

*Marcus Pfister - Artworks*





Marcus Pfister was born on July 30th 1960 in Berne, Switzerland.  
After attending the Berne School of Art he then completed an apprenticeship as a Graphic Designer.  
In 1992 he burst onto the international picture book scene with „The Rainbow Fish“, which  
enabled him to focus on writing and illustrating his own books.  
Marcus lives with his family in Berne.

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Nord-Süd Verlag, minedition, Ravensburger Buchverlag, cbj

[www.marcuspfister.ch](http://www.marcuspfister.ch)





## The Sleepy Owl

*North-South Books, 1986*

*Watersoluble marker, watercolor*

The little owl sleeps during the day- the little boy sleeps at night. Two different rhythms of life encounter each other. Even if they can't play together, the boy and the owl will remain friends forever.

### **How it all began...**

*At the end of 1984 I had just gone freelance as a graphic artist, and I felt a growing desire to become an illustrator. And so at the beginning of 1985 I started to make sketches for my first children's book, The Sleepy Owl. When it was ready, I offered the text and pictures to three publishers in Switzerland, and in due course the book was published by Nord-Süd Verlag in Mönchaltorf. The fact that this character was later to lead to the Rainbow Fish shows how important the book was for my later career.*



*"What, did you write that book too?"*

*It's a compliment I just love to hear. It proves that people don't regard many of my more recent books as typical Pfister, but see them as individual, independent works.*

*Even in those early days, I realized that it would be difficult for me to develop a personal style of my own, as many illustrators have done before me. You can recognize books by Eric Carle, Leo Lionni or Max Velthuis the moment you see them. But whereas in my first books, *The Sleepy Owl* and *Penguin Pete*, I drew the outlines with a water soluble felt tip which then merged into watercolour, the outlines of the little hedgehog's spiky jacket in *Who is My Friend?* required the hard edges of pen and ink. In my Christmas book *Four Candles for Simon*, I didn't need any outlines at all, and preferred a mixed technique of watercolour and pastel chalk.*



## **Where is my friend?**

*North-South Books, 1986*  
*Ink pen, watercolour*

A sympathetic boardbook that told its story in the original version without any text. A little hedgehog looks for a friend.







### **Four Candles for Simon**

*North-South Books, 1986  
Pencil, watercolour, pastels*

Simon the shepherd boy searches for a lost lamb and finds himself taking part in the miraculous events of Christmas Eve.

A Christmas story in which four candles represent hope and helpfulness.



### ***My first Christmas book***

*Early in 1986, after those first adventures with owl and hedgehog, I was asked by Brigitte Sidjanski, publisher and co-owner of Nord-Süd Verlag, whether I might be interested in illustrating a Christmas story. This was a real stroke of luck, because normally such potential best-sellers are only offered to artists who are already well known. The artist who was originally commissioned to do the work had fallen ill.*

*As the book was scheduled to appear in autumn 1986, I had just two months to do the pictures. I seized the opportunity and worked seven days a week. By doing so, I laid the foundations for the success all over Europe of my own books about Christmas and Santa Claus.*









## Penguin Pete

*North-South Books, 1987, 1988, 1989 und 1993*

*Watersoluble marker, watercolor*

*The Owl Prize, Japan, Mention*

Pete, the little penguin, tries to fly like a bird, but he crash lands, always on his belly. Then he learns to swim and discovers the secrets of the sea.

The illustrations are taken from the first four volumes of the five Penguin Pete books.



*Of course that meant there was quite a long period during which the fluid outlines and soft watercolour landscapes of the Penguin Pete and Hoppel books became a kind of trademark. But in due course I began to look for new forms of expression: the use of glitter in Rainbow Fish, the divided pages with two different endings in Mats, experiments with die-cuts and pop-ups that led to the famous Magic Book with its amazing use of folds. And at all times I had the unwavering support of Nord-Süd Verlag, without which none of these adventures would have been possible.*









### **Santa Claus and the Woodcutter**

*North-South Books, 1987*

*Pencil, watercolor*

*Schweizer Jugendbuchpreis 1988, Auswahlliste*

The festive atmosphere of the winter-illustrations and the warm hearted story makes the charm of this Santa Claus book.





