

# The Valentines Code

The key to interpreting the pages of  
*Klassic Koalas: The Book of Valentines and Other Loves*  
with an interview with Joanne Ehrich, by flutist Viviana Guzmán

## About *The Valentines Code*

*The Valentines Code* is a page-by-page key to interpreting the visuals and metaphors in the book *Klassic Koalas: The Book of Valentines and Other Loves*, which contains many references to the author's own personal journey. For more information or to download a FREE electronic version of *The Valentines Code*, please visit [www.koalajo.com/valentines](http://www.koalajo.com/valentines).

## About Joanne Ehrich

Artist Joanne Ehrich, founder of Koala Jo Publishing, uses her art not just as a career but also for the preservation of wildlife. She lives in San Mateo, California, USA, where she works as a user-interface designer and as an illustrator. She has attended photography trade school, and holds a University degree in printmaking. She has created numerous etchings, lithographs, monotype prints, and paintings of animals and landscapes. Her previous books have received rave reviews, not just for their stunning visuals and elegant layouts, but also for their loving treatment of the iconic koala.

## About Viviana Guzmán

Described by the New York Times as "an imaginative artist," Chilean-born flutist Viviana Guzmán ([www.viviana.org](http://www.viviana.org)) has been featured on programs for PBS, NPR, and NBC. She has performed with such luminaries as Plácido Domingo, John Denver, and Glenn Close, and she's graced the stage of Carnegie Hall five times. Viviana has fans worldwide, such as Kate Winslet (Titanic) who said, "I LOVE your music. It is truly beautiful!" and Isabel Allende, who wrote, "Your music is celestial!"

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# The Valentines Code

Part I: A short key to interpreting the visual symbols, page by page

## **Van Gogh quote and Valentine letter**

According to Van Gogh, the best way to know life is to love many things. Accompanied by a Valentine letter, it becomes clear that this book is not just for lovers, or koala fans.

## **Valentine letter and old family photo**

The letter bears a date stamp from 1946, though written by modern-day RB. He knows of her fascination with all things vintage. The old photo had been added by her grandmother, Panja.

## **Daguerreotypes of Sophie and Janek**

Panja's grandmother's images inspired Querida to draw a godly figure up in the skies. Panja's grandfather pops off the page in front of a castle drawing; here, it acts as a metaphor for her designated pantheon of ancestors.

## **Primordial**

Blood-filled veins, accompanied by a term compatible with the universal mystery about the generations of people who preceded us and those who will follow.

## **Cherished**

These pages feature Panja's letters, and images of sculptures Herbie made of her and others. The bright red letter seals look like cherries.

## **Jimenez quote and the ocean**

The statue looking into the ocean survives into all eternity, like a ghostly maiden on the cliffs. Waves mimic the human heart and can make us regain our center, as true love does, when two hearts beat as one.

## **Creative**

Here, Herbie is at work creating large sculptures inside his studio. The hand of an artist on the right mirrors the concept of creativity. Every person needs to be creative in some way.

## **Angelic**

The young girl's copious hair envelops her face like the wings of an angel. Her innocent expression mirrors that of the angelic koala.

## **Together**

Husband and wife are together, with each other and their friends, just like the koalas holding on to each other and the tree.

## **Forgiving**

The seriousness of expression could be indicative of sibling rivalry, or a play on the “other woman” theme. Forgiveness heals and always benefits the forgiver as well as the forgiven.

## **Magic**

A surreal landscape with fantastical animals encourages us to give flight to our imagination so we can create a new reality that can delight many others.

## **Devoted**

Just as the correspondence in the envelope expresses intent to be reunited, the devoted koala opens his arm to reveal his beloved, with whom he is one.

## **Wide-eyed**

Any relationship requires a willingness to allow oneself to be vulnerable. The lack of emotional safety, on the other hand, will disrupt the flow of energy.

## **Inquisitive**

Find out what’s beneath the surface. Looks can be deceiving – in both a negative and a positive way. Always aim at finding out who is the true individual under the clutter of pretenses.

