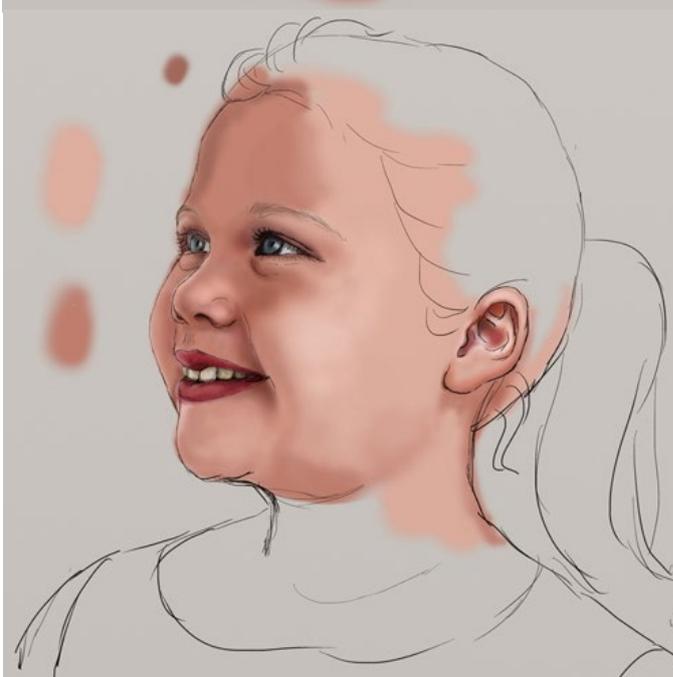
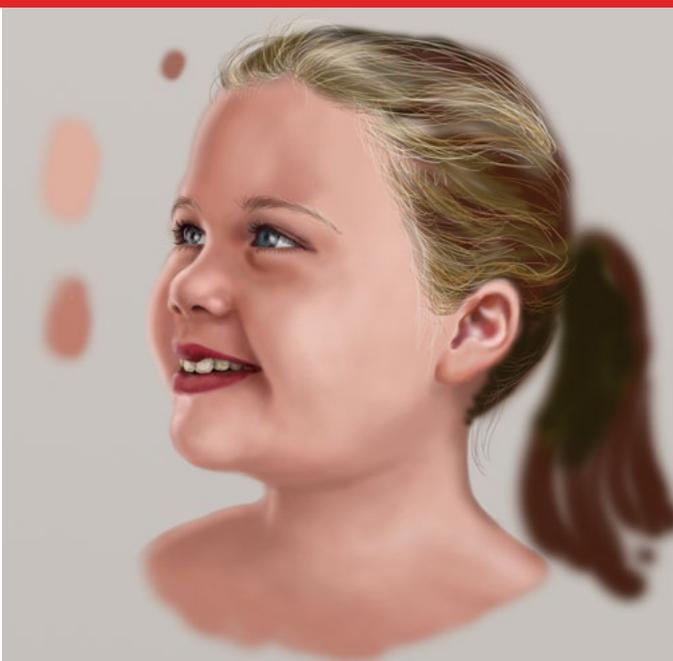


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Muza Ulasowski



Muza Ulasowski

Influenced by her mother's realistic painted portraits as a child, Muza shares her own process creating her detailed work (primarily for children's books) through a primarily digital process.

Outline: We'd love to hear of your career path to your current work. Reading your online biography, it appears you have made the transition between graphic design/more client based work towards children's books. Could you tell us about this transition - what inspired it, how you first became published, and what you love about children's books?

Muza: Thank you so much for inviting me to be profiled on the Outline Magazine - I feel very honoured and humbled to have been asked.

