



Windows into Illustration: Karin Littlewood

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[Karin Littlewood](#) [1]

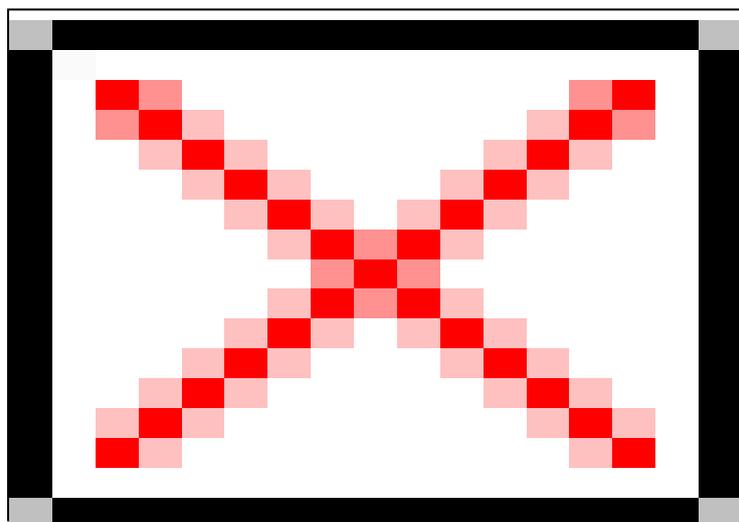
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Windows into Illustration

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Karin Littlewood on the illustrations for **Immi**.



Karin Littlewood lives and works in London. Originally from Yorkshire, she studied graphic design at Northumbria University, followed by an MA at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she specialised in illustration. She has been shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal three times and her most recent picture book, **Immi**, has just been shortlisted for the Cambridgeshire Children's Picture Book Award 2011. Here Karin explains the technique and thinking behind the illustrations for **Immi**.

The story of **Immi** began without any great thoughts at all, apart from the fact that it was almost Christmas and I needed to do a card to send to friends ? and quickly! I drew a very loose pencil sketch of a little Inuit girl's face on a scrap of tracing paper, added a few brushstrokes of gouache, and there she was? That original sketch remained pinned above my desk in my studio, her slightly forlorn, wondering face kept looking at me, and I looked back at her and I knew I had to write her story. It was an instinctive process and from the very beginning I felt very strongly that I had to keep the same feeling, simplicity and spontaneity in the final artwork.

I've always loved scribbling away at those initial sketches whenever I'm working on a book. Nothing is too precious. Everything just seems to flow ? the looseness of the marks on the paper, the experimental drops and splashes of watercolour. With **Immi** I wanted to place an emphasis on my natural sense of line, a departure from the finished illustrations in previous books where the strength lies in the layers of strong but loose watercolour brushstrokes.

A story began to emerge from these piles of loose drawings. A little girl (I still hadn't decided on her name) alone in her frozen white world begins to fish simple, colourful objects through an ice hole. As the story grows and she becomes happier, more and more colours fill each page. Her igloo becomes the brightest thing in the land and brings new friends into her life. There's a surprising explosion of colour in the final pages, in total contrast to the first spread.

I visualise my illustrations almost as stills from a film, zooming in and out of scenes with careful yet simple composition on the page. There's a close intimacy and emotion on one spread, turn the page and I play with scale in one

of my favourite scenes ? a tiny figure on the ice with an Arctic underwater-world beneath her and a whale too big to fit on the page!

For the final artwork I drew in quite a small scale with a soft watercolour pencil on paper. This way I could remain true to the simplicity of the thumbnail sketches. These line drawings were scanned and printed out two to three times their original size onto HP watercolour paper, again a change from my usual choice of a textured NOT paper. I then worked on top of the print with the same pencil, building up the depth and detail, finally adding simple washes of watercolour and gouache.

Inspiration came, quite often, unexpectedly. Sometimes, if I'm stuck, I try too hard and nothing happens. I have to let things find their own way in, so the little wooden bird Immi finds first is based on a silver charm of mine. During a visit to my favourite museum, the Pitt Rivers in Oxford, I spotted a little carved bear in a cluttered cabinet of objects, perfect inspiration for Immi's necklace!

Immi's name came right at the end. The illustrations were finished, the story written. Maybe I just had to get to know her! Immi is an Inuit name which I found out much later means 'echo', a name that seems very fitting for this gentle tale of hope and friendship.

Immi by Karin Littlewood is published by Gullane (978 1 86233 803 6) at £10.99.

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