### **Protected**

Like a walnut shell that protects its contents, an upstanding person seeks to protect his or her beloved. Camille Claudel lived in a world in which it was difficult to find shelter.

### **Enchanting**

Let yourself be enchanted by the true spirit and essence of another human being, in the same way that we feel an immediate attraction toward a beautiful prima ballerina.

### **Irreplaceable**

Most people want to find that one-in-a-million person in the nameless sea of people we encounter every day, such as at a schoolyard, or on the freeway on our way to work.

### **Loyal**

There might have been countless souls before and many after, but *the one* will always remain close to one's heart.

### **Notre Dame letter and Eiffel Tower**

The cereal on the floor reminds us not to cry over spilled milk, even if we could have packed all our things and made our way across the Atlantic.

## **Serene**

That girl with hair Medusa might have wanted is content to be alive in just this moment in time and no other, while absorbing the wonderful energies from all around her.

## **Dignified**

Everyone deserves a sense of dignity, regardless of race, age, status, and species. Note the dignified expression of the stately koala, who keeps an upright pose.

## **Letter with Michelangelo drawing and fruit**

Michelangelo's Jeremiah, the Italian fruit stand, and apples depict a zest for life and Mediterranean spirit. Behind the words is a faded rendition of Camille Claudel. Did she mirror Querida's own sadness?

## **Whimsical**

Two fish blowing soap bubbles in a human environment in this surreal scene portray a sense of spontaneity that makes life more interesting. Whimsy can be a key to enjoying life.

## **Impish**

Life is a dance; all the world a stage. It's good to laugh at one's own self; sometimes it's even good to "pull a leg" to lighten the mood.

## **Unpredictable**

We all know people who have been pivotal on our path. Good friends can also be unpredictable. The toughest experiences can teach us the most valuable lessons.

## **Magnetic**

Try to think of a universal symbol that's more magnetic than the Mona Lisa. Note the subtle spider web behind the koala. It is easy to see how one could get caught inside.

## **Refreshing**

While biting into a lemon can make us cringe, a feeling of refreshment will follow. Do things spontaneously, without regard to what will happen next.

## **A letter and drawing of cognac splashing in a glass**

Just as the cream will always rise to the top, a glass of cognac will always have a relaxing effect on the person who enjoys a sip.

## **Nurturing**

An artist needs to nurture a rare talent, even if it leads into temporary darkness. There is always light at the end of a seemingly long and dark tunnel.



## Priceless

Who can determine the value of a stamp that uniquely mirrors a person? Whether it be a significant other person or just a stamp, it just might be priceless.

## Curious

Try to keep an open mind; the world is not just black and white, hard or soft. Consider the views of others and see what *intangible* treasures may be in store for you.

## Accountable

The concentrated expression of the woman next to the open hand on the opposing page signifies both an examining mind and a sense of being accountable.

## Playful

Just like the koala that may be up to some mischief, the girl and dog in this image are open to having a good time, throwing caution to the wind.

## Letter and quotation about best things

An appreciation for one's surroundings and animals, despite the cold, cold weather, is evidenced on the left. This sentiment is mirrored in the quotation about the few things we need.

## **Mesmerizing**

We might be mesmerized by the youth in this serene winter lake landscape in a way similar to how we are drawn in by this trio of special koalas.

## **Mysterious**

Don't hunt for accolades in a desperate attempt for adoration. The mysterious will always be attractive, and inner values will pass the test of time.

## **Caring**

There is nothing like getting together for the holidays after a long separation, and showing our appreciation for the ones we love.

## **United**

It takes two to tango. In a similar way, we can achieve so much more with a united stand. Together, we can reach the clouds, just like the two clinging koalas.

## **Eternal**

True love survives hurdles and may supersede the earthly plane, as symbolized by a winged nymph and a drawing with didactic Baroque elements that symbolize bodily death: a skull, a fly, dying flowers, used cigarette butts.

