



In the Face of Presumptions: Essays, Speeches & Incidental Writings

Barry Moser

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Barry Moser, despite his tendency to sound like a Baptist preacher and his abysmal table manners, is a virtuoso close to our hearts. He is best known as an artist who works with books, and more specifically with the texts he loves. He has illustrated legions of children's books, adult books and poetry collections. And as works of art they have been embraced by children, adults and librarians for over three decades. But he started life as a modest lad, learning letterpress and how type should look on the page, engraving the end-grain of boxwood (when it could still be obtained) and perfecting the art of watercolor to the point where he could illuminate anything from the words of Br'er Rabbit to the poetry of Donald Hall and Richard Wilbur. His most recent project, illustrating the entire Bible, has occupied him for years and this magnum opus has just been published, to national attention.

But it is his writing that occupies pride of place in this book, and as a writer Moser is as passionate and as engaged (and engaging) as he is as an artist. Here is a rich selection of his prose, his essays, his speeches, and even his letters and notes all concerning his work as a working artist. Reading it, one comes away with a firm impression of a mind at work, a generous and genial mind, but one that is never afraid to separate the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff. If you want to know how an artist thinks, how someone who has not only read books but thought deeply about how their texts operates, how someone who is as committed to the book as object as anyone working in the field goes about integrating text and image, then this book is a book you should read and reread. It possesses depth, intelligence, and passion. The words are from the heart, but the conclusions come from experience. William Blake, the proto-genius, observed that "Execution is the chariot of genius." In Moser's work, as in his words, we see that chariot flying at warp speed.

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