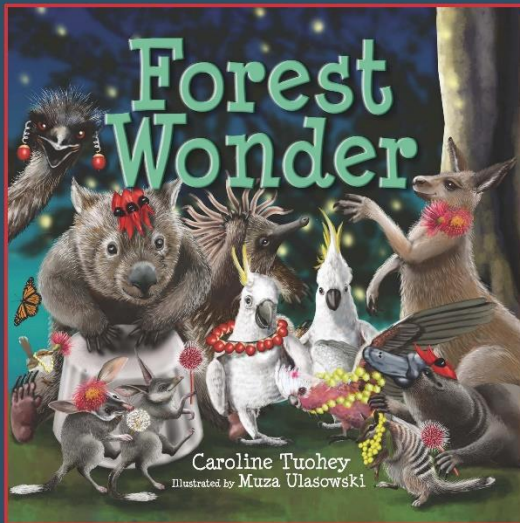




## Illustrator Spotlight: Muza Ulasowski



Images used courtesy of Muza Ulasowski. Please respect copyright. All rights reserved.

### **Muza Ulasowski: Illustrator**

#### ***Muza, when did you know you wanted to be an illustrator?***

I have always been 'arty' with it being my favourite subject in high school. Even as a child, I remember telling everyone that I was going to illustrate children's books!! However, life happened to get in the way - I ended up working as a legal secretary and various other professions instead - eventually, forgetting my dream.

After my children graduated from high school though, I went back to college and graduated in 2007 with a Diploma in Graphic Design. It was only in 2011 when I received my first publishing contract to illustrate the book, 'Where's Michael?' by Xavier Waterkeyn, that I actually remembered it had always been my ambition. So now, I am very happily living my childhood dream.

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

I do indeed - it's called my dungeon! It's a room that was originally created to be used as my darkroom before digital photography was invented. I used to be quite photography-mad and would spend hours developing black and white photographs I'd taken. Then, when digital photography came into vogue, the darkroom became our "junkroom" until I cleared it out in 2011 - converting it into my "studio". I like the fact that there are no windows - means there's no glare on the computer screen - and it is downstairs away from all the action and noise upstairs. In my dungeon, I have all my computers, printers, books & papers surrounding me ...plus with no distractions, I can work till all hours of the night!!

#### ***What time of day do you most enjoy illustrating?***

I am most definitely a night owl because most of my inspirations come late at night - it's not unusual for me to be working on my computer till 2 or 3 am.

#### ***What things do you most like to draw?***

I love drawing birds and animals and portraying the tiniest of details. I find it fascinating to try to convey expressions on their faces and though quite challenging, it's extremely rewarding when I "nail it".

### ***Where do you get your ideas?***

Usually, when I read a manuscript sent to me, I am able to visualise the words as pictures. I also tend to observe people and animals around me and have been known to become totally absorbed in observing how shadows form on a person's face whilst they are talking to me... sometimes becoming rather oblivious as to what they are actually saying! I call these my senior moments!!

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

I usually know what I want to draw before I start, but the pictures tend to change and evolve as I go. Sometimes it feels as though the animal characters totally take over – dictating to me what should happen on the page. Usually this happens once I am halfway through a book, and then I have to go back and amend or add to what I've previously drawn. With *Forest Wonder* however, the animals took over immediately - sometimes I had no idea what they were going to tell me to illustrate until virtual pen went to paper!

### ***What media do you mainly use for illustrating?***

I use digital illustrating for books, and I work in layers. The reason for this is so that I can move the characters and background around to fit the text in comfortably - without having to redraw the whole illustration. For fun, I like dabbling in acrylic painting.

### ***What media did you use for Forest Wonder? Why?***

I used a combination of Artrage and Photoshop digital programmes to illustrate *Forest Wonder*. I used Artrage because the program is very straightforward and has no “bells and whistles”. It is very similar in technique to using acrylic paints in that once you choose your brush, intensity, medium, colour and transparency - away you go. Each brush stroke is applied individually – just like using acrylic paints – except there's virtual “water”, no paint spillage and, you never run out of paint. Also, there's a magical button I like to use a lot - called “delete”!!

Each character is created as a separate illustration, much larger in size than needed so that I can put a lot of detail in each illustration. All the created characters and the background are then combined in a Photoshop file and any touch-ups to colour and shadows are then finalised.

### ***Why did you decide to illustrate Forest Wonder?***

As soon as I read Caroline's manuscript, I just knew I had to illustrate it! She has such a way with words – such a talented poet!! The characters were literally jumping out at me as I read the text. Also, at that point in time, I had just finished another book and was looking forward to creating something with Australian animals - so when Caroline's manuscript arrived in my inbox, the rest, as they say, is history.

### ***Do you have a favourite illustration?***

I have found that everyone has different “favourite” illustrations in that book – the possum page is a particular favourite - which was actually the first illustration I created for this book.

My personal favourites are probably the 2 double-page spreads; with the cockatoos and galah plucking a feather from the emu's tail which then continues over to the next spread with more cockatoos, an echidna, a wombat playing drums and all the animals having a party. I spent a lot of time at Lone Pine Sanctuary - photographing the wild life and observing the animals' movements and personas. I wanted to express the cheekiness and noisiness of the cockatoos and galahs, but still keep the illustration realistic without reverting to caricatures... I think I succeeded.

### ***Which illustration was the most difficult?***

The aforementioned spreads were probably the most difficult...

**How did you feel when you illustrated this story?**

Joyful!! I had so much fun illustrating this book.

**How do you hope readers will feel?**

Joyful!! I hope the readers feel my delight for the wonderful world of nature.

**How would you like teachers to present *Forest Wonder* to children?**

*Forest Wonder* is a rhyming picture book set in the Australian bush and tells the tale of creatures who enjoy a forest party on a moon-lit night. It celebrates the wonders to be found in nature but also encourages children to use their imagination and relish in a little bit of magic.

**Are there any messages you would like them to discuss?**

I asked Caroline how she would like to answer this question. This is her reply;

*"It would be great to have a discussion with children about dangerous creatures such as snakes and red back spiders, and to realize that although they are dangerous – they are creatures. It's important that we, as humans, respect and take care around them without blaming them for the possible injuries they could cause us. Creatures are creatures - to defend themselves is a natural reaction."*

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

Find the positives to be found in each illustration – whether it be colour, vibrant characters or the composition, and help them improve on that. Each child sees the world differently, so what may appear strange in an illustration to one child, may make perfect sense to another.

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

Practise, practise, practise - and believe!! The more you paint, the better you become.

**What is your favourite picture book?**

Oh, definitely Mem Fox's *Possum Magic*. I just loved Mem's poetry and the illustrations created by Julie Vivas – what an amazing collaboration. I adore how exquisitely Julie Vivas captured the expressions on each character's face. This book was first published over 30 years ago and it is still just as popular now as it was then. My aim has always been to capture the animal's essence as well as Julie does... Maybe with time I will succeed.

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

Oh my!!! That's a hard one!! I have so many favourite illustrators that I cannot possibly pick just one! ...I am so overawed and impressed by the sheer number of talented Australian artists. I am always fascinated by the artistry of the latest children's book I've purchased, so that particular artist becomes my favourite - until I purchase the next!

To find out more about Muza, visit her website: [Muza Designs](http://Muza Designs)