# The Valentines Code

## Part II

How to interpret the pages of *Klassic Koalas: The Book of Valentines and Other Loves*

An interview with Joanne Ehrich, by flutist Viviana Guzmán

***Viviana Guzmán:* Did you say parts of this book are based on real events and people, or is it all fiction? They sound so real, as if they might be ancestors.**

*Joanne Ehrich:* The story is fictional, but there are many meaningful parallels illustrated with visual symbols that relate to my personal journey. Querida finds her grandmother's photo album, which is already prepopulated with images of her family, scrapbook findings, and koala photos. She decides to accessorize it with torn-edged typewriter quotes and love letters. However, the actual story could be anything the reader makes it.

**Where did you get the beautiful pictures? Did you do the drawings? Are the aged notes made by you or are they real?**

I created most of those drawings as an art student; the image of my pet dog I had drawn when I was twelve or thirteen. I recently found my dog's picture still hanging in the office of a family member, after all these years. I photographed it and aged it in Photoshop to make it fit the theme. And the notes are real.

**So, RB – was he a student? He mentions both giving a lecture, I think, and doing midterms...**

In the book, Rowan was a student, just like the person who actually wrote me those letters a long time ago.

**These are your love letters? That is so romantic!**

Of course I changed the name to protect the identity of the person. Chivalry is rare and something to be admired. Note the way he addressed Querida as “Dearest,” signing his correspondence in a way that showed he somehow kept track, mentally, of his previous letters – written over the course of three years. Since he did have a noble air about him, I wrote him into the story as an Anglo-American.

**What, or who, has inspired you to put together the *Book of Valentines*?**

I had a series of vintage koala photographs that I hadn't published before, and was looking to create another book. Many of my old drawings were compatible with the koala theme, which, to me, is all about love. Also, I was always mesmerized when looking at photos of ancestors – particularly those of my sculptor grandfather and my grandmother, who was once his model. I could easily see myself there in person, as she had related many details about their life to me; in fact, she once thought of me as his reincarnation. After I looked through a stack of my own letters, a theme emerged: Aged album pages on which three-dimensional objects come to life, with photographs depicting an early 1900s love affair, family daguerreotypes, a photo collection of a favorite animal, alongside sketches of a young woman from our times with her mementoes – a sense of continuity as generation gives way to generation. That is how I came up with the

story of Querida DiGiovanni, who found her grandmother's old photo album and decided to turn it into an artist's sketch book. The name, though fictional, is made of two words coming from romantic languages: "Querida" means beloved in Spanish. DiGiovanni is a common Italian surname. While readers can't actually pull the letters out of their envelopes, imagine them containing anything you wish. Put it into a pink bubble, send it off, and wait to see what happens.

**What is the significance of the old parchment? What were your considerations in choosing this color theme?**

Querida synthesizes history with accents of love, considering the realities of life while coming to lighthearted conclusions. Splashes of raspberry red and mauve enhance that message. When those colors are considered in light of things found in nature, a happy undertone emerges that delights our senses. If you look at *The Da Vinci Code* book merchandise, which also uses old parchment, symbols often appear in bright red, which frequently connotes danger in nature, as it is the color of fresh blood. Both books' illustration styles contain metaphors on old paper, but a different mood is achieved with the use of a different red.

**The photos capture many beautiful expressions of koalas. Under each image, there is a caption that is so meaningful. It encapsulates the animal's spirit as well as the artwork. Can you tell us more about this theme I see throughout?**

In order to connect feelings and words with the photos, a didactic way of illustration seemed most useful. A "didactic" story is told by way of visuals that contain symbolic meanings, which can be either intuited or researched within any historical context.

The words I chose to pair with the expressions of the koalas, drawings, and love letters are qualities that would enhance any relationship in a positive way, whether it be romantic or cordial. The message is universal, not just for lovers, and can be anything you make it. You could call it a Valentine book for all walks of life, any time of year, and any age group, transcending race, gender, and time.