## Sun and Moon

*North-South Books, 1990*  
*Watercolor, spray-technique by toothbrush*

A book which I enjoyed very much. It tells us about the earth, the sun and the moon, from rainbows and tempests, a solar eclipse and meteors. And it tells an impossible love story that became reality. The illustrations still today belongs to my favorite ones.







## I See the Moon

*North-South Books, 1991*

*Watercolor, spray-technique by toothbrush*

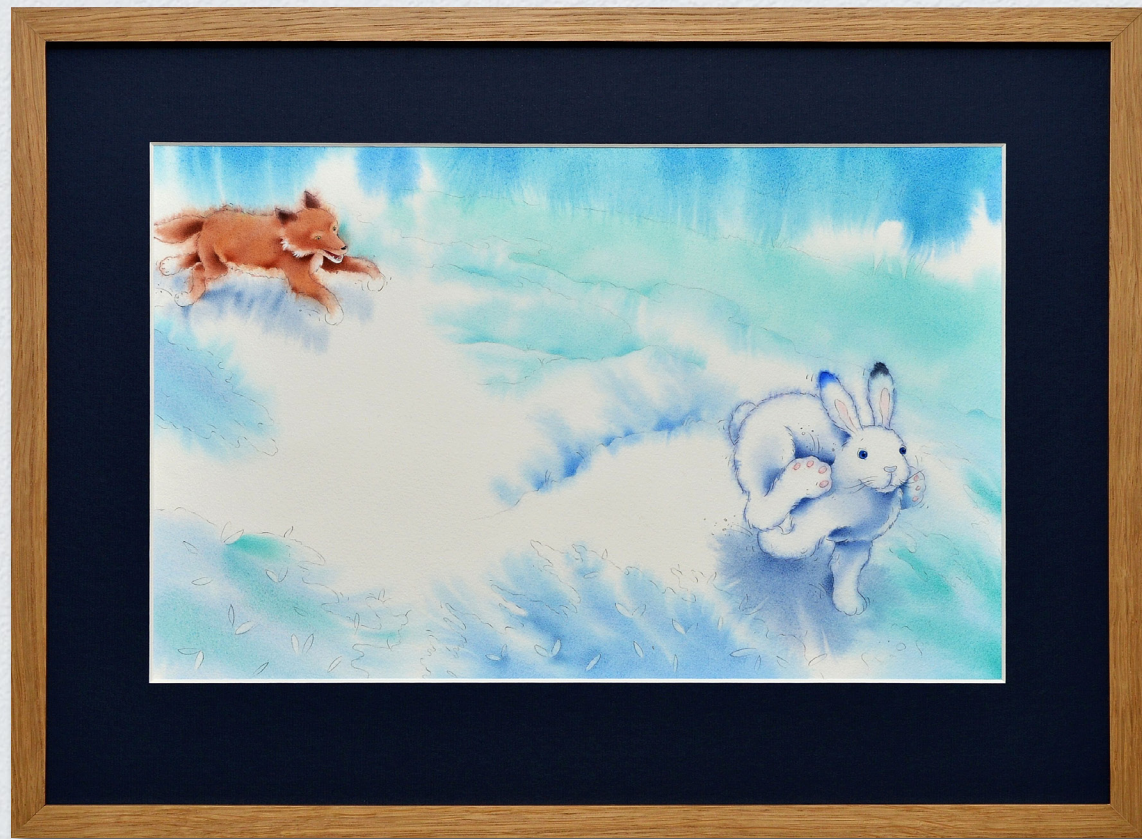
A collection of lullabies. I illustrated this book using the same technique as I used for "Sun and Moon".











## Hopper

*North-South Books, 1991, 1992, 1993 und 1997*  
*Pencil, watercolor*

The Hopper-Series talks about the adventures of a cute white rabbit. Hopper is looking for new friends, for springtime and, of course, the Easter bunny. The illustrations are taken from the volumes 1, 2, 3 und 5.











