



# Picturebook talent: the 2019 Klaus Flugge Prize shortlist

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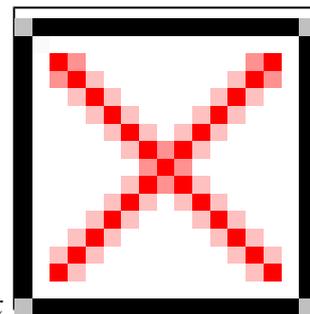
[Martin Salisbury](#) [1]

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## Martin Salisbury appraises the Klaus Flugge Prize shortlist

*The shortlist for the [2019 Klaus Flugge Prize](#) [3]*



*was unveiled at a special event at Foyles, Charing Cross Road on 15th May. Six debut picturebook illustrators are in contention for the award, which recognises the most promising new talent in this field. The winner will be announced in September, meanwhile **Martin Salisbury**, Professor of Illustration at **Cambridge School of Art**, assesses the shortlisted books, and the state of picturebook illustration in the UK.*

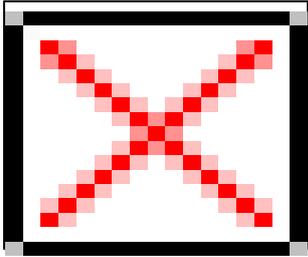
At such an exciting time in the evolution of the picturebook-maker's art, this annual award is particularly significant, rewarding as it does the most striking new work in the field. Coming with a prize of £5,000 for *best debut picturebook* the award is a welcome boost for the chosen talented newcomer, providing precious support in building a career in the field. Created in celebration of the immeasurable contribution of the venerable [Mr Flugge](#) [4] to this particular area of publishing, this is this the fourth year of the award.

This year's exceptionally strong shortlist reflects the rich variety of work that is currently appearing in our bookshops, both in terms of content and stylistic approach. English language picturebook publishing has become increasingly 'open' in the last few years as a greater proportion of sophisticated overseas artists and influences are making a long-overdue impact on aesthetics in what had become for a while a lamentably insular section of the industry. Much of this is thanks to the growth of the smaller, independent publishers who have raised the bar in terms of content, design and production as the unique physical qualities of the beautiful, tactile book reassert themselves and make a welcome comeback in response to the rise of the screen. Another factor is the presence in our art schools of the many overseas students who come here to study illustration and who graduate with a strong ambition to be published within the English language market. Happily, an increasing number of these are featuring in publishing awards. Speaking of students, here I must 'fess-up' with a disclaimer: four of the six shortlisted this year are former students of mine from the MA Children's Book Illustration course at Cambridge School of Art. But I am not involved in the judging process this year and wouldn't dream of revealing which ones they are!

The contemporary picturebook has increasingly become a vehicle for strong messages and themes in relation to issues of our time. The best of such books avoid didacticism or crudely explicit polemic, leaving much unsaid and approaching their subject obliquely and poetically, leaving the young reader with food for thought whilst inspiring and entertaining. This year's shortlist is full of such themes - social, environmental and political. But each of the books deals with its subject with lightness of touch and an element of humour. The list also reflects the increasingly specialised and integrated nature of picturebook-making as a visual, sequential artform that fuses authorship, draughtsmanship and

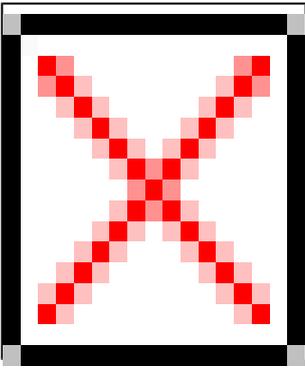
design ? each of the books listed is created by a single ?maker?.

What follows is a short overview of the list, in no particular order.



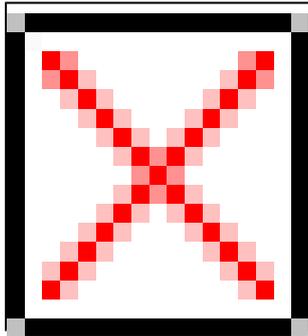
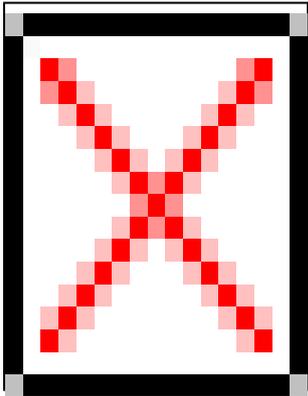
Sam Boughton's **The Extraordinary Gardener** deals with imagination and ambition in the context of ?greening? the urban landscape. A ?yes we can? dynamic reminds us that a little bit of creative thinking can allow anyone to contribute to the process of making the world that we inhabit a better place. The finale gives us an uplifting, spectacular fold-out explosion of colour. Boughton's artwork deftly combines watercolour washes with wax crayon, monoprint and photocollage to create a vibrant, freewheeling journey from dark to light. This is a celebratory book about planting seeds, both literally and metaphorically.

