



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An interview with Alison Jay

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

My earliest memories of books are of my mum reading to my sister, my brother and me. I think one of my favourite books was one that my dad or even my granny had owned when they were children. It was a big old thick book with a wonderful musty smell called "the Children's Wonder book" possibly from the 1930's or earlier, it was full of classic fairy tales, nursery rhymes, poems, stories and most importantly for me illustrations. The illustrations were by different illustrators some of them were quite sinister but I loved that about them as with the illustrations by Robin Jaques in the books by Ruth Manning Saunders about witches they had such atmosphere. My sister had a set of Beatrix Potter books, I loved the illustrations of the animals dressed in Victorian clothes and seeing inside their houses and shops. I have always been an animal lover so Beatrix Potter definitely was an inspiration to me. I was given one of the Ant and Bee books by Angela Banner when I was about six and although the illustrations are quite simple there are lots of amusing little details. I loved and that Ant and Bee live in a house like people. It is strange thinking about it that I have now illustrated my own book co starring a bee in "Bee and Me" so I guess that book must have been an inspiration too.

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

For as long as I can remember I have always loved drawing, painting and making models, like most children I loved picture books especially ones with lots of little details. Originally however I wanted to be an animator, so animated films inspired me to begin with. I remember there was an animation season on TV with wonderful films like " Hedgehog in the Fog" by a Russian animator Yuiry Norstien and Alice in Wonderland a very dark version by Jan Svankmajer. I loved the story telling teamed with interesting artistic imagery and music

which adds another emotional depth .I started to work in animation studios after leaving art school and was lucky enough to animate some tiny bits of my own work within a bigger production but as I wanted to experiment more with style and painting it became difficult to have any control as an individual, maybe I was also a bit impatient with the laborious process of animating. I love writing/making wordless books, I have illustrated four so far, they are a bit like un animated films or story boards, the whole story has to be told by the pictures, I would love one day to animate " Out of the Blue " or Bee and Me" but I know it would take months if not years and I don't really have time at the moment.

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

I think for me a successful illustration or book is one that interprets the text in a visually interesting and intriguing way, one that adds another dimension to the text or story. When illustrating another author's manuscript I try to create a picture that compliments the text, I pick out the lines that I think could work best in a composition. Depending on the text I love the idea of trying to create a dream like world, not a crazy fantasy but one that is just quietly a bit odd and intriguing. When I look at some other illustrators and artists work that I admire, I sometimes get that feeling of peering into another world, I suppose it is the artist's world.

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

I don't really have a specific audience, in mind I think it would be a mistake to try and imagine what a child would like, maybe a little patronising .The books I have written and illustrated myself have been about subjects that interest and intrigue me. I hope that my illustrations are interesting to children, I remember examining pictures with lots of details for hours when I was a child so I do have that in mind when I am painting and love to add little narratives and visual jokes in the backgrounds.

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

I think the physical book has a bright future, everyone say there is nothing like a proper paper book to hold and turn the pages but the electronic book must have made an impact on publishing. Having said that whatever the format the most important thing in a picture book is the story and illustrations, I don't think that will ever change.

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

I wouldn't call myself a book collector but I really can't resist buying children's books that I like, in fact I have very little room left in my bookshelves for any more books but it is amazing how I can squeeze in one more if I like it enough. I have a small collection of Edward Gorey books, which I absolutely love so I'm sure I can find a bit of extra space for more of his books.