## The Rainbow Fish

*North-South Books, 1992*

*Pencil, watercolor, holographic foil*

*Christopher Award, New York*

*Critici in Erba Prize, Bologna*

*1. Preis Ulmer Bilderbuchspatz*

*Prix spécial des Libraires religieux pour le livre d'enfant, Valence*

*Prix de la Jeunesse, Cherbourg*

*ABBY-Nomination*

*North Dakota Flicker Tale Children's Book Award, Nomination*

*ABBY-Award*

*North-Carolina Children's Book Award for Picture Books, NCASL*

*Readers' Choice Award, Michigan Reading Association*

*Steirische Leseule*

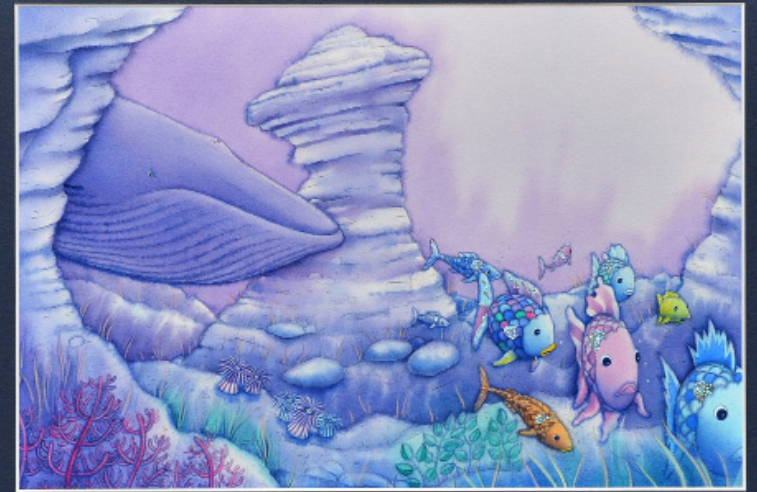
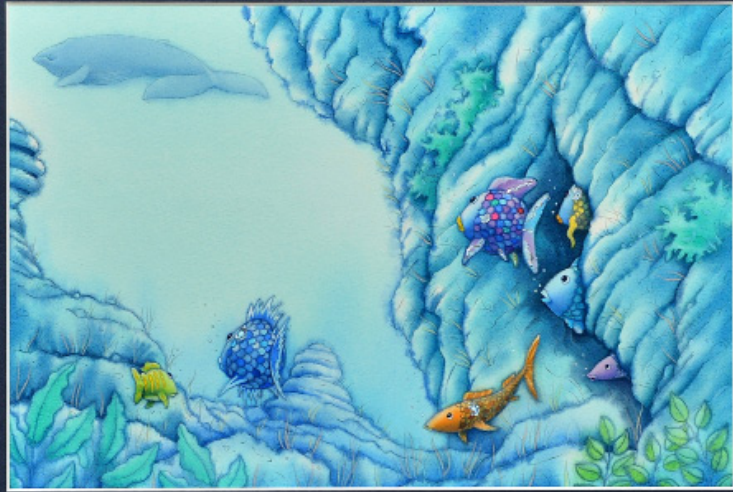
*3 Apples Book Award, Nomination,*

