

Interview with Karin Eklund

Would you like to introduce yourself?

I am Karin Eklund, a Swedish illustrator living and working in Cambridge, UK. I always keep a sketchbook and draw everything I see and hear around me. Activities that I do with my family, stories I read or films and TV, all inspire my drawings. I come from a background in Art History and working with art galleries and museums. At 33 I decided to take an MA in Children's Book Illustration at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. The course opened up a new world for me, one in which my visual storytelling found its own voice.

How would you describe your style in three words?

Emotive, fun and quirky.

In which subject areas are you specialized in your illustrations?

I tend to work mainly on children's publications, be they books, tablet apps or musically inspired learning. I have previously published 'Kids Yoga', a creative and fun introduction to yoga for kids and families. I've also illustrated the work of many other writer's and creatives. For example, 'My First Orchestra Book', written by Genevieve Helsby is a book, with accompanying music and a tablet/iPad app. Drawing kids and imaginary creatures comes naturally when I sketch and I am often asked to design new characters for museums, festivals and kids theatres.

Please give us an insight into your concept for illustrating Hilma's life and work

I was so excited when Ylva Hillstrom contacted me with the concept for a book about Hilma af Klint. I had first seen her work in Stockholm in 1999. At the time I was studying art history in Uppsala and her work blew my mind. Entering the museum filled with her large scale colourful paintings felt electric and the experience has stayed with me. A few years later, I was asked to give a talk about Hilma's work at Camden Art Centre in London where she was showing her work in 2006. So when I was approached to do the illustrations for this book I felt like it was meant to be. I felt very close to her work and I was fascinated to read the amazing life story that Ylva presented.

E. A. SEEMANN HENSCHEL VERLAGSGRUPPE

I feel very lucky to work with Ylva Hillstrom on this book. When I read her texts I immediately saw the images I wanted to draw in front of my eyes. At that point it is important to do some quick sketches of the initial ideas as they often tend to be the best. I let my imagination lead me and try not to analyze or judge.

When you work on an artist's biography, you also have to show something of their work – which you have done wonderfully. But how was it for you to combine your personal illustration style with the art of Hilma's works? Were there any challenges?

Yes. It was my first experience working on such a biography and it took some time to make a decision about how to depict her paintings. I tried a few materials before I settled for colour pencils. First I tried using gouache and acrylic paints, but somehow these techniques looked too close to the real paintings and it wasn't very clear that they were part of my illustrations. I hope that using a contrasting material like colour pencils will make it obvious for the reader that the illustrations are my interpretation of her work, and that I am not trying to mimic her technique. I think the result works well, especially as the book also contains so many excellent reproductions of Hilma's work for the reader to enjoy.

Were there any personal or artistic surprises while working on the book? Did your view of Hilma change while working on the book? How so?

I was fascinated to find out more about her upbringing and family and the rather abrupt change from painting traditional portraits and landscapes to making these large abstract paintings. Her perseverance and bravery, even with the lack of recognition, is inspiring. Following her own beliefs and trajectory whatever other people around her were telling her shows her strength and fascinating character.