own stories, such as the wheatfields of Breughel and the last supper of Da Vinci.

Hit latest book is about a Tyrannosaurus rex.



## Prizes

During Thé's long career, he has won numerous prizes for his work, such as several Golden and Silver Brushes (Gouden en Zilveren Penselen) and the Woutertje Pieterse Prize for his wordless picture book *Where is the cake? (Waar is de taart?)*. He was also nominated for the Deutsche Jugendliteraturpreis in 2007 for the second time, after winning it in 1986 together with author Els Pelgrom for their book *Little Sophie and Long Wapper (Kleine Sofie en Lange*

*Wapper*). In 2010, Thé was awarded with the Max Velthuis Prize – an oeuvre award for Dutch illustrators.

After so many years of great productivity, it is remarkable that book illustrator Thé Tjong-Khing kept renewing and rejuvenating himself and even kept searching for other forms of expression without slipping into mannerism or superficiality. Through all the phases of his work he attained a convincing style as an artist. His covers are arresting, the illustrations seem to have been accomplished spontaneously and with ease, the artist has gotten a feeling for *mise-en-page* and makes subtle use of the emptiness in the drawing.

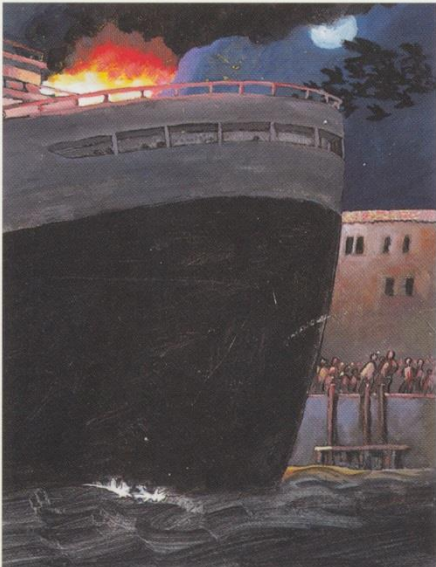
### **Thé about his work:**

“I am not an artist. An artist expresses himself. For me, drawing is like a craft, such as a carpenter. I am often asked to illustrate a children’s book and that is what I do. No more.”

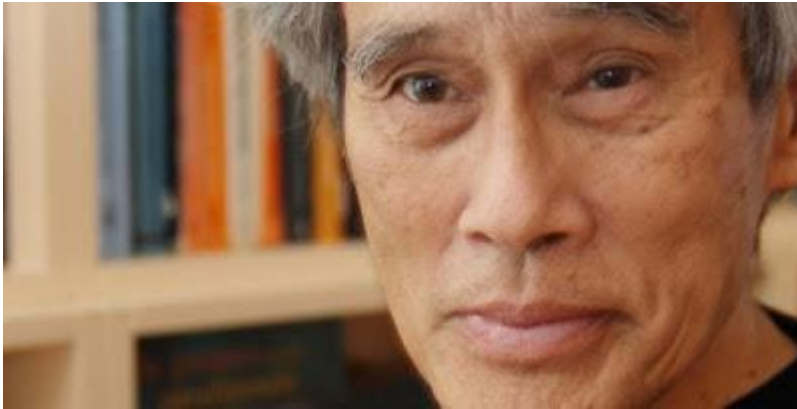
Tekenen is mijn lust en mijn leven! Vanaf de tijd dat ik in de boekenkast van mijn ouders drie heel mooi geïllustreerde boeken vond, heb ik bij verhalen tekeningen gemaakt. Echt fotografisch-naturalistisch werk vind ik niets. Maar ik zal ook nooit abstracte of daartoe neigende tekeningen maken, omdat ik denk dat kinderen daar niets aan vinden. Wat ik het leuke vind aan illustreren, is het visueel ‘meevertellen’ bij een tekst. Dat probeer ik bij elk verhaal, maar ik zie daar lang niet altijd de kans toe.

**Visueel meeververtellen**  
**Visually Telling the Story**

Drawing means the world to me! Ever since I found three beautifully illustrated books in my parents’ bookcase, I’ve made drawings to go with stories. I don’t like really photographic-naturalistic work at all. But I would never do abstract drawings, or drawings that tend that way, because I don’t think children appreciate them. What I enjoy about illustrating is visually helping to tell the story. I try to do that with every story, but I don’t always see a chance for it.



