

## CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN PAPER AND INK

*Artist Mariko Ando Spencer had to leave Japan for Canada to rediscover her passion for printmaking.*



*A gang of elk.*

MARIKO ANDO SPENCER'S prints and paintings frequently have names that suggest an underlying narrative to the image, and indeed there often is one. *The King & the Fake Shoemaker* (opposite) is an excellent example: it is shown here with the artist's story behind the image, written out for the first time ever especially for *Amphora*. Other titles capture the tension between whimsy and dissonance—think of David Lynch telling a joke—that is characteristic of Spencer's work. It is telling that *Alice in Wonderland* imagery recurs in a number of her prints.

Born and raised in Japan, Spencer

married a Canadian and moved to Vancouver in 1999. In Japan she'd worked for much of the '90s as an illustrator for a magazine publisher; it was the move to Canada that got her involved again with the intaglio printing she'd first studied under Yasufumi Chuma, a respected Japanese printmaker, in college. After she left school her printmaking was interrupted by lack of access to a studio and the demands of earning a living. Both of these obstacles disappeared when she landed in Vancouver; having left her career, and knowing no one in the new city, she started taking classes at the Malaspina Printmakers studio and "just experimenting day by day. When I came to Canada, I lost all the connections and the career I'd established in Japan. I didn't know what to do for a while. It was a difficult time, but getting back into printmaking changed everything."

First and foremost a printmaker, Spencer has developed her playful style into a line of greeting cards and attracted illustrating work from book publishers. Her first project was published this fall by Annick Press. *A Crash of Rhinos, A Party of Jays* is a children's book by author Diane Swanson about collective nouns for different animals, each illustrated by photographs and Spencer's original watercolours. While Spencer enjoys the challenges of commercial projects, her passion remains rooted in the tradition of intaglio printmaking. "I love pen and ink drawings. Intaglio printmaking is very similar, but you're able to create many more interesting details that you couldn't draw by pen. I've always been attracted to the more "raw" feel of prints created by traditional techniques. There's a conversation between beautiful paper and the ink and the etched plate. My teacher Mr. Chuma used to say "The existence of the plate is important'."

*Mariko Ando Spencer's art can be seen at [www.marikogallery.com](http://www.marikogallery.com). For information on Diane Swanson's *A Crash of Rhinos, A Party of Jays* (2006, softcover \$9.95, library binding \$19.95) see [www.annickpress.com](http://www.annickpress.com).*

## The King & the Fake Shoemaker



**U**pon the old king's death, the throne was bequeathed to his much-loved dog. This made the king's only living heir—a nephew—furious. Having in his possession a pair of enchanted shoes, he pretended to be a shoemaker with a present for the new king. The dog king loved the shoes and put them on immediately. At sunset, however, he started running and jumping, and could not stop! At sunrise the next day he collapsed, exhausted, and tried to take the shoes off but discovered he could not. In the afternoon the pretending shoemaker returned to court and laid his scheme bare: "The shoes come off when the kingdom is mine!"