



# Windows into Illustration: Thiago de Moraes

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Created *Oct '20*

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[Thiago de Moraes](#) [1]

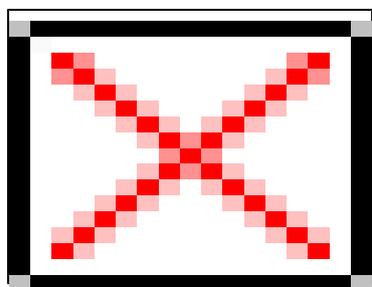
[245](#) [2]

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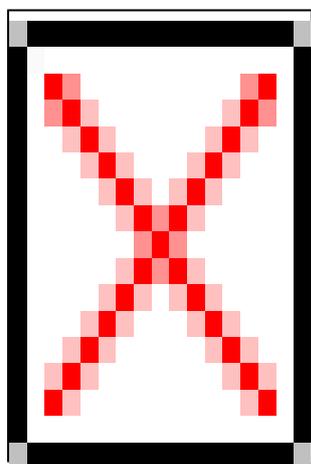
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**Windows into Illustration: Thiago de Moraes.**



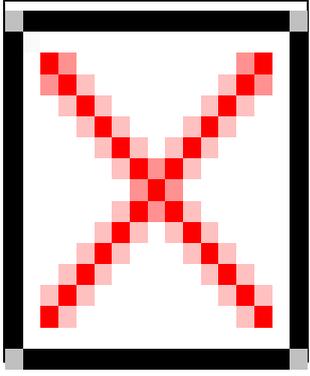
After working for twenty years as an award-winning advertising art director and commercial illustrator, Thiago de Moraes's first picture book, **The Zoomers? Handbook** (written with his wife Ana), was published in 2015. He went on to create **Myth Atlas** for Alison Green Books in 2018, a 96 page tour de force, packed with painstakingly detailed illustrations. A follow-up **History Atlas** has just been published Thiago talks us through his approach and illustration technique here.

One way and another, I spent most of last year living in the past. Considering the way things have been, it was probably more fun than living in the present. I worked on two books at once, which involved many hours of sitting in my shed, writing stories and drawing lots and lots (and lots) of little people.

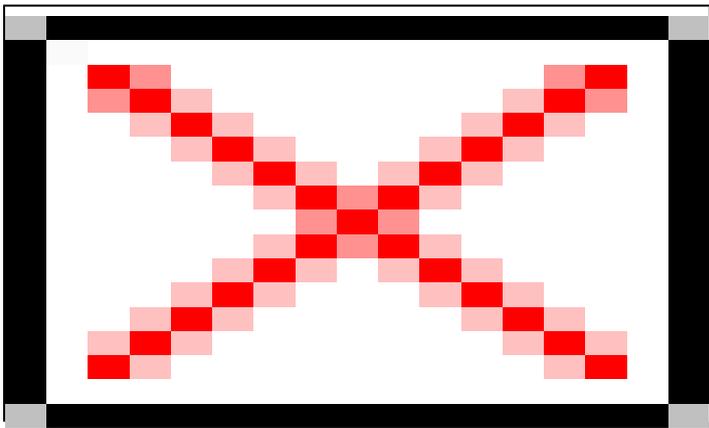


Both books are based on history, but they couldn't be more different. **A Mummy Ate My Homework** is a fiction book, set in ancient Egypt. It's the story of Henry, an 11-year-old boy from the 21st century, who gets sent back in time after a terrible maths-related incident. **History Atlas** is a non-fiction book, which takes readers through five thousand years of

human history, and shows how fifteen extraordinary civilisations saw themselves.

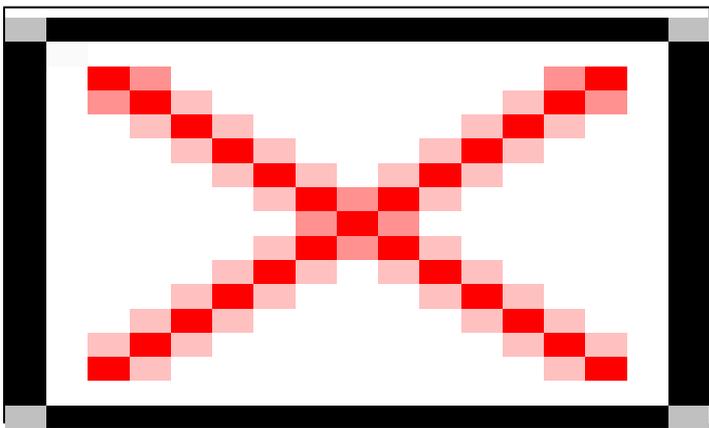


Although they're very different, both books are based on events, places and people that really existed. This meant that I had to do a lot of research before I could draw or paint anything. I studied all the physical stuff I could find: geography, architecture, fashion, art ? and, of course, people. As vital as all this was, the most important thing for me was trying to grasp each civilisation's personality, otherwise the books would be little more than collections of facts.



The maps on **History Atlas** started as lots of very tiny rough thumbnails on paper, which my editor, art director and I used to discuss composition and shape. They need to look and feel different from each other and be built around visual ideas that express the character of each culture. The Inca world is constructed around the peaks of the Andes, the Mongol map revolves around a huge column of horse riders, and so on.

From these thumbnails I went straight to the final illustrations. There are over 350 historical characters in **History Atlas**, but I tried to make sure each one had a strong sense of individuality; and that they were more than just symbols for roles or events. Their expressions, movements and interactions have to imbue each one with all the meaning that couldn't fit in the text.



In **Mummy**, a lot of what Henry experiences and finds interesting happens away from the grand temples and pyramids that we associate with ancient Egypt. It was great fun to try and imagine what everyday moments, like dinner, would look like. I worked from lists of possible recipes in academic history books and came up with a table full of fantastic

food. (I might have taken some liberties with the roasted hyena garnish.) I love spending ages in details no one probably notices, like silly frescoes on tomb walls, grumpy camels and all types of stuff. It helps me feel like the world I'm drawing is much larger than the small bit we're paying attention to at that moment.

I always draw with ink pens and brushes on paper, then scan the black line and paint the colour digitally. Drawing with black ink can feel quite definite, but I don't plan every detail of what I'll draw before starting. Leaving space for new ideas to appear as I go along feels more enjoyable and allows for a lot of stuff that didn't find its way into the text to appear in the illustrations in a natural way.

I have been doing this for a while, but I still have a huge sense of gratitude and wonder at being able to spend my time creating these worlds and stories. When I finish making a book I inevitably feel a bit sad (and relieved, depending on the deadline). I know I'll miss the characters in the book and all the collaborators who make it with me. It's like saying goodbye to friends who I went on an extraordinary journey with.

**A Mummy Ate My Homework** (978-1407194929 , £8.99 pbk) and **History Atlas** (978-1407189239, £20.00) are published by Scholastic.

Page Number:

10

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