## Interviews



**Thé Tjong-Khing has won all thinkable awards for his illustrations. Now he receives the Max Velthuis Prize as a coronation. But he's not going to retire...**

‘Moderst? Me? Why do people think that? That’s what they write everytime. Am I módest, Mino?’ His wife, who is glazing ceramics behind the sliding door, says: ‘No, you are not modest.’ Triumphantly: ‘You see?’

Conversations with Thé Tjong-Khing (1933) flap in every direction, just like the lively tones in his voice. He is still full of ideas. Only his body isn’t that eager anymore. Thé just, somewhat tired, descended the stairs, thin and lightly bent; he wipes his hand at his pants before he gives a hand, but the white acryl paint isn’t coming off. Just before the interview he is wiping away failed shadows in the illustrations for *The prince on the white horse*, the new book of Dolf Verroen.

All thinkable awards he has won and as a coronation he will receive next Thursday the Max Velthuis Prize, the PC Hooft Prize among illustrators. But retirement, no. He’s not thinking about that. ‘I saved some, but if it’s enough? Well! Money. It doesn’t interest me.’ He works because he doesn’t want to do anything else than drawing. And he is still asked a lot. The past one and a half years from his hand ten books were published at four publishers.



He also wrote a few books himself, among which *The fairytale teller* (2007) was the first. That was for everyone who doesn’t know him a surprise, not in the least for himself. ‘I can’t write, this was an accident. It was meant for my grandson.’ He has together with his second wife seven grandchildren. Tobias is the eldest one and during reading aloud to him he discovered that Tobias found every fairytalebook – even the ones meant to be accessible – tedious. ‘All those sideways! I kept on cancelling.’

Still a cricital note for his writing colleagues?  
‘No of course not. I just told those stories in

my way and then grandfather finally got attention. Tobias changed in a salt pillar. So I thought: I will write it down on a couple of papers for the next time. And by chance one of my

publishers asked me if I wanted to make a fairytalebook.’ Very proud his grandchildren were, of course, on their famous grandfather. ‘At the school playground mothers are nudging each other. That is fun, yes. With my own children this was not the case yet.’

Nice detail: one day he started with drawing images of Indonesian fairytales, inspired by Rie Cramer. Then he miserably failed, according to himself. Is he now satisfied about his own work? ‘Appreciation is nice, of course. I was very satisfied with *Wheel wheel step* and *Little Sofie and Lange Wapper* – the books that got him two Gold Pencils – ‘and because everyone said to me: you did that so well. But I think one of my later projects is more important.’ That is called *Greek myths* (2006, Els Pelgrom). That almost nobody wrote about it is something he doesn’t care about. ‘It is my best work until now. I am fi-nal-ly satisfied.’



To come to those stilled illustrations of god and men King scrutinised images of Greek myths across centuries. When he found Greek vase art he was touched by something he didn’t see before. ‘Those motionless drawing are unbelievably eloquent. How is that possible? I looked at whole series of Daphne who is chased by Apollo, painted many times en drawn not by the least, and everytime I ended up with those weird old vases.’

Then the illustrator knew: you never have to remake reality again. In his succesfull *Where is the pie*-series it’s pretty apparent: the drama is often not in view, but the occasion and the consequences are. If there are emotions, like fright, then it looks like a puppet panicking; a kind of frozen slapstickfright.

‘Yes, how is someone frightened?’ He extravagantly puts his hand in the air and rolls with his eyes. ‘I can draw from a photograph, but I can also stylise it. I keep on searching, it never ends.’ He draws, makes a mistake, wipes it out and accidently takes a hip while erasing, suddenly he sees. Hip has to go like this, hand has to go like that. Not like in reality, but stylised. ‘Like an author that finds the right word by coincidence. That’s how it goes. You have to have a lot of patience for it. And some luck.’

To the big ‘fi-nal-ly’ of Thé Tjong-Khing a long search preceded. He left Indonesia when he was 23 in 1956, not because of Soekarno (although after signing the independence some stones went through the windows of Chinese families), but because he wanted to go to the Artschool in Amsterdam and maybe rather because he wanted everything he didn’t like about himself to leave behind. ‘I was an extremely shy child. That has ruined my life. I hid between the sarong of my mother and preferably said nothing. I expressed myself in drawings.’

