




The Owl and the Pussycat



Sometimes, when I'm working in my studio, a dreamy feeling comes over me. The pine trees I see out my window fade and palm trees appear. I'm back on a tropical island, Martinique. This was the place we went to get ideas for my book "The Owl and the Pussycat".

I'm Hedgie! Jan wants me to ask pointed questions.

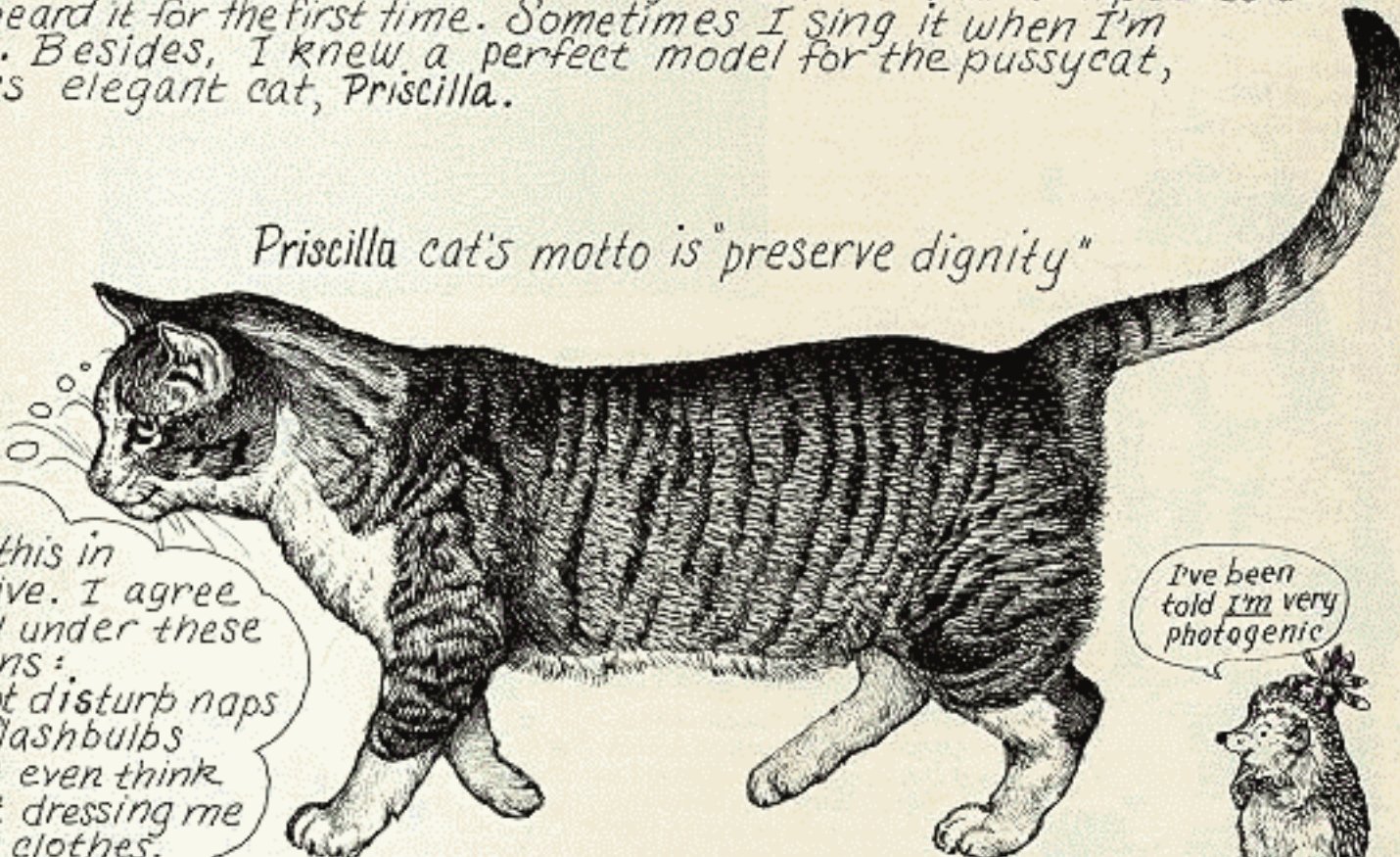
But wait. I'd love to dream out loud and tell you all about imagining the pictures for my book. I hope someday you'll go to Martinique and have strong happy memories, too.



Why did you want to illustrate Edward Lear's poem?