In looking at the two many-faced drawings toward the middle of the book, the ones titled “Dignified” and “Unpredictable,” you can see how the words and expressions of the koalas are in some way mirrored by the faces of people. In the “Dignified” drawing, we see a Pierrot figure gazing directly at us, along with people from all walks of life: Asian, African, children, seniors, male, and female; they all deserve to be treated with dignity. The faces on the “Unpredictable” page refer to how literally unpredictable human beings are. Featured side by side are famous faces, such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s partner Simone de Beauvoir; Greta Garbo; Sophia Loren; and model Ines de la Fressange, as well as old friends and family members, artist models, teachers, and pivotal people from my past – even those who’ve taught me tough lessons I had to learn, hence are valuable to me.

**Of course I've heard of Sartre; and I've heard of Simone de Beauvoir, but I did not know she was with Sartre. They did live like koalas in a breeding aggregation, a multiple marriage like Heinlein wrote of!**

Sartre and De Beauvoir had a lifelong relationship. Though they had their ups and downs, they always found their way back to each other, as they had common values. If you look at the pages labeled “Mysterious” – the ones with the transparent pink envelope containing a mezzotint etching of carnival masks that look like enigmatic human faces, with some partially obscured

behind the transparent envelope – the quote behind the transparent material says that people will always follow a veil, as the mysterious is attractive. The hidden message is for us to not let it all hang out. Inner values are so much more important if you wish to have any meaningful relationship. A crash-and-burn mentality, in which people fall in love with nonexistent, idealized fantasies, has become all too common.

**That is one of the best things about this book: the subtle layers one can find if one just looks! I love something like that, that makes me think and learn and grow. Speaking of didactic, what are some other examples of how you used the images as a tool to communicate meaning or a message?**

The book starts with a quote by Vincent Van Gogh saying that the best way to know life is to love many things. Accompanied by a Valentine letter, it is the first sign that this book is not just for lovers, nor people who love koalas, as it contains many layers of meaning and open-ended realities. The next page features another such letter and an old family photo of my maternal grandfather as a little boy with his mother Sophie, who is also featured on the next page. I found the portrait of Sophie when conducting ancestor research some time ago. In the background is a faded image that I “sandwiched” in a photo darkroom, a long time before anyone had ever heard of Photoshop. It consists of a gnarly tree in the heavens revealing the likeness of the Roman god Apollo, which originally was a photo of a small sculpture I owned. Opposite is an even older image of my paternal great-great-grandfather, a descendant of the Polish landed gentry class. The castle image I chose as a backdrop for Janek, though related, has a separate significant meaning for me. It stands in Berlin and belonged to a sculptress named Julia Hauff; she was a friend of my grandmother, whom I named “Panja” in the book.

**Interesting stuff... Perhaps you could do another book in which you can showcase all of the other photos?**

Perhaps. A handful of old photos was all I could include here, in order to make room for all the other images that seemed more essential for this book. From the first pages, the book segues into its first metaphoric drawing done by Querida. Tree roots drawn with a red pencil are reminiscent of blood-filled veins, accompanied with the description “Primordial” – a term compatible with the universal mystery about how many generations have preceded us, and who will come after us. The drawing inspired me to find out a lot of interesting information, including the fact that my great-great-great-grandfather was part of a hereditary noble or “herb” clan, a land-owning class bearing a coat of arms. Polish nobility derived from a Slavic warrior class given special privileges by the monarchs for defending their country against the Russians and Germans, beginning around the thirteenth century. Over time, the nobility grew to make up some ten to fifteen percent of the population, making Poland the country with the most aristocrats. Other European countries had between one and three percent. These landed aristocrats stood apart with a sense of solidarity, even electing their monarchs, and were credited with having the first democracy, with high emphasis on passing land on to their eldest sons. The Polish word for coat of arms, “herb,” comes from the German word “Erbe,” which literally means inheritance – one of the main goals of the higher, as well as the lesser, nobles of those days. Poland had some whopping 40,000 different coats of arms by the eighteenth century, and by then the pieces of land allocated to them had been divided up into so many subdivisions that it seems hard to believe Poland was once a sprawling kingdom. To think my ancestors lived during those days seems almost surreal. Many lost their titles during the Russian occupation in the mid-eighteen hundreds. Those who got to keep them finally had to give them up in the end, between 1918 and 1921, when it was forbidden to continue using titles



in Poland. It is my understanding that my grandmother's grandfather, whom I've named Janek in the book, lost his land at that time.

