



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Kate Milner

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

The first book that really grabbed my imagination was *Green Eggs and Ham* by Doctor Suess. The rhythm of that headlong text, like a train going over the tracks and those strange beguiling shapes reaching out across the white paper made a very deep impression on me. I find myself reproducing them again and again in my own drawing. I also loved the *Molesworth* books illustrated by Ronald Searle. I didn't understand that these were really comic books meant for adults. I simply loved the drawings.

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

I have always drawn pictures and made up stories but those two activities had felt in opposition to each other. Did I want to be a writer or an artist? I did a lot of print making for awhile and tried to write radio plays with limited success. It was only when tidying up the children's section in my local library that the answer became obvious. Here was a world where pictures and stories worked together.

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

Does the reader know what a character in an illustration is feeling? Can they understand their mood or motivation? A good illustration has to add something to the text it illustrates not just repeat it in a different form.

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

Because I'm always writing and illustrating for children I try and think about what I would have valued at that age so, in a sense, my audience is my younger self. When illustrating "The Girl Who Became A Tree" it seemed important to try and remember what it felt like to be a girl in her early teenage years.

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 think that the physical book has a great future, especially for children. A real book fits in to a child's world, it can be read back to front or upside down. A single image or sentence can be examined again and again while it is stood up to make the corner of a fort. I would guess that, for children, the screen will become a thing for school, homework and doing what you ought to while the book provides food for the imagination. Lovely illustration and excellent design will be important for keeping the book alive but I'm sure we can manage that.

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

I buy books for the illustrations and I have a particular love for those wonderful draughtsman making images for publication after the war. Anything illustrated by Charles Keeping or Brian Wildsmith or Ronald Searle or David Hughes would do very nicely.