

# ICOON: a book with no words

By Paolo Marcesini

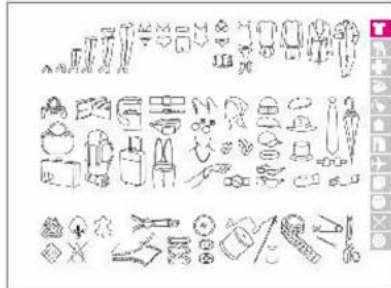


How many times have you been in a foreign country, desperately looking for a pharmacy or a public toilet, longing to eat a slice of pizza or simply seeking the tourist information office? You will not have any problems if you speak the local language, but if you don't? How do you communicate? How do you ask for information if you don't know the proper words? You may start to stammer helplessly or wring your hands... unless you pull a little magenta-coloured book out of your trouser pocket, a passport-shaped mini booklet that speaks the world's most universal language: pictures.

**ICOON**, published by *AmberPress*, is a wordless universal phrase book a real global picture dictionary. It is divided into twelve different categories each one of them full of essential everyday symbols. The illustrations are simply designed and clearly arranged in order to make the icons even easier to understand. So, regardless of whether you need a toothbrush, safety pin or swimming trunks, want to explain hay fever without using words, ask how to change money or are trying to rustle up a replacement battery for your camera's light meter, this small book can be very useful. You only need to point to one of over 2,000 symbols to express a concept and make yourself understood. **Gosia Warrink**, the author and designer of **ICOON**, tells us about the making of this perfect travel companion.



**How were the images which illustrate the Global Picture Dictionary chosen? What sort of research was done?**  
During our trips to Central America, Africa and Asia we collected lists with items you need abroad. We talked to friends who travel a lot and chose the new relevant symbols.



**What type of traveller did you have in mind when you designed these images? What is your portrait of a "typical traveller"?**  
Our book is for everyone who travels. For a businessman who is "lost in translation" in Tokyo, for a backpacker in Venezuela, and also for a family travelling in France.

**If you were to graphically depict the cities of Rome, Milan, London, Paris, Barcelona, Berlin and New York which images would you**

**assign to each of them? Why?**  
We would choose typical food, city landmarks/architecture, and also special images for tradition and lifestyle, fashion and culture. For Rome we would create symbols of the Coliseum, Pantheon, Forum Roman and Vatican, the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps. For Berlin - Brandenburg Gate, TV-Tower, Berlin Wall, Reichstag and Museum-Island. For Paris - The Tour Eiffel, The Arc de Triomphe, The Louvre, Centre Pompidou and Notre Damme. And for New York - the Statue of Liberty, Empire State and the Chrysler Building, The Museum of Modern Art, Manhattan, Broadway and The Wall Street.

**What has influenced the way in which you depict the world through images? How important are the stimuli which come from the web?**  
We are influenced by the simplicity of visual communication and the desire to be able to communicate anywhere in the whole world through pictures. The important thing is to reduce and show the essence of one thing without showing too many details. The symbols have to be understood in a minimalist way. The web as a stimuli was not so important for our book.

**In your opinion what are the most representative images of modern urban culture?**  
If we chose five icons, which we think would be understood in every country by young people, they would be: jeans, hairstyling, hamburger, football and iPod.



Gosia Warrink, the author and designer of ICOON

April, 10th 2008

Next >

This is a new meeting place, wanted by Moleskine and open to free participation



active blogs: barcelona, berlin, detour, london, milan, new york, paris, rome,...

Recent post

**Discover Europe /BERLIN**  
Europe, one of the world's seven continents with an area of 10,180,000 square kilometres made up of 50 different countries [a more](#)

**Blood on Paper /LONDON**  
The V&A have put on display a fantastic collection of books from famous artists of the 20th and 21st centuries. Entitled [more](#)

Focus on



**Detour Paris, the Moleskine notebook experience**  
The Detour exhibition presents an exceptional collection of notebooks by artists of international acclaim. After the successful experience in London and New York, Detour comes...[more](#)

Urban interviews



**Barcelona through the lens of a camera**  
Walking through the streets and squares of Barcelona with Carlos Lorenzo from Barcelona Photoblog, a daily updated photoblog which provides not just images of the city but...[more](#)

Video



**Gordon Cheung Moleskine notebook at Detour exhibition**