
DEBORAH STEVENSON

Associate Editor

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Graduate School of Library and Information Science

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

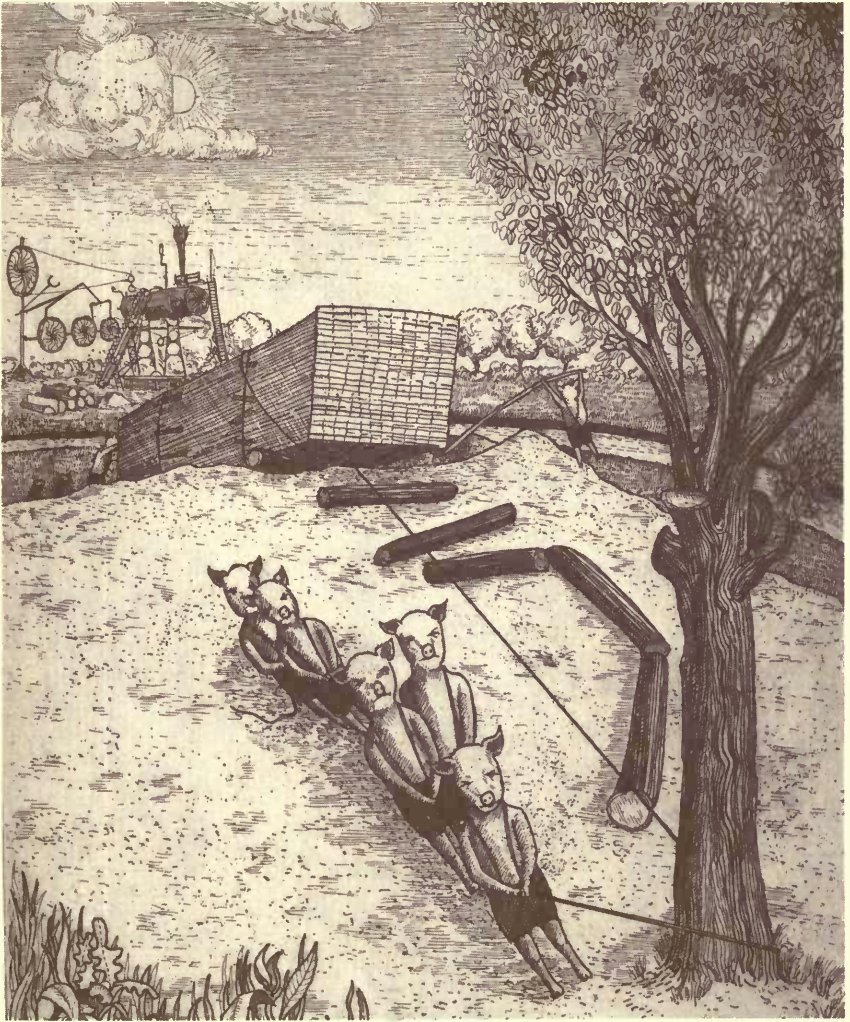
Construction, Illustration, and a Plethora of Pigs: Reflections on a Lecture by Arthur Geisert*

It's a measure of the power of storytelling, I suppose, or at least the power of Arthur Geisert's storytelling, that after two days of intense concentration on the topic of story we were still seduced into rapt attention by closed curtains, dimmed lights, and a well-turned tale. In this case, however, the tale was autobiographical and accompanied by slides, describing the Geiserts' Herculean labors in the construction of two charming and almost entirely inaccessible homes as well as Mr. Geisert's work in picture books.

