

{PROFILE}



Anne Spudvilas



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With her own print studio, Anne is a prolific creator of prints (collagraphs, monoprints and etchings) as well as artist and illustrator. Anne kindly delves into her career path and practice, including her work as a children's book illustrator.

Outline: We would love to hear about your multi-faceted practice, from illustration to photography to print making. What are your favourite ways to create images, and do you have a formal background learning them?

Anne: I've been drawing all my life, which led to fashion illustration and graphic design after I left school and went to work on a small suburban newspaper.

Painting came later when I did three years at a small art school in Geelong. I exhibited through the 80's and got into illustrating after I had my two children and started looking again at picture books.

Because of my fine art background my first three books, *The Race*, *Big Cat Dreaming* and *In My Backyard* were all done in oils on unstretched canvas.

But book texts came along that needed a different approach and I moved into watercolour and coloured inks, charcoal and coloured marker inks.

I've been a avid photographer since mum bought me my first instamatic camera at about age 10 and photography's been an important part of creating the reference I use in illustration, but more than that it's something I do every day. My camera hangs on my shoulder constantly. I record what I see and post on facebook and write a daily blog '*Another Year on the River*':

www.annespudvilas.blogspot.com.au

Printmaking is the most recent of mediums for me – I began studying in short courses at the Australian Print

Workshop in Fitzroy, learning etching and monoprint techniques. I printed there using their open access studio for ten years when I lived in Melbourne. It's an invaluable resource for printmakers – we learn so much from each other on the days we print there.

Now I live on the confluence of the Murray and Darling rivers in Wentworth and have recently set up my own print studio, Riverbank Press.

Outline: Specially focusing on print making, we'd love to learn about some of the techniques you use and your work as a teacher.

Anne: In printmaking I prefer making collagraphs (a method of using texture to create the surface of the plate that is the printed), monoprints made on aquatinted copper plates or acetate, and etching on copper plates.

I held my first classes – 'An Introduction to Printmaking' – in the print studio in September this year. We made collagraphs and students produced a number of plates and prints over a two day workshop. I plan to do all kinds of workshops with adults and young students in the future.

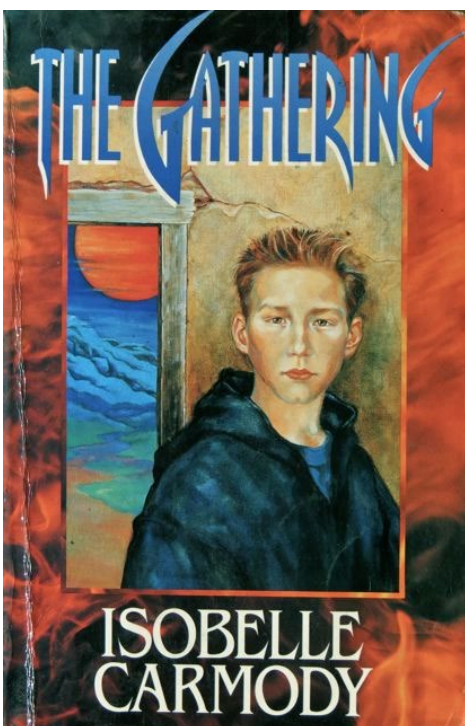
My work as a teacher to date has been holding workshops in drawing, mostly at schools and literature festivals and portrait workshops for adults.

Outline: Could you share with us an overview of your career history and highlights?

Anne: My career began on an 8 page community newspaper in Geelong where I learned basic layout, typography and later contributed illustration to the advertisements. I've worked for ad agencies doing fashion illustration and spent 10 years at Target doing catalogue design and art direction on fashion shoots.

In the early 90's I began working in children's publishing with my cover design for Isobelle Carmody's book *The Gathering* for Penguin.

Isobelle asked me to do a cover for her to present to Penguin and it was accepted. Since then I've illustrated twelve picture books for authors including Gary Crew, Margaret Wild, Li Cunxin, Nette Hilton and Janeen Brian. Book covers include the young readers' editions of Bryce Courtney's *The Power of One* and *A Fortunate Life* by A.B.Facey.