It was worse that his father didn’t take the one thing he excelled in seriously. He could perform as a fast drawer when there were visitors, but a carreer with the dip pen his father found a disappointing future perspective. Thé rather not talks about it, there is something pubescent coming over him when you ask him about it. ‘Authors always have to tell everything about themselves. I don’t like it. You can stop talking about it.’ Thé never returned

to Indonesia in the rest of his life, except for one very fast visit.

It is therefore very imaginable how important it must have been for him when his parents, years ago visiting their son in the Netherlands, met his teacher Marten Toonder. ‘That man saved my life.’

The Artschool – breeding ground for the most known illustrators in the Netherlands – didn’t have a real illustration department yet. For unclear reasons he didn’t end up with the famous model cartoonist Piet Klaasse, but with the section advertising design. There he was very unhappy.

‘But if I quit I had to go back to Indonesia and that was a nightmare.’ He knew the name Toonder of the Tom Poes comics from an Indonesian newspaper and found him in the telephone book. He could become a volunteer, for sixty guilders a week.

‘One day Marten called me upstairs. He was sitting behind his desk with some of my drawing. ‘Look, this image is fantastic. Those two barely looking at each other. You can see something is not right, that something bad has happened. But what? That is drawing.’ After 25 years hearing I couldn’t do anything, finally somebody with status said that what I made was something. I was so troubled. I could leave that behind after that happened.’

He passionately started drawing, with heart and soul, day and night, for whom wanted to pay him. It started with comics, later magazines and books were added. Libelle, the Spiegel, Okki, Taptoe.

But even though he worked at the best thinkable place for the best young comic artists of the Netherlands, with whom he founded the anti authoritarian and provoking Vrije Balloen: the comic sector was not his world. ‘Drawing the same characters page after page day after day, you have to be a little bit crazy to do that. And I never knew what those boys were talking about. I draw comics with all my heart, but I never read one with pleasure, can you believe that?’



Just at the moment when he was again seriously doubting how he had to proceed a publisher called him with the question if he wanted to illustrate the book of Miep Diekmann: the crazy chickbook *Total loss, you know*. It still Thé the comic artist all the way: filmgirls with long legs, pin-ups almost. Shortly after he draw for the first time the famous, thin dip pen figures of *Wheel wheel step* that got him his first coronation.

Again he was lucky: Diekmann was in those days one of the biggest names in the children’s book section. In 1973 he arrived in a country he never left.

‘I was very fortunate with my work since I arrived in the Netherlands. It has always been like this: in my first month I met the Indian author Tim Maran at a party. He promised me I could illustrate all his books on the spot. He kept his word. And that’s how it always happened. I never had to peddle with my work. That whole discussion about if illustrators get paid enough is not concerning me. I drew very much in my younger years. From early in the morning until late at night.’

‘Also in the weekend,’ his wife says from the veranda. Thé, slightly unhappy: ‘But that I can’t do anymore.’ Is it never finished? ‘No. Now I want to get rid of the lines. They start to annoy me. I don’t know yet if I will manage. I drew lines my whole life.’ Again a sigh, wringing arms: ‘Sensitive subject. Let’s put it like this: in the end it always starts to itch.’

Then, with shimmering eyes: ‘It’s not nice to want something that you can’t do yet. But I rejoice myself already over the fact that I can be satisfied again in a while.’

His wife, from the veranda: ‘Do you believe it? That is boring, man.’

Do you refer to yourself as an artist or an illustrator? I understand that some artists think the term 'illustrator' is beneath them. But I really am an illustrator. Because I like to tell a story with my drawings. Just drawing a picture doesn't do much for me at all. What would you have been called if you were a girl? I've never really thought about it. I've never liked the surname Thé very much though. I think it's a lovely name. Oh, thank you. It's Chinese. My surname comes first, followed by my first name. And what's your name? Just Elephant. Oh, that's a very unusual name. No, not really. Everyone's called that where I come from. So I've learned something about your country then. Hardly anyone's called that here in the Netherlands. I should have turned my name round right at the beginning to make it like a Dutch name. It sometimes causes problems for me. I never know which name they're going to sort me by, for example. T for Thé or K for Khing. I used to write Thé without an accent, but then people thought I was a band, like The Beatles or The Bee Gees. Have you ever won a prize? No, never. Actually, yes I have, in a tombola. I won first prize, a chicken. And I've won prizes for my drawings too. A couple of Gouden Penseel prizes in the Netherlands, a Zilveren Penseel and a couple of Pluim awards. In addition to that, a German prize, an Austrian prize, some Flemish ones and a Mexican one. What do you think is particularly distinctive about your work? I've often tried to work in a style that's different from my usual style. I hoped that no one would recognise it as my work, but I've never managed it. They always know immediately that I've done it. So I must have my own style. Only I don't have any idea what it is. What do other people think is distinctive about your work? I often hear that my work has humour in it, but I

