



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Poonam Mistry

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

My earliest memories of reading were at school. I remember reading Biff and Chip books when I was learning to read. One of my favourite books growing up was Peace at Last by Jill Murphy. During my childhood in the summer my twin sister and I would read in the garden.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

Originally I wanted to be a graphic designer but I loved drawing and creating art by hand and felt at the time that graphic design was becoming too technology based. During my foundation course, a few of my friends and I went to visit an exhibition showcasing up and coming illustrators. It was around this time that I realised illustration was actually the pathway I wanted to explore. At university I chose to study graphic design and illustration before deciding to specialise in illustration in my second year. After graduating I mostly received commissions for advertising or editorial illustrations for magazines. After a few years of this, I was approached to do some artwork for an anthology of poems and short stories around the world. It was then that I felt illustrating stories and children's book was what I enjoyed doing most and have focused on this since.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

For me I think it's important that the text and illustrations are one. I personally like artwork that is different and unique. There are so many beautiful children's books out there at the moment. I love to see books that do something really different and exciting. I think a good example is Rob Ryan's 'A Sky Full Of Kindness'. I love how the text is part of the illustrations. Each page is so beautiful. Another is Coralie Bickford-Smith's 'The Fox and The Star'. The pages are so elegant and well composed. They almost look like wallpaper and it is so unlike anything else out there.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

No I don't, well I try not too. My style is very detailed and intricate. When I worked on Chitra Soundar's 'You're Safe with Me' I felt it was important that I didn't simplify my style just because it was a children's book. As the story was set in India, it was particularly essential to me that the illustrations reflected traditional Indian art. As I illustrated the book I would ask my nephew, who was 4-years-old at the time, what he could see and what was happening in the illustrations. If he was able to tell me I knew I didn't need to change it. I think children can appreciate all sorts of types of art.

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

I actually wrote an essay on this at university when I was studying at the time. I don't think electronic books will ever fully replace the physical book. Nothing beats physically holding a book and turning its pages or the smell of a brand new book. They are objects to be treasured.

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

Yes I love to collect picture books with artwork that I adore. My all time favourite that I own is the 'Ramayana: Divine Loophole' by Sanjay Patel. It is one of the most exquisitely illustrated books I have ever come across and it is written so well - A true piece of art.