Does illustration have a place in today's society and does it possess the means to stand alone as a discipline in its own right?

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Summary

An exploration into the true essence of illustration. Illustration as a discipline is often misunderstood and lacks the customary reputation attained by fine art and graphic design. My aim is to explore the reasons as to why illustration lacks the recognition and understanding present with other disciplines and whether it carries the capacity to be able to stand as a discipline in its own right and whether it carries with it considerable purpose. I will do this by investigating the differentiating factors between illustration and fine art, as well as examining the role of authorial illustration and how it plays a part in defining illustration. I hope to decipher illustration's standing in todays society whilst questioning its lack of appreciation, and in doing so, clarify its purpose and stability whilst debunking myths that illustration no longer has a place.

Does illustration have a place in today's society and does it possess the means to stand alone as a discipline in its own right?

Introduction

“The underlying nature of illustration practice will continue to be fed and nourished in the same way it always has been, and by the only way it can be, and that is, by that inexplicable marvel that is the human imagination. As one of the most accessible arts. illustration has a big role to play; the soul needs tending.” (Braund, 2012, p.100)

There has always been a certain sense of ambiguity behind what the term ‘illustration’ means. It seems we have the fine arts, which is art in its traditional sense - made to provoke and be appreciated for its visual form; and then we have the commercial arts - graphic design and advertising. Then, in the somewhat grey area between the two, lies illustration - so what is it, what is its purpose, and is it in itself, an art form?

Illustration as a discipline has undergone much scrutiny for its intent and substantiality - it has been depicted as a dead art form, no longer required and no longer valued. But does much of this deprecation stem from a lack of understanding and recognition, and why is illustration considered to be substandard amongst the art world?

Graphic designer, Milton Glaser claims that “In a culture that values commerce above all other things, the imaginative potential of illustration has become irrelevant.. illustration is now too idiosyncratic.” (Glaser, 2004) What he is proposing is that ambiguous concepts are lost in commercial design, as they do not act as a successful marketing tool as they are too conceptual and not forthright, therefore some believe that clear cut and coherent graphic design reigns in the advertising and marketing world.

However recent trends may challenge this viewpoint as illustration takes on a new life and is arguably prospering more than ever before, as major corporations opt for a more decorative and illustrative approach and abandon the straightforward, routine and typically graphic presence. “Illustration has a special ability to bring personality into design… the

use of illustration lifted Waitrose packaging, rapidly taking the store from being just another supermarket onto a more sophisticated level above the other UK high-street supermarkets." (Dickens, 2011, p15) This demonstrates how illustration can add sophistication and edge to a brand or product to make it stand out above its competitors, and therefore illustration is becoming an increasingly popular route for commercial needs.

Many illustrators are adopting a more authorial role in their practice and are not relying solely on commissions but are making work that they want to and often selling it as prints or on products to be appreciated solely for their aesthetic, changing the way we view illustration as purely a means of explanation and now seeing it as an imaginative and conceptual discipline - however there is still some uncertainty as to whether illustration can stand alone as a singular practice or does it rely on others - and can an illustration stand alone? We are accustomed to seeing works of fine art hung in gallery spaces to be appreciated for solely aesthetics, but can an illustration with no context prevail under comparable conditions and if so how would we differentiate between the two practices under the same circumstances?

In chapter 1, I will explore the key differentiating factors between illustration and fine art, investigating what factors subject a work to either discipline and questioning whether or not such black and white labels exist and putting forth examples of professionals who challenge this viewpoint.

Chapter 2 will discuss the practice of authorial illustration and its importance amongst illustration as a discipline, as well as questioning how it can alter perceptions and challenge conventions of illustration and how this influences the idea of what illustration is today.

Chapter 3 will expand on the use of authorial illustration, investigation whether an illustration possesses the means to stand alone or does it always rely on the context in

which it is in, ultimately concluding with a clearer definition on illustrations purpose and determining its place in society today.

