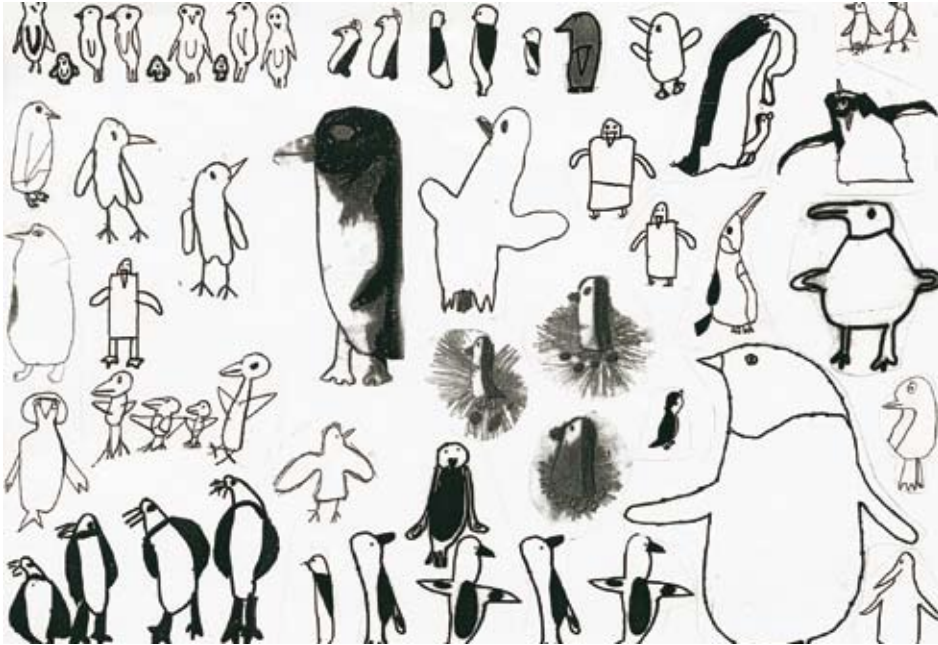


KIDS' ANTARCTIC ART



In 2005 I travelled south on the *Aurora Australis* as an Australian Antarctic Arts Fellow. My aim was to be the eyes and ears of children around Australia and to produce a series of collaborative paintings, based on the children's drawings, for an exhibition called *Kids' Antarctic Art* (*Australian Antarctic Magazine* 10: 35).



Every night of the six-week voyage I posted an email, detailing my experiences, and encouraged my readers to draw what they saw through my descriptions. When I arrived home a huge pile of fat envelopes and packages was waiting for me.

It took me days to sort through the drawings. Some were so striking I could see immediately what I wanted to do with them. Others I sorted into piles; whales, seals, birds, icebergs and so on, so I could use them to construct collages.

The pictures came from all over the place. Ryo Nakagawa from the British School in Tokyo sent a beautiful, vigorous, wax crayon drawing of a leaping orca. I remembered seeing the orcas early one morning, when the sunrise was reflecting gold on the sea, and planned a yellow background with swirls of gold.

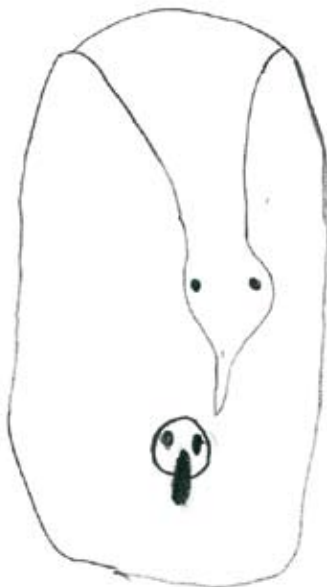
Pearl Nabegeyo, from Gunbalanya in Arnhem Land, drew an emperor penguin and chick, the parent tenderly bending over the young one, which sat within it. I liked the sense Pearl conveyed of the chick being surrounded and protected by the parent.

The image was spoiled by the long, duck-like bill of the chick (like that of an Arnhem Land water bird), but as art director of the project I thought it was okay to alter this digitally. Images of emperor penguins huddling together in swirling snow under dark skies combined in my imagination with the concentric dot patterns that appear in much indigenous art to produce 'Arnhem Land Penguin'.

'Crazy Penguins' is the work of many children. The penguins they drew were most unusual, some with long necks and others with their black and white reversed. I kept the background crisp, with blue spots to create the feeling of cold.

To produce the single-image artworks, I scanned the originals into my computer, then manipulated them digitally; cleaning up smudges and removing writing and sometimes colouring the lines. I then printed the results on to A3 watercolour paper with an inkjet printer. To make the multi-image pictures I photocopied the original drawings, then cut and pasted them on to an A3 sheet before scanning. Some of the pictures were finished at this stage, but most images were worked on with watercolour paint and crayon, pencil, wax crayon and gouache.

I made 40 pictures, but could have made many more. The hardest decisions were choosing the images. Even now, if I flip through the drawings, I'll see one and wonder why I didn't use it.



'Arnhem Land Penguin' original (Pearl Nabegeyo) – pencil drawing on cartridge paper (left). 'Arnhem Land Penguin' (Pearl Nabegeyo with Alison Lester) – inkjet printed image on watercolour paper, hand-coloured with watercolour and gouache, 2007 (right).

Kids' Antarctic Art had its first showing at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery during the 2007 Mid-winter Festival. For three days school groups came to see the pictures and I explained to them how the images were made and demonstrated how to make Antarctic effects with various art materials. Many of the images used were drawn by children from Tasmania and I got a huge kick out of one small girl recognising her drawing within a picture.

Since then the exhibition has been shown at Gasworks Park in Melbourne, and is currently at Dromkeen at Riddell's Creek. A digital version is also being shown at the Victorian State Library. The originals and the slide show will tour Australia over the next 12 months and a book of the images is planned. Two images have been produced as limited edition prints and a set of eight postcards, with all artists' profits going to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

The *Kids' Antarctic Art* project reached children in schools all over the world. Teachers said they loved turning on the computer in the morning and finding the next Antarctic email there. It was such a personal and immediate connection that the students become instantly involved, not only drawing Antarctica, but researching and discussing it as well. Their participation in the project has



Alison Lester talks to school children about Antarctic art at a workshop in Hobart in mid-2007

given them an ownership and concern for Antarctic that will stay with them always.

For further information visit www.alisonlester.citymax.com

ALISON LESTER
AAD Arts Fellow, 2005

'Crazy Penguins' collage – photocopied images glued on cartridge paper (top left).

'Crazy Penguins' (numerous children with Alison Lester) – inkjet printed image on watercolour paper, hand-coloured with watercolour, 2007 (bottom left).

Two picture books have originated from Alison's Antarctic Arts Fellowship. *Snoopy Sparks Goes South* is the journal of a young detective who travels south with her biologist aunt. *One Small Island, the Destruction and Regeneration of Macquarie Island* is a co-production between Alison and Coral Tulloch – another former Arts Fellow. The pair are sharing the writing and illustration and plan to have the book finished next year.