*New York Library Association*

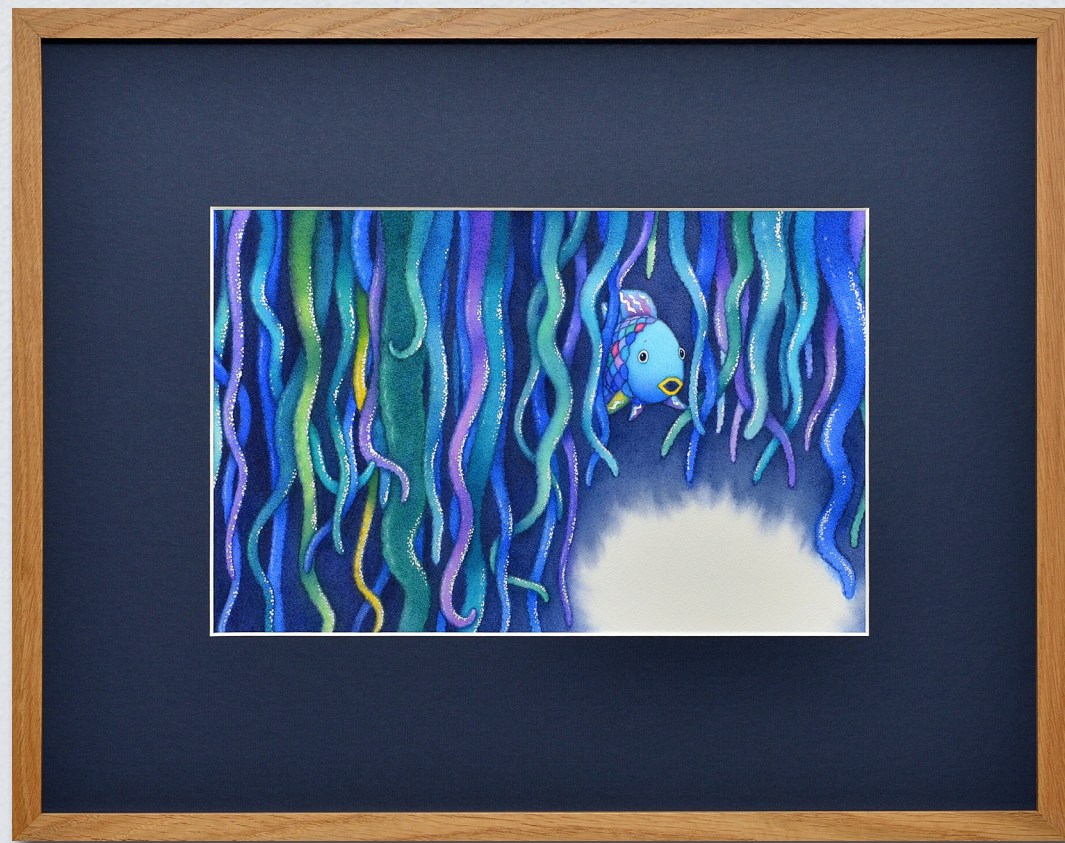


A proud and vain fish learns sharing and finds real friends.  
A picture book classic which is still up to date.

















## Chris & Croc

*North-South Books, 1994*  
*Chinese ink, watercolor, collage*

For Chris his stuffed crocodile becomes alive and so they experience various adventures through thick and thin.











## Wake Up, Santa Claus!

*North-South Books, 1996*  
*Pencil, watercolour*

It's like there is a jinx on Santa: First Santa over sleeps on the day he is supposed to deliver presents, then he can't find his second boot and his big bag won't pass through the door. Is it possible that the children won't get their presents this year?











## Milo

*North-South Books, 1997*

*Pencil, watercolor, holographic foil*

*Christopher Award 1997*

*IRA Storytelling World Award 1998*

*Honor Book 1998, Society of School Librarians*

*Best Children's Illustrated Books of 2000,*

*presented by The English Association*

The first volume with this character, which I carried about with me for a long time, tells about how to be responsible in regards to our planet. The sequel is a story about the passion of travelling and the understanding of foreign cultures.

*Milo has always been one of my favourite characters. I can vividly remember how the book originated and the long process it went through before the final version with its divided pages was at last ready for publication.*

*The first version, which had an unhappy ending and in which the main characters were gnomes, got such a negative response from my own children that I had to rethink the whole thing. Luckily for me!*

*I now had to look for a technical means by which I could give the story a sad ending AND a happy ending. I hit on the solution of dividing the pages from the middle onwards. And so eventually the book offered not only the two different endings but also room for its readers to use their imagination and devise an ending of their own. We are told what happens when greed and selfishness come out on top, and when respect and gratitude win the day. The message is clear: all our decisions have consequences, and each individual shares responsibility for the future of our planet.*









## How Leo Learned to Be King

*North-South Books, 1998*

*Pencil, watercolor, pastel crayon*

The animals make fun of the lazy and arrogant lion as a king of the animals. Now he wants to prove, that he really deserves the crown.

A story about modesty and helpfulness.











