

A Florianthology: An Exhibition on the Art and Poetry of Douglas Florian

Artist's statement:

I've always felt that an illustration should have a life of its own, even a narrative of its own, independent of the prose or poetry that it illustrates. To research my subject I might go to the American Museum of Natural History, not far from my studio in New York City. I also borrow a great number of reference books from libraries in addition to purchasing relevant titles. Field guides are an especially valuable source of information and are usually up-to-date. Naturally I prefer primary sources recently written by scientists who specialize in the field I'm studying. So for my book *Dinothesaurus*, I relied upon Thomas R. Holtz, Jr.'s *Dinosaurs: The Most Complete Up-to-Date Encyclopedia for Dinosaur Lovers of All Ages*. I sometimes use the internet, but the information there is only as good as the web site.

For my paintings I like to use a wide variety of materials, not only artist's supplies. So if you look in the colophon of my book *zoo's who*, you'll see I employed "watercolor, gouache, colored pencils, inks, tin foil, candy wrappers, shredded papers, stencils, rubber stamps, and much collage on primed paper bags." I enjoy using paper bags, primed first with white gesso, because they lend themselves to layers of collage and they don't buckle when wet. The rubber stamped or collaged letters often spell out words within the art. So in my painting for "The Pig" in *zoo's who* the words Pig Out and Pig Latin are hidden.

I also like to achieve a variety of art within the book. So while some pictures may be dense, others will be open or simple. Warm pieces contrast with cool, and light with dark. But despite all these differences the book must remain a cohesive and unified whole. And each illustration must be related to the content of the poem, even if not directly.

There is no formula for where my ideas come from. I may read an interesting article or even see an outstanding TV show. David Attenborough's program on frogs and amphibians some years back on PBS was very memorable and inspirational. Once while on an author's visit at a Long Island school, I saw some amazing pictures that first graders had done regarding space and that evening I began researching material for my book *Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars*. So I'm always keeping my eyes, and ears, and mind open for new ideas for books.

I'm currently working on a book about ants that hopefully will be the sequel to my recent title on bees, *unBEElievables: Honeybee Poems*. And I'm also writing poems about basketball to follow up on my recent title *Poem Runs: Baseball Poems*. In addition, I've begun my first chapter book, managing to squeeze a few poems into it.

To close, I would advise all writers and artists, young and old, to do one thing: keep growing. Never be satisfied with what you've already done. Always try to do something new and exciting. And if you create something of value to you, don't give up on finding an audience for it, even if it's only the people you know.

I would like to thank all the editors and designers who have helped me to create my children's books: Susan Hirschman, Ava Weiss, Virginia Duncan, and Libby Shub at Greenwillow Books, Barbara Fenton at Crowell and Harper Collins, Allyn Johnston and Andrea Welch at Beach Lane Books, Michael McCartney and Lauren Rille at Simon and Schuster, my agent Reuben Pfeffer and my wife Marie. I'd also like to thank Lee Briccetti, Stephen Motika, and the amazing Mike Romanos of Poets House for making this exhibition possible.

Douglas Florian

Biography:

Douglas Florian was born and raised in New York City where he still lives and works. His love of poetry began in the fifth grade when he discovered the light verse of Ogden Nash at his local Queens library. He has written and illustrated more than thirty books of poetry including the national bestseller *insectlopedia*, *lizards, frogs, and polliwogs*, *zoo's who*, and *beast feast*, winner of the Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award. His most recent titles are *unBEElievables* (Beach Lane) and *Poem Runs* (Harcourt). He also creates abstract paintings and his work is currently represented by Bravin Lee Programs in New York.

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