

Question 3: 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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Course: Ba Illustration

Word Count: 2545

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According to Apatoff in his online article *The Old Question Finally Answered: "What is the difference between illustration and fine art?"* the difference between fine art and illustration is that fine art is the process of creating art for art's sake, and illustration is the process of depicting an idea. In this essay we will be discussing what could typically determine the difference between fine art and illustration. But we will also discuss the factors that blur the lines between the distinctions of fine art and illustration, which has caused much debate over its true answer. We will be looking further into Apatoff's use of language when determining the difference between the subjects with a critical eye. Which will be more informed when we will discuss the differences between the two subjects, with reference to philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Language games" in his book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with notes from Bertrand Russell. To find a definition and distinction between the two subject matters, we will also discuss the personal connotations of the meaning of both fine art and illustration, with reference to fine artists such as the pre-Raphaelites and more specifically we will look at what fine art meant to Frida Kahlo and the exhibition "Frida Kahlo: Making Herself Up". In this essay we will identify that there are differences and distinctions between the two subjects, while also acknowledging the similarities in both subjects.

First and foremost we must acknowledge how David Apatoff determines if something is labelled fine art or illustration. And then look at his use of language in his argument where he tries to discern the difference between fine art and illustration. The use of language in any argument is highly important because it can be used to persuade, educate, and portray meaning and emotion. But it is in the language of an argument where you can find error and loopholes. From the language used in Apatoff's (2011) article *The Old Question Finally Answered: "What is the difference between illustration and fine art?"* we can see that he is highly opinionated on the matter and states quite

boldly “The distinction lies in the fact that art is the idea (brought to life) while an illustration is a depiction (or explanation) of an idea.” (Apatoff, 2011) Here we have our first part of language that needs to be critically evaluated. When analysing the language used, it can be hard to justify Apatoff’s determining between fine art and illustration because in the first instance, he says that his distinction between the two “lies in the fact” but is that really a fact? What evidence does he use to strengthen his argument? Furthermore, this is not a factual statement but an opinion. And then there is the issue with actually determining the difference between depicting an idea and bringing an idea to life when he says that fine art is “the idea brought to life” and illustration is “a depiction (or explanation)” because this is where the argument for how to differentiate between the two becomes weak. A fine artist will have an idea of something they would like to create, for example they would like to paint a fox, so they do. An illustrator could then also want to paint a fox and so they do. So what is actually the difference between “depicting” an idea and “bringing an idea to life” when both artists had the same idea and the same freedom to paint a fox? There is no difference. And it can also be argued that these statements are interchangeable, according to the Bright Illustration Agency “illustrators are expertly paired with clients to achieve an array of brand objectives...whatever the brief” (The Bright Agency, 2020) so we can see how the statement used to define fine art can be used for illustrators, because an illustrator will take the clients idea or brief, and literally bring it to life. Before the client met the illustrator their idea was just that, an idea. It wasn’t real or tangible yet and more often than not a client will be surprised by the outcome because they themselves could not visualise it yet. And the same can be said for a fine artist, from their work we can see how they depict and see the world. A good example of a fine artist depicting themselves and the world around them is Frida Kahlo. In the Frida Kahlo: Making Herself Up (Victoria Albert Museum, 2018) exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum, people could see her personal belongings like her dresses, her body casts and more alongside her own self-portraits. According the V&A the exhibition offered “A fresh perspective on Kahlo’s compelling life story” (Victoria Albert Museum, 2018) Kahlo depicted her life and how she saw herself through her paintings of the world around her and in her own self-portraits. Her work was not “simply art for art’s sake” (Apatoff, 2011) as Apatoff suggests in his article trying to determine the difference between fine art and illustration. And so here we have a grey area in Apatoff’s discernment between the two subjects because his use of language falls short when attempting to determine the difference.

It can be argued that one of the factors that determines the difference between fine art and illustration can be found in the subjects accessibility and meaning to its audience. Here we will be looking into the work of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein to get a better idea of this argument. In the translated version of Ludwig Wittgensteins book *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 1998) he explains how problems in communication arise and what causes a conversation to go wrong. Wittgestein goes on to say “This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it.” (Wittgenstein, 1998, p.27) here Wittgenstein acknowledges that not everyone will understand his thoughts or his book because not everyone has shared the same thoughts as him. This gets explained further in his book *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, Hacker, Schulte, 2010) where he expands upon his theory known as language games. This theory is very important for the argument that the difference between fine art and illustration is found in its accessibility and meaning to an audience. Wittgenstein expresses that communication problems happen because every conversation is its own unique language game, and like any game it has rules. Now, the people participating in this game, or conversation, know the rules. Whereas the people who are not playing the game or don’t know how to play the game, do not know the rules. Wittgenstein gives the example of religious language versus non-religious language, for example a group of Christians have a conversation about God and faith and are therefore playing their own language game and this game has its own set of rules. But a scientist has their own language games and rules that aren’t necessarily compatible with the faith based language game. That’s not to say that one or the other is not valid, it just means that you can’t use one set of language game rules for a completely different language game. So when we take this theory into consideration and apply it to fine art and illustration we can see that a communication problem arises. For example, abstract fine art is not easily accessible to the audience because sometimes its meaning is obscured. The fine artist who created the work is the only one to truly know the rules of their language game and all symbolism and meaning can sometimes be lost on an audience. Steven Heller and Seymour Chwast also noted this in their book *Illustration: A Visual History*, they say “abstract expressionism- the radical rejection of all representation- was introduced...it was not adopted for illustration purposes.” (Heller, Chwast, 2008, p.10) this was because it was not easily understandable for the reader or audience to understand what the visual language is trying to communicate. The School of Life also touches on this when they expand on Wittgenstein’s language games theory “we often say muddled or unelaborate things that can go nowhere in the minds of

