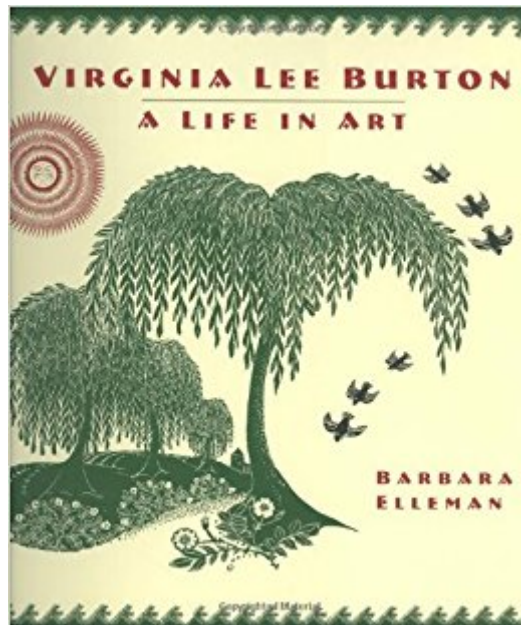


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# Virginia Lee Burton: A Life In Art



## Synopsis

Virginia Lee Burton's name may bring to mind a steam shovel and a man called Mike Mulligan, a charming little house, and a snowplow named Katy. Yet to speak only of Burton's achievements as a picture book creator would be to paint only part of the canvas of her life. She was also a dancer, an illustrator for an early Boston newspaper, and a musician, designer, sculptor, and printmaker. Together with her husband George Demetrios, Virginia enjoyed a full life. They raised two sons, gardened and kept sheep, entertained friends, and taught art and design classes. Led by Burton, the design classes made up of local artists evolved into the Folly Cove Designers. A cooperative of sorts, this group created elaborately intricate designs of rural scenes and other natural elements, which they would carve into linoleum and print onto fabrics. Simultaneously, Burton began her career in children's book writing and illustration. The early success of her first books, *Choo Choo, Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, and *The Little House*, as well as other books was an auspicious beginning for Burton, and the books have become classic and lasting examples of the fine art of children's book creation. Well-known children's literature expert Barbara Elleman introduces the exuberant life, art, and books of Virginia Lee Burton, complemented by family photographs, illustrations, and other images of her inspiring work.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Virginia Lee Burton: A Life in Art by Barbara Elleman looks at the artist close up, from her early stints as a dancer and newspaper illustrator, to the founding of Folly Cove Designers (where she was a top producer of hand-crafted textiles), to her career as a writer and illustrator of books for children. Family photos, original sketches and reproductions of Burton's manuscripts (with text recorded by a manual typewriter) personalize the offering. Ages 12-up. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The creator of *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* (1939) and *The Little House* (1942, both Houghton) played many roles during her too-brief life: dancer, artist, exacting designer and teacher, craftswoman, illustrator, shepherdess, wife, mother, and ebullient hostess. This appreciative biography portrays a gifted artist balancing a successful professional career with family responsibilities at a time when most women chose one over the other. Elleman examines Burton's early work and investigates the genesis of each of her seven picture books, from *Choo Choo* (1937) to the epic, carefully researched *Life Story* (1962, both Houghton). She shows how Burton's perfectionism shaped her art, which is characterized by organic movement, rooted in the rhythms of nature, and has "survival through change" as its constant theme. A generous selection of family photos and full-color art from Burton's published and unpublished work, laid out in a handsome, open page design, accompanies the text. Research notes, an index, and an extensive bibliography are appended. This welcome tribute to a beloved artist should be a first purchase. Margaret A. Chang, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book was written by well-known children's literature expert Barbara Elleman. She introduces the exuberant life, art, and complemented by family photographs, illustrations, and other images of her inspiring work. I love to read it.

Bought it and resold it very fast !

I enjoyed this book and recommend it to fans of the books of Virginia Lee Burton. The book is beautiful enough to go on the shelf next to your collection of Burton's books. I knew almost nothing about Virginia Lee Burton herself, but this book gave me what I wanted to know about her life and work. Burton put a lot of design work into her books. The books were created by her, from the

endpapers to the way the print appeared on the page. Her design career is also explained. Also, Disney did a film of *The Little House* that I never knew existed. The author was not happy with the film, but we will always have her wonderful book. I love how the book explains that Burton read her works in progress to her two boys as a way of knowing if the story held a child's attention. If you love Children's Literature, or are thinking about writing for children, this is a wonderful resource.

This book is one of the most interesting biographies! It brings this wonderful author alive with many anecdotes about the woman who gave us *The Little House* and *Mike Mulligan*. She was a complicated person, and Barbara Elleman's writing makes this a page-turner. It's a coffee table book that will be read over and over!

As an artist working in lino cuts for now, I find this story truly inspiring. Even more so, as a lifelong fan of ALL of Burton's work, it's the story I've always wondered about, the woman who was able to so beautifully visualize the fantastic stories and successfully create gorgeous illustrations that fill the viewer/reader with a sense of wonder. I still love all of her books and it's so much fun to learn about her fascinating life.

I've long been a fan of Virginia Lee Burton. "*The Little House*" is one of my mother's favorite books of all time, and that love has passed down to me. I've also discovered other books by Burton that I hadn't been aware of while growing up - such as "*Life Story*" and "*Song of Robin Hood*." Elleman's book has some wonderfully intimate photographs, selections of prints from the *Folly Cover Designers* and good readings of Burton's classic picture books, all of which are still in print. The only thing about the book that puzzles me is the lack of context. There are a lot of similarities between Burton's designs and the work being done - somewhat earlier - by British artists such as Eric Gill and Eric Ravilious. Also, there is a noticeable overlap in Burton's work with a lot of contemporary art going on in Britain at the time as well. Was this coincidental? Probably not, and I wish the book had put Burton against the tapestry of these artists as well. I don't think it would have diminished Burton's accomplishments but enhanced them. Still, we are lucky to have this book about Burton because it really is a gem and has a place of honor on my shelf as a tribute to a very talented and beloved artist.

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Mary Burton

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