

“The distinction lies in the fact that fine art is the idea (brought to life) while an illustration is a depiction (or explanation) of an idea. Fine art is simply art for art’s sake. (Apatoff 2011).

Discuss the factors that typically determine whether an artwork is labelled fine art or illustration (giving examples), and the connotations of this labelling.”

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'Fine art' and 'Illustration' are terms often used inaccurately and sometimes interchangeably. Although they boast their own definitions, many pieces of work can be difficult to label - not only are there areas of overlap, but the viewers' subjection plays a vital role in assigning these labels. As part of this enquiry these factors will be considered in further detail alongside discussions of pertinent artists and their work, and what these labels mean for an item once assigned. Galleries play a vital, and sometimes subtle, role in the industry especially in assigning value. This will also be considered as they can potentially influence the views of many in the art community and even the direction in which broader practices take.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines fine art as "forms of art, especially painting, drawing and sculpture, that are created to be beautiful rather than useful".

Some fine artists include Andy Warhol, Henri Matisse, Jackson Pollock and Eka Sharashidze.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines illustration as "a drawing or picture in a book, magazine, etc. especially one that explains something."

Some illustrators include Cicely Mary Barker, Quentin Blake, Beatrix Potter and Raymond Briggs.



Figure 1: Eka Sharashidze, *Wall Detail No.11*, 2010/2011.

This is an example of fine art. The image itself has no connection to a piece of text - its only relationship it has is with itself, or a series of images as part of the same collection.



Figure 2: Beatrix Potter, *First he ate some lettuces*, 1901.

The above is an example of an illustration. This painting can be classified unquestionably as such since it ties in directly to a piece of text - there is a relationship between this artwork and a written story. It is argued that one cannot exist without the other and still be considered an illustration.

John Harthan wrote about studying illustrations for their techniques, but not focusing on it too much that one misses the complex relationship between text and image (Harthan 1997). As image is older than text, does this imply fine art is essentially a rudimentary form of illustration? Perhaps not. Like many organisms, they could have split from a single form and evolved independently. But even so, there are many areas in which fine art and illustration overlap resulting in a grey area, an area in which labelling a piece of artwork becomes difficult because of the many conflicting factors.

An example of this grey area is Josephine Wall. Wall's paintings are rarely connected or sequential and although she is labelled a fantasy artist, both by herself and others, they could effortlessly be classified 'Fine Art'.



Figure 3: Josephine Wall, *Aquarius*.

“Books are not meant to be known or assessed from isolated pages, illustrated books in particular. These contain usually a sequence of pictures which cumulatively form a visual commentary on the text.”

- Harthan, 1997

The only book containing her artwork is one produced solely to display her work, not a storybook. Her works tend to remain approximately 30 x 40 in size which lend themselves to a fine art label. Wall also became a member of the Society for Art of Imagination, a group of artists who create not to tell stories, like illustration, but to *“foster the resurgence of interest in imaginative and sacred art...”* (AOTI). It can also be argued that by definition her work can not be labelled illustration as there is no companion piece of written text.

However, it takes only a moment of viewing her artwork to recognise their clear and acute illustrative nature. In addition to this, there is an air of intention present. They don't feel painted for the sake of being painted - there's a pull, an invitation to escape that would typically belong to an illustration instead of a fine art piece. Not only are her paintings magical, so is the feeling of unity she achieves between fine art and illustration.



Figure 4: Josephine Wall, *Catch A Falling Star*, 2007.