it. It doesn't work because I don't try to do it often enough and I don't try often enough because it doesn't really interest me. I have no idea what the difference is between a Chrysler and a Fiat. As far as I'm concerned, cars are green or yellow or black. Do you have anything to tell me about the illustrations that were selected? The picture with the mirrors, to start with I tried to reflect absolutely everything. But I soon got really confused. Particularly with the reflections on the ceiling – they're completely wrong. And I thought the picture of the wood wasn't anything special, but I soon realised that a lot of people really liked it. They think it's really scary too. Which I don't at all. What's so unusual and exciting about it is that there's a very narrow, perfectly straight path running through a tangle of trees. Oh. How do you make an illustration? The most intensive work is all the thinking beforehand. I only pick up the pencil once I know what I want. And then I have to start thinking about how I'm going to get it onto the paper. Most of my sketches end up in the bin. I'm working on a picture now of a princess dancing round on her own with a baby in her arms. I've been fiddling around with it, thinking about how her hoop skirt should sway. Where should the shadow go? How should I draw her upper body? Is she bending to the right or to the left? Should she be bending at all? Do you have any favourite materials to work with? I like using watercolour best, sometimes mixed with acrylic. I used to prefer to draw only with Indian ink. But now I always work in colour. Are there any materials you really detest? Chalk. I work in a very detailed way, so chalk is too coarse for me. If a story said a girl was wearing a yellow dress and you'd rather draw a blue dress, what would you do? I'd just make it yellow. That's not a problem. In my experience you

## Awards and nominations

- 1972 Nomination Hans Christian Andersen Award
- 1978 Gouden Penseel for *Wiele wiele stap*
- 1981 Vlag en Wimpel (Penseeljury) for *Een krekkel voor de keizer*
- 1983 Vlag en Wimpel (Penseeljury) for *De dieren van het Duitbos*
- 1985 Vlag en Wimpel (Penseeljury) for *Het Witte Herten Park*
- 1985 Vlag en Wimpel (Penseeljury) for *Hoor je wat ik doe?*
- 1985 Gouden Penseel for *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper*
- 1986 Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis for *Die wundersame Reise der kleinen Sofie*, translation of Mirjam Pressler of *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper*
- 1988 Nomination Hans Christian Andersen Award
- 1999 Vlag en Wimpel (Penseeljury) for *Vos en haas*
- 1999 Pluim van de maand for *Vos en haas*
- 2003 Gouden Penseel for *Het Woordenboek van Vos en Haas*
- 2003 Pluim van de maand for *Aa bee see van Vos en Haas*
- 2004 Pluim van de maand for *Waar is de taart?*
- 2004 Nomination Hans Christian Andersen Award
- 2005 Woutertje Pieterse Prijs for *Waar is de taart?*
- 2005 Zilveren Penseel for *Waar is de taart?*
- 2006 Nomination Gouden Boekenuil Jeugdliteratuurprijs for *Picknick met taart*
- 2007 Nomination for the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis for *Die Torte ist weg*, German publication of *Waar is de taart?*
- 2007 Prize of the Kinder- en Jeugdjury Vlaanderen 6-8 years for *Vos en Haas en de dief van Iek*
- 2008 Leespluim for *De sprookjesverteller*
- 2008 Gouden Uil prijs van de Jonge Lezer for *Koek koek Vos en Haas*
- 2008 Nomination ALMA award (Dutch IBBY-section)
- 2009 Nomination ALMA award (Dutch IBBY-section)
- 2010 Max Velthuijs Prize for whole oeuvre
- 2011 Vlag en Wimpel (Penseeljury) for *Avonturen van Baron von Münchhausen*
- 2015 KIDDO-Leespluim for *Van wie is die hoed?*

### *The 'Penselen' (brushes); annual awards for illustrations*

Each year the best-illustrated Dutch children's book is awarded the Gouden penseel (Golden Brush), and since 1981 Zilveren Penselen (Silver Brushes) are given to runners-up or to illustrative work from abroad. The 'vlag en wimpel' is a honourable mention for this award.

