

Juan Hernaz, illustrator.

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You are collaborating with the Botanical Garden in Gijón regularly. How do you think can illustration contribute to attract people for nature and beyond that how can it motivate them to contribute to its conservation?

Illustration is a powerful language, a tool that gives you the opportunity to transmit very complex messages, even mixing different levels of interpretation. You can handle it like a feather or a hammer. Or both at the same time. All depends on your intentionality and, overall, the concept that you are searching to transmit. The real power of an illustration is to move your mind and your heart without words.

I regularly create posters for the Botanical Garden in Gijón and I always try to do images that can communicate by themselves. When you are composing a poster you must know that the life of your work is very short for the public. You have only a few minutes, even seconds, to give an effective message.

I am honored to recognize that my illustrations are popular welcomed. The Botanical Garden of Gijón has a very complete range of activities for children and adults. The mix of both, attractive image and attractive activities, is the key to attract people and motivate them. This is another step to make grow up a popular sense of conservation of nature.

How do you approach a new project? Do you look into the topic intensely before starting your work or do you act spontaneously (gut reaction)?

I always work very conscientiously. I always try to find all possible and exhaustive information from different perspectives and approaches: specific treaties or essays, encyclopaedia and dictionaries, internet, books, magazines and newspapers... A thorough knowledge is the key to tackling a project with guarantees. I feel the responsibility to know in depth the ground floor to walk safely and to give a coherent message to my public. This is the only way to respect them: respecting their intelligence.

The last book I'm working on has passed the first step: the documentation about the theme. I've collected more than seven hundred references (texts, images, photographs...), related to issues addressed in a front or side way by the main text. I need to see and analyze a great amount of images that can help me to put in order my ideas, to know what to do and what to do not. This process has took about three months of work in this new project. Now, I feel with enough knowledge base to build a coherent and interesting work.

What kind of techniques do you use for posters?

My technical process begins with the first sketches. Graphite on paper, usually in my notebooks. This is a very funny phase: so quickly, trying to print the ideas in a graphic way, sometimes a fight...

And when I have clear the message to transmit and the image I must create to do that, I select the technique that I think it could be the best aesthetic vehicle. In this way, I always try that the technique does not limit my work. I use graphite on paper, digital colouring, oil painting or watercolour. But, for me, the technique is only 'the tool', 'the vehicle' that helps me to reach the place where I'm focusing on. I use it according to this parameters and never is an aleatory choosing.

You have illustrated the winner tales of this year's world earth day. How did the children respond to your illustrations? Did they like your adaptation of their stories or did you also get some criticism?

The children are the best public. So true! I love work for them, because they always say you what they are thinking, without conventionalisms.

The experience this year was very positive. Their first reaction is always the surprise. For them is incredible to see their tales illustrated by a professional and they love this idea. After the first contact, many are pleased with the pictures (and they tell me), others give me their opinions on how they would made the illustrations, even someone shows me his drawings. But I've never found anyone who didn't like anything at all the work I've done with his text.

I remember with special affection a child who comes to me to say "thank you, sir" and to ask me for dedicate and sign the book for him. He came accompanied by his mother. She later told me that her son wants to become an illustrator, and this idea was his great illusion. I think this is one of the best comments I've received and, of course, the best reward I can have. Knowing that your work is able to motivate and inspire others is a wonderful thing.

Is there a time of day that you would call your creative peak time?

I believe that creativity is the product of the constant work. I consider it as a long process rather than a flash in the dark. So when I face a project I do not crave the light to enlighten me, because I know the key, at least for me, lies in the constant search combined with an aesthetic sense of the reality that I try to cultivate.

Moreover, I have not preferences about a special time of the day for working. The only thing I can not stand is the interruptions. I can be working for hours and hours without watching the clock. Stop working is often something annoying for me. I enjoy every part of the process.

What do you do when you are confronted with a new topic and no idea comes to your mind? Did this ever happen to you?

Of course! This is a very common situation on the first steps of the work. But for me is the incentive I need to delve deeper into the creative process, from the documentation to the final result. I don't believe in muses, I believe in work and seeking. This is the only secret.

How did your parents react to your ambitions to become an illustrator?

My story with drawing begins since I could hold a pencil in one hand. At two years old notebooks and notebooks filled scribbles; when I was five I received my first classes in academia and at ten years old fluent drawing techniques such as oil painting, gouache and watercolor. So when I was eighteen and I told my parents "I don't understand my professional future without art"... I think they already sensed. Anyway, at first it was a difficult decision for them to understand.

Later, when I was a fine art student at University of Salamanca, I discovered the book illustration. This way of expression was the perfect join of my beloved interests: drawing and books.

But all of this would have been much harder if I had not had the support of my parents. From my early years in this world they were able to see my skills, promote them and make them grow. I've been very lucky in this regard and, therefore, I am eternally grateful.

Do you prefer to work as a solo illustrator or could you imagine to be part in a joint project?

I understand the process of creation in a very introspective way. Although certain parts of the process can be carried out in collaboration, there is always a part, the most important in my opinion, that is a confrontation with yourself, with your way of work, with your thoughts... An illustrator's work reflects a very personal process.

And although this work, with the illustrator in his role as a communicator, to me is difficult to understand without a certain social activity (a public to target, to get in contact), I think the deep process of work is so personal that is so complicated to be participated by other creators. And also I always think that the results would be unpredictable. This variability makes me having serious doubts.

Anyway, all experience is enriching, in one way or another, and is important maintaining your mind open and alert. This is, for me, one of the ways to maintain a creative mind. If you have the enough creative autonomy could be interesting a joint project. The key is knowing where you want to go and finding the way to do that.