

## **Elaine interviews: Otto Dettmer, Illustrator**

Elaine: Well, hello Otto, and welcome back to er spotlight on Brittany. It's been about three years, I think, since when I last spoke to you about your work, when you'd first well quite recently arrived here with Elena.

Otto: Yes

Elaine: And I think there's been some changes.

Otto: You mean the family changes? Well, yes, we've, er we've had a couple of children.

Elaine: And they are how old now?

Otto: Er they are half a year or six months

Elaine: Six months

Otto: And two and a half years,

Elaine: Two and a half. Wow, yeah, so you've got your hands full.

Otto: Yes

Elaine: Or Elena has her hands full!

Otto: Well, yeah, we both, unfortunately, me too,

Elaine: Oh, don't say unfortunately! You'll have parents protesting,

Otto: Well, you know, yeah it's getting the work and and the children done as well is, you know, is

Elaine: Yes

Otto: A lot of work.



Elaine: So anyway, just to um remind our listeners, for those who didn't perhaps hear your previous piece, er what, how would you describe your particular occupation?

Otto: Um, I'm initially an illustrator, that's my profession. And er now I make artist books, which means I er make the content of the books. We're talking um visual content, mainly so images. I write some text as well. Or sometimes I use found bits of text. Or, you know, I get er, I get other people to write texts. Um and then I make, make narratives, and I print them here in the workshop on that machine over there, which is a screen printing table, and I bind them into books, and then I distribute them.

Elaine: And how do you distribute them? Through which channels?

Otto: Mainly artist book fairs. I have to, you know, go far and wide for those, like um abroad, but there are some in um France as well of course. There's one near here, in fact, Morlaix, which is that Multiples, Morlaix, which I go to quite, quite often, er once a year. That's a very good fare for artist books and prints.

Elaine: And online, too?

Otto: Online. Or, of course, yes, online. I have a distributor in London as who kind of sells the more um sells the books that are kind of have a bit of a wider range, er you know.

Elaine: So who are they aimed at? Any particular age group, or just a a wide range?

Otto: Well, the ones I sell most of are the practical books, the manuals. So I have manuals on screen printing, mainly. The kind of range for like, about five. Well now it's maybe three left now of screen printing manuals. There's also some. I've got some popular titles. I've got a a series of science fiction booklets over there. That's a series of three. Um they're kind of small books, um heavily illustrated and, of course, screen printed. Like all of my books, they're quite popular. I've made sort of probably in the 1000s by now. Um I also have a popular range at the moment, which is these these plant books here, which is leaves. People can hear that.

Elaine: With no writing in. It's very pretty. Very pretty colours. And it opens out.

Otto: Yes, they have poems, in them.

Elaine: Right

Otto: And they have prints of, you know, over printed leaves. I mean, this is difficult to explain for the radio. However, you have to see it really.

Elaine: We'll visualise it

Otto: Yeah

Elaine: We'll visualise it. But who, where? Did you write the poems? Or do they

Otto: With these? No I found them. This is one poem by er Victor Hugo,

Elaine: OK.

Otto: Another poem by Guillevic, who is a Breton poet, or used to be a Breton poet, and then there's one of Lauretius, what's the English word liquid?

Elaine: Licorice?

Otto: Lauretius, yes. Something like that. A Latin Poet

Elaine: Oh, well,

Otto: From the ancient days. So

Elaine: I don't know.

Otto: So that's the three I've got so far. I'm actually looking,

Elaine: Right

Otto: I'm making a a fourth one and I'm I'm still looking for a bit of text for that. So, er



Elaine: It's very – now I have to say, I'm sorry people out there that you can't see it, because it's a beautiful book, colourful,

Otto: Thank you

Elaine: Yes. And I remember folding. You had er one books that unfold don't you.

Otto: Yes, every everything is about folding, because er the nature of screen printing means you you can't print a lot of individual sheets. It's better to print everything on a large sheet. So each book starts with a a one sheet, large sheet of paper, and then it gets cut up and folded. Because I'm not a book binder as such. I prefer I keep things simple. So I prefer folding and, er you know, to kind of lots of stitching, which I don't like, or binding and hard binding I I don't like, because it's a lot of work. And, er you know, my books are really kind of affordable. On the affordable side. They're not really expensive. I have some slightly more expensive books, but usually they're kind of for for the general public, really,

Elaine: They're very, very eye catching

Otto: So I have to keep costs down.

Elaine: Yes

Otto: That's what I'm saying. So um I prefer folding and and just a little bit of stitching rather than heavy book binding,

Elaine: Absolutely. Well, that's, it's more simple in in its way isn't it. Now, since I was last here, I have to say you have expanded enormously. I was like, which

Otto: Yes

Elaine: Door do I, what doors - here, doors – there,

Otto: Doors, yeah

Elaine: Doors everywhere. Which one do I go in?



Otto: Yeah

Elaine: So do you have any workshops that you run here?