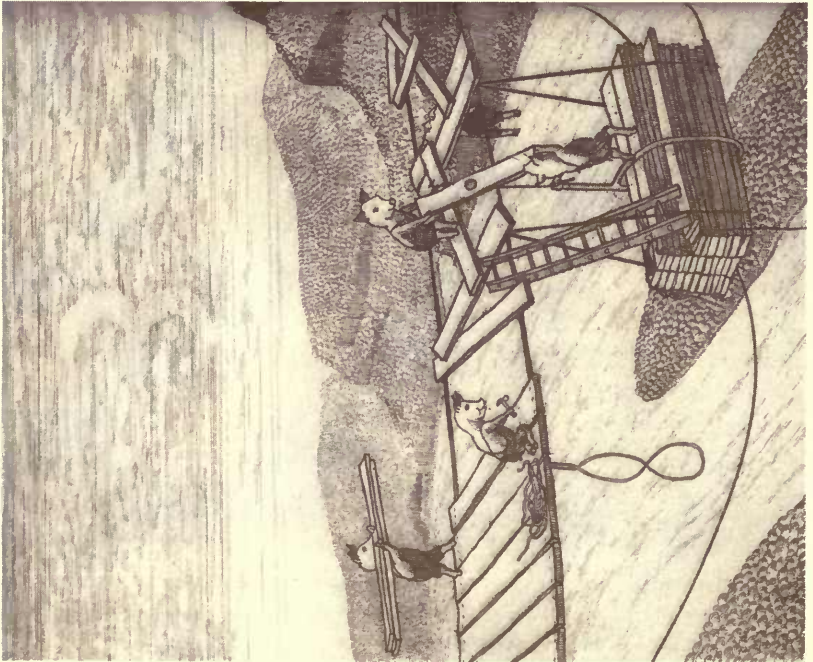
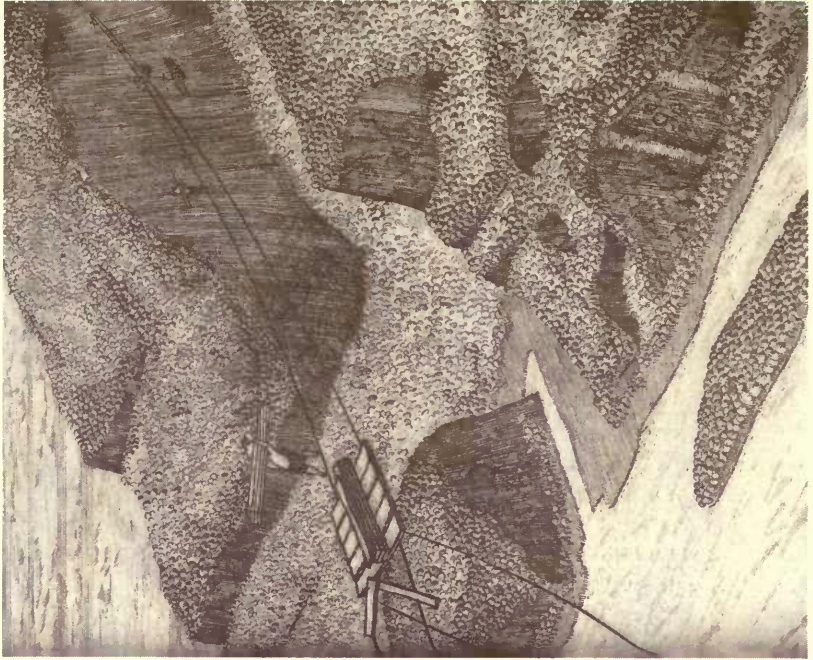
Even without the literary connection, the Great Building Saga would have made a gripping narrative; one hopes the Geiserts found it as amusing at the time as they managed to make it seem in retrospect. Both the house constructed atop a forested and trackless hill (it looked like a mountain in the pictures, but we're not supposed to have mountains in Illinois) and the elegant yet appealingly Rube Goldbergesque structure in the old quarry were infinitely desirable artistic eyries and thrilling to contemplate, but perhaps even more thrilling was the safe distance between us in the audience and the labor of their building process.

As Mr. Geisert's slides made clear, these were not merely significant and backbreaking aspects of his life, but experiences that were the source for much of his art. Obviously the man had peculiar insight into Noah's ark-building travails, for one thing; more important, however, was the realization that his literary pigs's bent for construction came from that of their maker. When the D pigs in *Pigs from A to Z* drag lumber, pulling together as a team and relaying around a pulley-tree, it isn't just a porcine way around the problem of hooves or a conveniently alliterative action, but an echo of a Geisert construction scene. When the pigs of *Pigs from 1 to 10* build a bridge across a gorge, they're simply following Geisert's real-life

*Arthur Geisert's art is reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.