Chapter One

The Art of Illustration

“That’s not art, that’s illustration.” Holland (2000)

The dictionary definition of art states that it is “the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power”. Taking this into account, I pose two considerable questions:

1. Can something only be considered art if it demonstrates skill?
2. Can something only be considered art if it is deemed beautiful?

> If nothing stands behind an image or drawing, then we are left with surface skill as the selling point of illustration. Decoration is a craft and not an art form. Style can be the partner or enemy but without content, it’s incidental and subject to fashion trends. Art always reflects what’s on the artist’s mind. If nothing is on the illustrator’s mind, then all of the wrenching, outbursts, accusation, and gossip is meaningless.
>
> (Arisman, 2000, p.20)

Arisman is professing that with no emotive meaning behind an illustration, the only selling point is the demonstration of skill and something which is purely decorative. However this unfavourable viewpoint of illustration neglects the matter that an illustrator is required to convey the emotion desired by the client and personal expression is inconsistent in commissioned illustration. Conversely he mentions that art is a portrayal of the artist’s emotions thereby implying that often the appeal of a piece of art is the emotional undertone to the piece as opposed to the level of skill demonstrated, ultimately suggesting that illustration is not an art form but a decoration, something utterly visual. However, as is beauty, skill is something that is arguably abstract, and particularly with illustrators, often a naive and childlike style can be misinterpreted as a lack of skill.

Often with illustrators, more so than fine artists, there is a sense of anonymity. Fine artist's paintings often sell for extortionate amounts of money ordinarily because of the reputation of the artist. A lot of illustrators are virtually unknown, and so a commissioner is buying into their style and skillset rather than their influence and reputation as an artist, making it an arguable sentiment that an illustrator requires more skill than a fine artist in order to be successful.

Isobel Harbison, writer and curator, defines beauty as:

> Far more than a pretty face. And if we accept that it might assume many guises, but be primarily a force of attraction that is somehow alluring - often but not exclusively visual - then how can we reasonably argue against its value in art? (Harbison, 2016)

This considers beauty as being something more than solely visual, which if we begin to contemplate, we can apply this perception throughout many practices, such as literature and music, which are often described as beautiful despite not being visual - so if we begin to perceive beauty as something that engages the audience rather than something that is merely aesthetically pleasing, perhaps it would be more befitting to acknowledge that for something to be considered a piece of art it does require a certain level of 'beauty'.

Both of these questions are highly subjective, as what one considers skill another might consider inability, and if beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, so does the judgement of the artwork itself. This then formulates a third, overshadowing question; what is art? A question that has been contemplated for centuries with still no real definitive answers, can we then undeniably associate all means of creative production with an unequivocal classification; and if so, what then defines illustration, and is it a form of art?

The dictionary definition of illustration: An illustration is a decoration, interpretation or visual explanation of a text, concept or process, designed for integration in published media.

I would like to pay particular attention to the term ‘decorative’ in this definition. It implies the act of making something appear more attractive. We could then compare illustration to the Art Nouveau movement, which was the era of decoration and simply, art for arts sake. Influential amongst this movement, William Morris defined its purpose as being:

> To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce use, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce make, that is the other use of it.
>
> (Morris, 1878, p.7)

Morris possessed a socialist view and pursued in making art ‘by the people, for the people’. Ironically, by virtue of his significance in the movement, “the successful sale of wallpapers, tapestries, rugs and furniture created the “Morris look” in British interiors, one zealously sought after by the middle classes and titled owners of fine houses” (Morris and Kelvin, 1999, p.5) reinforcing the conception that reputation often compels sales more so than dexterity; perhaps being a contributing factor to the struggle amongst illustrators, as it is a particularly anonymous discipline. Furthermore, examining Morris’ status in the art world he is considered revolutionary in British textiles, however despite creating with intent of commercial purposes, he is not considered to be a commercial artist nor an illustrator.

To return to the definition above, if an illustration is only designed for integration, by interpretation we can then presume that an illustration must be an accompaniment of another work, and therefore cannot stand alone.