## **Make a Wish, Honey Bear**

*North-South Books, 1999*  
*Chinese ink, watercolor*

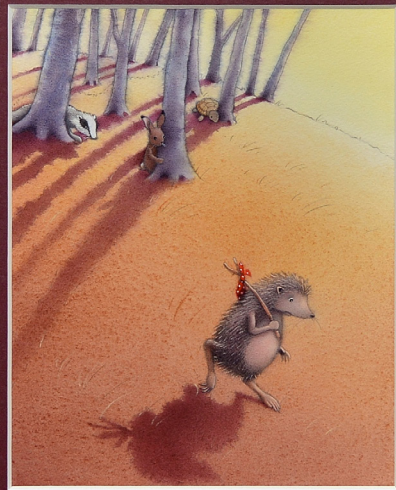
A delightful birthday-book.  
The friends of the little bear don't bring huge presents  
to his party, no. Everyone just has a very personal  
birthday-wish for the future of the little bear.











## The Happy Hedgehog

*North-South Books, 2000*  
*Pencil, watercolor, pastel crayon*

The little hedgehog doesn't understand the world anymore. Has one indeed to be faster, stronger or more intelligent than others to be happy? No, the happy hedgehog finds other paths that leads to happiness.











### **Just The Way You Are (left-hand side)**

*North-South Books, 2002*  
*Acryl on canvas, die-cuts*

A humorous book about wishful thinking, how friends and partners should be. Fortunately the animals recognize, that exterior appearances aren't that important. And the day ends with a funny party between friends.



### **Henri, Egg Artiste (right-hand side)**

*cbj, Munich, 2005*  
*Pencil, watercolour*

Henri is so tired of painting the same ordinary Easter eggs. After all, he's an artist, and artist create masterpieces- not just boring old eggs. So he decides to do something completely different.. Join Henri, as his eggs take you on a tour de force through art history, from the Renaissance to surrealism to pop art and beyond.









## Holey Moley

*North-South Books, 2006*  
*Pencil, watercolour*

Two young moles want to play together.  
One of them would like to build a big hill, the other one  
prefers to dig a huge hole.  
But they can't agree to make a compromise.  
Will they find a solution?











## **Bertie at Bedtime**

*North-South Books, 2008  
Acrylic, watercolor*

The little hippo Bertie doesn't want to go to bed. He would prefer to continue to play with his Daddy. Bertie keeps his Daddy on the run until he falls asleep- his Daddy...



*In Hello Friend! I experimented for the first time with acrylic. I decided to use canvas as my base, and I wanted to make its structure visible. In my mind's eye I could see pictures with vivid colours and striking colour contrasts, and I could only achieve this with shining acrylic paint. I found the patterned backgrounds fascinating, and I repeated this effect in the floral patterns of the Nils books. With these, though, I used acrylic on watercolour paper. And the patterns were not confined to the backgrounds – you can see them decorating furniture, clothes and other accessories.*









## The Little Moonraven

*minedition, 2010*  
*Acrylic, watercolor, holographic foil*

All the little moonraven wanted to do was to fly and play with the other ravens, but they just teased him. To show them, he decided to fly to the moon. But has the little raven attempted too much?



*The Little Moon Raven and its sequel The Paradise Bird are brought to life by black and white illustrations, with just a few vivid colours to create highlights. A striking stylistic device in these books is the merging of individual black sections into a single large surface. This underlines the content of the story, in which the bullying ravens form a powerful unit in contrast to their isolated victim, the moon raven.*









## The Paradise Bird

*minedition, 2015*

*Acrylic, watercolor, holographic foil*

„We are so bored!“ croak the ravens.

„Nothing ever happens.“

But then something does happen. Something bright and colourful and very, very noisy. Paradise Bird has arrived and life will never be the same!





