



Quentin Blake: In the Theatre of the Imagination: An Artist at Work

Ghislaine Kenyon

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Quentin Blake is one of the foremost illustrators of the twentieth century. Perhaps best known for his collaboration with Roald Dahl on books such as *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, *The Twits* and *Matilda*, he is cherished by young and old alike, throughout the world.

Yet his work has not attained 'fine art' status. Should it be considered so? How does Blake's background in education inform his work? And what is the interrelation between the work he makes and the life that he leads? Distinguished curator Ghislaine Kenyon has spent a great deal of time with Blake during the last decade and a half and in *Quentin Blake In the Theatre of the Imagination* she provides a profound insight into an extraordinary man and a truly remarkable body of work.

Kenyon has known Quentin Blake since 1998, and worked with him on staging a jointly curated exhibition 'Tell Me A Picture' in the year of Blake's tenure as Children's Laureate (1999-2000). She followed Blake during the years in which he continued to work 'off the page' producing work for hospitals in Angers and Paris and staging major exhibitions around the world, collaborating with him both in an administrative and curatorial capacity. But what Kenyon has observed, during a number of years of working alongside him, and sharing a friendship, is that Blake's work is necessarily intertwined with his life. His life informs his wonderful illustrations and his artwork in turn informs his life - a life which is extremely private, mysterious and full of complexities and ambiguities.

Kenyon and Blake share a background in teaching, and this interest informs Blake's connection to what educationists call 'learning and teaching' but which could also be termed simply education. A shared enthusiasm for education brought Kenyon and Blake together and informs the projects both the artist and curator now work on, aiming to reach children and adults in new ways and provide new experiences.

With exceptional insight into Blake's *oeuvre* and his life, Ghislaine Kenyon has produced not merely a biography, but a critical view of the artist's work. *Quentin Blake: In the Theatre of the Imagination* is a fitting tribute to Quentin Blake's journey and his great legacy - the delightful illustrations to over 300 books, several written by him, paintings, prints and sculptures - and the contribution he has made to art education and the lives of so many different people.

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