

HOOT OWL, MASTER OF DISGUISE

A Q&A with Illustrator

Jean Jullien



You're well-known for your graphic-design work, and *Hoot Owl, Master of Disguise* is the first picture book you've illustrated. Can you tell us a bit about the process?

Thank you! My work has a very naive feel, which I use to talk about darker issues in a light way. There's a double level of reading in everything I do; first it looks a bit simple and charming, then you read it and understand that there's actually a message behind it. With that in mind, I've always tried to stay away from doing kids' material, as I found it annoyingly straightforward. However, the intelligent team at Walker Books made me understand that this doesn't have to be the case and that we could do a lot of things with this book. I really enjoyed working with them, as it was a first for me and I learned a lot. My work is usually very spontaneous, so there was a real challenge in redoing the pages to get it right. Hopefully I did!

You've had success working in different media, including illustration, photography, video, installation, and clothing. Can you tell us a bit about your philosophy when it comes to art? Is there something you particularly enjoy creating?

Illustration is my original medium and the one I'm the most comfortable with. But I love a good challenge, which is why I regularly take on projects I'm not comfortable with. I learn a great deal every time I try something a little bit riskier than my usual work. I like to engage the viewer in every project I do; it is at the center of my practice. I often comment graphically on the news: sometimes in a lighthearted way, and sometimes in a dramatic way. I use social media a lot, as it's a great way to share and see people's reactions. I don't like the idea of staying in



my ivory tower, creating work disconnected from the world we live in. I try to make it as relevant (and fun!) as possible. Humor is a very powerful tool that allows me to talk about pretty much anything.

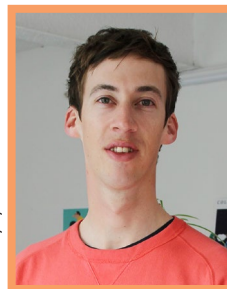
Did you have a favorite book growing up? Are there any children's book illustrators who inspire your work?

Oh, yes! I'm a big fan of Tomi Ungerer, William Steig, and Quentin Blake. But as far as my favorite book goes, growing up or now, it is definitely *Where the Wild Things Are* by the wonderful Maurice Sendak. I know it's not a very original choice, but there's a reason it's such an acclaimed book.

If you were a master of disguise like Hoot Owl, what would you try to eat, and how would you disguise yourself?

I'd disguise myself as a diner waiter and gulp a juicy burger!

Photo by Lydia Garnett



JEAN JULLIEN is a graphic designer who works in a wide range of media, including illustration, photography, video, installation, and clothing. His clients have included the *New Yorker*, *New York* magazine, the *Guardian*, and the Pompidou Center. Originally from France,

he now lives in London and regularly exhibits his work in both places. *Hoot Owl, Master of Disguise* is the first picture book he has illustrated.



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