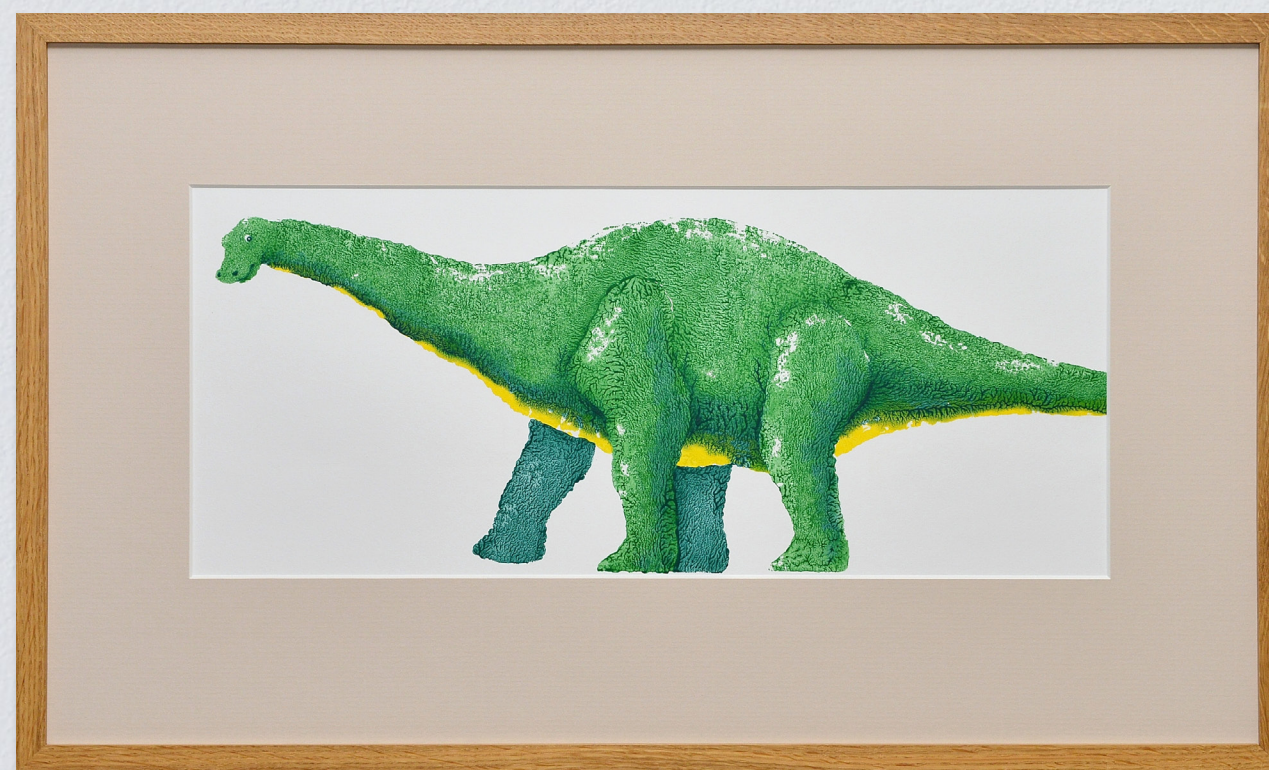
**Publisher's Weekly Book review, January 2011**

*In an age when infinite answers are available in an instant, maybe the questions we ask are what matter most. "There's so much that I want to know," writes Pfister, and in 13 short couplets he shows readers how questioning is a genuinely creative act – a way of being fully engaged in the world. His verses are by turns fanciful, scientifically minded and even faith based. In a departure from his Rainbow Fish series, Pfister has created images as pity as they are poignant, boldly graphic and dramatically cropped against white backgrounds. A blue-headed songbird is reminiscent of Asian watercolour; a storm cloud looks like it's been fashioned from salt dough; falling leaves seem cut from pieces of thickly tufted carpet. Although each was created using the same painted paper method, the results are as varied as the questions.*



**Kirkus Reviews, February 15, 2011**

*In a departure from his usual sparkly fare, Pfister's latest is a sweetly simple look at some very deep questions, allowing children the opportunity to delve into some of life's mysteries. The questions, each presented as a rhyming couplet, could have been just as easily formulated by a child as by the author - they feel like the charming queries children seem to make when adults least expect them. Although readers will find no answers here, most have scientific explanations, but others certainly hint toward the divine. And while the text is well written it is the beautiful artwork that will draw readers back for more. Luminous colors and amazing textures stand out against the stark, white backgrounds. The result echoes the mix of simplicity and complexity inherent in each question. In a world that so often emphasizes answers and solid facts, it is refreshing to see a text that encourages questioning, whether realistic or imaginative flights of fancy.*







