



Windows into Illustration: Nicola Bayley

Article Author:

[Nicola Bayley](#) [1]

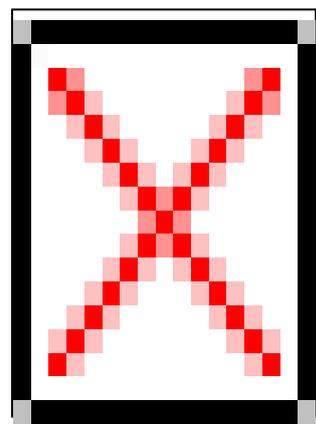
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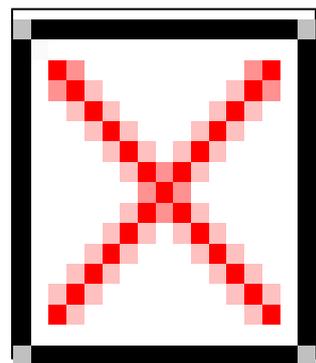
Windows into Illustration

Byline:

Windows into Illustration Nicola Bayley on the methods that create her jewel-like illustrations

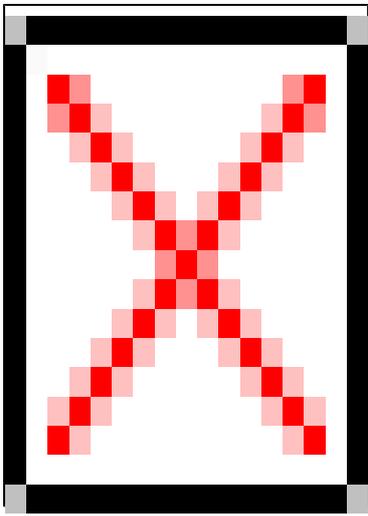


Nicola Bayley's first book was published 1975 after her degree show at the Royal College of Art caught the eye of legendary publisher Tom Maschler. On publication of her latest book, **Can I Come Too?**, she describes the technique and thinking behind two of her best loved illustrations.



It was pure luck that Richard Adams saw a painting I had done at college of three tigers having afternoon tea and was prompted to write **Tyger Voyage**, my second book in 1976. When I look at it now I'm amazed by how primitive it is, the pictures seem fearless, none of my present hang-ups about doing people. I was simply left to get on with it.

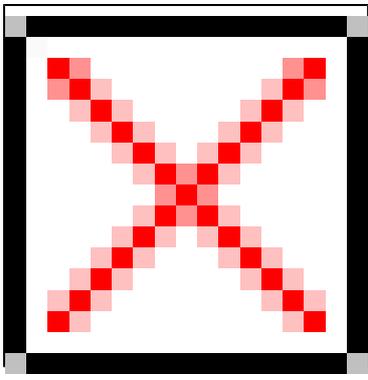
I've chosen the volcano picture as it shows most of my tricks and mannerisms being developed. The artwork is 100mm x 135mm, I took a strange pride in working that small and would cram in pattern and texture wherever possible.



I used a mixture of my ancient Reeves watercolours and a new set of Schminke. Friends would criticize me for using murky water and I had a lazy habit of using colour straight from the pan, there's a lot of violet carmine there, I still prefer that colour for shadows.

For all my love of painting cats and tigers, it's surprising how often I left out whiskers. In larger pictures I would paint around the whisker leaving white paper showing, but here I obviously forgot to crack open the opaque white for the final flourish. I used quite fat brushes that went to a fine point so that I wasn't constantly loading up. I would do a light wash over the drawing and then stipple away for hours building up colour and form. I was put out to be accused of using an airbrush once.

At school I was inspired by Ronald Searle, Rex Whistler and Pauline Baynes for their black and white brilliance and Kathleen Hale supreme illustrator of cats.



I've chosen another cat. Working on **The Mousehole Cat**, Antonia Barber let me stay in her (Tom's) cottage in Mousehole so that I could do some authentic reference and roughs. I also went out in a small fishing boat with a kind fisherman.

I got a proper lump in my throat when I first read the text and I wanted to retain that emotional pull in my pictures.

The important, intangible things were challenging - the storm cat's caterwauling, Mowzer's singing and the big purring, calming moment at the end. I tried to blend sound waves with sea waves and the wavy patterns on the storm cat's tabby fur. In this picture her stripes merge into the clouds and there's another of my unrealistic moons.

My methods haven't really changed much over the years. I make up a long layout concertina of the whole book about 5mm x 128mm so that I can see it's flow, I block in text and first ideas for composition and usually find it changes very little from that point. Then it's larger roughs on tracing paper for the publisher and finally onto Arches watercolour paper. The painting would take between four and six weeks per picture, I'm a lot faster now since I changed to Derwent colour pencils and a larger format which might have something to do with my eyesight.

Tyger Voyage, Richard Adams, illus Nicola Bayley, reissued Andersen Press, 978-1849396271, £6.99 pbk

The Mousehole Cat , Antonia Barber, illus Nicola Bayley, Walker Books 978-0744523539, £5.99 pbk

Can I Come Too? Brian Patten, illus Nicola Bayley, Andersen Press, 978-1849396264, £11.99 pbk

Page Number:

6

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