Ever since I can remember, I have always been "arty"... at school my favourite subject was art. If I wasn't doodling, then I would have my nose in an art book. My mother was an extremely talented portrait artist and as a child, I would sit for hours watching her as she created her artwork. I think I have also always wanted to illustrate children's books, but life has a habit of getting in the way and for a long time I actually forgot my childhood dream

I did go back to art college way back in 1979 and obtained the first of my qualifications - a 'Diploma of Arts - Visual Communication'. Then my husband and I travelled overseas and then we had kids (2 beautiful daughters) and

I ended up pursuing various other careers from legal secretary to promotional work and my art career went on hold. Once the girls had both graduated from high school in 2003, though, the urge to be creative resurfaced and I started to dabble in various computer courses at TAFE. One of these was a beginner's course in Photoshop. I realized then that the world had become digital and that the lessons learned in the first Diploma course were not relevant any more. So I decided to enrol in a 3-year, full time Graphic Design course, graduating with a Diploma in Graphic Design and Certificate in Graphic Design at the end of 2007.

I was very happily freelancing as a Graphic Designer, when, in 2010, I was contacted by Xavier Waterkeyn, the author of a book called "*Where's Michael?*", whose publisher, New Holland, offered me a job as one of 12 illustrators each doing one double spread panel in the book. My panel ended up as the cover of that book and I was hooked ...

I then experimented with digital illustrating and one of my experiments caught the eye of another publisher, MacMillan Library, and I was invited to illustrate 2 books - '*Life Cycles of Marine Animals - Laysan Albatross*' and '*Life Cycles of Marine Animals - Emperor Penguins*'.





These were published in 2011.

Later in 2011, my work was seen by a digital publishing company, uTales.com, and I was invited to join them as an illustrator. Through this contact I met some amazingly talented writers and illustrators and have since then been collaborating with them on the children's books that have been published to date.

Outline: With background studies in graphic design and visual communication, could you tell us the courses/unit or life experience that you think has been most influential on your current creations?

Muza: Definitely learning how to be proficient using such

digital programs as Photoshop, Illustrator, Indesign, Dreamweaver, Fireworks and Flash, as part of the Graphic Design course, has helped me with creating digital illustrations. My knowledge means that my creativity is not limited to what I could do with the programs, as it was when I was still learning to use the programs, and it gives me the confidence to experiment, as I know what they can do. I don't have to worry about which buttons to press - they are just another tool to be used and combined. And, of course, I now couldn't exist without my Wacom Tablet, though I did create the first three books using a mouse!! It was very tedious!

Illustration was not a subject taught with the Graphic Design course, so I think my mother's very realistic style of portrait painting had a huge influence on the way I create my illustrations now. She was influenced by the Renaissance style of painting with her shadows and highlights. She would show me how to create depth and shadows in her portraits, and I probably use her methods to this day. I would love to have the time to take illustrating classes or go back to college and do a degree in fine arts. It is probably just a pipe dream now, though you never, never know!!!

Outline: You also work as a book layout designer. How do you work with other illustrators?

Muza: My job, as the book layout designer, is to bring together the author's text and the illustrator's illustrations together in a pleasing design and present the artwork in print ready pdf format for the printer to use. I am usually presented with the text and illustration files by the author/illustrator and we discuss the suitability of various book dimensions suitable for that particular story. I then create a



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design that I think would suit the story.

When I create my own illustrations, however, I have the design of the book already worked out and place the rough images and text into the Indesign program. As I create the final illustrations, I replace the roughs with the final illustrations. This can then be very quickly exported into a print ready pdf format, which the printers can use to create the final book. The job is very easy when the illustrations have been created to fit a specific sizing of the final book. It can become quite challenging when the sizes and proportions are not consistent or when the illustrations are created in 72 ppi instead of in 300 ppi!

Outline: We'd love to hear of the process building your images. What digital programs do you typically use? How long do they take on average?