To think that those people were only five generations before me makes me realize how insignificant our individual identities are in the grand scheme of things. We are often tied to what our neighbors think, what we own, or what we wear. All these things are just a drop in the vein of eternity and so insignificant to the only thing that really matters in the end – love.

**That is quite an interesting story. Who would have known that this could end up as a history session? Do you feel a sense of connection to your past?**

I don't think the nobility thing is a big deal, but I find it interesting how much importance people place on external things. Beneath the surface of it all, when I put myself into the shoes of those who came before me, I am also able to put myself into the shoes of countless other people whom I feel unrelated to on the surface, yet who are part of the human family. It ties in with the theme of love and having compassion for everyone.

**I see. If we all took that proverbial “mile in someone else's shoes,” life could open up endless other possibilities.**

We're all connected. Even in researching my mother's family tree, there are so many other people who make me appreciate how different we can be within the same family, even within a single generation.

One of the next pages, with the description of “Cherished,” features Panja's own correspondence covered by photos of sculptures depicting her and a little boy, as well as a

bronze bust of Bach – which the University of Berlin commissioned my grandfather to do. Unfortunately, it, along with the busts of Beethoven and other works, were destroyed during the Second World War. Notice the appearance of bright red on the letter seals, making them look like cherries – playing off the theme of being cherished.

**Do you have example of pages in the book that reveal some darker moments?**

Take the koala image with the “Protected” caption. Opposite is a reduced version of a huge walnut drawing I did, along with a fake stamp of Camille Claudel and a quote that comes from wedding vows and goes something like this: “My heart will be your shelter, my arms will be your home.” The theme of protection and shelter on these pages was what Camille Claudel craved throughout her life; many people are familiar with her thanks to Isabelle Adjani’s famous movie bearing her name. While she knew neither protection nor shelter during her lifetime, they were things she craved despite the realities she faced.

Claudel was a gifted sculptress, but primarily known as Rodin’s mistress; she was not given recognition as an artist during her lifetime. Rodin took credit for many of her works and discarded her when he was done – both as sculptress and lover. Plagued with financial problems, fading beauty, and a broken heart, her life became hard to handle as she progressed into middle age. She spent the last thirty years of her life in an asylum and was known to repeatedly plead to return home to Villeneuve, the place where she spent her childhood. Claudel was acknowledged posthumously in 1984, in Paris. Her story reverberates in the echoes of the many women in history who have met similar fates.

The koala with a somewhat solemn expression with the word “Forgiving” is opposite a pencil drawing I did of two sisters. Disagreements are part of life and acceptable as long as people

remain civil. This could also apply to the proverbial “other woman” in a relationship. Forgiveness benefits everyone in the end. A continuation of that theme can be seen toward the back of the book, where a similar image of that same woman resides with the big word “Accountable,” symbolized by an open hand (which was my own). We are accountable for our actions. The koala holding its little friend almost appears to display a tiny trace of regret.

The woman in pink surrounded by fish with the word “Inquisitive” is a more subtle example. As an art student, I went through a period of noticing people walking hurriedly past each other in shopping malls; they reminded me of shoals of fish. Undertones of isolation are inevitable. Beneath a beautiful face just might be a lonely child. We are far too quick to judge fellow human beings. Just like a cowboy who was quick to put his hand on his gun in the Old West, we often pull the trigger; but the bullets we modern-day cowboys fire off are often words, or even just looks ... looks that kill. It was during that period that I also came up with the notion that culture is to humans what water is to fish. Place a freshwater fish into salt water, and it won't be easy. Culture, too, has inherent rules a person needs to learn before feeling at home.