### *Pluim van de maand (feather of the month)*

Monthly award from some magazines concerning children's literature and education and a children's bookstor. Awards are given since 1984 to books for children from 3 till 8 years old.



### *Woutertje Pieterse Prijs*

The Woutertje Pieterse Prize was established in 1987, and awarded for the first time in 1988. Libris, a bookseller's chain, sponsors the prize, which is attended for children's books of Dutch origin with literary merit. This annual award is for a maximum of 15.000 euro. The goal of the Woutertje Pieterse Prize is to improve the quality of children's writing by means of this award. The jury is free not to grant an award when there is no book of sufficient quality. The prize owes its name to the character Woutertje Pieterse, since the story of this boy by Multatuli is said to be one of the finest ever written. This Award is seen as the most important award for authors of children's literature.

### **Thé Tjong-Khing wins the Woutertje Pieterse Award 2005**

Normally, the Woutertje Pieterse Award for the best juvenile book of the past year honours the work of an illustrator in combination with the contribution of a writer. This year, the award goes to an illustrator on his own: Thé Tjong-Khing, for the book *Waar is de taart?* (Where is the cake?). According to the jury, it is a book that 'can be read without text, the words are never missed'.



## Translations (selection)

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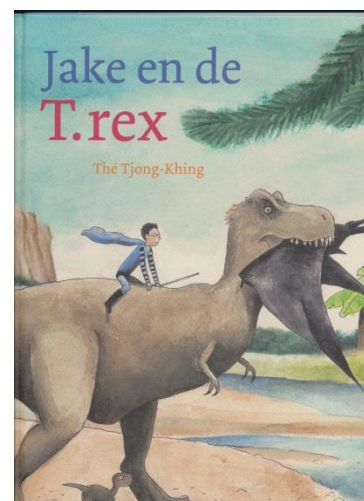
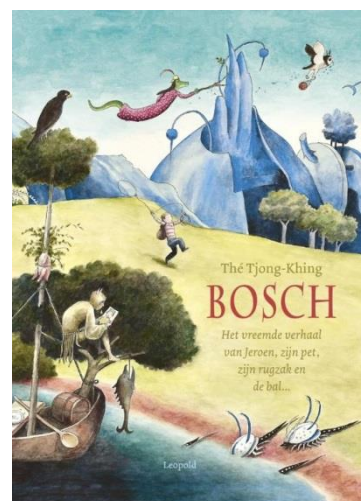
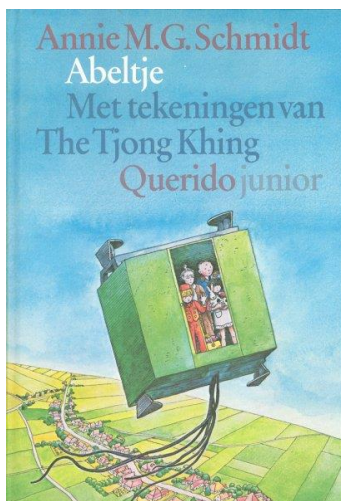
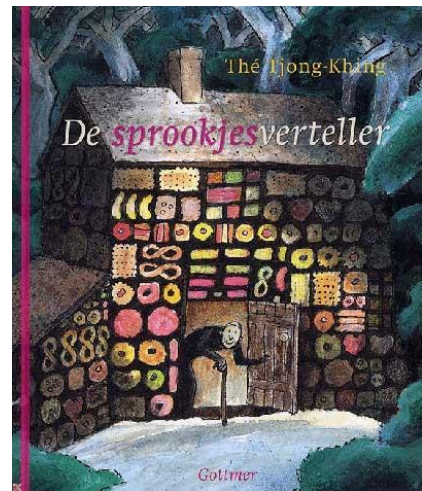
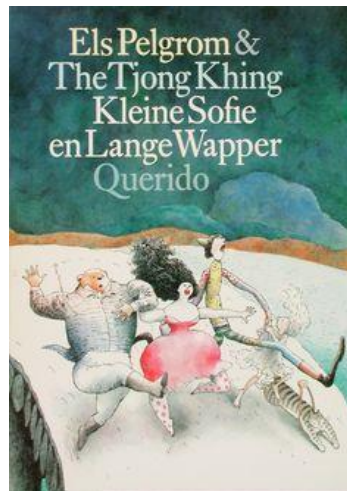
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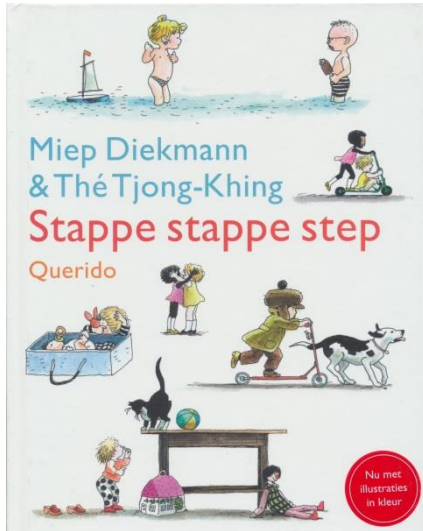
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## The most important titles