## Questions, questions

*North-South Books, 2011  
Acrylic, holographic foil*

What turns the rain on in the sky and brings the sun to  
make things dry? How many shells are on the shore?  
Millions? Billions? Even more?  
In thirteen engaging couplets children's eyes becomes  
open to the wondrous mysteries all around them.



*This whole project started with the lyrics of Lucio Dalla's song Cosa sarà. I was inspired to write a poem of my own, which eventually led to my book What Makes Colours Bright? Until then I had always resisted writing texts in verse, but suddenly the rhymes and rhythms seem to flow of their own accord. The conciseness of the lines seemed to demand large but simple illustrations, and plain acrylic seemed to me too monotonous. And so I experimented, using acrylic with what I call a "clapping" technique, creating animated structures within the coloured surfaces. It worked well, and brought me glowing reviews in the United States.*

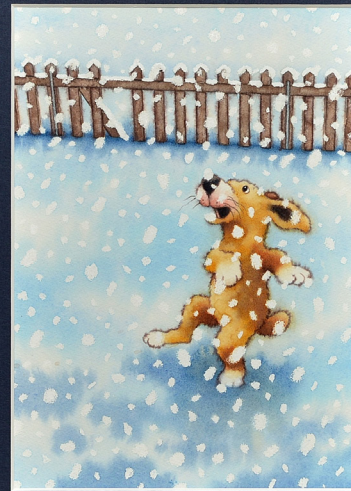
*During the next few years I used the same technique in no less than six other books, five of which figure on the pages that follow.*



## Snow Puppy

*North- South Books, 2011*  
*Watercolour*

When Sophie goes shopping with her parents, Rascal has to stay at home all by himself. It's just plain mean. Then Rascal notices something unusual outside the window. White specks are floating down from the sky...







## Dr Samichlous under dr Duschi

*North-South Books, 2012*

*Acrylic*

In this book there are lots of new and amusing verses about St Nicholas Day, Advent and Christmas – all in Swiss dialect!











## **Ava's Poppy**

*North-South Books, 2012*  
*Acrylic*

Ava is delighted when she discovers a brilliant red poppy. She sits with the flower in the sunny days of summer and shields it in the rain, until one day the petals start to drop and the beautiful flower fades. But when spring comes again... Ava is surprised anew.











## **The Yellow Cab**

*North-South Books, 2013*

*Acrylic*

Jack, the yellow cab, used to be the fastest taxi in town. Now he spends his time day-dreaming. Suddenly he finds himself in the Brazilian rainforest...

The charming little cab will take listeners on a delightful and thought-provoking ride.











## **Animal ABC**

*North-South Books, 2013*  
*Acrylic*

Playful rhymes highlight the distinctive features of each animal- from alligator to zebra- allowing little listeners to guess the name of each.



















## Happiness is...

*North-South Books, 2014*  
Acrylic

From a winter snowflake melting on your tongue to blowing the seeds of a dandelion, this book celebrates happy moments shared by two friends across the seasons. The print-style illustrations capture these moments of joy with a rainbow of colors and textures.











## The bear, the rabbit and the red thing

*Ravensburger, 2015*

*Acrylic*

“What is that?” the little bear asks the even smaller rabbit, pointing to the red thing hanging from the sky. Is it a roof? A square apple? Gradually the two friends find out more and more about the mysterious red object.

A warm-hearted story which tells us that not all mysteries have to be solved for us to enjoy them.











### **Little strong duck**

*North-South Books, 2014*

*Acrylic*

Lina the duckling would love to go and play outside. But she is too ill and weak. What she likes best is to be visited by her friend Freddy the frog. And it's Freddy who discovers that the little duck has a very special gift.