I chose "The Owl and the Pussycat" because it was my favorite when my mother read to me. When I read it to my daughter Lia, she loved it, too. She's twenty-one now, and after all those years the poem still comes alive for me. It is just as fresh and unexpected as when I heard it for the first time. Sometimes I sing it when I'm running. Besides, I knew a perfect model for the pussycat, my mom's elegant cat, Priscilla.


Priscilla cat's motto is "preserve dignity"



Let's put this in perspective. I agree to model under these conditions:

1. do not disturb naps
2. no flashbulbs
3. don't even think about dressing me up in clothes.

I've been told I'm very photogenic



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Bon Appétit!

Two things fascinated me about "The owl and the Pussycat," the runcible spoon, and the bong-tree. I knew about runcible spoons, because my family had a set we used on holidays. They look like pudgy forks, and are perfect for eating pie à la mode.

Why did you set your version of "The Owl and the Pussycat" on the island of Martinique?

My husband, Joe and I went to the Caribbean because of a line in the poem, "they sailed away for a year an a day."

I have a friend, Sarah Terry who is now a ship's pilot on the Panama Canal. At one time she sailed her boat from Massachusetts to the Caribbean Sea. She lived on her boat

for years. She dove for seafood, fished and bought fruit and vegetables at island markets. I thought that if Sarah could sail away happily, the Owl and the Pussycat could too.



A bong, I am not impressed. I don't have an opinion, but it looks inedible



unnaturally smooth, too.

When I was little, I tried to imagine what a bong-tree looked like. In the poem, the Owl and the Pussycat sailed away to the land where it grows.

When Joe and I went to Martinique, we saw an amazing tree. Instead of leaves, this tree had drooping fronds, covered with what looked like green ping pong balls. I never learned it's name, but it looked like the bong-tree I imagined all those years ago.

I'm having my photo taken with a Queen Conch. It's a mollusk, which means it is a relative of the slugs we feast on back home. You would think that Hedgehogs would love it here, but I found the 4 inch tall toads positively scary.



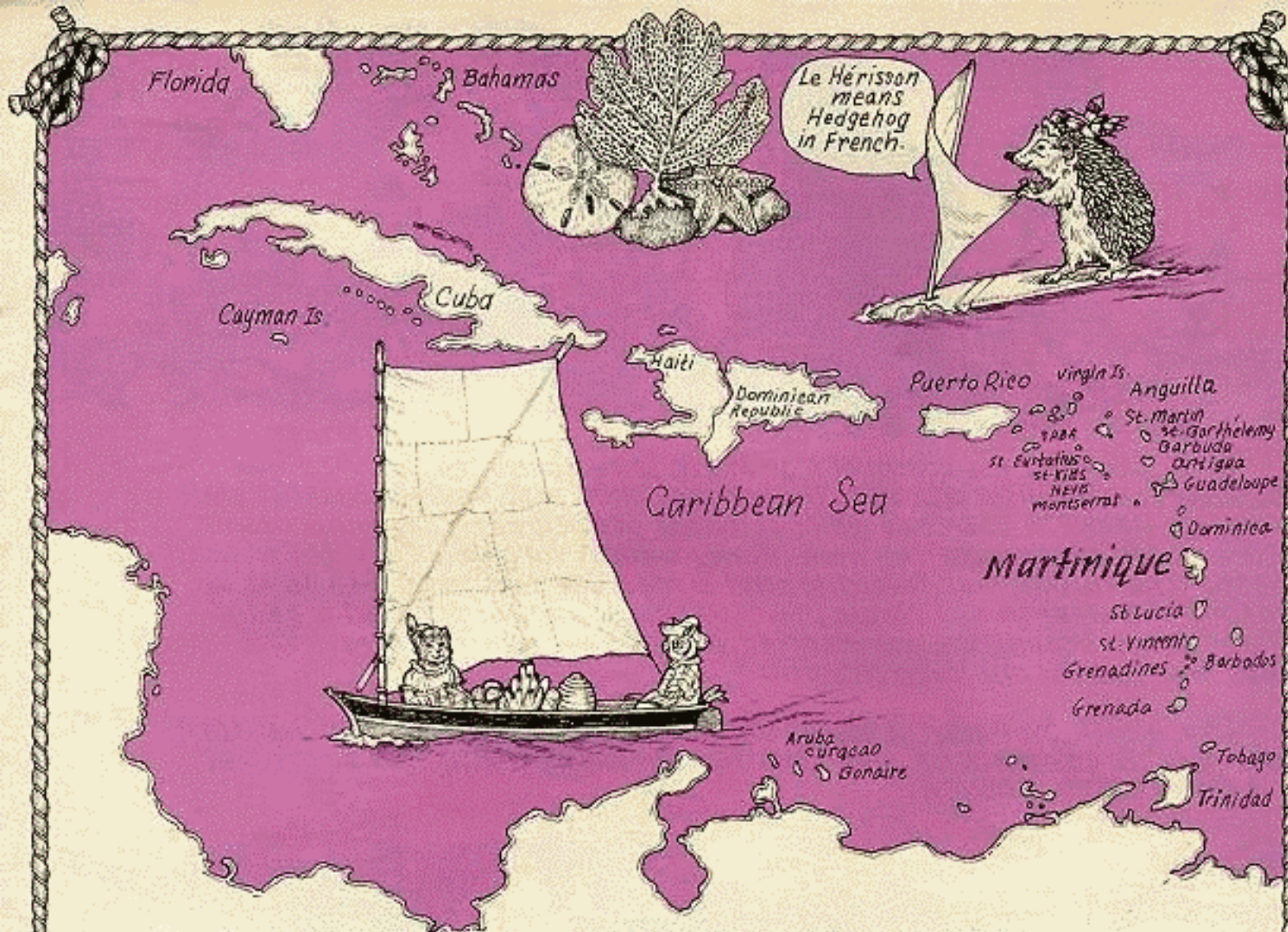
In the Caribbean Sea, there are underwater gardens of coral.