## Books sent to the jury

1. Thé Tjong-Khing and Miep Diekmann (author). *Stappe stappe step*. [*Step step step*]. 1979/2015. Amsterdam: Querido.



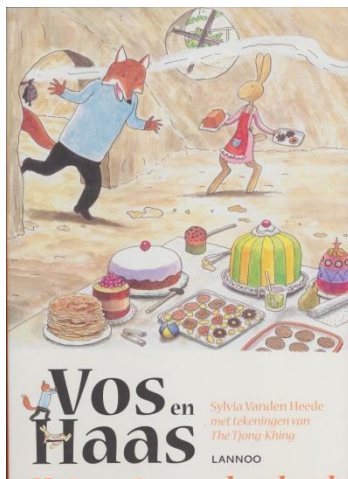
2. Thé Tjong-Khing. *Bosch. Het vreemde verhaal van Jeroen, zijn pet, zijn rugzak en de bal...* [*Bosch: the weird story of Jeroen, his hat, his bag and the ball*]. 2015. Amsterdam: Leopold.



3. Thé Tjong-Khing. *Kunst met taart*. [*Art with pie*]. 2015. Tielt: Lannoo.



4. Thé Tjong-Khing and Sylvia Vanden Heede (author). *Het grote voorleesboek van Vos en Haas*. [*The big reading aloud book of Fox and Hare*]. 2015. Tielt: Lannoo.



5. Thé Tjong-Khing and Hans Christian Andersen (author). *Sprookjes van Andersen*. [*Fairytales of Andersen*]. 2016. Haarlem: Gottmer.



## Reviews of the books sent to the jurors

### Stappe stappe step / Step step step (1979/2015)



#### Step step step

On the 26th of January the ninetieth birthday of children's book author Miep Diekmann was celebrated extensively. For her efforts on children's and young adult's literature Diekmann deserves all praise: she wrote more than seventy children's and young adult's books, received numerous national and international awards – among which the Honorary Membership of IBBY International in 2006 – and was a mentor for beginning authors. Because of her ninetieth birthday publisher Querido publishes a special tenth edition of *Step step step* (1979), with illustrations by Thé Tjong-Khing in colour.

In this collection of poetry Diekmann describes recognisable situations for the very little ones, like the arrival of a newborn, being sick, a trip with the tram and a boring birthday. The biggest merit of the author is that she looks at everyday reality with a big wonder and she describes them in catching images, like the huge scale of feelings a child experiences with the arrival of a baby. On the one hand there is disappointment: 'my mummy has a baby./ my daddy, he is free. / and I? / a new room. //’ At the same time the careful attitude at another time the forwardness of the child when the baby sleeps: 'TELEPHONE. Bye sire, it is your fault. That the baby now howls.'

That smart attitude of the stubborn child seems to be a trait of Diekmann. Like we can read in a poem about eating candy: 'puh, cavities in my teeth? / I only eat with my hánds? At the beach the girl turns witty forward when she spots a new playmate: 'are you a girl? a boy? / I can't see / do you have a rope? / no? yes? / let's see?'

