



MacNaughton's "Meanwhile" column for *The New York Times*

Never Look Down

Illustrator Wendy MacNaughton has built a career drawing the world she sees around her and spreading her love of art to others.

By Daniel Jewett

MARIN-RAISED AND SAN FRANCISCO-BASED illustrator and graphic journalist Wendy MacNaughton (www.wendy-macnaughton.com) has had many pursuits and professions, including working in advertising, serving as a campaign manager for nonprofits and even creating the national campaign for the first democratic elections in Rwanda, before returning to the Bay Area to once again work in advertising. It was then, commuting from Oakland to S.F., that she found a way to start drawing again, discovering a new vocation in the process.

"I was taking BART every day and I started drawing everybody on the train," she says. "I taught myself how to draw without looking down because you have to, you're rolling pretty fast and people move all the time."

While still working at the agency and trying to transition over to illustration full-time, MacNaughton met her wife,

Caroline Paul, and they wrote a book, *Lost Cat: A True Story of Love, Desperation, and GPS Technology*, together in 2013 about their relationship and a "big catastrophe that happened" — Paul writing and MacNaughton illustrating, and her new career began to come into focus. A year later came *Meanwhile in San Francisco, The City in Its Own Words*, featuring the kind of observational journalism that became her trademark and led to recurring columns in *The New York Times* and *The California Sunday Magazine*.

"Let's say you're driving along and you see a funny-shaped tree or a person who's wearing an interesting outfit. And you say, 'Oh, I wish I just could go back and look at that thing,'" MacNaughton says about her style. "That is your artistic brain screaming at you saying 'Stop, pull over, go back, look at this thing, draw it and talk to it, because it will never happen again.'"

Around this time an author and chef named Samin Nosrat approached MacNaughton about illustrating a cookbook called *Salt Fat Acid Heat* that would seamlessly fuse the talents of the two and go on to become a sensation. "We had a great breakfast meeting and then started down a long journey together," MacNaughton says. "It's mostly all drawn from real life — she and I worked together in the kitchen."

Five years ago, MacNaughton, partnering with co-founder Julia Rothman, founded Women Who Draw, a database of female, BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized illustrators that has since exploded to more than 5,000 members. "If you have art directors who are white men then they're probably going to hire their white, straight, dude friends because that's who they know," MacNaughton says. "We wanted to make it impossible for any art director, creative director or editor to say, 'I would hire more blank if I could find them.'"

Right now, MacNaughton and Paul's attention is focused on expanding another initiative called DrawTogether that the two started right after the pandemic lockdown. The free or subscription program offers drawing classes for kids on its website (www.club.drawtogether.studio) and has since been seen by tens of thousands of people in 70 countries. "It was the biggest joy ever; it was amazing to create that space during such a challenging time," MacNaughton says. "I really do believe that art transforms the way we see the world and each other, and it really transforms our hearts." 