



# Windows into Illustration: Charlotte Voake

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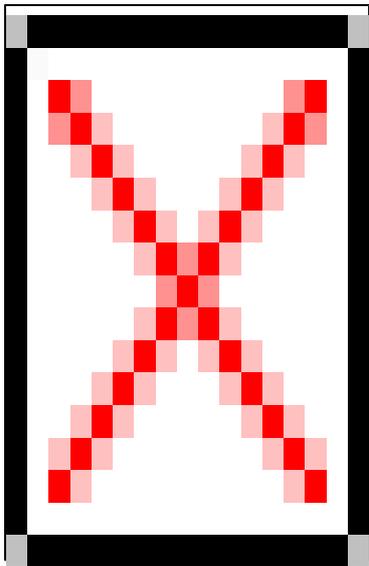
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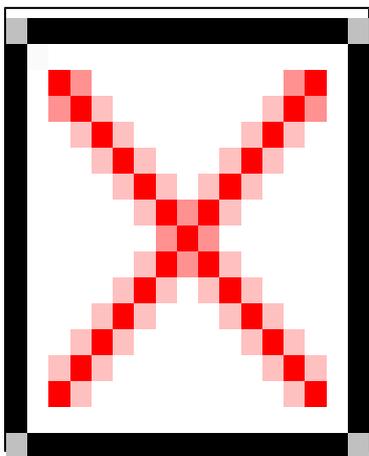
Windows into Illustration

Byline:

Charlotte Voake on drawing Lear's Owl and the Pussy-cat

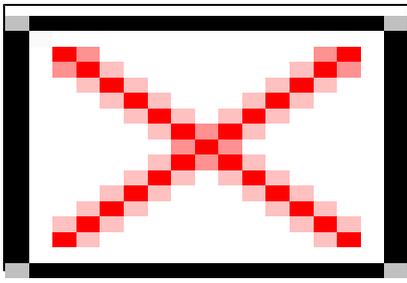


Charlotte Voake's beautiful stories of Ginger the cat epitomise the way cats look and behave. Her new book, a collaboration with Julia Donaldson, tells of the further adventures of one of the most famous felines in children's literature; here she describes the techniques she used to bring the Owl and the Pussy-cat to new life.



This is the first spread from **The Further Adventures of the Owl and the Pussy?cat** by Julia Donaldson (Puffin August 2013) a sequel to Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussy-cat*

I chose this illustration because it's the one I worked on most to try and get the look for the whole book. It's the page where you meet the Owl and the Pussy?cat for the first time.



When I'm starting any book I roughly map out each spread, from the first page to the last, even though at this stage I don't really know my characters yet. I try to vary the composition in as interesting a way as possible, and while I'm trying to illustrate the text accurately, I am also thinking of ways to bring as much extra to it as I can through the illustrations. Julia must have been thinking visually too ? she puts in so much that is exciting to draw.

I looked at a lot of Edward Lear's drawings, especially since Julia has included various other characters from his Nonsense Rhymes in her sequel. The Pobble who had no toes (a challenge; Lear only drew his head sticking out of the sea) is a major character.

Lear's **Nonsense Rhymes** are bursting with owls and other birds, and however sketchily drawn, have a sureness of touch resulting from his extensive studies of them from life.

Originally I wanted to draw the pictures with a dip pen as he would have done, and I had a lot of fun with that, but after much trial and error and some reluctance, opted for a super- fine nib and watercolour.

The fine nib makes drawing a big double page spread like the first one quite daunting ? you cover such a lot less ground with a tiny spidery pen than with a thick one, and with a nib that small you cannot put as much energy in the line ? one extravagant arc and it can actually sheer off, especially on a textured paper. Sometimes the ink doesn't flow as fast as you're moving and you end up with no mark at all. It's a much more controlled sort of drawing. It is also difficult to balance a reasonably strong palette with a delicate line. For that reason it was tricky to make the night time scene convincingly dark, especially as there was another problem of balance - we needed to be able to read the text over the sky. For a while the Owl and the Pussy-cat slept on their branch, eyes tight shut, in what looked like brilliant sunshine!

What you do get with the thin pen though, I think, is a certain atmosphere and restraint which seemed right with the text.

I hope this gives you some idea of how the Owl and the Pussy-cat ended up like that in the picture, the moon behind them, their pea-green boat on the shore, the Owl's guitar leaning against the tree, ready to begin their new adventure!

**The Further Adventures of the Owl and the Pussy?cat**, Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Charlotte Voake, Puffin, 978-0141332888, 32pp, £10.99 hbk

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