### **What a day...**

*minedition, 2017*  
*Acrylic*

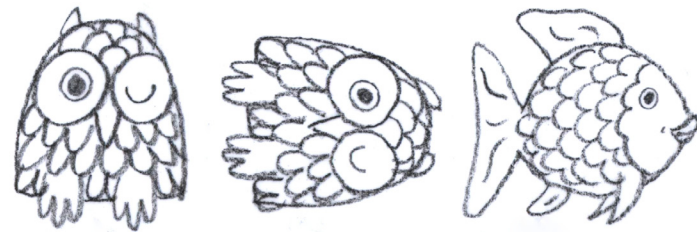
A book without any text.  
In a single day you can experience a variety of emotions,  
from anger to sadness to joy. And the little raven lives all  
of them in one single day...





### **The story of the Rainbow Fish**

At the end of 1990 Brigitte Sidjanski was reminiscing about my first book *The Sleepy Owl* and she remarked: "It would be nice if you did something else in a similar vein." But what did that mean? There was no question of a sequel, and of course the content would have to be different. I could use the same painting technique and other details of form and design, but what else? If the book was to have something in common with *The Sleepy Owl*, the main character would have to have a similar appearance. But another bird would come too close to being a repetition of the owl. I couldn't find an answer until one day I looked at the owl again.



Of course! The stylised feathers turned into scales, and the coloured owl turned into a colourful fish. In the end this was the only point the two books had in common – but that was the moment when the rainbow fish was born. Starting with this single image, I developed the idea of the most beautiful fish in the sea. Initially he is vain and selfish, but then in his loneliness he learns the joy of sharing. If the robe of colourful scales had remained the only defining characteristic, then all the other fish would have had to look grey and boring. And so I looked for an additional, completely individual feature that would not only distinguish him from all other fish but would also bring out the value and uniqueness of his scales.





It was now up to the publishers to make inquiries in Europe, Asia and America as to the practicality of my idea. The fact of the matter was that production costs would be twice as high as for any normal picture book. Nevertheless, Davy Sidjanski decided to take the risk and to publish the book complete with its glittering holographic foil. In view of all the technical problems we were faced with, there was no time to worry about whether the book would be a success or not. But it soon became clear that the initial print of 30,000 was nowhere near large enough. With the help and support of schools, teachers, bookshops and libraries, that first edition of 30,000 soon extended to 3 million, and since then sales have risen to approximately 30 million copies worldwide.

“ The idea of a story about the most beautiful fish in the sea grew into a desire to present the rainbow fish as a kind of anti-hero. Before my mind’s eye was the image of Oscar Wilde’s Happy Prince (illustrated by Jean Claverie). I had always loved the tale of the little swallow who, instead of flying to Egypt, stays behind in order to distribute the treasures from the prince’s statue to people in need. But the self-sacrificing bird who is even ready to die in the service of others seemed to me to be an inappropriate model for small children, as was the kind-hearted and generous prince high up on his marble column. No, the rainbow fish had to be one of us – liable to make mistakes, but able to admit them and to learn from them. Someone we and our children could identify with.”



The ideal solution came to me in the form of the holographic foil I had used in my work as a commercial artist. This glittering material brought a wonderful new dimension to the story. It helped both children and adults to understand the feelings of the rainbow fish when it came to sharing such a treasure. Giving away any old scale would be nothing special, but giving away a precious, glittering scale was a very different proposition. Although for children the foil may simply have been something attractive, for grown-ups it symbolized the wealth that humans ought to share with others.





*Der Regenbogenfisch*

Ein Kinderbuch erobert die Welt

*Arc-en-ciel: Le plus beau poisson des océans*

Un livre d'enfant universel

20.3. – 23.5.2015







**Exhibition The Rainbow Fish  
at the Swiss National Library**

*From 20 March until 23 June 2015, the Swiss National Library devoted a special exhibition to the rainbow fish. It was accompanied by a variety of smaller events, such as children from different countries reading the story aloud in their own language.*











Between spring 1986 and autumn 2017 Marcus Pfister has published 60 picture books. In this book you will find a cross-section of his work as author and illustrator, and it contains some of his own favourite pictures.