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The Island

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~~Editors Choice:~~

Editors Choice

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

First published in Germany in 2002, this large format picture book is a powerful fable for our times. A man is washed up on a beach and his arrival provokes fear in the people that find him because 'he wasn't like them'. Grudgingly they allow him to stay but locked up in a goat pen. The man's very presence begins to haunt their lives and the people project their prejudices and hatreds onto him eventually setting him adrift once more on his fragile raft. The fisherman who initially rescued him and tried to help him has his boat burnt.

All the protagonists in the tale are white and the story thus evokes the pogroms and ethnic cleansings of Europe although its message is one that applies to all the many places in the world where refugees are made unwelcome in camps and detention centres. The title is also resonant recalling John Donne's 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind'.

Greber, a Swiss illustrator and designer, now lives in Australia. His strikingly forceful artwork in sombre pastels with charcoal line contrasts the vulnerability of the small figure of the naked man with the burly, thickset men who menace him with their pitchforks. The turbulent sea that surrounds the island underlines the man's desperate need for a safe place. This is a book that will provoke a great deal of discussion and teachers can download useful teaching notes from www.allenandunwin.com [4].

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