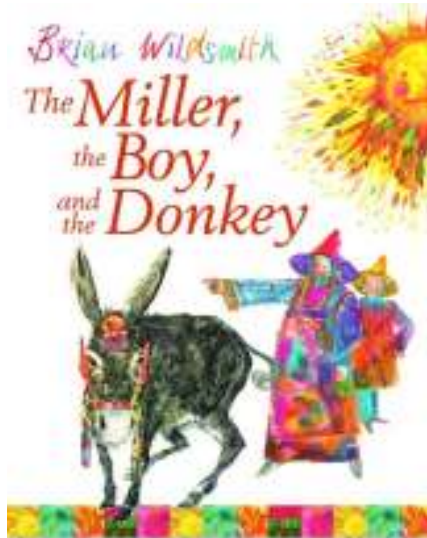


In Celebration of Brian Wildsmith



On 22nd January, Brian Wildsmith (*pictured right*) celebrated his 80th birthday quietly with his family in the South of France, where he has lived since 1971. Talking to him about nearly 50 years of illustrating books, it is hard to reconcile the colour, originality and range of today's world of children's illustrations with his initial experiences. Brian explained: 'When I started there was no full colour printing, everything could only be done in three colours. This meant that I had to do a separate drawing for each colour and each drawing then had to be precisely over-printed.' Brian owes the start of his long and highly successful career to the vision of Mabel George of Oxford University Press, who found a printer in Austria who could print full colour and for whom he produced his highly original ABC book, winning the Kate Greenaway medal in 1962. Looking at Brian's work now it is astonishing to see the vivid colour and detail of every one of his illustrations.

Brian has been inspired by many famous artists: he mentions Michelangelo, Giotto, Goya, Matisse... and Picasso – whose former house he can see from his own. He tells me his belief: 'There is no right or wrong in art. No child should ever tell you that he or she can't draw. Drawing is an expression of what you think and feel, and is always right for you.' Lions can be any colour you want them to be!

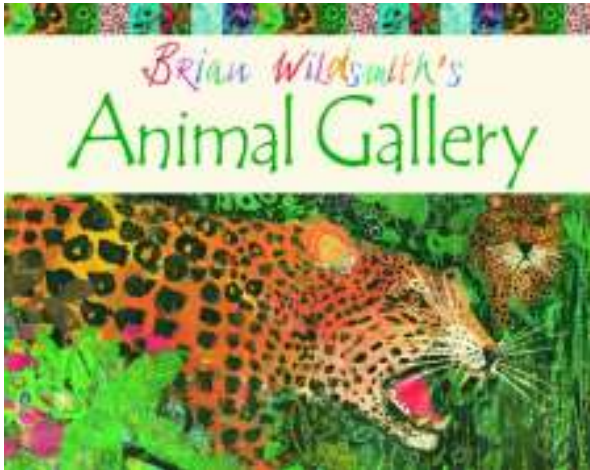
Although he originally intended to be a chemist, Brian decided that he wanted a creative career, leaving the moors of Penistone to study at the



Slade School of Art in London. He is also a gifted musician, loving the piano, but art illustration has been his lifelong passion. Many of his works are known for their portrayal of animals. Although he had no particular love for animals as a child, they 'grew on me' after the ABC book, 'providing enormous potential', Brian explained, 'for the use of colour and shape and a perfect vehicle for telling stories for children.' He always adds touches of humour to his work – a trait he puts down to being (and remaining) a

true Yorkshireman!

One of his proudest achievements is the creation of the Brian Wildsmith Museum in Izukogen, Japan. When asked how this came about, he explains that in the 1980s he produced 50 large paintings, which toured in exhibitions across the USA, before arriving in Tokyo, where his agent



suggested keeping the paintings in a permanent exhibition rather than selling them. His work has proved highly popular in Japan: in 2003, the Fuji Art Museum in Tokyo welcomed 1.35 million visitors to see 300 of his works in the *Brian Wildsmith and His World of Illustrations and Picture Books--Fantasia from a Fairyland* exhibition. Brian says: 'In Japan, everything is seen as art; it is a highly cultured nation with a very strong visual appreciation. In the UK we separate art from everyday life.'

Brian loves illustrating for children, saying: 'I wanted to help children develop an awareness of colour and their own vision'. He has a very clear vision when illustrating. When he has an idea for a book, he waits until he can clearly 'see it' in his mind and then he draws each picture until he has fallen in love with it. And then so do his readers...not only with the man himself, who is gentle and courteous throughout, but also with the vibrancy and colour of his work.

Happy 80th Birthday Brian!

Thank you to Harriet Bayly of OUP for arranging the interview and providing the pictures and, of course, to Brian himself for his time.