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Essay 4: "The distinction lies in the fact that 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. Even if you are doing a commission for a client, it would still be fine art. But illustration is illustrating a story or idea."

Word Count: 2,623

What defines Fine art and illustration and how do they work differently? Despite them being both in the same field subject, they have completely different definition of art and ways of thinking when they go about their work.

Being a former Fine Artist at the beginning of my journey as a university student as well as being an illustration student, I have a good understanding on the differences between the two subjects.

The definition of Fine Arts is considered to have been created mainly for its aesthetic and intellectual purposes and became a popular term in the Renaissance era. The visual art works are judged upon its beauty and meaningfulness, specifically, drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, drawing, watercolour and architecture, many of them being the traditional main forms of Fine Art.

As for illustration, it's a subject that delivers more as it can be used to be a part of something, such as a book or a production in a film.

"An Illustration is a drawing, painting or printed work of art which explains, clarifies, illuminates, visually represents, or merely decorates a written text, which may be of a literary or commercial nature." - (Nikolaeva, 2017)

Seeing as fine art offers a visual attraction to its audience, Illustration on the other hand, delivers more as it can be used to be a part of something, such as a book or a production in a film. An example of an illustration art work is a children's book, not only does it gives out a visual decorative appeal from the art work, but also an emotional attraction of how the artwork has been interpreted with the use of descriptive text.

There are many main factors that determine whether an art work is labelled Fine Art or Illustration that proves their differences, though one online blogger, David Apatoff, argues that Fine Art and Illustration doesn't have much differences and are two similar subject from a narrative and decorative point of view. -

"Etc, etc-- under your test, does fine art that tells a story (Renaissance, pre-Raphaelite, Goya, Homer, Sargent, Hopper, . . .) count as illustration or fine art?

Do book illustrations that decorate a text (illuminated manuscripts with floral borders that don't advance a narrative, Korans and other Islamic books decorated with abstract geometric designs, those 19th century books of poetry by Riley and others where each facing page is decorated with a realistic drawing of flowers, but which don't contain a narrative to be advanced, . . .) count as decorative fine art or book illustrations?" - (Apatoff, 2011)

Fine Artists and Illustrators, being two different subject practitioners working on the same field, work completely differently to one another. It's not common for Fine artists to get many clients, meaning the practitioners may not have much on offer to work towards. So, Fine artists will tend to work alone try to either sell their work to galleries or promote your work to perhaps gain public attention.

“Fine art is art that is generally for decoration purposes only. It’s hung in galleries and kept in collections. Originals are generally sold and that is how the money is made. Unfortunately, Fine Art degrees are almost useless when it comes to getting art related jobs so many graduates move on to being art teachers.” - (Gin, 2012)

Fine Artists getting commissioned to produce an artwork doesn’t happen very often, as it’s improbable for artists to have private individuals knocking on their door asking for a particular art work from them for their company or so.

The only real potential of fine artists getting commissioned is from the government or a ruler of the city who will request a public art work.

“Throughout history, it has been common for rulers and governments to commission public art as a means of demonstrating power and wealth, or even for specific propaganda purposes.” - (Wiki, 2017)

Public art is seen everywhere around the world, there’re are a lot of popular, well known public art works, mostly are usually some sort of installation piece (eg - sculpture, mural) and are likely bigger rather than smaller pieces you’d see from an illustrator (adverts, books, leaflets etc).

“Public Art adds enormous value to the cultural, aesthetic and economic vitality of a community. It is now a well-accepted principle of urban design that public art contributes to a community’s identity, fosters pride and a sense of belonging, and enhances the quality of life for its residents and visitors” (Amherstma.gov, 2014)

Despite the positive value public art brings to the local community, it does bring a negative effect. At times the artists installations are commissioned from a fundraiser, but most of the time are paid by the local council and the public tax payers, which sparks controversy to the community.



Figure 1: Paul McCarthy ‘butt plug’ sculpture in Paris Provokes rightwing backlash

One public art sculpture, installed in 2014, located in Paris that sparked controversy was a 24-meter high inflatable tree sculpture by Paul McCarthy. Despite it officially being described as a Christmas tree, it took many criticism from the public for its resemblance of a huge green butt plug. The sculpture, McCarthy admitted that it was deliberately shaped as such as a joke.