D is for dragging the lumber. Dragging was drudgery. (Pigs from A to Z, p. 15)



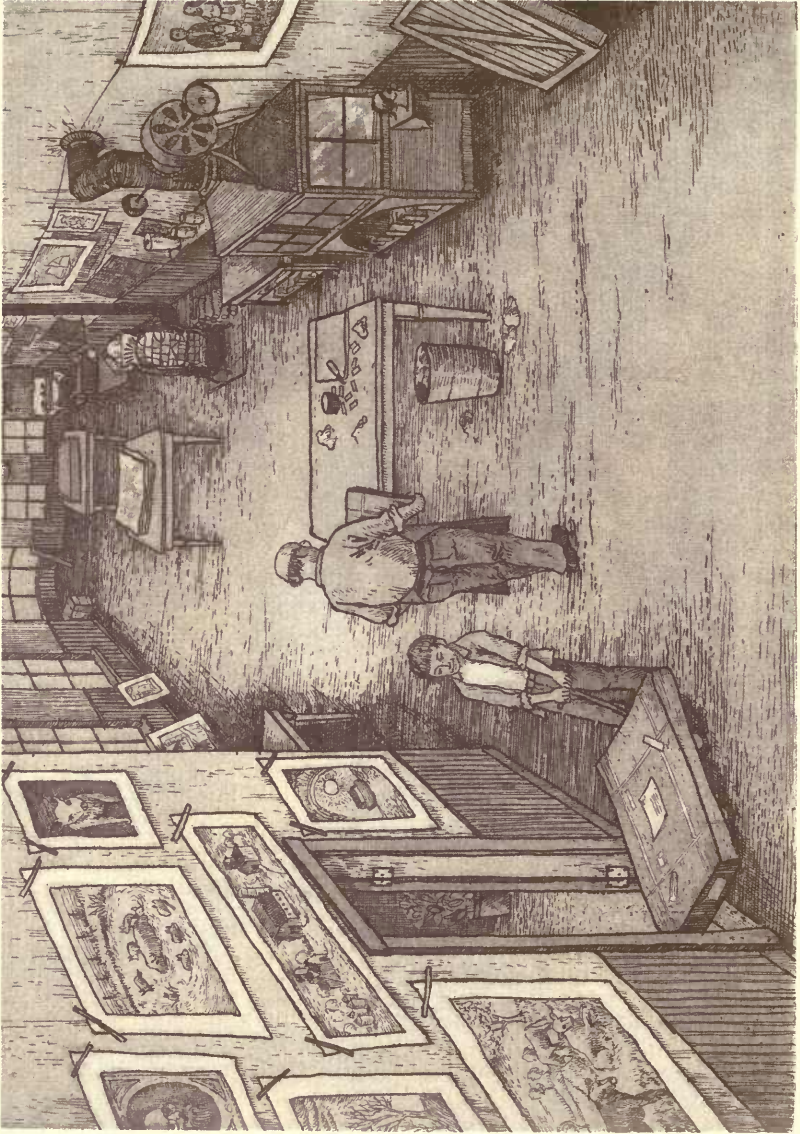
Balancing carefully, we built a bridge. (Pigs from 1 to 10, pp. 16 and 17)

example (which leads one to wonder if there isn't somewhere a pig building houses and illustrating books showing teams of laboring Geiserts).

The places Geisert made are, of course, not only the places in his art but the places wherein that art is created. This was made brutally clear by the photograph of a huge press being hauled up the hillside through the trees, looking like the scene from *Burden of Dreams* documenting the dragging of a Spanish-galleon replica through the Peruvian jungle. This is also reflected in his book *The Etcher's Studio*, which shows a workplace that, like etcher Geisert's studio, is chock-a-block with the tools of the trade and the fruits—and the pigs—of his labor. Fortunately both the construction and artistic labor have been well worth the effort: Geisert is an artist who knows construction, whether it be of an etching or a house among the rocks, and who seemingly takes as much pleasure in the process as in the product. He lives in both kinds of creations, since slides of his studio show the illustrations he made lining the walls of this room in the house he made, and his stories about the one construction become the stories within the other.

WORKS CITED

- Burden of Dreams*. Videocassette. Dir. Les Blank. Flower Films, 1982. 94 min.
 Geisert, Arthur. *The Etcher's Studio*. Boston: Houghton, 1997.
 —. *Pigs from A to Z*. Boston: Houghton, 1986.
 —. *Pigs from 1 to 10*. Boston: Houghton, 1992.



I helped him get ready. (The Etcher's Studio, p. 5)