

Laudatio given by Patsy Aldana, Jury President, Hans Christian Andersen Award 2016 at HCA Award Ceremony, August 2016, Auckland, New Zealand

It was an honour to chair this remarkable group of jurors from all over the world. They came from such diverse professional backgrounds and from very different countries and cultures. Yet the meetings and discussions were extremely harmonious and the process of selection remarkably consensual.

The jurors in alphabetical order by country:

Lola Rubio Argentina an editor and librarian

Dolores Prades Brazil a publisher and reading expert

Wu Qing China professor of English literature

Kirsten Bystrup Denmark a children's librarian

Yasmine Motawy Egypt a professor of children's literature

Shoreh Yousefi Iran a pre-school educator and editor

Andrej Ilc Slovenia a publisher of adult and children's books

Reina Duarte Spain a children's publisher

Susan Stan USA a professor of children's literature

Maria Beatriz Medina Venezuela the director of the Banco del Libro and a professor

The first criteria for the selection of the shortlist and the winners was the artistic excellence of the writing and of the art. The jurors were also interested in seeing how the creators had evolved in the course of their careers and whether they had been willing to take creative risks. It was also deemed very important that the books produced by the authors and illustrators be of significance—that important things were at stake in their work. And finally, did their books speak to children? Were these creators people whose books could be read by children all over the world, be accessible and meaningful to them, and enrich their lives and understanding?

Illustrators

The shortlist is:

Germany: [Rotraut Susanne Berner](#)

Iran: [Pejman Rahimizadeh](#)

Italy: [Alessandro Sanna](#)

Korea: [Suzy Lee](#)

Netherlands: [Marit Törnqvist](#)

And the winner of the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration is:

Rotraut Susanne Berner from Germany

Berner's work is at all times recognisably hers, while simultaneously being intensely responsive to the demands of the text.

Berner is notable for technical experimentation throughout her career using all kinds of media, pen-and-ink, brush drawings, colored and accented borders, linocut, stamping, flat screen printing, among others.

She has also worked with a wide range of texts, or in the case of the *Wimmel Books* no text at all. Berner claims a special affinity for the work of Ernst Schubiger, the 2008 Swiss Hans Christian Andersen Award winner. As she says, “His texts are simultaneously aloof and brimming with emotion; they run zigzags, they are at once melancholic and witty, exacting and full of respect; they are without taboos and yet cautious. Taken altogether, this seems to be the ideal backdrop for my drawing and painting. “

True, but to the reader she seems to respond equally to the fairy tale cannon which she treats as mini-graphic novels, picture books, or in her own crowning achievement the wordless *Wimmel Books*.

These are an example of how to create a world, filled with small, individual narratives that all together add up to a portrait of a town--a contemporary, specific German town and its adjacent countryside. And yet they are universal. Using purely visual story telling power these books engage the reader for hours as one sits and follows this world through the seasons- tracing specific characters, or buildings, markets, stores and streets and what is happening and changing. They are simply masterful.

Berner always finds the best way to tell a story with a deep respect for the material world in all its specificity. As Hans Joachim Goldberg says in his essay *Pictures Become Words*, she has great “insight into the secret life of things.

Berner is willing to take risks—*The Princess Will Arrive at Four* is a brilliant example of this as are the fairytale comics, *Definitely Not for the Little Ones*, and *When Death Came for a Visit*, written by Jurg Schubiger. Her books can be hilariously funny, and equally deeply moving. And she doesn't fear showing life's dark moments.

Berner never talks down to her audience and yet her books are unmistakably for children.

Children all over the world deserve to be exposed to her brilliant, humane, rich, emotionally true and deeply engaging books.

Authors

China: [Cao Wenxuan](#)

Denmark: [Louis Jensen](#)

Germany: [Mirjam Pressler](#)

Netherlands: [Ted van Lieshout](#)

USA: [Lois Lowry](#)

And the winner is:

Cao Wenxuan from China

The unanimous choice of the jury, Cao writes beautifully about the complex lives of children facing great challenges. He is a deeply committed writer, whose own difficult childhood has been deeply influential on his writing in which there are no easy answers. In *Bronze and Sunflower*, a novel set during the time of the Cultural Revolution in a rural Chinese village close by to a re-education centre for people

sent from the city, a village boy who does not speak and a little city girl who ends up coming to live with his family can be said to “save” each other. These children are entirely convincing and we care deeply about their fate. In the *Dingding Dangdang* series we are captivated and moved by two brothers with Down syndrome who separately flee their village and then search for each other through a world that is alternately loving and rejecting. These books take risks and have a great deal at stake.

Cao Wenxuan’s books don’t lie about the human condition, they acknowledge that life can often be tragic and that children can suffer. At the same time, they can love and be redeemed by their human qualities and the kindness they sometimes find when they are most in need.

As he has said, “ China has given us so many heartbreaking stories. How can you avoid writing about them? I can’t sacrifice my life experience to make children happy.”

Cao’s writing about the natural world is lyrical and beautiful. And Cao is a great example of how writing wonderful prose and telling stories about brave children facing tremendous difficulties and challenges can attract a very wide and committed child readership. He has literally millions of readers in his own country.

Cao Wenxuan has been a very important influence within Chinese children’s books as well helping to shape a literary tradition in China that honours the realities of children’s worlds. Recently Cao Wenxuan’s books have been making

their way into the world and have found enthusiastic readers in England, France, Germany, Italy, and Korea. The rest of the world's children are waiting to discover him, too.