Interview with Harriet Russell

Would you like to introduce yourself?

My name is Harriet Russell, and I am an illustrator based in England, UK. I studied at Glasgow school of Art and Central Saint Martins where I completed my MA in 2001.

How would you describe your style in three words?
Quirky, hand-drawn, colourful.

What subject areas do you specialise in with your illlustrations?

I tend to do a lot of book illustration, specialising in non-fiction for children aged 8-12. Many of my most recent books have been about STEM subjects, which aim to explain complicated or dry subjects like measure, climate change or the Internet in a simple and fun way. As well as illustrating for other authors, I have created several of my own books for Italian publisher Corraini Edizioni.

In spring 2025, E. A. Seemann Bilderbande published your book The Brainiac's Book of Robots and AI. What fact about robots surprised you the most?

Just the sheer number and variety of different robots that exist really surprised me. There were lots I didn't know about or hadn't thought about - I think perhaps because I haven't seen them in everyday life, many are working hard behind the scenes. The robot cow herder for example, and some of the medical robots. It was also fun to find out about the robot soccer world cup and table tennis playing robots!

Did your view of robots and AI change while working on the illustrations? If so, how?

I didn't really know much about robots when beginning to work on the book, and I certainly didn't know what many of them looked like. I had to have really good reference to draw from! I definitely know more than I did about different jobs that robots are used for. AI is an area that is constantly changing, and one that is a concern for artists and illustrators, as people have started to use AI to create images rather than employ us.

Which robot would you like to have for your everyday life? What should it be able to do?

It would be great to have a self driving car that could navigate the route and park itself!

In September, we will be publishing the German translation of The Brainiac's Book of the Internet. What did you enjoy most about illustrating the book?

I enjoyed bringing the subject to life and adding little bits of humour where I could. A lot of the focus of the illustrations is on people and how they use and interact with the internet. I also enjoyed developing the spider character 'Webby'.

Since you have illustrated several children's books – is there anything you pay particular attention to when illustrating children's books, or anything that is especially important to you?

I often try to include some humour or a visual pun into my images, sometimes leading to pieces that are slightly surreal or quirky. This is especially true of my books for Corraini, or some of my one-off prints. I have also done a lot of hand drawn lettering - the font used for both Robots and Internet was developed from my handwriting and has been used in several of my books.