### **What is the significance of the Paris photographs or Italian scenery?**

They accompany their respective letters. In one, Rowan Blair writes to Querida from Italy. On the left is a charcoal drawing in which I interpret Michelangelo Buonarroti's Sistine Chapel painting of Jeremiah, which emerges from behind an Italian fruit stand photograph and a colored pencil drawing of apples in a straw hat. The fruit depicts not only a zest for life but also the Italian spirit, as does the passionate drawing of Michelangelo. The letter addresses her with a new nickname: "Cara Giovanna." Behind the words is a faded rendition of Camille Claudel. Could it be that Querida held a similar sadness of expression?

On the Paris pages, you can see photographs of Notre Dame's gargoyles and the Eiffel Tower. RB's letter describes the famed cathedral where he had cafe au lait by himself. Perhaps a bit crushed, he expresses his desire to share it with her next time, if she chooses to join him. It seemed appropriate to add a drawing of a cup and saucer with coffee that had been stirred, an antique chest of drawers with cartons that are ready for a great move, and spilled milk with cereal on a wooden floorboard. Note the subtle reference to not crying over spilled milk. Sometimes, it's just better to let bygones be bygones, and hold that feeling of gratitude.

**Tell me about the quotes you used in the book, what are their significance?**

Jimenez was a famous poet. Wherever you see a quote affixed with raspberry-red tape, imagine Querida leaving a trail of thoughts. The Jimenez quote about his love being like water relates to the ocean drawing backdrops, which are just Photoshop "drawings" derived from real oil paintings I had done of the ocean. The pencil drawing of a woman looking into the waves is of an actual bronze sculpture of my grandmother. The way it fits into the scenery gives an impression of a ghost that survives into all eternity. There are many legends about a forlorn maiden on the cliffs. This archetype might relate both to the different vibrations we experience when we find ourselves close to an ocean shore and to the commonly experienced euphoria. The recurring waves mimic the human heart and our breath. Just as ebbs and flows are created by the push and pull of the sun and moon, so too are some of our strong emotions. Think of lunacy being attributed to people according to moon cycles. As ocean waves can make us regain energetic equilibrium, so can finding true love, when two hearts beat as one. The photographs of my grandmother practicing yoga on the beach, an ancient practice in which breath is so important, seemed perfect for that spot.

### **Is the wanted poster supposed to be of someone in particular?**

The wanted poster represents the one-in-a-million person most people seek to find. In this book, it was symbolically pasted over a watercolor painting depicting a sea of anonymous faces that disappear into a distant university school yard. The face in the poster has a warm expression and beauty many people can relate to.

### **I love that fish picture, the one beside the koala with the “whimsical” label!**

The original scratchboard drawing was admittedly one of the most intricate drawings I’ve ever done, in my first illustration class at University. The teacher gave me an “F” because I forgot to include a piece of parchment paper to protect the image from being marred. Strict about being a straight-A student, I somehow blocked out the experience and made the same mistake again, this time with the image toward the end, where the couple floats in the clouds above the mountains. It won me another F! At the same time another student, whom I helped to improve his techniques, got a B+ course grade, but I ended up with a C- in a class that should have been among the easiest for me. Since it prevented me from having a perfect GPA, I dropped out of the illustration program and embarked on a completely different path. Everything happens for a reason, and you will always end up doing what you’re meant to do in the end. Did I mention the book is full of meaningful experiences?

**Yes, and that makes a good story to tell. I too think everything happens for a reason. I think that maybe those who are going to accomplish something are given greater challenges to overcome in order to prove they can do it. It's amazing how these little instances can affect us so much!**

### **Do you have any messages for current art students?**

Follow your heart, even if nobody seems to think what you do is worthwhile. Listen to that inner voice, and follow your calling. Don't let negative opinions derail you from your path. Toward the end of the book is a photograph of an attentive koala, along with the image of a girl holding a harlequin doll. The "Nurturing" caption is accompanied by a quote urging the nurture of one's own special talent, even if it may lead into darkness for a while. At the end of every tunnel of darkness, there is light.

