

# Aunty's travels puts junior readers in the frame

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ROWENA Wiseman is immersed in art. As publications editor for Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery she is surrounded by and closely involved in exhibitions.

Her fascination and affinity with art has now led her to delve into the mysteries that might lie behind and beyond the framed pieces.

In a series of ebooks Wiseman takes junior readers behind the canvas. Literally jumping into the picture with Frieda and her Aunty Arty.

The unfolding adventure illustrated by Narelda Joy introduces youngsters to the world of art occupied by such artists as Georgio de Chirico, Yue Minjun and Paula Rego.

In the first of six ebooks slated for publication Aunty Arty takes Frieda and her sister Mona into Georgio de Chirico's painting *The Disquieting Muses*.

The trio set out to save their new friend Fibula from Cupid's lead arrow while the statue of Venus suffers from lovesickness.

The acceptance of Wiseman's series by Melbourne children's ebook publisher Jet Black Publishing comes after a decade of creative disappointment.

Wiseman, who lives in Mt Eliza, admits to "receiving a lot of rejection slips" from her attempts to find a publisher for her adult and young adult fiction manuscripts.

But the digital age is changing the face of publishing. Some of her pieces were published free online and the



**Ereaders:** Author Rowena Wiseman and daughter Sasha go online to read the first of Wiseman's Aunty Arty series of children's books. Picture: Gary Sissons

author believes the feedback from her growing audience became "part of the journey as regards characters".

"Going digital becomes part of the journey. I enjoy people reading and commenting," Wiseman says.

"I love this new age of digital reading. Someone in Mexico wants to translate my works into Spanish – we're talking [online] about it."

Writing on her blog led her to a Twitter reference to Jet Black Publish-

ing and she made her pitch.

Although the children's books had not been online they obviously hit a chord with Jet Black's owner Kim Mungcal.

An ereader user, Wiseman also "loves the feel of a paper book".

The reality, she says, is that digital publishing of an illustrated book in colour is far cheaper than a print version.

"The illustrations in Aunty Arty

are full colour when. Books for eight to eleven year olds usually just have black and white line drawings. Because these are ebooks and we aren't restricted by printing costs, we've been able to make full use of colour - which has been really important as they're all about art and the backdrop is adapted from a famous artwork."

Wiseman says Aunty Arty came from her desire to read about something other than fairies and goblins to

her then six-year-old daughter.

"I wanted something more sophisticated to be available for keen readers like my daughter.

"When I look at a painting I often wonder about the story in the artwork? Often we don't know. I thought it would be interesting to make up what would happen if we could meet the characters in a work of art."

She recognises difficulties may arise in explaining the meaning of the title of Chirico's *The Disquieting Muses*, but says "that's the artwork's title and I didn't want to dumb it down too much".

Publisher Mungcal says the book is "full of wholesome fun and adventures ... a *Mary Poppins*-tale for the modern day".

Twenty per cent of sale profits will go to the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF).

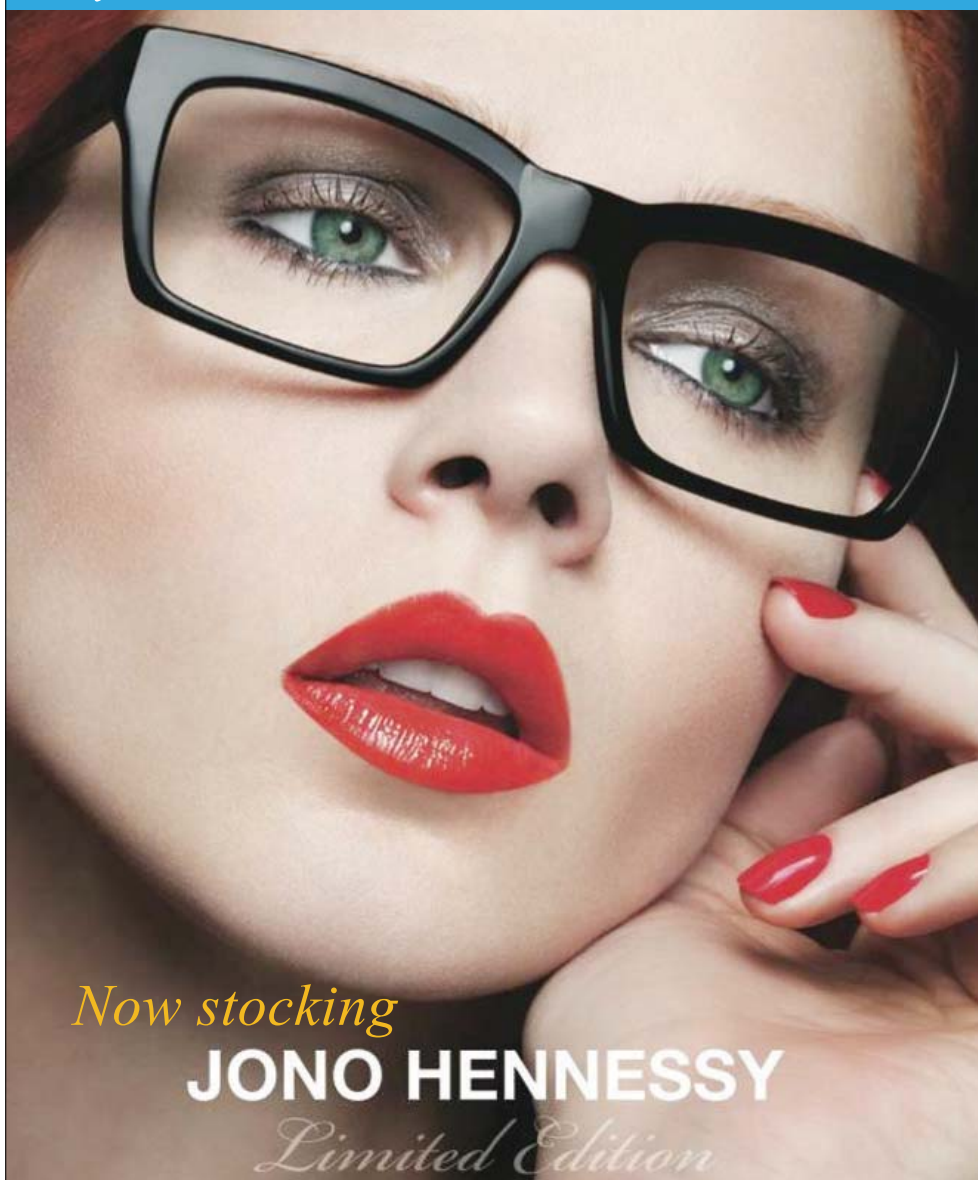
Illustrator Narelda Joy: "I start each series of illustrations by exploring the colours and textures of the painting that they enter. This gives me a feel for the environment and I dream up the other illustrations from there.

"It's important to be sensitive to the original artwork, while creating the rest of the world within that painting that the characters explore.

"We've been able to create something far more interesting for children than what we would have been able to do with a printed book."

Aunty Arty and the *Disquieting Muses*, by Rowena Wiseman, illustrated by Narelda Joy: [www.jetblackpublishing.com/shop](http://www.jetblackpublishing.com/shop)  
A short film about creating Aunty Arty: [www.youtube.com/user/AuntyArty](http://www.youtube.com/user/AuntyArty)

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