



Jane Ray Windows into Illustration

Article Author:

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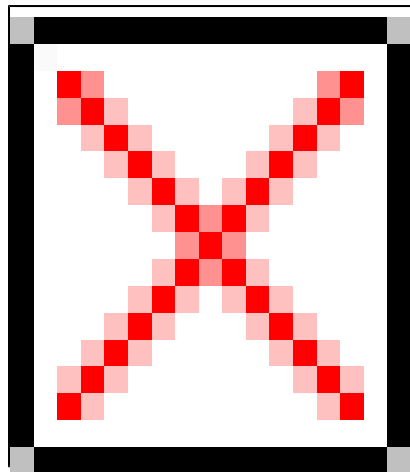
Article Category:

Windows into Illustration

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Jane Ray on her new style of illustration

Jane Ray is no stranger to **Books for Keeps**. Her titles have frequently featured in reviews and articles. Here she talks about her latest project. The texts may be familiar ground - the folk and fairytales that are so often her subjects, the work is as exquisite as ever. But there is a great difference; gone are the glowing colours. For **The Emperor's Nightingale and other Feathery Tales** she has adopted a radically different and distinctive approach, allowing fresh inspiration and a new dynamic.

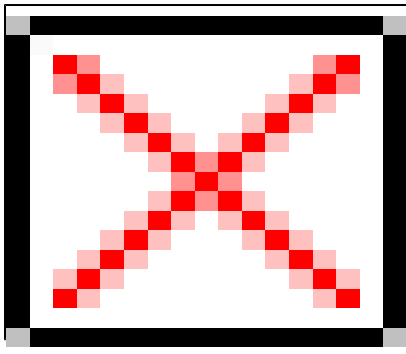


I have rediscovered a whole new technique for the illustrations in this book, which feels quite adventurous! I usually use paint and collage in my picture books, and revel in full colour and double page spreads. But this book, the first in a series of four anthologies for Boxer Books, called for a different approach and I decided to revisit a technique I first used as a teenager.

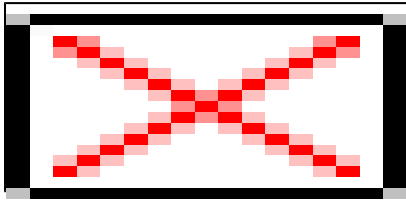
Scraperboard, or scratchboard, is thick card with a coating of white china clay covered with a layer of black India ink. Using a stylus, you scratch through the ink layer to reveal the white layer underneath, and once I was over the slight ?finger-nails-on-the-blackboard? aspect of the scraping, I loved the clean line and detail that is possible.

Areas of light and shadow are created with varying degrees of cross-hatching, rather like engraving. It is a satisfying, if slightly obsessive way of working, and felt right for this book.

Confusingly, it is opposite to the usual method of drawing where you make dark lines on a light background - here you make white lines on a dark background. You are carving light out of darkness and the technique lends itself especially well to atmospheric night and moonlit scenes.



I have chosen an image from **The Owl and the Pussycat** to show this, where 'hand in hand, on the edge of the sand, they danced to the light of the moon?? With fine scratched lines I have outlined the owl and the pussycat with light, and somehow the moon, a smooth disc scraped clean of ink, glows in the black sky with a brightness it is hard to achieve with paint.



The second illustration is from an African story called **Mulungu Paints the Birds** where I've used the Scraperboard to slightly different effect. Here it is almost reminiscent of the wood cut, or lino cut and felt appropriate for a traditional folk tale. I have used scraperboard without the black layer of ink. Instead I have painted black India ink onto the white board roughly in the shape of the birds and the man, and then worked into those shapes, creating texture, and detail within the shape.

The technique, to me, rather dictates the size of the images. It is perfectly possible to work on a larger scale I imagine, but I have worked very small - most of the original images are around 5cm x 6cm. This in turn affects the way I have approached illustrating the stories in this book, tending to go for details, little glimpses of things, or facial expressions. Many of the illustrations have then been blown up in the finished book so that some fill the page, but the originals were all done on a very small scale, much to the detriment of my eyesight!

The Emperor's Nightingale and Other Feathery Tales, Jane Ray, Boxer Books, 978-1907152597, £12.99 hbk

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