### **There were many more pictures that I just loved. The still-life types are my favorites.**

I have always liked that pocket-contents still life. There's a push and pull between the hard, shiny objects, such as the scissors, and the delicate shell earring and feather, for example. It's fronted by a koala who appears to be examining the items, with the big word "Curious" and a quote about not taking oneself too seriously and focusing on other things in life. I like that message; it's good to keep an open mind.

### **On the very next page, under the koala labeled "Impish," the creature there, I love that! As well as the picture on the next page. The closeup of the water droplets several pages away, too, makes one feel the moisture!**

When I worked at Apple, a coworker talked about a friend who really made her laugh and whom she named Goat Boy. I found her descriptions humorous and started drawing the body of a goat, with a hairy human head, luscious lips, beautiful doe eyes, and hair made of peacock feathers. I rather liked how it came out and thought it went well with the risible expression of the koala and look of the Dance-of-Life etching, which also contains a clown.

**Did Querida and RB see each other in between the postcard from Alberta and the typewritten note? They didn't break up, did they? (The giving back of the book and the bracelet.) Did they have a brief falling-out?**

Rain clouds are a normal part of any relationship and so it was appropriate to include the one letter containing a sentence to make us wonder. Whether Querida and Rowan Blair ever had a chance to see each other in between the times of his travels remains open. The message is that true love survives hardships – and even the earthly plane, as shown on the last two pages, which showcase both a nymph with wings and a more serious drawing containing didactic Baroque elements symbolizing bodily death: a skull, a fly, dying flowers, used cigarette butts.

**I saw many like that in the Metropolitan Museum of Art when we were there; loved that.**

**What do you find is your most powerful inspiration as an artist? And does that have any bearing on the direct inspiration for this book?**

Art is a tool to communicate. How does one express one's feelings about a ten-foot-high ocean wave? Pictures can speak a thousand words. If my mother is to be believed, I drew sitting, standing, and flying birds on the kitchen floor with a permanent marker when I was only a year old. I wish she had taken those floor tiles with her when we moved to prove it! I would never have thought that drawings I did twenty to thirty years ago might fit into one and the same book.

**In noticing a collection of many different types of drawings in the book, is there a particular technique or type of artwork that you find most rewarding? A particular subject?**

There isn't one style that defines my artwork as a whole; I've tried anything from photo realism to abstract expressionism over the years, with a repertoire of diverse bodies of work that were done in completely different styles. Take the *Klassic Koala* imprint, where each book is completely different, yet stylistically consistent within its own framework. It's a good way to not get bored as an artist. As far as techniques, I still have a lot of abstract monotypes, as well as figurative etchings of animals, but I've tried just about any technique under the sun, such as oils, watercolors, scratchboard drawings, and pottery. The list goes on.

**As your style has evolved, what have you found most useful or most inspiring?**

There have been many inspirations. I like Salvador Dali's work. In Surrealism, realistic painting techniques are used to suspend reality, if just for a moment, and fool us into believing the utopic world in front of us is real. For instance, the drawing opposite the koala with the word "Magic" originally was a 20-minute large pencil sketch I created in my first drawing class at University. The teacher asked us to do anything that came to our minds. So I thought up a three-dimensional plane in which whales and fish flew through the air along with an iron ball; a bird looks at us upside down; the shadow of a giraffe emerges on top of a mountain; a tiger sits peacefully next to a zebra. You would never see all these unrelated creatures together in the wild. I like how this drawing is not perfect, as it was created spontaneously. By giving the viewer the power to judge, a connection can be so much more powerful. Another message is that by suspending one's own ego, the rewards can be so much greater, for all involved.