We saw them from a glass bottom boat. We saw many colorful, exotic fish. The water was so clear that it was like a window into another world.

As the Owl and the Pussycat sailed away, I imagined a fish story happening in the borders.

Martinique's nickname is Isle of Flowers. I tried to tuck a flower into every page of my book. Just like the people of Martinique do in everyday life

I'm having my photo taken with an hibiscus flower behind my ear.



The Owl's boat is called a gommier. It is unique to Martinique. The boat's hull is made from a hollowed out tree. Because Martinique is close to the equator and gets heavy rainfall, the trees grow tall enough to make these boats. A board is attached to each side, reinforced with a strip of wood, and then each part is painted a different color. The Owl's gommier is pea green. On Martinique we saw boats of royal blue, emerald and red, flamingo pink, lemon yellow, and turquoise, lavender combined with orange and mint green. My favorite was a red, green and white gommier named Christmas Tree. The Owl's boat is named Promise, because in the beginning of my book, he kneels down and proposes to the Pussycat.

The people of Martinique are resourceful. The gommier's sails were once made from flour sacks. You knew that if a person had a twenty-five sack sail on his boat, it was a large one. Gommiers are used for fishing. If a storm came suddenly, you could easily furl the sail, unstep the mast and throw it overboard, line attached. Then it would act like a sea anchor, pulling in the water so the boat wouldn't be swept away.

Nautical Words:

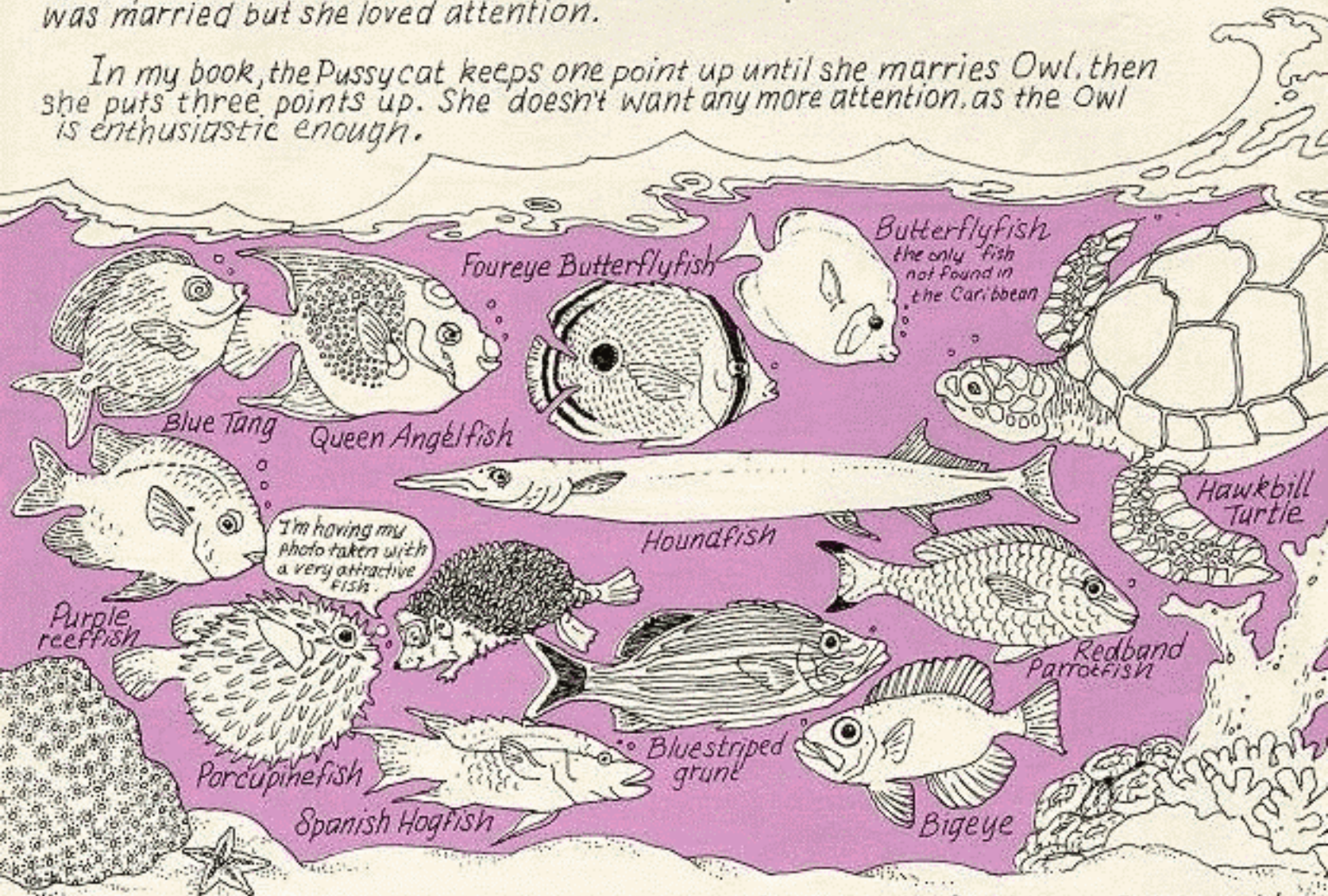
- hull: the frame or body of a boat
- furl: to wrap or roll around something
- unstep: to remove or take down the mast
- line: a rope is called a line at sea





In the olden days the women of Martinique wore special clothes. The blouse would be white, with ruffles and lace. The full airy skirt was made of madras plaid in rainbow colors. A starched white petticoat peeked out from underneath. Coral beads went around the neck. Perky madras turbans were tilted on their heads. The turban was folded to send a message to others. One point up meant the wearer was single. Two points up meant she had a beau. Three points meant she was married, and all four points up meant she was married but she loved attention.

In my book, the Pussycat keeps one point up until she marries Owl, then she puts three points up. She doesn't want any more attention, as the Owl is enthusiastic enough.



The creatures in the undersea border are found in the Caribbean. But it would be fun to imagine some really wild things, or some very beautiful ones, under water. If you draw your ideas on the on the opposite page maybe something wonderful will happen.

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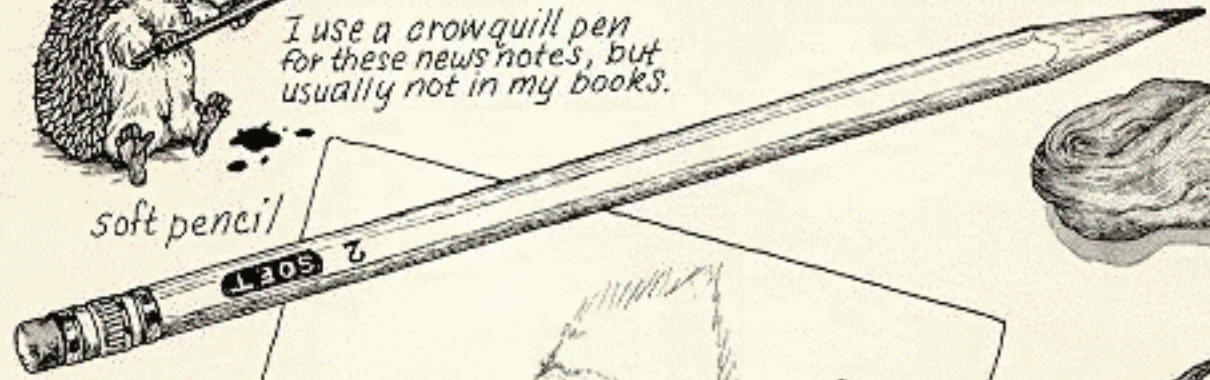
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What kind of art materials do you use?



I use a crowquill pen for these news notes, but usually not in my books.

soft pencil



I use a kneaded rubber eraser. It doesn't leave scratches on the surface of my paper.



First I do a pencil sketch to get the general idea. Sometimes I draw on tracing paper, then do a pencil sketch.