Illustrators are very much the opposite as it's more probable for practitioners in getting to work with clients and creative directors. Clients/Directors will offer you the opportunity to illustrate for commercial posters, magazines, books etc and will be commissioning you to do that work. Unlike fine artists who are in complete control of their work in how they want to present it, as an illustrator you may get to work freely in some cases, in others they(directors) behave more strictly with your work and may decide the aspects such as composition and colours. In every client you'll get different jobs, so as an illustrator you'll have to be very dynamic and be prepared to adapt to different projects.

The galleries purpose is to promote the art work and provide recognition for the artist, along with that it also creates awareness or art amongst the public.

Art Galleries are regarded as the best place for fresh debut artists who want to exhibit their work for positive feedback and to also gain public attention

Primarily, Fine artists will reach out to galleries that fits their style of work and can develop a relationship and sense of trust with those involved within the art gallery that knows how to professionally speak about their art work. It also works vice versa, though galleries do like to ensure they have a good variation of work from the artists and not have them bring in too many similar pieces.

"A narrative is simply a story. Narrative art is art that tells a story. Much of Western art until the twentieth century has been narrative, depicting stories from religion, myth and legend, history and literature. Audiences were assumed to be familiar with the stories in question. From about the seventeenth century genre painting showed scenes and narratives of everyday life. ... In modern art, formalist ideas have resulted in narrative being frowned upon. However, coded references to political or social issues, or to events in the artist's life are still commonplace" (Tate.org, 2017)



Figure 2: Sir Stanley Spencer 'The Centurion Spencer' 1914

"The Centurion's Servant", is one of the major art works by Stanley Spencer, who is well known for his painting portraying biblical scenes, one story he particularly liked is St Luke Chapter 7. The Centurion's Servant is an example of a narrative painting. Artist, Steve MacCarthy wanted to do a painting of a biblical story where Christ from a distance, heals the Centurion's servant, which he found was out of his reach but began to find mind in trying to imagine how the scene would be like then and wondered what the scene would be actually at the house where the servant was, seven miles away.



Figure 3: Paula Rego 'The Betrothal: Lessons: The Shipwreck, after 'Marriage a la Mode' 1999

Portuguese visual artist, Paula Rego is also a well known painter who works on the bases of storybooks. Rego's style of work has evolved from abstract towards representational, and she has favoured pastels over oils for much of her career. Her work a lot of the time reflects feminism, coloured by folk-themes from her native Portugal.

"Rego's paintings often seem to tell stories although the stories are never fixed. She uses narrative - found in books, films, fairy tales or fables - to explore the conflicting emotions and activities which structure human identity and interaction. Rarely illustrative, her paintings instead use the stories they incorporate as ways of approaching particular sets of ideas or emotions; exploiting the story as a focus of common cultural knowledge. Doubling love with hate, freedom with repression, innocence with violence, she weaves new narrative symbolic webs which, in their intersection with our own lives, seem relevant and already familiar." (London, 1997)

One of Rego's most popular artwork is 'The Betrothal Lessons (1999). Its a large scale pastel triptych interpreting the 1743 six series painting of the satirical narrative painting - Marriage A-La- Mode (1743) by William Hogarth.

The artwork was purchased by the London Tate collection from the Art Fund and the Gulbenkian foundation 2002, and is currently on loan at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

The subject of William Hogarth's six paintings Marriage a La Mode, an arranged and unhappy marriage, is transported into mid twentieth-century Portugal in Rego's reinterpretation, which is strutted by women.

Rego's pastel work, is made of three panel - The left panel of the triptych, 'The Betrothal' is based on The Marriage Settlement, In 'The Betrothal', the left panel, two mothers negotiate their children's future marriage, while the girl's father is only visible in the background.

Then in a Beauty parlour scene, 'Lessons', the girls mother tells her how to hold onto a man. The scene of the painting involves the girl's mother sitting on a swivel chair having her hair done while her daughter looks on. This pastel work is an interpretation of the fourth painting in Hogarth's series - The Toilette.