?Charm? is a word that is perhaps overused in the context of children's literature but Eve Coy's **Looking After Daddy**



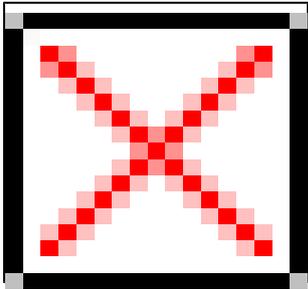
has it in bucket loads. A playful disparity between word and image is at the heart of the storytelling structure here, the word-reading giving us a child's version of events while the picture-reading presents an altogether different reality. But it is Coy's superb artwork that makes the book exceptional. Her secure draughtsmanship and use of colour perfectly capture character, movement and gesture in the English narrative, anecdotal tradition that is exemplified by the likes of the great Edward Ardizzone, but which is firmly rooted in observation of twenty-first century lifestyles.

**The King Who Banned the Dark** by Emily Haworth-Booth is very much a book for our times. This is a brilliant, thought provoking exploration of the idea behind that old adage, *?be careful what you wish for?*. Although the political and philosophical undertones are clear to the adult reader, the visual and verbal tone of the storytelling never preaches but delivers its message in a friendly, playful and mischievous manner. That message is all the more resonant for arriving inside this comedic ?Trojan Horse?. You can't have light without dark - and the people of the city soon realise this. The King is never portrayed as a ?baddie? but as vulnerable and misguided. The storytelling is perfectly structured in classic fairy tale style and exploits a simple two-colour palette to maximum effect to convey the relentlessness of a world without dark.

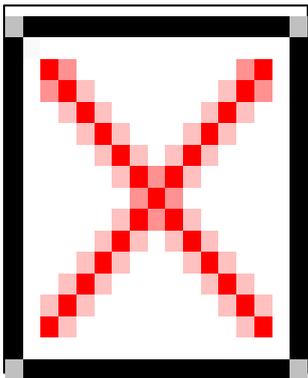


There may be plenty of picturebooks themed around the metaphor of 'reaching for the stars' and learning to value what we already have but Fifi Kuo's **I Can't Can Fly** stands out from the crowd for its empathy, economy and once again, pure charm. Little Penguin's urge to fly is described through simple blue and black coloured pencil drawings - no stylistic tricks or techniques, digital effects or complex combinations of media. It is the author's absolute understanding of emotions expressed through body language, gesture and movement that makes the character so compelling and engages us so fully with his hopes, fears, disappointments and ultimate joy. Kuo is a major talent to arrive on the picturebook-making scene.

The inevitable attention that has surrounded **Julian is a Mermaid** by Jessica Love centres primarily around its theme of



gender identity. Once again, a prominent contemporary topic finds its way into the picturebook maker's domain. Julian loves mermaids. He daydreams mermaids and at home he gathers clothes and plants with which to adorn himself and transform himself into one. His 'abuela' or 'Nana' as she is in the English version is depicted as quietly world-weary with an occasional look of mild surprise. But Nana is never judgmental as she takes Julian on a journey to a place full of mermaids (a thinly disguised Coney Island Mermaid Parade). Jessica Love's artwork has a somewhat 'raw', untrained aesthetic, rendered in watercolour and gouache on a brown 'paper-bag' paper. The author's studious avoidance of proselytism helps to deliver the 'express yourself' message all the more powerfully.



In recent years there have been countless variations on the *Little Red Riding Hood* theme in the world of the contemporary picturebook. The origins of the story can be traced back to 10th century Europe before being reinvented along the way by, among others, Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. The story's archetypal, timeless nature allows it to be adapted and reinterpreted in endlessly inventive ways, appropriate to time and place. In **Red and the City**, Marie Voigt replaces the deep, dark forest with the dull grime and occasional bright lights of the modern *urban* jungle, with its distracting temptations of toys and sweets, guaranteed to lure Red away from the straight and narrow path of hearts that her mother had instructed her to follow. With Woody the dog playing a supporting, but important role in the visual narrative, this is an extremely well designed and produced picturebook. Voigt's digital artwork employs red and half-tone black to striking narrative effect.

**Martin Salisbury** is Professor of Illustration at **Cambridge School of Art**, where he founded the **MA in Children's Book Illustration**.

**The Extraordinary Gardner** by Sam Boughton, Tate, 978-1849765664, £9.99 hbk

**Looking After Daddy**, Eve Coy, Andersen Press, 978-1783447107, £6.99 pbk

**The King Who Banned the Dark**, Emily Haworth-Booth, Pavilion Children's Books, 978-1843653974, £6.99 pbk

**I Can't Can Fly**, Fifi Kuo, Boxer Books, 978-1910716434, £11.99 hbk

**Julian Is a Mermaid**, Jessica Love, Walker Books, 978-1406386424, £6.99 pbk

**Red and the City**, Marie Voigt, Oxford, 978-0192767745, £11.99 hbk

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