Muza: With the first couple of books, I used to scribble the first roughs very roughly with a pencil on 32 sheets of paper with the text pencilled roughly in place. Now I usually do these roughs digitally. I play around with these sheets until I am happy with flow of the storyline, as if it were a storyboard. Once the rough layouts are okayed by the author, I start with the colour, using the roughs as a guide. The programme which I absolutely prefer, is Artrage Studio Pro. It is probably the closest you can get digitally to traditional watercolour or acrylic painting. There are no 'bells or whistles' on this programme, as there are in Photoshop or Illustrator. You just pick your brush, you pick your colour, you pick the transparency etc, and away you go with your Wacom Tablet. Every stroke is painted on as if it were painted onto a canvas, except you don't use water and never run out of paint. I love it!!

Each character in the illustration is painted separately. I then export all the images into Photoshop and combine them into one file and use Photoshop's 'bells and whistles' to fine tune the colour, contrast, and to add highlights and shadows. Finally, once I am happy with the final result, these layers are merged together into a jpeg file, which I

use to export to Indesign. Keeping all the layers in Photoshop also means that if required, I can move the characters around and make edits on the final layout, so that the text can be positioned easier when the print ready pdf is being created.

I can't really say how long the process takes, as it differs from illustration to illustration. Some illustrations come together in a day, some take several weeks. I tend to be quite realistic and detailed in my style, so my illustrations tend to take a bit longer than the norm.

Outline: As someone who doesn't have the patience (or skill!) to suit working in a realistic way, I'd love to learn more about the skills/commitment/or personality type that is suited to working in this way.

Muza: I am always very hesitant starting each new image. I always think I won't be able to successfully portray what is in my head. I usually know when it is going to work half way through the process, when the image starts to pop out from the screen. Then I can relax and enjoy the rest of the process - it's simply a matter of painting in the detail stroke by stroke. I have tried to simplify my illustrations in the past, but have come to realize that this is my natural style, so will just try to improve it as much as I possibly can.

Outline: Do you have a favourite book you've worked on - what makes this one special?

Muza: My favourite book that I have worked on has to be 'The Sea Cat Dreams', written by the very talented award winning poet and author, J.R. Poulter. This was my first true collaboration in that Jennifer gave me total freedom to create the images and split the text into separate pages and design the print ready pdf. It was so much fun!! I have been so lucky to date in that I have had the same freedom with all my ensuing collaborations, but the 'Sea Cat Dreams' was my first collaboration baby, and I learnt so much about the pitfalls associated with creating a book during its creation, that it will always have a special place





in my heart.

Outline: What other illustrators inspire you?

Muza: There are so many wonderfully talented illustrators out there at the moment, that it is totally impossible to decide on just one – if I spent a day with every artist whom I admire, I would still be doing so a year later! But recently I have been FB “trolling” the work of an amazingly talented portrait artist by the name of Dirk Dzimirsky. I am totally in awe of his work and would love to be a fly on a wall for a day and watch and learn as he produces his most amazing portraits. Then there’s Sarah Stribbling and her family’s AMAZING animal paintings, and Marina Dieul, and Max Ginsburg, and Morten Solberg and Brian Hollands, and, of course, Australia’s Vincent Fantauzzo for his wonderful portraits and Wendy Binks for her emus and native animals, and Elise Martinson, and and and and..... the list of artists I admire and who inspire me goes on forever!!

Outline: What plans do you have for the rest of 2014?

Muza: Ooooooh.... I have so many projects that I am currently working on, that I will be glued to my computer for quite a while. I am hoping to finish all my current projects by the end of this year. In 2015 I am hoping to

find the time to commence writing and illustrating my own little children’s book – I have so many stories running through my head at the moment. Hopefully, they will transfer successfully down on paper. If not, I will quite happily continue illustrating someone else’s fantasy.

I also plan to start using real paint and water again – something I haven’t had the chance to play with for quite a while - and create something on actual canvas – possibly some portraits. I enjoy doodling with acrylics, but to date have not produced anything worthy of note!! Maybe in time I will... I am hopeless at watercolour painting as I naturally put the dark colours down first and of course, with watercolour painting, it is the other way around. I use that technique with digital painting as well – the dark shadows are always put down first.

But that will be just for fun!! ●

{CLICK!} Muza Ulasowski

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