

What Makes Us Happy?

Mila Tenaglia (November 10, 2016)



A short book of images and brief thoughts that seeks to answer the question: What makes us happy?

Michela, you are an Italian artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Can you tell us a little about

**yourself?**

I was born and raised in Italy. I am from the beautiful region of Puglia, in southern Italy. I moved to NYC thirteen years ago. Back in Italy, I studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti. Upon graduating, I have been working with a start-up company creating cartoons and games for both cell phones and the Internet. I consider illustration to be my main background. However when I came to the US, I, as many others find themselves, began exploring many different and new fields (from the food industry to babysitting sporadically and other various freelance gigs). I also tried a couple of corporate jobs... but personally that was not right for me. Although I made ends meet to adequately survive in this jungle, I truly never lost focus of my main goal, which is doing what I love to do.

Why did you choose to write a children's book? Is this your first publication with Caracò?

It was never actually my intention to write a children's book. Even I was surprised by the development of this book! It was such a quick and spontaneous process that I was done with all the pages before even realizing that I had "written" a book. I was experiencing an internal urge to communicate certain thoughts, so I found myself drawing them and writing them down. I only understood right after that all the drawings were connected and had a common line. That's when I looked at all of them as a "picture book." I am very pleased that my first publication was with Caracò because it is a young and energetic publishing company that emphasizes education and social communities in bringing ethics to young learners.

"If You Are Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands" is the title of the book but also a nursery rhyme... who doesn't know it? We all grew up with that song. What is the meaning of the book?

Yes, it's probably one of the most famous nursery songs and I think it has been translated in languages around the world. It's as easily understood as it is popular because of its simple but powerful message about what we care about in life. All of us, indistinctly, no matter what our walk of life is, we are all searching for happiness.

In the book there are 35 illustrations, English text, and Italian text... Would you consider this book to be bilingual? Is the audience for children or adults?

It was initially conceived in English only, but obviously, after meeting with Caracò we decided to also target the Italian consumers. Instead of just translating the book, we thought it would have been interesting to have it in both languages so that the book itself could become a teaching and learning tool. At first glance, the book appears to be for kids only. It's a picture book, the illustrations are very simple and the title is a nursery rhyme... so it would obviously appeal to a younger audience. But the concept of happiness does not target a specific age... so it actually speaks to adults as well. And we also like the idea of having a book that can be read and appreciated, regardless of the reader's age.

What do the illustrations mean?

Each illustration is a visual representation of each aphorism. While the aphorisms might refer to a deeper concept, the illustrations make ironic and funny statements.

The main character of these illustrations is a simple figure of a sweet stylized man with a red heart drawn on his t-shirt. Does he embark with the readers on this wonderland journey?

If we consider exploring the concept of happiness as an abstract journey...then yes. They travel together!

Are you working on anything new for the future?



Yes, I am working on a new book. This work is slightly more articulate. It's still a picture book, but it contains an actual story line and dynamics that bring the two main characters to understand the importance of friendship to defeat loneliness. Hopefully, I will be able to share more soon about this second work.

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