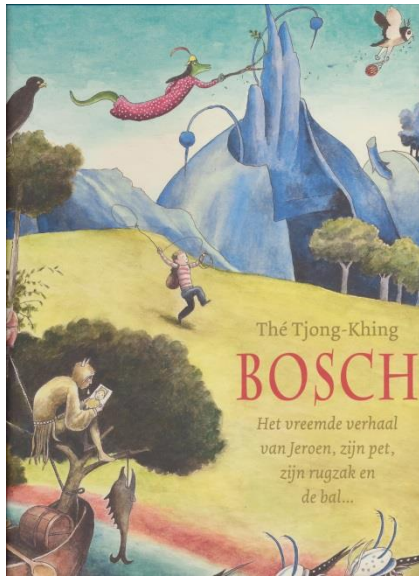
In short, but powerful sentences Diekmann approximates the speaking language of toddlers and preschoolers, without becoming childish. Onomatopoeia and neologisms enstrengthen the rhythm and the playful impetus of the rhymes, like 'ssst, cat / with your jump-jumped-paws.', while a headphone is called 'quiet-his-ears'. Alliterations and a functional repetition grant the poems a cheerful, musical rhythm, like in the title poem:

'step, step, step,  
from here until the corner.  
step, step, step  
i will step myself lost.'

In his illustrations Thé Tjong-Khing is in a strong dialogue with the witty verses, when he focuses on the imaginative view and own logic of toddlers and preschoolers. The combinations with Diekmann's original approach of reality works very well, and proves that *Step step step* didn't lose its attraction after more than 36 years at all.



**Bosch. Het vreemde verhaal van Jeroen, zijn pet, zijn rugzak en de bal... / Bosch: the weird story of Jeroen, his hat, his bag and the ball (2015)**



One drawing recently appeared to be and two paintings appeared not to be drawn by Jeroen Bosch. It is about details in the technique and years of research was needed to make it clear. It is fascinating how centuries can go by discussing the originality of the work of an artist. The work of Bosch gets extra attention because in 2016 it is 500 years ago precisely that the famous painter Jheronimus Bosch died. That is remembered with expositions and, hurra, children's books. By the hand of Paul van Loon an adventure book based on work of the painter will come out soon and by Thé Tjong-Khing there already is a picturebook that is simply called Bosch.

The subtitle is 'the weird story of Jeroen, his hat, his bag and the ball...' and a weird story it definitely is. There is no other possibility when it concerns Bosch, who sketched bizarre worlds. It is quite a challenge to take Bosch's alienated work as the starting point of a children's picturebook but that can be fully entrusted to Tjong-Khing. The wordless book is about a boy, that according to the backcover is named Jeroen, and during playing falls over the edge of a ravine. He then finds himself, according to the backcover, 'in a heavenly world full of weird creatures'. It depends on what you call heavenly, a heavenly hell perhaps. The nature is pretty beautiful and the skies are blue but for the rest it is more like the hell. Tjong-Khing seems to rely mostly on Bosch' most known work 'De Garden of Earthly Delights'.

The animals immediately disappear with the bag, the hat and the ball of little Jeroen, who is trying to get his things back the rest of the book. Everytime he deals ingeniously and unexpectedly with lots of remarkable and scary creatures. And just when you think he ends in the cookingpot of a horrible witch (who seemed so cheatingly sweet in her dress with dots) you see him somewhere else on the page, freeing other prisoners. In the end Jeroen is flown back to his own world by an angel, while being waved at by some friends he met along the way.

The storyline and the figures are a little less slapstick than in the other wordless picturebooks of Tjong-Khing and are at the verge of deadscary. But there's enough present to make it not too scary for preschoolers. The world of Bosch is not one for fragile souls. But opposite from the devilish and crazy creatures there are enough playful characters. Moreover our little Jeroen is the big hero who everytime thinks of a ruse.

Thé Tjong-Khing is the uncrowned king (although often awarded fortunately) of the wordless picturebook, with his Pie-series (for example Birthday with pie and Art with pie). The old master is already 83 years old but is still going strong and delivers with Bosch literally and figuratively a masterpiece. Illustrations on which you continuously make new discoveries and with which you can make your own story. Just like with the paintings of Jheronimus Bosch.

## Kunst met taart / Art with cake (2015)



‘Running through a painting’

Two layers of chocolate cake with yellow pudding in between, pink glaze and a cherry on top. That is the pie about which illustrator Thé Tjong-Khing already made three wordless picturebooks. For the first part, ‘Where is the pie?’ (2004), he received both the Woutertje Pieterse Prize as well as a Silver Paintbrush.

In that book and in its sequels ‘Picknick with pie’ (2005) and ‘Birthday with pie’ (2010) permanent, humoristic animal figures and story ingredients return: most of the time something gets stolen, there is a pursuit and you see all kinds of things go wrong in a slapstick manner. At the end the bad guys get caught and there is pie for everybody.