1991 oil on canvas cover illustration

The Peasant Prince (the true story of Mao's Last Dancer) by Li Cunxin won the NSW and Qld Premiers Awards and the Australian Book Industry Award in 2008. That book was definitely the highlight of my illustrating career to date. I received Australia Council funding to do the artwork and the Australia/China Council funded a trip to China with Li to research the background for the book. I spent three weeks in Beijing, visiting the old and new Beijing Dance Academies, watching the students performing and photographing the dance studios where Li rehearsed in the 60's and 70's. We also stayed with his family in Qingdao. It was a wonderful year for me.

At the same time I was painting in oils and doing portrait commissions in Melbourne. My portrait of artist/author Leigh Hobbs was a finalist in the Archibald Prize in 2000 – definitely another highlight in my working life (*image on right*).

Outline: Do you combine your children's book work with print making? We'd love to hear some specific examples of these processes.

Anne: My latest picture book 'Where's Annie?' by Janeen Brian for the National Library of Australia is the first project where I have used printmaking techniques in my illustration work.

The monoprint process lent itself to this project because of its ability to give the images a feel of times past. The story is set around 1910 and the monoprints were used as the basis for the artwork, printed in a dull raw sepia tone, then hand coloured in water-based paints to add the outback colours the story required. I found this technique freed me up from the often finicky and controlled methods I use in watercolour illustration. I often find the spontaneity and looseness of the original roughs is lost in the planning that is required to 'get things right'. It's a killer, the final image always loses something of the freshness found in the roughs. The monoprint works in a subtractive way, ink is applied evenly to the surface of the plate then the light areas of the image are taken away, using soft fabric, brushes, cotton buds, sometimes with the addition of turpentine or oil to lift the ink away. This back-to-front method of working seems to use my brain in a completely different way – it seems to free me up completely from that need to control the medium. It's very liberating and often surprising, definitely enjoyable.



Outline: Your blog shares some beautiful images from your life "on the river" - how does this idyllic looking location filter through your work?

Anne: It's been a huge move and change in my life going from a second floor apartment on a six lane highway in Melbourne to a house on 1½ acres on the Murray River. I can see pelicans gliding in to land on the water right outside the bedroom window and I wake to the sounds of magpies, butcher birds and kookaburras. How could it not influence my work? I've been making prints of the moody riverbank at eventide, and etchings of the pelicans, darters and herons. I wish I had more time to spend on my printmaking but work always takes precedence. Still it's early days, I'll find a balance in time.

Outline: In November you had a beautiful looking exhibition in Fitzroy with some of your etching and chine-colle work. Could you tell us a little about how you put this work together?

Anne: The work I had in a show called 'The Unknown Wearer' at Mario's Café in Melbourne recently is based on



subject matter that's interested me for a long time – vintage dresses and bathers, most importantly wedding dresses and evening gowns found at garage sales and op shops. There's something about the unknown histories of these garments that draws me in and I have quite a collection that I work from. I began with drawings but since I've been printing I have produced a large number of etchings with chine colle – a technique where textured or patterned papers can be added to the plate at the printing stage to add another element to the image.

Outline: For any illustrators looking to learn more about various print making techniques, it would be wonderful to

hear of any online resources or Australian classes you can recommend.

Anne: I'm not really into online resources - I believe strongly in learning by doing and the exchange between teachers and students in a practical setting. I can definitely recommend the Australian Print Workshop as a centre of printmaking excellence where classes in all aspects of printmaking are run regularly. Students get to learn from master printers and can then use the access studios to continue their practice. In Mildura the Art Vault also has printmaking facilities available, and visiting artists often hold workshops during their residencies.

Outline: What other print makers inspire you?

Anne: I'm blown away by the gorgeous work of Cressida Campbell, her hand coloured woodblocks are truly beautiful. Other Australian printmakers I admire - Martin King, Raymond Arnold, Wayne Viney, Lizzy Barnett, Kate Hudson, there are so many. And the superb Japanese-inspired prints of Mary Cassatt and fine etchings by James Whistler.

Outline: Are there any upcoming plans for 2015 you'd like to share?

Anne: I do have a project that I'm about to start on, I don't want to say too much about it – feels like bad luck. But I'm definitely using the river as inspiration for the setting of the story and it will be largely black and white images both in drawings and prints. ●



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