



Illustrator spotlight: Helene Magisson



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Helene Magisson: Illustrator

Helene, when did you know you wanted to be an illustrator?

It was an old dream but it was only after settling down here in Australia that I gave it a try. Starting a new life in a new country gave me a special energy. It was the right time to start.

Do you have a special place for working on your illustrations?

In my atelier (artist's studio) where I can store all my books, paints, and brushes; and find silence.

What time of day do you most enjoy illustrating?

Any time of the day. I love entire days when I know that nothing will interrupt my creative process. I feel I can go very deep in my creative world.

What things do you most like to draw?

I love drawing tiny details on a huge page, or people from different countries. And portraits also. We can express so much with a close up of a face. They can be very strong.

Where do you get your ideas?

By observing. Observing people, nature, tiny little details, colours, patterns. I am also so much inspired by all my travels and all the different countries I have lived in.

And I like to observe the art of great painters and the work of inspiring illustrators too.

Do you know what you will draw before you start, or does the picture evolve as you go?

It depends. Sometimes I have a clear idea, I know exactly the idea I want to express but don't know how I will build my composition. So I try, start again and again until I find the right composition and express the right mood.

What media do you mainly use for illustrating?

I really love the luminosity and the softness of watercolour which I sometimes combine with gouache. I feel I can still go much further and deeper in that technique. I sometimes try to use digital, but that will never replace the charm and this wonderful warm contact I have with the paper, the brushes and the paint.

What media did you use for Magic Fish Dreaming? Why?

I think the images had to be gentle, soft and luminous to convey the atmosphere of June's poems. Watercolour was just the right medium. I couldn't think of any other possibility.

Why did you decide to illustrate Magic Fish Dreaming?

First I love poetry and June's poems are so rich that I immediately had many ideas coming through my mind. I love this feeling. It is very exciting for an illustrator. Also I was very touched by the value of multiculturalism that this book conveys. It is so important to open our children's mind to other cultures, to awaken them at a young age to the richness of diversity.

Do you have a favourite poem in Magic Fish Dreaming? Why?

It is difficult to answer because they are all very different in mood. Some are joyful, some depict the mystery and the beauty of nature, some are more contemplative; and I love all of them for this diversity too. But maybe the poem "Grumpy Fisher Man" brings all this together (humour, mystery, beauty, family...)

Which poem did you especially like illustrating? Why?

I really loved illustrating "Beyond Caterpillar Days" because of the interesting possibility to accompany the text by drawing a very special portrait. Also the warmth of the colours was very pleasant to work with and the dreamy feeling of the girl was calming.

What is your favourite illustration in the book?

It is difficult to answer here too, because they are also very different. But if I had to choose from a pure artistic point of view, I would say "River Song" and "Beyond Caterpillar Days" for the well-balanced composition and the tones.

How did you feel when you were illustrating this book?

I felt like I was exactly where I had to be, just in my right place; and that brought me a lot of peace.

How do you hope readers will feel?

I would like them to feel the beauty and the joy of life through this book. Poems and illustrations here just highlight everything that is around us and that we can see if we are willing to open our eyes and heart.

How would you like teachers to present the book to children?

A book of Beauty.

Are there any messages you would like them to discuss?

Beauty is everywhere and in everyone. I am convinced that if we leave more space for beauty there will be more peace around us. It will raise awareness among children to discover the beauty in nature in order to better protect it; and among each people and culture to better accept and respect each other.

Do you have any advice for teachers when responding to children's art work?

Find out what is good in the children's art work (composition, sense of colours, vibrant characters...) and help them improve that. I like the idea of highlighting the positive rather than trying to correct what is wrong.

And also, get the children to discover at a young age the work of the greatest painters like Da Vinci, Vermeer, Fra Angelico... Children are very capable to appreciate the work of these geniuses.

Do you have any advice for children when creating art works?

Observe, create with passion and love, and share it.

What is your favourite picture book?

The Arrival by Shaun Tan. I will always be fascinated by all these stories of people moving, leaving everything behind them, and integrating in a new "world". Also it is a silent graphic book that everyone in the world can understand, thanks to his brilliant artistic interpretation.

Who is your favourite illustrator? What do you like about his or her work?

I have two very favourite illustrators: Rebecca Dautremer and Shaun Tan.

I love the way their illustrations complement the text and also the amazing richness of their artwork. Each page of their work is a piece of art. There is so much to observe and study. When I see their work I always think that illustrating is definitely an art.

To find out more about Helene visit her website [Helene Magisson - Illustrator](#)



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