Rego has described the scene as an apprenticeship in femininity"

The right of the three panel, The Shipwreck, is based on Hogarth's fifth painting, The Bagnio. Twenty years later, in 'The Shipwreck', now mature, the wife sits in the same large armchair she occupies in the left of the three panels, supporting the exhausted body of her failed husband. Evidence of bankruptcy lies within the empty drawers of the wardrobe. The triptych is laden with themes of Western art, such as the Deposition and the Pietà.

Both the narrative paintings I've discussed, from both Paula Rego and Stanley Spencer, could be interpreted in the nature of illustration, especially when they have a historical, religious and mythological story conveying within the painting. But they're clearly seen as a Fine art work, due to its aesthetic value and are seen exhibited in galleries and is to some extent authorial, rather than commissioned.

"Narrative illustration. ... It is any image that tells or augments the story in a product. Every book cover you ever responded to, every comic book cover, every evocative Magic or Warcraft card had a segment of story to tell." (Lockwood, 2014)

As for narrative Illustration, the illustrators intention is to sell an image that tells a story, because that's what a narrative is, a story, so as an illustrator it's clearer for them to work towards that. Stories are formed and read in various ways from illustrators, some story books are presented with such little text but with artworks that can tell a thousand words.

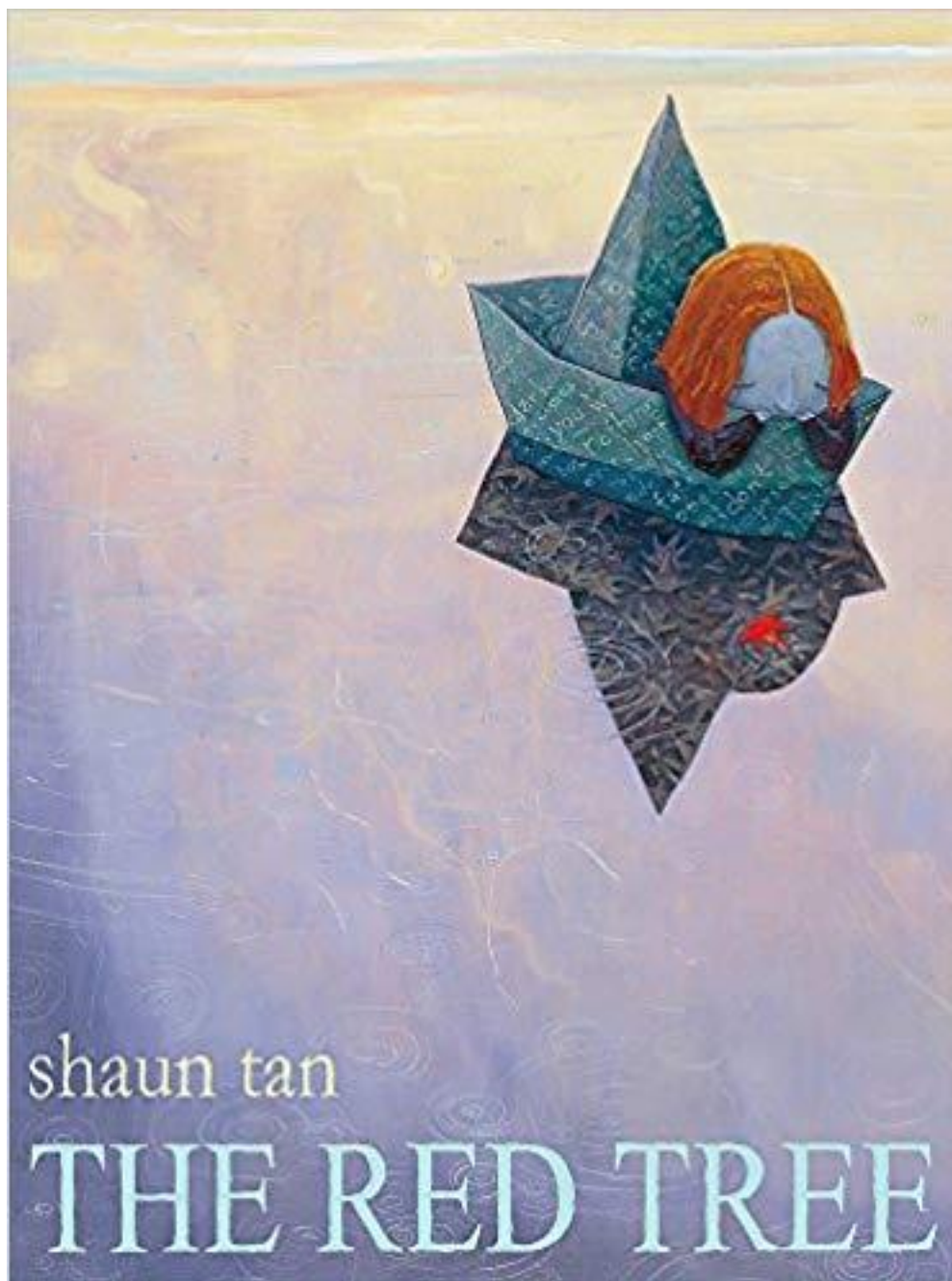


Figure 4: Front cover of the picture book "The Red Tree", written and illustration by Shaun Tan in 2001

When The Red Tree book was first introduced and presented out to me for the first time, I was amazed at how a book was represented without any particular narrative, but still invites readers to level their own interpretation in the absence of any written explanation, and draw their attention towards a series of self-contained images that presents a nameless young girl that appears on every page, passing through many dark moments, helplessly. Until she ultimately finds something hopeful at the end of her journey.

The picture book - "presents a little girl on a fragmented journey through a dark world. The illustrations are surreal. The Text is sparse and matched the dark illustrations."

'The story is based on images inspired by the experience of depression. The main character is a lonely red-headed girl. A red leaf from a red tree follows the girl through her day; it states how she feels and depicts her worries. Almost unnoticed in each picture is a small red leaf (symbolising hope). At the end, the little girl stands smiling at a beautiful red-leafed tree growing in her bedroom.' (Wiki, 2019)

Having studied both Fine Art and Illustration during two years as a University Student, I've seen how different both teaching methods is when it comes to teaching and helping students on their journey to having a career as an artist.

