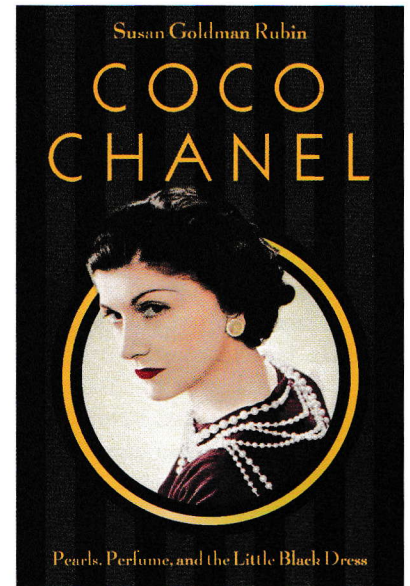
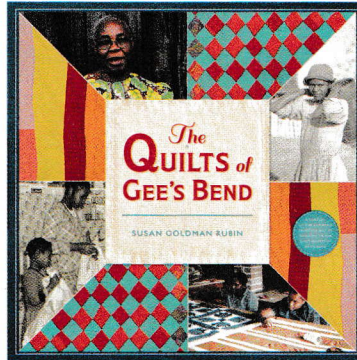
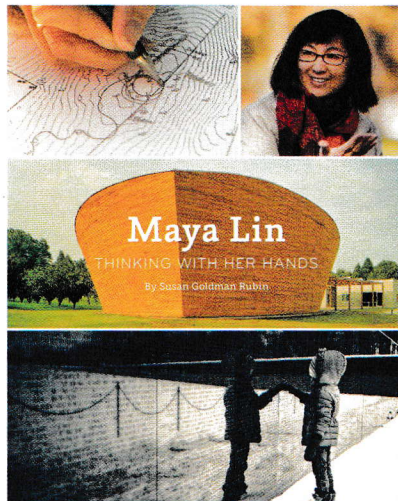


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BOOKS

Kid Lit Big Wig

BY ELEANOR MALLET BERGHOLZ '65

WHEN SUSAN GOLDMAN RUBIN '59 enrolled at Oberlin, she wanted to major in art. Instead, on the advice of her mother, she took up English literature. After all, she came of age in the 1950s, when women were still expected to follow a narrow, prescribed path.

But that didn't last long for Ruben.

After Oberlin, art was still in her heart. "I thought I would illustrate children's books," she says. "But I was struggling. The whole idea of a woman artist: How do you make that happen? I was a wife, raising children."

In time, she found her niche, writing books for young adults and children. She has published about 65 books, including two last year, one this year, and another coming next year. Although they vary widely in topic, many serve as portraits of the struggle for individual expression.

Rubin's books have introduced children to artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Georgia O'Keefe, and Jacob Lawrence, using the artists' own colorful works as illustrations. Ruben doesn't focus on the famous artists as stars, but rather on the ways

they found pathways for their art. Her books provide a necessary reality check for young people who are often taught that a successful life proceeds in a straight line through high school, college, and a job. Ruben shows that many were not sure where they were going or what they would become.

In her book *Music Was It*, about Leonard Bernstein, Ruben wrote of the composer's early love of music and the difficulties he encountered while pursuing it. "His father told him he would never make it as a musician," she says. "This struggle went on throughout his childhood, and I wanted to explore this struggle."

In *Delicious*, Ruben describes how the artist Wayne Thiebaud, known for his luscious paintings of cakes, pies, and gumball machines, often lined up in rows, gathered in his mind certain pictures from his childhood—the pattern of crops on his grandfather's farm, or the use of light and shadow in his high school theater department—that would find their way into his work as an adult. "Wayne didn't realize it, but he was collecting images and storing them to use in his paintings later," Ruben wrote.

In *Maya Lin: Thinking With Her Hands*, Ruben's book on the artist who won the design contest for a proposed Vietnam Memorial when she was only 21 and a student at Yale, Ruben writes

that Lin skirted the politics of the Vietnam War. Her design, which focused simply on those who had died, created so much controversy that she did not attend the groundbreaking. Despite the dustup, Lin was glad she stuck by her original vision.

Rubin's 2017 book, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, tells the story of how stunning quilts stitched by women for decades in obscurity in a remote, impoverished community in Alabama came to be exhibited in the top museums. Ruben quotes Missouri Pettway, who made a quilt of her husband's clothing after he died in 1942: "I going to take his work clothes, shape them into a quilt to remember him, and cover up under it for love."

Rubin's books cover a range of subjects, from a Catholic woman who rescued Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto (*Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto*), to Civil Rights workers in the American South (*Freedom Summer: The 1964 Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*), to an iconic fashion designer (*Coco Chanel: Pearls, Perfume, and the Little Black Dress*, published in March of 2018).

Next up: Ruben is working on a book about singer and activist Paul Robeson called *Sing and Shout*, to be published in the fall of 2019.