You would think that this would be enough for the concept, but with the new edition ‘Art with pie’, Thé outdoes himself. It is an innovative visual spectacle, a beautiful ode to the art and at the same time a wonderful book for preschoolers.

After reading a pile of artbooks lady Dog dreams that a painting of her husband with the pie in his hands is stolen from the museum. She and her friends immediately start the pursuit, across landscapes which Thé composed from famous pieces of art. The result is a very clever mix of Thé’s style and that of the artists.

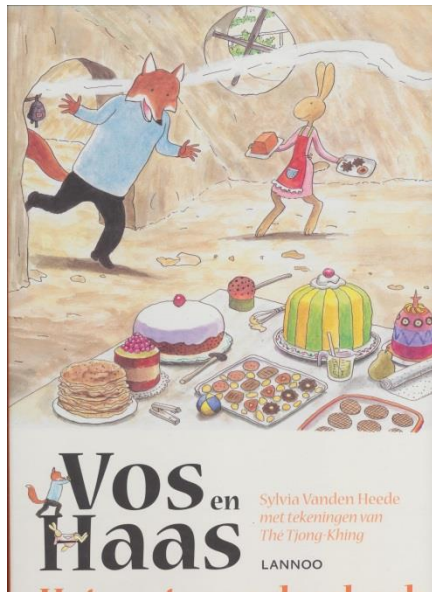
Like passing the wheatfield with crows by Vincet van Gogh. One of those crows is caught by a cat on the next page, in a landscape of Georges Braque, but fortunately saved. Like this Thé allows the bird that ends in the beak of a cat in a painting by Picasso a second chance.

The animals run across a candycoloured street of Kadinsky in a surrealistic beach that is cribbed from ‘The perseverance of memories’ by Dalí (you know, his painting of the clockwork hanging loosely over a treebranche).

The most art is coming together on a drawing of a house where the animals run around in: you see wallpaper of Matisse, little curtains by Keith Haring and the Mae West lips sofa of Dalí and outside the swirling air of ‘The scream’ of Munch.

For young children ‘Art with pie’ is a beautiful, unconstrained meeting with the big art, but also ‘just’ a colourful lookingbook full of exciting and funny events. The book challenges adults also: how many pieces of art do you recognise?

**Het grote voorleesboek van Vos en Haas / The big reading aloud book of Fox and Hare (2015)**



This big cardboard reading aloud book collects four previously published picturebooks of Fox and Hare. In 'A neighbour for Fox and Hare' Fox and Hare meet their new neighbour Owl. They immediately get a lot of things, because Owl doesn't want them anymore. In 'Looking for cookies' Fox has a big appetite for cookies. He doesn't want rice or raisins, or apple or nuts, and even less cheese or meat. Owl and Hare surprise him with cookies when he returns home hungry from a long search. In 'The party of Owl' Owl learns that candles belong on a birthdaycake and in 'Blue is boring' Fox doesn't like the colour of his sweater anymore and he thinks with Hare and Owl about another colour that suits him. Author Sylvia vanden Heede doesn't need an introduction anymore. She already has written a lot of books and was awarded a Silver Pencil and a Golden Owl Prize of the Young Reader. Through funny stories, the simple words and short sentences the books of Fox and Hare are festive reads for beginning readers. Some words and sentences are in bold, and that makes it easy for them to make the (often funny) emphases in the story. There is also a lot of humour in the big, beautiful illustrations by Thé Tjong-King. A very clever (reading aloud) book!

## Sprookjes van Andersen / Fairytales of Andersen (2016)



In the past Thé Tjong-Khing has adapted several fairytales and in this recent edition he turns to thirteen (less) known stories by Hans Christiaan Andersen. The original longer fairytales are shortened and adapted for reading aloud in understandable language or reading yourself. Although some storyparts are left out because of this, the author mainly remains true to the original work with only a minor adaptation every now and then. In some stories the adaptations are bigger, but only an expert will notice. Original fairytales are often more severe concerning themes and course than later adaptations, but Thé Tjong-Khing is not afraid of the basics. For very young children this can be hard. Death, murder and violence are present in some stories, like in the heavy Big John and Little John.

Two stories are preceded with 'warnings' about the sad ending. Every now and then the reader is addressed directly, which works comically. The illustrations are in a characteristic style, with attractive use of colour and (like in the text) little finery. 'Princess on the erwt' and 'Clothes of the emperor' are published before in the 'Thirty most beautiful stories of the fairytale teller'.