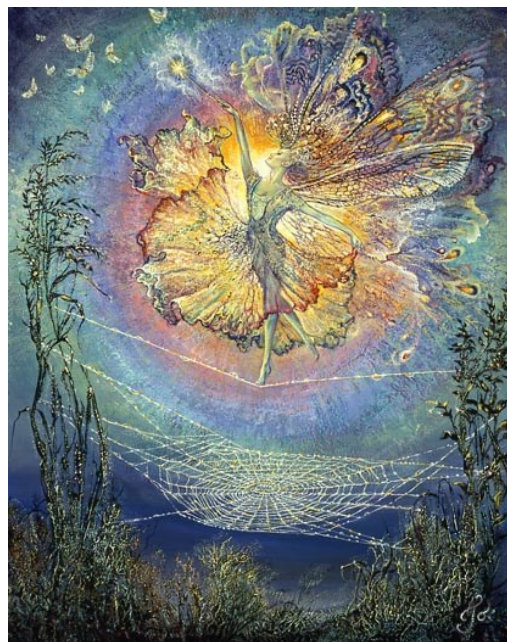


Figure 5: Josephine Wall, *Silken Spells*.

Among Wall's range of surreal and fantasy paintings is a selection of fairies. Another artist famous for their fairy paintings is Cicely Mary Barker. An interesting comparison can be made between Wall and Barker, and that is the fact that Barker was without a doubt an illustrator. This is backed up by the numerous children's books she illustrated.



THE SONG OF
THE RED CAMPION FAIRY

Here's a cheerful somebody,
By the woodland's edge;
Campion the many-named,
Robin-in-the-hedge.
Coming when the bluebells come,
When they're gone, he stays,
(Round Robin, Red Robin)
All the summer days.
Soldiers' Buttons, Robin Flower,
In the lane or wood;
Robin Redbreast, Red Jack,
Yes, and Robin Hood!

THE SONG OF
THE RED CLOVER FAIRY

The Fairy: O, what a great big bee
Has come to visit me!
He's come to find my honey.
O, what a great big bee!
The Bee: O, what a great big Clover!
I'll search it well, all over,
And gather all its honey.
O, what a great big Clover!



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THE SONG OF
THE STORK'S-BILL FAIRY

"Good morning, Mr Grasshopper!
Please stay and talk a bit!"
"Why yes, you pretty Fairy;
Upon this grass I'll sit,
And let us ask some riddles;
They're better fun than chat:
Why am I like the Stork's-bill?
Come, can you answer that?"
"Oh no, you clever Grasshopper!
I fear I am a dunce;
I cannot guess the answer—
I give it up at once!"
"When children think they've caught me,
I'm gone, with leap and hop;
And when they gather Stork's-bill,
Why, all the petals drop!"

(The Stork's-bill gets her name from the long seed-pod, which looks like a stork's beak or bill. Others of her family are called Crane's-bills.)

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Figure 6: Frederick Warne, *The Complete Book Of The Flower Fairies*, 1996.

Fairies are deeply rooted in myths and legends. They are so tightly woven in storytelling that perhaps imagery of them cannot exist without an inherent narrative being told. Fairies demand stories, either they tell it themselves or the observers' input is inescapable. To attempt to label a painting of a fairy *fine art* is a futile task.

Although both artists have produced works involving the same subjects, they are perceived differently. Wall tells stories, as did Barker, but the world Wall has created around herself and her paintings calls for deeper introspection. They aren't there purely to be viewed but to be contemplated.

An intriguing point about Barker's work is her pre-Raphaelite influence. She stated, "I am to some extent influenced by them—not in any technical sense, but in the choice of subject matter and the feeling and atmosphere they could achieve." (Ortakales, 2002). This may seem like an off-the-cuff comment, but this sentence alone holds vital information

regarding fine art and illustration. To understand this point we must work backwards from the present-day.



Figure 7: Andy Warhol, \$4, 1982.

Andy Warhol was an extremely popular figure in the fine art community world-wide with his involvement in pop art and the range of mediums he experimented with (BBC 2014).



Figure 8: Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait*, 1963.

Despite working with fine art media and being an important pop artist, he was employed by Glamour magazine as an 'illustrator' (Brown 2018). This makes sense as Harthan described, illustration is an image coupled with text, which is the essence of magazine publishing.

As one views Warhol's work, it quickly becomes apparent that the value it holds is in the ideas he explores, not in his technical ability. The same can be said about Jackson Pollock.

