



Tracie Grimwood

{PROFILE}

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Tracie's work reminds me of fairytale worlds, with dreamy, layered artworks. Along with children's books, Tracie's work lends itself to a variety of mediums and industries and she generously shares her work and process here with Outline.

Outline: We'd love to hear of your illustration career - studies, "breaks" into the industry, highlights and lowlights!

Tracie: I studied Graphic design at Swinburne University back in the late 80s/early 90s. The lecturers were quite supportive of any students who wanted to specialise in certain areas and I was able graduate with a competent illustration folio. I had been freelancing since my second year so it was a natural progression to just keep freelancing.

My first big break was to rent a studio with fellow graduate, Michelle Katsouranis, at the Clyde Street Studios in St. Kilda, where we found a wonderful friend and mentor in Ned Culic. He was incredibly helpful and encouraged us to join IA and take a page out in *The Book*. That was when the work really started to come in and, before I knew it, I was a full time illustrator.

Any day that I get to work on a nice project with a decent budget is a highlight! I've also made some great friends over the years and I love the flexibility of freelancing. I can't say I have had too many lowlights; I've been asked to sign quite a few contracts that have been so unfair they're laughable and I did have one publishing project where the rough approval process became so long and convoluted that there was no time left to produce the final illustrations. It's the only time I have ever had to walk away from a job and it didn't feel good. Then, of course, a few years' back the whole illustration industry seem to change and I went from knocking back work to not having enough. In hindsight this has been a positive though, because I've expanded my business to include a whole lot of things that I've never had the time to do before.

Outline: What is an average day in the studio for you?





Tracie: One of my other passions is dressage so, most mornings, I drive out early to where I keep my horse Tilly then, once I'm back in the studio, I check emails, Facebook etc..and skim through my blogroll. If I have any print orders to fill I see to those and then I spend the rest of the day working on the current project. If I don't have an illustration assignment I work on my own paintings, do some research or work on my online shops and social media.

We recently acquired a little rescue dog named Roy, who is great company, but by 6.30 he's demanding his walk. If everything is under control I'll call it a day otherwise I'll do a few more hours in the evening.

I like to leave things like mounting prints and preparing painting surfaces for the weekend, when I can spread out and take my time.

Outline: We'd love to hear about your work in the children's book world. How did you get your first publishing deal, and what projects are you currently working on?

Tracie: In

my second year at Swinburne, a fellow student and I answered an ad put up in the design department by a small local publisher. We pooled our folios (not having much of worth to show at that stage) and went for an interview where, to our surprise, we were given a picture book on the spot to illustrate together. I ended up doing quite a lot of work for them, which paid for my course and allowed me to start freelancing full time.

I've only just finished illustrating six picture books back to back, so I'm happy to be having a little break from books at the moment. Having said that, I've also been working on some character sketches for a book project I'm collaborating on.

Outline: What do you think makes a good children's book illustrator? Who are your art heroes?

Tracie: Aside from technical skill, I think a really good children's book illustrator needs to have a great deal of empathy and, by extension, the ability to anthropomorphise, as well as a sense of humour. They need to feel what the characters feel to be able to show the appropriate expression and gesture and convey the text in a way that the reader can relate to, not just how an adult thinks they might. This is why I admire illustrators like Charlotte Voake. Her line work is spare and loose to the point of carelessness yet it is so full of expression and character. She can summon a whole range of emotions with just a few words and some scratchy lines. I think it goes without saying that they must also love books themselves and have a feel for language; to just literally interpret the text isn't enough; they must be able to reach the heart of the story.





I have so many art heroes it's impossible to list them all but some of my current favourite book illustrators are Jon Klassen, Calef Brown, Carson Ellis, Lisbeth Zwerger, Aurelia Fronty, Giselle Potter, Isabelle Arsenault, Katherine Dunne and Oliver Jeffers.

Outline: You have a few illustration sales streams - such as Etsy, Red Bubble, picture books, markets, exhibitions and commissions. How do you market to these different audiences, and what do you find the most successful/enjoyable?

Tracie: I've always taken out pages in the IA Book and I periodically make submissions to publishers. I haven't done too much marketing of my prints and cards, partly because I've been very busy with illustration work and haven't made much new work of my own for a while, however I have a lot of new pieces planned for this year and will be putting myself out there a bit more. I've dipped my toe into the market scene but I'm not quite sure if it's my thing. I have all of my prints made at Acme et Al in Yarra Glen and I sell quite a lot through the print gallery there and I think that suits me better.

I market my horse themed paintings and prints fairly directly to the equestrian community via word of mouth, equine art societies, forums etc... I also support a horse charity called Quest Equine Welfare by providing them with artwork for merchandise and this has been a mutually beneficial arrangement.

I actually find my Facebook Page and blog to be one of the easiest and most successful ways to reach my audience and

one I haven't made nearly enough use of.

Outline: What upcoming projects are you excited about?

Tracie: The main one that I'm super excited about is my first solo exhibition of paintings that I'm holding at Wyreena Gallery in July. I'm also working with an author on some book submissions, which are a lot of fun and, later in the year, I'm planning to produce a picture book that I've written as an ebook and app, with my partner doing the sound design and my best mate doing the animation. I'm really looking forward to the collaborative side of this project, as I spend so much time working on my own. I also have a little film project on the back burner. One of my friends is a documentary film maker and we've done a bit of playing around with some stop motion animation in the manner of William Kentridge. I have a story idea that we'd like to realise into a short film so I'd love the chance to work on that, as well. And, of course, more prints and hopefully more picture books

Outline: Do you have any resources, online or off, that you can share with the IA community?

Tracie: <http://www.wikipaintings.org/>
<http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/home>
<http://www.illustrationmundo.com>
<http://www.brainpickings.org/>
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>
<http://theopeninghours.com.au/>
<http://theartroomplant.blogspot.com.au/> 

{PROCESS}

Outline: Could you share with us your process - how you create your beautiful, dreamy painterly work?

Tracie: I always work from fully resolved roughs, out of necessity, when I'm illustrating so when I get the chance to make personal work I prefer to let my paintings evolve in a more intuitive way. This helps me stay emotionally engaged and keeps the work fresh.

I keep sketchbooks full of very rough thumbnails and words and phrases that I use as springboards for ideas. I start by preparing the surface (canvas, timber panel or paper) with gesso, then I paint the background texture, building up layers of paint to create the intended mood. Then, using my very rudimentary sketches as a guide, I draw in the main elements with chalk pastel, which can be easily erased with a damp cloth. Once I'm satisfied, I take a photo with my phone so I can refer back, and then start blocking in shapes, making adjustments as I go. After that, I add all the little details.

Occasionally I'll go back and repaint a section but once I'm happy I set the painting aside to cure and then varnish it.



{  **CLICK!** } **Tracie Grimwood**

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