Otto: Er. No. At the moment it's I just make my own work.

Elaine: Right?

Otto: It's kind of kids. I'm always in here basically. At the moment making

Elaine: It's an escape.

Otto: Um. I wish it was, it's er, I kind of rely on it also, you know, to er to pay the bills. So, you um know, it's real work, if you like,

Elaine: No. Absolutely no. It's, it's very obviously it has to be productive in order to cover all your sort of,

Otto: well, exactly.

Elaine: Overheads isn't it.

Otto: Yeah. So when I get a chance to be in here, I do, you know, I do try to sort of er make the most of it, get things done.

Elaine: Excellent. Now, I gather you're involved wi' in a project in Gouarec.

Otto: Yes.

Elaine: Um, I think there's several of you in the in the team. Can you explain it? Because I've heard different things from different people, and er

Otto: Yeah

Elaine: You've been having meetings.



Otto: Well, it started with a book I made, which is when I got here, which I'm holding up here. It's um yellow and um it's on grey. The cover's on grey card, and inside it has um 10 illustrations, if you want to call that illustration. So I suppose images which are designed er about Gouarec. So these are locations, some architecture, some other locations which are not necessarily locations which are kind of typical tourist locations or anything, but things that interested me. So I went around and took some drawings and took some photos, and then I designed those 10 images, and I put them in the book. It's called Aspects of Gouarec or Aspects de Gouarec,

Elaine: And it's very eye catching, I would say, people listening out there, you might have seen it if you've gone into the AIKB office,

Otto: Yes, they have one

Elaine: They have a copy in there. Um it's quite large and square and with the yellow, er with the title, with Aspects of Gouarec.

Otto: Yeah, so this obviously um is Gouarec not being such a huge place. It's this book was er picked up quickly by various people and um and, yes, Marilyn er decided er this was would be a good chance to put some er panels around er the small town um where with the with the drawings, with the designs, on it in the panels would be in the locations where did the drawings.

Elaine: Right

Otto: So.

Elaine: Clever.

Otto: And she thought it would be good ideas. It was like made a little tour around the town.

Elaine: OK

Otto: So we have a little walk that you can do once the panels are up, which er will take you around town.



Elaine: And then there is going to be a a narration, isn't there, I think

Otto: That's right, yes. Um there, there are um QR codes on each panel, which take you, if you, you know, er put your phone on it, which take you to the um recordings. And these are recordings. This is, I I didn't do them. That was Simon who did that. Er they are stories that people, locals, told about er that were associated with the locations where the designs were made.

Elaine: Right, how interesting.

Otto: So each panel has three codes, one for French, one for English, one for Breton, eh and eh each panel it has a story associated with it.

Elaine: Right. So they've got someone in I think believe, didn't they an actor or someone to narrate it?

Otto: Yes, I think some of the recordings er were a little bit difficult to understand, um so they got an actor to er voice the er

Elaine: To do the voiceovers.

Otto: Yes, exactly.

Elaine: Right. Excellent. Well, it looks, I mean, it's going to be amazing. Have you an idea when er it will be set up.

Otto: Um

Elaine: It's been a long time, quite a long time .....

Otto: Yes, it's been. Marilyn has been planning it, I think, for three years now, almost. And now they have, they now have the panels, I think, already printed, I believe, and the supports. The supports was apparently what, I wasn't involved with it personally, but I was told that it was um a lengthy process, because you can't just put a couple of, initially they just wanted to, you know, put a board up, stick a panel on it, whatever. Eh, but it's not that easy, you know. You need to follow procedure. So an architect had to come and, er you know, um review all this and

er and she decided er that it needs a proper support of metal, something a bit more durable, and also in keeping with the with with regulations

Elaine: I was going to say

Otto: To look,

Elaine: You probably had to get permission from the Mairie to establish them?

Otto: Yeah, not just the Mairie, more like the re... department.

Elaine: Ah, the department, right? Yes. Yes.

Otto: These people came from Rennes, and they checked everything. Eh and they, said, Okay, you can have this. And also about the colours, you know, we couldn't just print in any colours we wanted, but they were quite happy with the colours of the actual book. So, which is convenient for me, because I designed the panels, so um the background and everything had to be the right colour. They didn't like white, which is fine, because it's all off white what I've got in this book. So um I basically used the same colours as are already there.

Elaine: Beautiful. They are. They are amazing, very, very, certain different aspect to looking at those places in Gouarec

Otto: Oh yeah.

Elaine: A new look at it I think.

Otto: Well, thanks. Yes. I I think this is probably what people appreciated this. Er if you you know what, what it's like if you live in a place, you kind of get used to it.

Elaine: Well you take it for granted don't you.

Otto: You just go to the shop and the bank and the post office, you don't really look around it

Elaine: No





Otto: At at any anything,

Elaine: No, absolutely no.