others" (The School of Life, 2015) this is because the language game rules for abstract fine art and illustration are two different sets of rules for two different games. According to Heller and Chwast "Illustration is communication, after all, rooted in decipherable visual languages" (Heller, Chwast, 2008, p.10) meaning illustration is based solely on communicating clearly through visual language, there are no hidden messages or complex metaphors because it was made for everyone to understand. So a factor that can determine the difference between the two subjects is that illustration is a more easily decipherable visual language, compared to the visual language of fine art. This is because the language game rules for illustration are perhaps more simplified and were made for everyone to take part in, like it is written in *Illustration: A Visual history* illustration was "produced for accessibility (and readability)" (Heller, Chwast, 2008) compared to fine art. In fact, illustration is such an easily accessible visual language game, that it is easily understood by children and is even important for children to be a part of this language game. There are many research articles that suggest that illustration in children's picture books is important to the cognitive development of young children. It is an easily accessible visual language game that children can take part in and learn about the world around them, through storytelling and visual imagery. The research article for developmental psychology titled, *The Role of Books Features in Young Children's Transfer of Information from Picture Books to Real World Contexts*, says that research has shown that picture books "support children's learning and transfer of that information to the real world" (Strouse, Nyhout, Ganea, 2018). In simpler terms of this argument, a defining factor between illustration and fine art is that illustration is more accessible and easily understood by a wider audience compared to that of fine art, because illustration speak a decipherable visual language game compared to visual language game of fine art.

While a distinction can be found between more modern forms of fine art such as abstract expressionism and illustration. The same cannot be said for all fine art, especially when we go backwards in the history of illustration and fine art. According to Heller and Chwast in their book *Illustration: A Visual History*, there was even less distinction between the two. While illustrations were being produced for the masses in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, that did not mean it was of a poor quality, it was "produced for accessibility (and readability), but not at the lowest aesthetic" (Heller, Chwast, 2008) and they go on to say that "certain illustration styles were more or less indistinguishable from academic or gallery art- representational, narrative, or symbolic"

showing that in the nineteenth to early twentieth century some illustration styles ran alongside the styles and techniques used in fine art exhibited in galleries. The only difference between the two at the time was the way in which it was produced and for what purpose. For example, illustrations were mass produced from etchings and were used in books and pamphlets while fine art pieces were made only once, and they became exclusive pieces that you could only see in galleries or purchased for high prices, because they were so exclusive. During the pre-Raphaelite period it can be argued that there was less distinction again between the subjects when the brotherhood and those inspired by the pre-raphaelites, brought to life scenes from Shakespeare and poetry, much like an illustrator would. Sir Frank Dicksee was an “English painter and illustrator” (History of Art: Romanticism, 2020) who was inspired by the PRB, and painted *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* which was “inspired by the ballad of the same name by Romantic poet John Keats” (Artfund, 2019) here is an example of a fine artist whose work was celebrated and put in galleries, but he essentially illustrated a scene from a poem. Except the trend in style was not cartoons, or the crisp clean lines provided in digital art, it was in the hours long technique of oil painting. This is where some may argue that there was no difference back then between fine art and illustration, because fine artists were bringing words and poems to life in a visual language the same way that illustrators were- the only difference was that at the time the most popular style and technique of illustration was oil painting.

In conclusion both fine art and illustration are subjects that are too fluid to ever truly be completely apart from one another. To set hard rules for each subject to define them would be too confining for artists and illustrators, and there shouldn't ever be a limit on creative freedom and the visual language that they put out into the world. Apatoffs (2011) definitions were too confining and the connotations of his definitions ignored all other aspects of fine art and illustration. The connotation that fine art was just art for the sake of it, would be highly insulting to many fine artists whose life's work was their art and to those seeking full time careers as artists. The connotation that illustration was just depicting something in an instruction manual also does an injustice to the whole genre of illustration, it ignores all the other wonderful aspects of the subject. To define them both and put them into a box is limiting. If fine artists could only paint pretty things for the sake of it, we wouldn't have all the insightful portraits and paintings from Frida Kahlo that showed us her world. We wouldn't see the wildly realistic and mythical painting of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by Sir Frank Dicksee, as he brought to life the words of Keats in a visual and tangible way. Yes, there are some

valid arguments for the differences between the two art forms such as their accessibility and their readability. This was highlighted when applying Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games theory. Sometimes the language game rules for fine art are not understandable for everyone, so not everyone can take part in and understand and enjoy fine art. Whereas in the illustration language game the rules are simplified and were made that way, so that everyone could take part and understand this visual language. But there are plenty of examples of fine artists telling a story through their art in the same simplistic visual language that illustration uses. There were arguments made that the difference between the two was that illustration was for commercial purposes only and fine art was not. But illustrators have their own passion projects that they work on for their own enjoyment, and fine artists take on work for commission. So we have come full circle again, when we find a definition between the two art forms they are almost always turned on their head with a counter argument. To finish, both subjects are vastly broad and vivid in their possibilities and are admirable for all of their unending possibilities and they should not be limited by definitions, both their similarities and differences should be celebrated and not trapped by the connotations of their definitions.

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