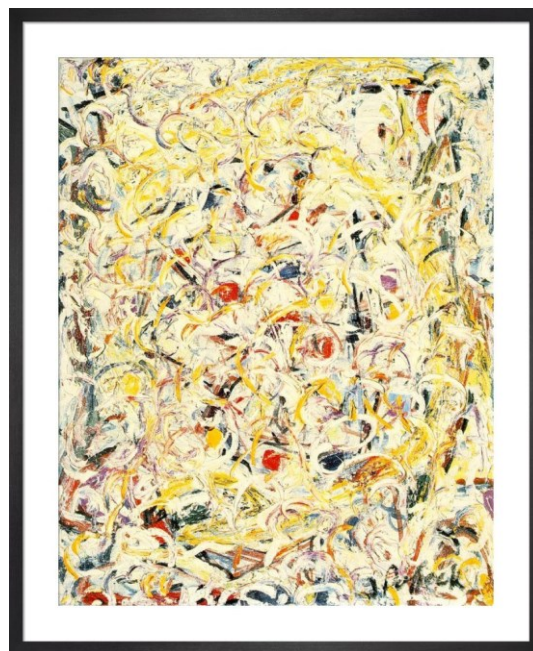


Figure 9: Jackson Pollock, *Shimmering Substance*, 1946.



Figure 10: Jackson Pollock, *Summertime*, 1948.

They can be appealing to look at and study but there's no cause for celebration where technical skill is concerned. It is this element of creating art that results in fine art and illustration locking horns. From the mid-late twentieth century and onward, fine art is valued

not for its technical prowess but for the ideas conveyed. Illustrators, on the other hand, are taught and actively encouraged (either by themselves or by others) to refine and push the bar of their technical skills. Where these two principles cross over is with the pre-Raphaelites.

The nineteenth century art movement, The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was formed by a group of artists who rejected the direction art was taking, which was primarily dictated by the Royal Academy, and focused their interest on Italian art prior to Raphael (Davidson N/A).



Figure 11: John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851.

Ophelia is perhaps the most famous pre-Raphaelite paintings to exist and is said to be a perfect demonstration of Millais' ability as an artist (Easby 2015). It falls within the definition of illustration as it is directly informed by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.



Figure 12: John William Waterhouse, *Lady Of Shalott*, 1888.

Once again, a famous pre-Raphaelite painting fits snugly into the definition of illustration as it links with a passage of text from Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* (Tate).

Although both paintings are depictions of literature and technically astonishing, they are still considered by some as 'Fine Art'. It is entirely plausible as they were "...committed to the idea of art's potential to change society." (Tate), an ambition not typically associated with illustration.

So, the further back we go, the more technical fine art used to be, and it was that technical aspect that contributed towards the value of the work. What about illustration? Harthan (1997) writes, "Illumination was confined to monastic scriptoria supported and patronized by royalty, and nearly all the texts thought worthy of illumination and illustration

were religious.”. This could imply that before the value of illustration was superseded by fine art, it may have transcended value itself being used mainly to visually realise religious texts. However, that only applies if illustration and fine art were definitively two separate entities. Fine art cherishes focus on meaningfulness, and what holds more meaning for royalty and the general public than religious scripture? With these ideas, religious illustrations could easily be considered fine art too.

From this information, what we consider fine art and illustration is mainly subjective, despite there being differences, and it is therefore down to the individual to decide what label is used. There are instances, however, where it is not decided by individuals but rather by a group of people. This is where galleries play a crucial part. Discussions or debates can be had between individuals regarding an art piece’s place in the world, but when it is dictated by a group, seemingly subjective views become canon. As is the case with galleries.