Otto: So if somebody comes new to a place, you know it's it's a good opportunity to

Elaine: Well it's like isn't it? If you have visitors here, you forget how stunningly beautiful the countryside is

Otto: Well that's right.

Elaine: And the lake, isn't it.

Otto: And it's it's nice to maybe be reminded, also for people who come here, and and

Elaine: Also, I believe so we're looking forward to seeing that when and where it will be when it's set up. But you've got a new book?

Otto: Ah. Yes, I have. I've also made a book about Rostrenen, which is a similar book. Um by the way, I make this, I'm making, I'm remaking this Gouarec book. I make it a bit smaller, and it will also be for sale around Gouarec, um obviously, er in association with the panels. And also, I've made a book about Rostrenen, eh which is very similar. It's just the colours are slightly different. And obviously the locations they're Rostrenen

Elaine: So that's orange, with lovely, vibrant colours. They're eye catching colours, I think that you use, you know, with with the yellow there on that book and the orange and then the, you know, against the black,

Otto: Yes

Elaine: Contrasting with the black.

Otto: So, so what I'm I'm kind of thinking of is this as a as a bit of a series. Er and, you know, Rostrenen is also a place which has got, it's quite inspiring architecturally, I think, and it it's a working town. It's not really a tourist town, but that's exactly what I like about it. You know, it's not, it hasn't got the obvious beauty spots,



Elaine: Well, it's not got the ancient buildings, particularly,

Otto: It has them, but they're kind of hidden aren't they.

Elaine: Yes

Otto: And so I quite like discovering things for myself. Um. And I I went around quite a bit into around Rostrenen, and er I found some some places that interest me. I mean, some of them are are, the are the obvious spots. But for example, the view of the church is a bit unusual. People wouldn't normally go to the back of it and and see it from there. Then this building here, this is an ancient furniture factory. I mean, it's not, it's not something where you would normally, er you know, stop and look at it. But I thought it was

Elaine: Well you, what you're doing with your book, is you're drawing people's attention to these places that aren't noticed and aren't seen.

Otto: Well. Yeah, maybe that's what what happens. Yes,

Elaine: It is. Because otherwise people, as you say, we just take it for granted. We go into a town, we go to Rostrenen, maybe to go to Lidl or to shopping,

Otto: Yeah

Elaine: The shopping part, but we don't walk around,

Otto: That's right. Yeah.

Elaine: And I think you would encourage people to to walk around

Otto: Yes

Elaine: And

Otto: Yes

Elaine: Actually look at what is there?

Otto: Well, exactly, I suppose that's the job of the artist, isn't it? Get people to look so I did it. I I'm doing this with the Gouarec book, and sort of expanded this now a little bit for the for the Rostrenen.

Elaine: And so the Rostrenen book is now. Is that um available again?

Otto: Not yet I've only done it last week,

Elaine: Ahah. right

Otto: But it will be, I I hope. But this will be the same format as the new Gouarec book, which, which is will be a little bit cheaper than this original one is 40 euros, which, for an artist book, is not probably a fortune, but you know, for I would rather have something of 30 euros and less. So I'm making it a little bit smaller.

Elaine: That's good. I think in these sort of economic times, we're we're all feeling that the pinch a bit.

Otto: Well yeah.

Elaine: And er you have to think twice.

Otto: Well, for me, it's always, I mean, getting the price right is is very important, you know, I mean, it's, er you you're trying to make it affordable. You're obviously, I'm obviously trying to sell as many as I can, obviously, like anybody would. Ah, so that's the question of making getting enough for me so I can pay my bills as well as

Elaine: Feed your children,

Otto: Feed children, uh feed the Electric Company and everybody,

Elaine: Electric yes absolutely

Otto: As well as people being able to afford it. You know, it's it's tricky.

Elaine: It's true. It's the balance, right? Well, I wish you the very best of luck with the new book, with Rostrenen book and also with the



Otto: And with the Gouarec book, yes.

Elaine: And with the Gouarec one.

Otto: This will be the next one

Elaine: And with this whole . Well now, just finally, will people have to pay anything to see these panels? Or is it all just

Otto: Well, no, they're like in the street

Elaine: They walk about. It's in the street. Right

Otto: will be in the same places where I did the drawings.

Elaine: Right OK.

Otto: So you get to you have, there will be in Les Halles, there is, there will be a panel, a separate panel which has leaflets in them. The leaflet will tell you where they are, and it will have a little path around town which you can take and from from panel to panel.

Elaine: Excellent

Otto: And it will explain a little bit about the project and about me as well.

Elaine: Good, good bit of publicity then.

Otto: Yeah, yeah, of course. It's nice to have a bit of publicity yes.

Elaine: Well, you certainly earned it Otto. Thank you very much for your time. Um. And it's been good catching up. It's been and I think probably the that's it with the family, is it now. You're not going to spring anymore.

Otto: Oh no, no, no. That's no, that's it. That's definitely it, yes.

Elaine : OK. Thanks.



Otto: Thanks