



Windows into Illustration: Kristjana S Williams

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[Kristjana S Williams](#) [1]

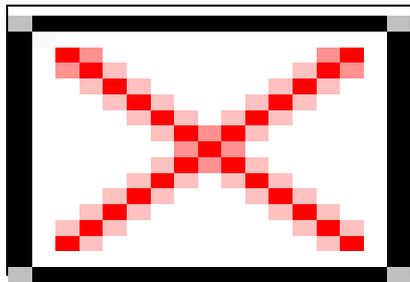
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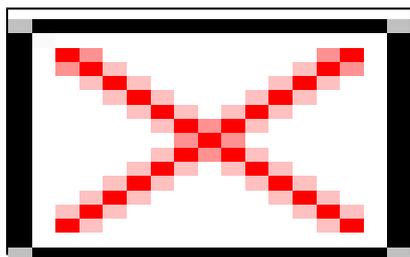
Kristjana S Williams on **The Wonder Garden** and working with old Victorian engravings



Kristjana S Williams studied graphic design and illustration at Central St Martins and quickly gained a reputation for creating fine art pieces, art prints and furniture. She mixes fragments of Victorian engravings with contemporary illustration and colouring. Here she explains how growing up in Iceland influences her illustrations for [The Wonder Garden](#) [3].

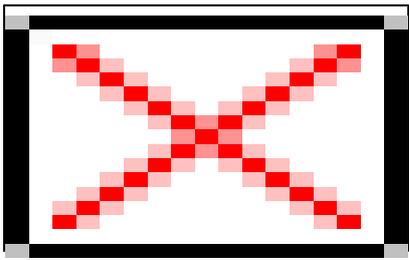
Growing up, I was really fascinated with the Icelandic landscape. I was surrounded by books, and my mum and great uncle would tell us a lot of stories. All of the stories were essentially about Icelandic nature ? if you look deeply into any Icelandic story, everything is shaped by the weather and landscape.

When I look at the images I make now, they are inspired by the stark landscape in Iceland, of black and white ? the black sandy beaches and the white frozen ice and snow, and the sea which freezes over. In Iceland, nature is in charge! It's brilliant and overpowering ? you're very much put in your place by nature there. So I feel like the foundation of how everything comes together with my work is to bring in the black and white of the engravings, and add in the colour and detail.



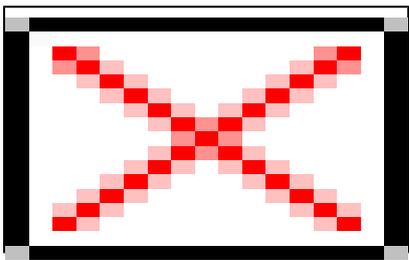
Essentially all my work is made from old Victorian engravings, which I take in and rework. I scan it in, and do all the colour treatments ? I might change the fur or the eyes of an animal, its placement, or sometimes I might create new

creatures out of old ones. All the different engravings I found came from different periods, and so I had to treat them all to find a way to make them work harmoniously together.

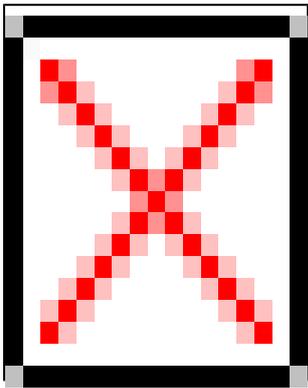


When I create a scene, I'm actually taking different landscapes apart and it's slightly theatrical, creating a whole new landscape from 12 or 15 different plates. I have to make the grounds blend seamlessly together to create depth, as though you were walking through somewhere. And from this I can make my own landscape from my imagination, which is totally unique from what someone else would do with the same materials.

This was my first book ? before now I have created fine art and furniture ? and putting together each scene was very much about finding the right elements, and combining the animals, trees, and landscapes until I'd created a new universe. For **The Wonder Garden** I focused on five habitats: the Amazon, the Black Forest, the Chihuahuan Desert, the Great Barrier Reef, and the Himalayas. And to do this I had to find all the elements that fit within those environments.



This book was incredibly special to work on because until now I had created my own fantasy environments, and I



realised the licence I had there was to do what I wanted with each scene. I thought making this book would be a lot simpler than it turned out to be ? but it was an incredibly involving, wonderful process. I had to really look deeply into each of the individual elements to give the right story. Finding the creatures was really challenging, and I had some help with that. We would go through books and books and books, and without the author Jenny Broom and my design assistant, Jo, working with me through that phase, it would have taken me three or four years to complete the research! But with that help and support we worked towards creating something that looks natural from antique engravings.

My favourite spread was the Great Barrier Reef, with the octopus. I found the desert hard to do, artistically, as I had less decorative elements to work with, but what I love about the book is that it feels rich and full, and without the desert it would be quite empty, and missing a quiet space. It would be too busy. The desert works to balance the other, fuller environments. Finishing with the Himalayas makes you feel like you've reached the top of the world at the end.

Making a book was such a different project to anything else I have done before. It was a much more collaborative

experience, and I wanted the end result to talk to young people by being brighter and clearer than my other work. Working within the constraints of making a non-fiction book made the artwork more direct and real. It was a wonderful experience.

The Wonder Garden [3] is published by [Wide Eyed Editions](#) [4], 978-1-8478-0647-5, £20.00 hbk

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