Like all subjects, teachers' main targets are to educate students and to be vocal in order to have their students understand on what they are learning.

Same works as an art teacher, despite it being such a practical and creative field there are various levels of observation to teach to a student when creating art. Taking Fine Art for starters, theoretically students are taught a fair completion of art history, the different culture to art around the world from historical artists and how the subject developed over time. They generate these historical art theories and transfer them into their studies to increase their skills.

From a practical point of view, which I find is an art teachers priority, is to teach students to be aware of all surroundings and observe the little detail in what they are studying, whether it's a still life of an object(s) or a life drawing session of the human figure, they are taught to pay attention to the composition, scale of your drawing, the colours, texture, lighting and so on.

Teaching in illustration has a completely different as to Fine Art, illustration teachers are more involved in the teaching process with their students as they are more vocal with their students, teaching them the importance of how to respond to a concept, picture or a text using the form of illustration.

Naturally, practitioners are drawn to the illustration in a picture book and are more observant than an adult reader. It's natural that a students are more interested in the images within a book rather than explore the bigger picture and discuss what's going on in the illustration image. Their ability to read them can be developed through discussing their different interpretations of the story and discuss the images, working out what's happening and possible motivations of the characters. Illustration is known to be a storytelling environment, giving students the time to illustrate their own characters for a children's picture book as part of their idea development focuses attention on them; how they look, what they say; how they behave. When first creating a character, practitioners will use their time explore and experiment different concepts and ideas, using a range of media so they can talk about which idea works best for them and which characters they feel speak the story they are telling.

Students are asked to picture or visualise their ideas, which is a powerful way of encouraging them to move more towards the fictional world. They can be asked to picture a scene in their mind, walk around in their imagination or even have the involvement of a scenery event that they can use to influence and bring it to life recreating it in drawing, painting, digitally or other media. Story setting is equally as important as creating a character, as it enables student to enter the world of the story and provide support for their writing, so they'd be asked to imagine what a scene looks like, or visualise them from a particular viewpoint.

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