There are two main types of art galleries, the first being for the public to view art that is not for sale (a museum of sorts), and the second for the purpose of selling artwork to clients via the public display of work (Cambridge Dictionary). Each serve a different purpose. The first one is not concerned with the value of the artwork (as they are not selling anyway) and therefore do not worry about whether they display an illustration or a piece of fine art or display a piece whose label is highly debated. It does not matter to them because their end goal is not to sell. When the second gallery sells a piece, they get a cut, which means the value of artwork is very much on their minds when selecting pieces to display. For the sake of their reputation and their clients, they must label artwork appropriate or inappropriate – in terms of ideological value. If they view a piece that may not be considered fine art by their clients or the wider art community, they may elect to leave it out, as it does not serve the status-quo.

What is important to keep in mind are the subtle aftereffects of these actions. Galleries exist to display art. They were never given the responsibility of shepherding artistic

tenets, but by only exposing artwork they deem valuable, they can take credit for many trends and directions of those practices.

This leads to an interesting consideration – where are illustrations typically exhibited? After a quick search it becomes clear that many places that exhibit such artwork are either *purpose-built for illustration* or *rented lots*. London's House of Illustration, William Heath Robinson Gallery and the Chris Beetles Gallery aim to exhibit work within the subject of illustration, although Chris Beetles Gallery does display figurative sculptures too. Some artists or organisations rent out warehouses instead of galleries to exhibit their work. This makes sense with events like the London Illustration Fair as they need as much space as they can get, so even a standard gallery would not be able to accommodate them. *Cluster Illustration* held an exhibition in the Truman Brewery, which is a large area with multiple units available to rent (Marinova 2019). The only contacts on their website are emails - no fixed address or phone number.

It is not necessarily an inferior *modus operandi*. Being without a permanent building could potentially work in their favour. There are little to no overheads to consider and they can display work wherever they feel suitable, instead of being stuck in one place. Although standard galleries do travel, they must close their galleries to do so, which is not free – council tax will not change, and the electricity bill will not plummet to zero suddenly.

This need to create a separate space for illustration divides the practices, whether it is as a result of both fine art and illustration being large subjects individually or standard galleries do not cater to illustration. The illustration climate does fluctuate at times as, “For the first time, Books Illustrated is exhibiting at Salisbury Museum.” was the introductory sentence in the description of *The Wonder of Illustration* exhibition in Salisbury Museum in 2009 (T.S.M 2009) – a small hint that perhaps there is a slight persecution complex amongst illustrators.

If the issue is viewed from a business point of view, instead of personal, it begins to make more sense. If a gallery's list of clients does not include anyone interested in illustration, then why would they elect to present such material? It is not in their client's best interest, so it is not in theirs. Although many famous painters including; Rubens, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Delacroix and Hogarth all engaged in book illustration during their careers (Harthan 1997) - the same painters responsible for pieces that these clients would pay a lot of money for. Although Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* has no sale price, there is no doubt the current owner would make millions if brought to auction.

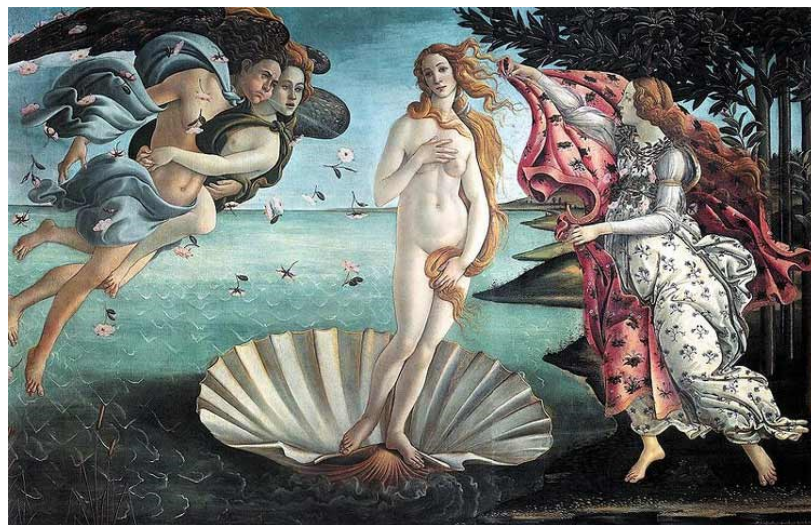


Figure 13: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, 1485.

