YOU CAN JUDGE THESE COVERS BY THE BOOK!

Book cover—or dust jacket—design is a huge business segment within the book publishing industry, and the cover design can often play a crucial role in determining a book’s overall sales and ultimate success.

So, when students in MSU Department of Art, Art History, and Design Chair Chris Corneal’s illustration course were tasked with designing alternate covers for “The Yellow Birds,” the book featured as East Lansing’s 2013 One Book, One Community selection, Corneal reminded them to keep that in mind. Corneal’s class was made up of juniors and seniors majoring in studio art, most concentrating in graphic design. The resulting works of art from Corneal’s class clearly demonstrate his students were up to the challenge. So much so that many of their designs, along with corresponding design statements, were on exhibition at the East Lansing Public Library in October and November 2013. Once the book cover designs had been completed, the MSU College of Arts and Letters graphic design faculty worked together to select the strongest designs for the Yellow Birds library exhibition.

DEBUT NOVELIST

The Yellow Birds, by debut novelist and Iraq War veteran Kevin Powers, tells a fictional story of war by capturing the harsh reality and aftermath of combat, as well as raising complex questions about returning home after serving in the war. A finalist for the National Book Award, The Yellow Birds received the 2013 PEN/Hemingway Award for first fiction.

Kevin Powers served in the U.S. Army in Iraq in 2004 and 2005, where he was deployed as a machine gunner in Mosul and Tal Afar. Born and raised in Virginia, he holds a Master of Fine Art from the University of Texas in Austin, where he was a Michener Fellow in Poetry.

ONE BOOK, ONE COMMUNITY

Co-sponsored by the City of East Lansing and Michigan State University, the annual One Book, One Community program encourages the city-university community to read the same book and discuss it in a variety of settings. The book is also an assigned reading for all incoming MSU freshmen.

Kevin Powers visited the East Lansing Michigan State University community to kick off the 2013 One Book, One Community (OBOC) program and appeared at three free community events, including “An Evening with Kevin Powers,” the official kickoff for the 2013 OBOC program; an event for incoming freshmen at the MSU Academic Welcome at the Jack Breslin Student Events Center; and “An Afternoon Coffee” at the East Lansing Public Library, which was free and open to the public.

A series of community and campus events also took place centered on the themes of the book, including Boot Camp 101, films, a partnership with the MSU Department of Theatre on its production of “Widows” with a post-show discussion featuring The Yellow Birds, panel discussions, and more.

First launched in 2001 by city and university representatives with Ray Bradbury’s classic “Fahrenheit 451,” the One Book, One Community program has brought East Lansing’s diverse community together each academic year with a new book and distinguished author.

For additional information, visit www.onebookeastlansing.com.
Mariya Avanesyan

“When I started this piece, I wanted my finished product to convey a sort of emotion. I tried to achieve this not by just the color, but by the eyes and perhaps the lips. The subject itself is of my brother. My brother grew up labeled as the wild child of the family, often causing mischief. Over the years, my brother grew out of his mischievous behavior (but not completely), and developed into a curious, deep thinker. I feel like people seem to assume he’s still a troublemaker, and don’t see the more intellectual being he’s evolved into. With this piece, I try to pin down a more somber mood with the blues, but still keep the bright orange in the background in regard to his adventurous and energetic character.”

Holly Nauta

“In my design I wanted to reflect Powers’ poetic and metaphorical writing style. Choosing a carnival scene as the focus for my cover allowed me to explore the main character’s thought on death during the war, his idea that they were already marked from the beginning. Similar to the shooting targets, they all have the same purpose but only the shooter knows which one he will aim for.”

Liz Haskin

“For ‘The Yellow Birds’ cover, I directed the basic graphic elements to activate the space by using directional lines, tension and asymmetrical uniformity. I intentionally enveloped the term “bird” within the circle as an afterthought while offsetting the last bullet, to mirror the function of a loaded gun. For the viewer, I want the repetitive components to convey a message of tribulation, conformity and internal conflict.”

Heather Jarosz

“Throughout the book, Bartle communicates an inner struggle dealing with the rights and wrongs of war. I decided to illustrate this with a layering of inkblots. The viewer can interpret the inkblots in whatever way they see fit, mirroring the way Bartle tells his struggle; never finding a real solution.”
J.J. Jenks

“My alternate design combines two unrelated objects—barbed wire and a bird’s nest—to create an image metaphor for several of the book’s underlying themes. The nest is a metaphorical reference both to home as a place of nurturing, as well as the human mind. By creating the nest out of barbed wire (an obvious symbol of war), its meaning is transformed to represent a threatening, uninhabitable place that could never serve as an adequate home for a bird. Here, I am alluding to the soldier’s inability to re-assimilate with society, having been transformed permanently (i.e. PTSD) by the atrocities of war. Home, as represented by the nest, no longer exists as a place of safety, peace, and protection. Instead, it serves as a constant reminder to the soldier of the peril and destruction witnessed during time of war. A lone feather represents the fragmentation of the soldier’s psyche. With the nest empty, only the single feather remains—a solemn memorial to a time when the life and the mind of the soldier were once innocent and whole.”
Francoise Gagnier

“I chose to highlight the heavy mood and grim subject matter of the narrative through the use of dark tones and slightly macabre imagery. By abstracting the rib cage illustration through stroke style and cropping, the viewer can more easily experience the emotional aspect of the piece at first glance. The visual metaphor of the birds within the bones aptly reflects the psychological and physical journeys of the characters in the novel.”

Katie Rzemien

“My design depicts the chaos and confusion that occurs in Bartle’s mind as he attempts to piece together his memories from the war. The erupting patterns and colors create disorder, while the simple sans serif typeface of the title provides a contrast.”

Kevin Marquardt

“My idea was to illustrate the complexities of war. The puzzle motif represents both the mental anguish of a soldier’s duty and the intricacy of the current situation in the Middle East. My hope was to convey that war leaves just as many emotional wounds as physical ones.”

Courtney Russ

“In designing the cover, I took an approach that would capture the essence of the military and its rigid, systematic structure. By combining a limited color palette with a simple illustration, highlighting the central setting of the piece at first glance, I aimed to allude to warfare so that the viewer would drum up their own ideas of exactly how this concept is pivotal to the author’s tale.”