

INSTANT IMPACT

Meet talented cartoon artist Claire Kiernan

words Fiona Langton pictures Paul Barber

Looking at Claire Kiernan's art works is guaranteed to make you feel better. Her cheerful and colourful designs have a childish quality of innocence and happiness – but they are aimed at grown-ups as well as children.



"I have always been attracted to bold design and bright colours. My works can best be described as fun moments of escapism and I find they are popular with art and animal fans of any ages and backgrounds," Claire said.

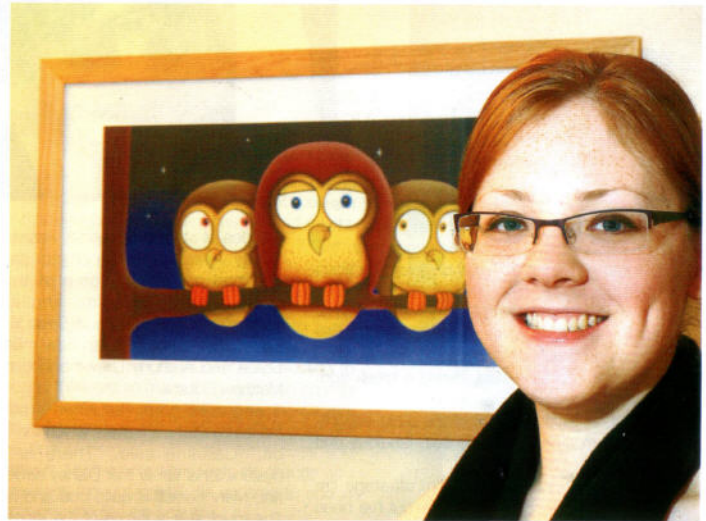
Growing up in Sutton Coldfield, Claire went to Walmley School and credits her family with encouraging her artistic talents.

"My mum is very creative and really encouraged me when I was little, and all my family appreciate art," she said.

Because she loved animals and cartoons so much, Claire first of all studied animation at the University of Lincoln, where her friends gave her the nickname of Claire Bear. A cute bear, therefore, became the central character she based her art around when she graduated, after deciding to capture her character designs on canvas rather than on screen.

Over the past few years, she has been putting all her efforts into establishing a business, selling not just her original paintings, but a wide variety of prints and greetings cards, which she sells online and at craft fairs and exhibitions.

"I can paint pictures, but so can a lot of people. To turn it into a business, I needed help, and I found that there are a lot of people out there who will help you if you are really determined. To succeed, though, I find you have to work very hard, be very organised and very flexible too," Claire said.



Claire Kiernan and, left, Claire Bear, the character based on her university nickname. Top: some of her animal designs.

animal's personality."

A child of the digital age, she is an expert at producing her drawings and prints on the computer, which suits her bold colourful style.

"I spend at least half my time each day on the computer. I love detail and I am a perfectionist.

"I aim to capture a sense of passion and a particular mood in all my paintings but most of all I get a kick out of making art that makes people smile," Claire said.

"Basically, I'm just doing what I love doing."

• For further information, call 0121 351 3061.

www.cartoonarts.co.uk

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Claire Kiernan

Her first break came when she got funding of over £3,000 from the Prince's Trust to help set up her business. She has also had help from HiBus, the media and arts charity, which has provided her with free mentoring, and Business Link, which she credits with helping her appreciate all the core skills it would take to run a business.

Claire is currently getting a lot of work doing commissions, particularly of people's beloved pets.

"People send me pictures of their animals and I do a cartoon version. My commissions are massively popular, which is handy in the Midlands as apparently fifty per cent of us own at least one pet!

"People say my cartoon portraits are much nicer and more original than a traditional painting, and they can really convey the



Claire at work in her study.



Basil, one of Claire's pet commissions.