



A LOOK AT MANICA K. MUSIL

How to sew together a picture book

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PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

A piano, architecture, a childhood with special needs peers, family (spouse Bojan, son Izidor and daughters Neža and Jera). Four elements in the life of Manica K. Musil that have left an indelible imprint on her creativity. Playing the piano gave her the capacity for abstraction. Architecture expanded her view of creativity. Childhood familiarised her with being different, making it seem quite normal. Her family offers her inspiration, encouragement and security.

With her many successful endeavours in publishing and exhibitions, Manica has shaken up the world of picture books, in Slovenia, Brazil, China, Turkey, and Pakistan. Doors are opening wide for her elsewhere, too, as confirmed by numerous awards that have recognised her innovative approach and use of unusual techniques.

Manica sews, glues, crochets and draws her picture books. They are not just beautiful, fascinating and attractive to the gaze and touch, they are also instructive and educational – without moralising.

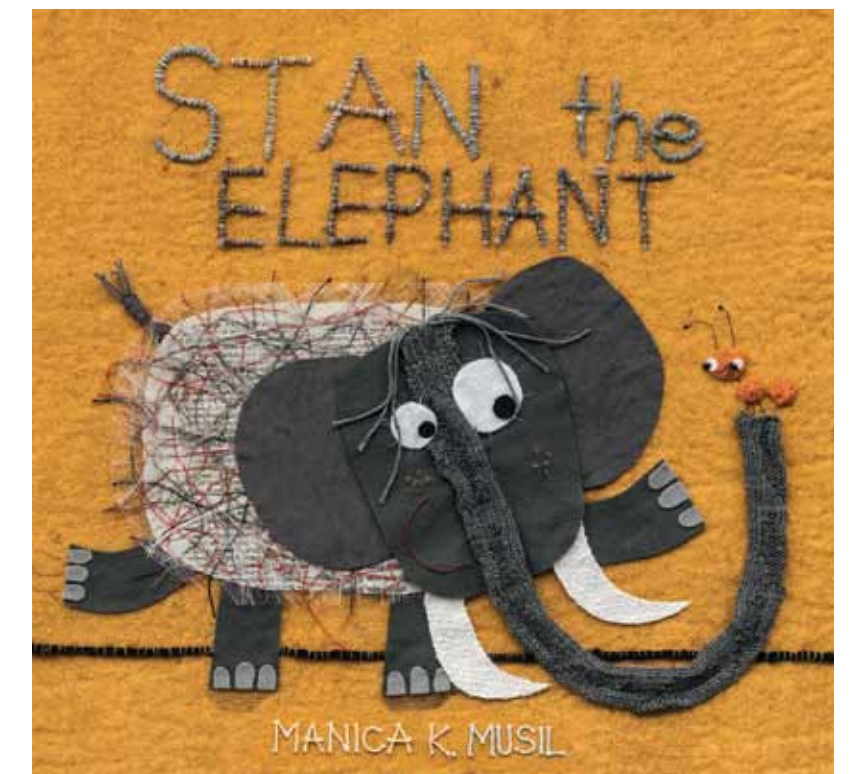
CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Manica was born near Ptuj in northeast Slovenia – in one of the oldest Slovenian towns. Her childhood is linked to a Baroque mansion that housed an institute for adolescents and children with learning difficulties, where her parents were employed. In this way, she got to know other worlds, and in the park she played with those pushed to the margins of society.

Then the family moved to Maribor, where Manica attended grammar school and secondary music school. Here, the piano occupied an important place in the life of this blossoming school girl.

ARCHITECTURE

When Manica was wavering between studying the piano and everything else (medicine, fine art, architecture), what swayed her was that she did not want





to be just a performer of other people's work. Moreover, her decision to follow architecture had a further benefit, since it gave her a broad view of things and taught her to think on multiple levels.

After graduating Manica was very active, and received several awards as a young architect. Then one after the other came three children, so for a while her creativity made way for other obligations. Still, that inventiveness kept simmering quietly in the background, and burst forth in 2011. Although architecture gradually became side-lined in her work, Manica's first two picture books deal with the topic: *Two Little Architects* and *The Magic Pencil* (both 2012).

OUTBURST OF CREATIVE ENERGY

More picture books came one after another. Manica did everything – writing the text, putting together the material for illustrations, and designing the whole thing. First she worked with Slovenian publishers, but soon she gained attention abroad. The story almost reads like a film script. She packed up her materials, gathered together her prizes (she had submitted illustrations to international competitions) and already printed picture books, and set off for the Bologna Book Fair. Then in 2014 *Koza Cilka* (*Cecilia the Goat*) was published in Brazil (by the publisher Bicho Esperto). This was followed in 2016 and 2017 in China by *The Naughty Pigs*, *The Magic Shell*, *Cecilia the Goat*, *Cecilia and Who Drank the Water*, *Stan the Elephant and the Magic Shell* (*Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House*), *Johnny Mosquito*, *Franky the Anteater* and *Three Kittens and a Dragon* (*Modern Press Co.*). In Turkey, Timaş Publishing brought out *Three Kittens and a Dragon*, *The Magic Shell* and *Franky the Anteater*. Preparations are now underway for Oxford University Press to publish an English and Urdu version of *Stan the Elephant* in Pakistan.

Over the years Manica has perfected her approach to making picture books. They reveal a strong architectural influence, which has emboldened her to use unusual and innovative technologies and practices.

She no longer simply draws her illustrations, but sews, glues and crochets them.

These processes are very slow, but the end products are very attractive and seen as rather unique on the international publishing market.

AWARDS AND EXHIBITIONS

Manica has received awards for her artwork. *The Naughty Pigs* "Best Books in Jiangsu Province," China, 2017. *Three Kittens and a Dragon* and *The Naughty Pigs* at the 5th Book Illustration Festival 'BookILL Fest' Serbia, 2017 and 2016. Two gold medals for illustration of the picture books *Stan the Elephant* and *Three Kittens and a Dragon* in the competition run by the international New York publication *The Magazine of Contemporary Illustration 3x3*, 2016. "Best of the Best" for *The Naughty Pigs* in the Hiii Illustration competition, China, 2015. Most Beautiful Book of the Slovenian Book Fair for *The Naughty Pigs*, Slovenia, 2015. Ten best illustrators at the COW Illustration Festival, Ukraine, 2014.

In addition to her illustration work, Manica is also active in other areas. She makes various practical items (bags, wall clocks and more) that are thematically linked to the heroes in her stories.

The Naughty Pigs has now been adapted into a puppet show by the Maribor Puppet Theatre, which is also working on the children's project *Pišeki*. Manica exhibits a lot, too. *The Thread Unravalled* (group exhibition) at VM Art Gallery in Karachi, Pakistan, 2017. Invitation to the Exhibition of Picture Books at International Cultural Industry, Shenzhen, China, 2017. Solo exhibition at the gallery of the Nanjing Art Institute, Nanjing, China, 2016. In the last three years, she has also participated in several group exhibitions: Klovičevi dvori Gallery, the 5th Croatian Biennial of Illustration, Zagreb, Croatia, 2016. The 5th Book Illustration Festival 'BookILL Fest' Novi Sad, Serbia, 2016. The Biennial of Illustration BIBIANA, Bratislava, Slovakia, 2015. COW International Design Festival (participation in the exhibition), Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, 2014. And the invitations keep coming.

