



Windows into Illustration: Britta Teckentrup

Article Author:

[Britta Teckentrup](#) [1]

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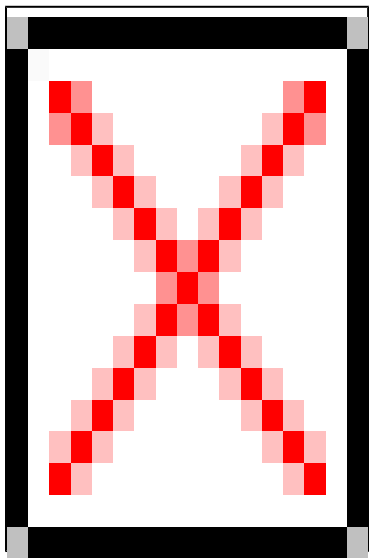
Article Category:

Windows into Illustration

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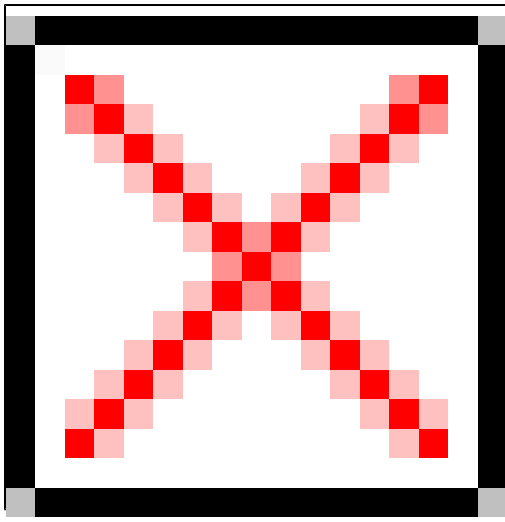
Britta Teckentrup explains why she was so excited to be asked to illustrate **The House by the Lake**

Britta Teckentrup's career as a children's book illustrator started at her St Martin's degree show when she was approached by a publisher and asked to illustrate a children's book. This was back in 1994 when Britta's intention was to become a fine artist. She did a Masters at the Royal College and for many years saw her books and her fine art as two separate areas of her life. She still continues with both and following publication of books including **Under the Same Sky**, which was shortlisted for the **Kate Greenaway Medal**, is recognised as one of our leading picture book illustrators. Here she describes illustrating **The House by the Lake**, a picture-book adaptation of Thomas Harding's Costa-shortlisted biography.



When my agent showed me Thomas Harding's text for **The House by the Lake** in the summer of 2018, I just knew that I had to illustrate it.

In his book Thomas tells the remarkable true story of a little wooden summer house built on the shores of a lake on the outskirts of Berlin throughout the course of a century. The house played host to a loving Jewish family, a renowned Nazi composer, wartime refugees and a Stasi informant; in that time, a world war came and went, and the Berlin Wall was built through the garden of the house. The 'loving Jewish family' was Thomas Harding's great-grandfather and his family who had built the house nearly a hundred years ago.

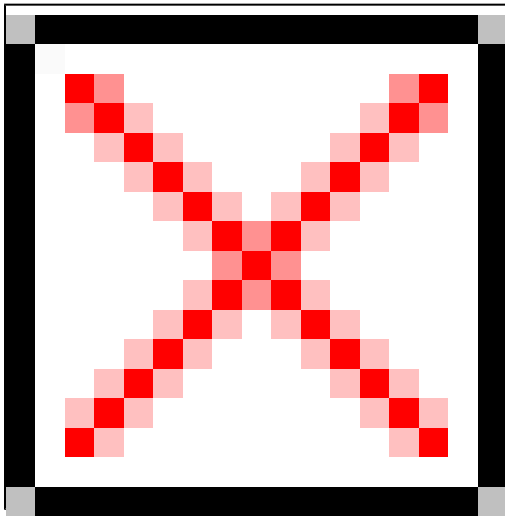


When the Nazis rose to power the family had to flee Germany and abandon the house. Thomas Harding first visited the house with his Grandmother Elsie; the house had been her soul place where she had spent many joyous, happy years when she was young. When Thomas returned to Berlin in 2013 and found the house abandoned and derelict, *he felt that he had to do something to bring it back to what it once was and started to piece together the extraordinary stories of the four different families who had lived in the house.*

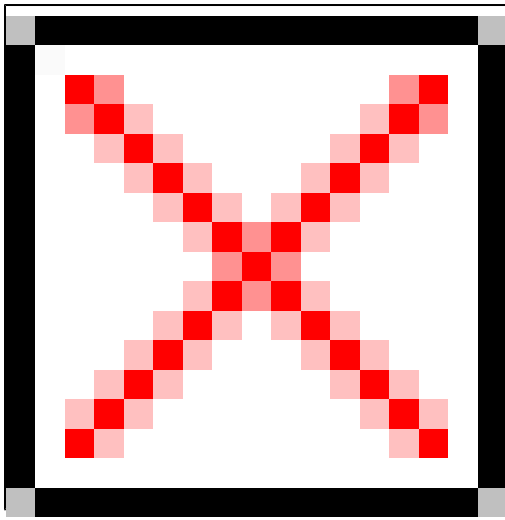
With the help of his family and the local community he restored the house to its former glory and it is now a centre of reconciliation and education.

I am very grateful that I was asked to illustrate the book. It does mean a lot to me being German...

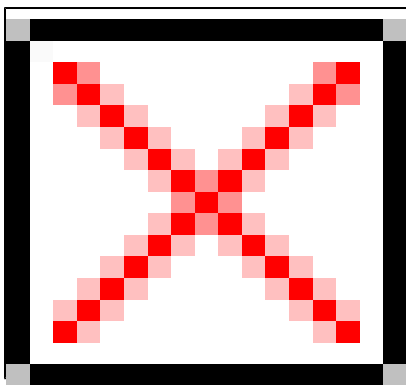
I live in Berlin and in the late summer of 2018 Thomas and I visited the lake house together. It was just in the process of being restored and it was very hard for me to imagine what it had once looked like. But Thomas filled the empty rooms with stories and the house became alive. Images started to form in my head. I never saw the fully renovated house until I had actually finished illustrating the book and had to rely heavily on Thomas Harding's archive films and images and the photographs I took on that day.



The story is told from the perspective of the house and I began illustrating the house from every angle ... trying to understand the many changes it had been through over the course of a century.



I also wanted to preserve the memory of the people that lived in the house by staying as close to the archive photographs as possible.



Thomas Harding's text beautifully combines lightness and dark, the beautiful and the harrowing the house has lived through and I tried to reflect that in my artwork.

The House by the Lake: The Story of a Home and a Hundred Years of History by Thomas Harding illustrated by Britta Teckentrup is published by Walker Studio, 978-1406385557, £12.99 hbk

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Source URL (retrieved on Oct '20): <http://imap.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/244/childrens-books/articles/windows-into-illustration/windows-into-illustration-britta-tecken>

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