Are you wondering about that blob on her brush? That's a piece of eraser to make it more comfortable.

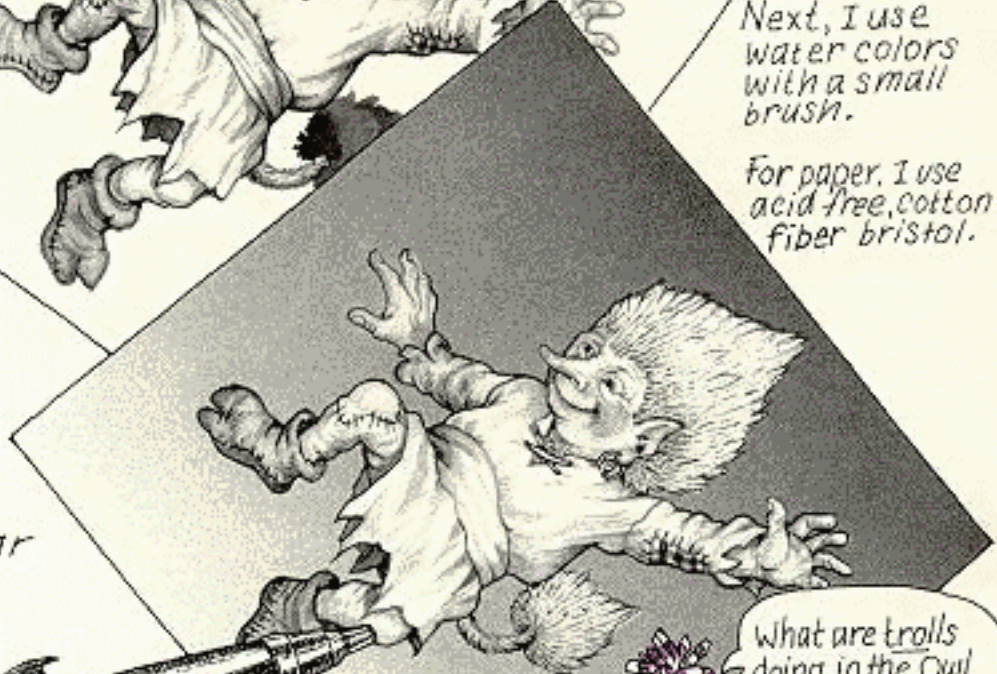


Next, I use water colors with a small brush.

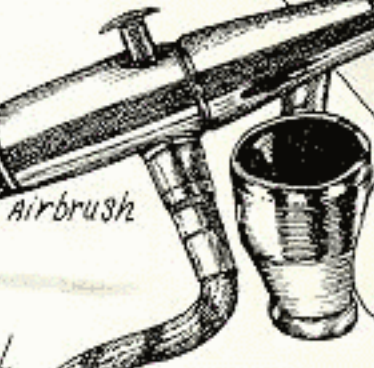
For paper, I use acid free, cotton fiber bristol.



Often I use white gouache to pick up highlights or create a texture. It is similar to poster paint.



Last of all my husband, Joe Hearne, airbrushes the background. This is like a fine spray painter. It takes lots of practice.



Airbrush

Airbrush trail

The fall '92 book is called, Trouble with Trolls. And the best part is: a hedgehog has a significant role.



What are trolls doing in the Owl and Pussycat news notes? It's not easy keeping those pushy trolls out!

My book is dedicated to my daughter, Lia. She's self contained, thoughtful and adventuresome, just like the Pussycat.

I have happy memories of Martinique. Color, for a person who loves art, is like a language. Colors are different on the island. The blues of the water and sky contrast with the beaches, green jungle and the hazy blue volcano. The people of Martinique paint their boats and houses differently than the people in New England, in bright colors and fanciful combinations.

The French speaking Martiniquans are proud and gracious. To a New Englander, they seemed to go about their lives in a graceful, stately way. I'm grateful that we could travel to their country.

LE PARC BOTANIQUE
TROPICAL DE BALATA

"Spot," the pig with the nosering is a beach comber. He used to have a 9 to 5 job. Now he's gotten away from it all. He has everything he needs.

mmm
Good prickly
qualities!

You're a teacher?
Great, would you
like some author
info for your
classroom?

One of the hardest things about being an illustrator is saying goodbye to my characters and the stuff I've accumulated once the book is finished. This has been fun to go back and remember everything for these notes.

Please write to me, and ask questions, if you like. I'll be sure to write back and send you future news notes. Next time I'll tell about my book, *Berlioz the Bear*.
I can't wait.

Your friend, Jan Brett