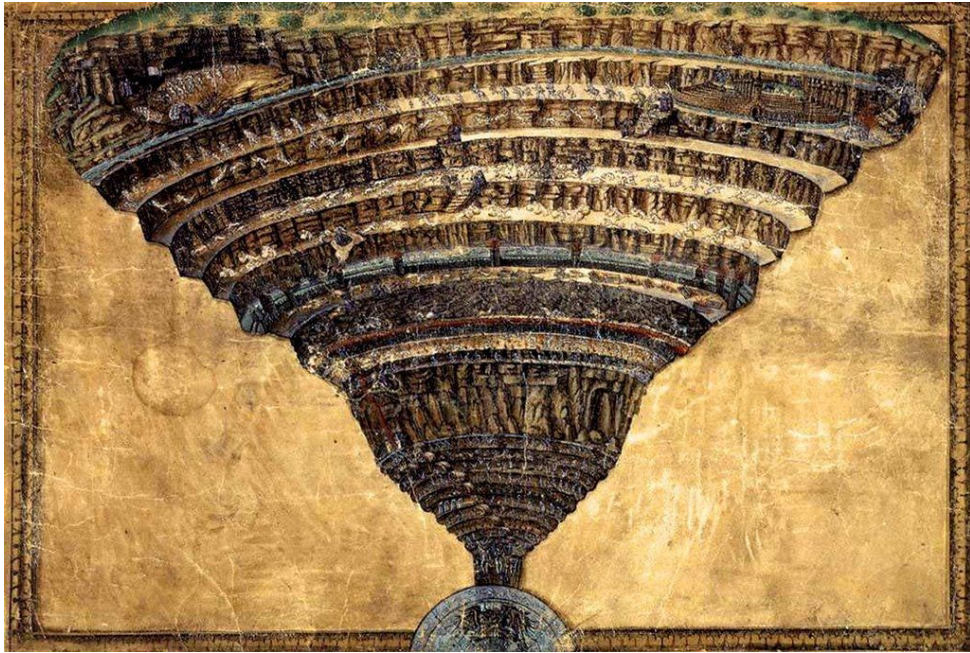


Figure 14: Sandro Botticelli, *Map of Hell*, 1480-1497.

Above is one he created as part of his work on the Divine Comedy representing the nine circles of hell in Dante's *Inferno* (F.I 2013). It is unclear what his illustrations would be worth but they would not get near the value of *Birth of Venus*. This is not necessarily a result of this debate however, it could simply be the popularity difference between the two pieces.

What started as cave paintings more than thirty-thousand years ago (Marchant 2016), visual communication has since sprouted two separate ideas: fine art and illustration. There is a need to fit in to one of them as a visual artist, a pressure to take sides which is detrimental to both parties. While this worry persists, precious time is misused that could otherwise have been spent immersing ourselves in work, improving our practices and co-existing peacefully.

It is clear from the information gathered that assigning one of these labels to a piece of art is not a difficult task – if it is tied to text, it is an illustration. The difficulty starts when text is absent, and it becomes a task for the viewer to classify the piece. It is also apparent that a painting does not necessarily lose value for being an illustration, as the pre-

Raphaelites show, though much of that value comes from the impressive technical skills demonstrated.

Like planets orbiting the same sun, fine art and illustration can drift close to each other, exist far apart, and sometimes even collide - Josephine Wall being a beautiful example of this collision. The labels can be without doubt and in many cases entirely subjective, but it is important to remember that the more we focus on the labels of our work, the less we acknowledge what our work is achieving. Does it give people pause for thought, a place to escape for a time, or raise people up and away from their woes? Ultimately that is what matters, whether it is fine art or illustration.

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