Art director and writer, Veronique Vienne, claims that:

> More often than not, the work of some of the best illustrators today is used to support the image of the people who hire them - not to inform, expose, startle, clarify, or, God forbid, illustrate. As a result, few illustrations stand on their own anymore.
>
> (Vienne, 2000, p.6)

What is suggested by Vienne is that an illustration is something only to be integrated, and not something that can exist for its own purpose - as opposed to fine art which is created with the sole intent to stand alone without integration.

In the hierarchy of creative professions, illustrators are arguably one of the most misunderstood.

As defined by Arisman:

> 1. Fine Art is pure.
> 2. Illustration is the beginning of selling out.
> 3. Graphic design is commercial art.
> 4. Advertising is selling - period.
>
> (Arisman, 2000, p.3)

This excerpt arguably regards illustration as inferior to the other three mentioned art forms. The expression 'selling out' implies a compromise in principles and integrity as a means of monetary gain, suggesting a lack of authenticity amongst illustrators and applauding fine artists for unadulterated practice.

American illustrator, Norman Rockwell "idealised America through his covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and America idolised him as the people's artist." (Heller, 2000, p. 23) His depictions of 'The American Dream' were loved by civilians and condemned by critics, and despite originals selling for $46 million, still his illustrations were considered "the people's art" (Heller, 2000, p.23).

"In modern illustration the intent is most often the selling of a product. When something noble is put to ignoble ends, there is a deterioration of value." (Apatoff, 2011). However Rockwell disproved this as originals of his commercial work sold for prices that would

typically be associated with works of fine art, although it was his granddaughter who claimed “it is Rockwell himself who kept publicly pronouncing, "I'm not a fine arts man, I'm an illustrator.”” Rockwell (2015) implying then that the value of a work is not indicative of how it is considered, be it illustration or fine art.

Comparable to Rockwell, illustrator Brad Holland has “never bought the notion that the distinction between commercial and fine artists is worth remarking, or that it even exists.” In an article for *The Washington Post* on Brad Holland, it is stated “A real artist, he likes to say, is someone who doesn't care whether he's a fine artist or a commercial artist.” (Span 1986)

The widespread distribution of a single illustration through production of mass printing perhaps alleviates its name to that of a low culture stature, perhaps compelling illustrators to an inferior standing to other disciplines in the art and design world. The often immense appraisal attached to a work of fine art is by virtue of its exclusivity and consideration of being denoted a high culture status, in turn being unavailable to the masses. Perhaps the notion of “selling out” comes from the understanding that illustrators often retain copyright of their work and sell only licenses to use it whereas fine artists are prone to selling their original pieces, something not routinely done amongst illustrators. Holland, in fact, is very much in favour of creating art for the masses to enjoy and has chosen to never sell an original; “I was convinced there should be no originals left in art. They should be destroyed, so only the mass art, the reproduction, remained.” (Holland, 1986, quoted in Span, 1986)

Holland is greatly opposed to selling paintings at extortionate costs to those more privileged, and mass production allows the manufacturing of widespread art allowing it to be appreciated by the masses. This disproves Arisman’s notion of illustration being “selling out” as undoubtedly it is less inclusionary to inhibit ones work to be attainable to those only

affording of the higher price tag as opposed to creating work for mass production which in turn is far more accessible. As summarised by Martignette, illustration is “the art of the common man.” (Martignette, 2009). If this is the case, why then is the remunerative gain in illustration regarded by many as a lack of integrity when it is an excessively inclusive craft.

Arisman himself admits that “the only time I feel I am “selling out” is when I am trying to solve someone else’s problem and not my own.” (Arisman, 2002, p.158) This views the term in the sense that the selling out of illustration is in regards to selling work you do not believe in yourself.

Sculptor, David Smith, defined commercial art as “art that meets the minds and needs of other people,” and fine art as “art that meets the mind and needs of the artist.” (Arisman, 2000, p.3)

This definition reinforces the notion of fine art being solely a means of self satisfaction, however if then an illustrator was to produce work for personal fulfilment, would this then still be considered to be an illustration, arguing the case that there is no clear boundary but only interpretations.

As concluded by illustrator, Milton Glaser:

> The overwhelming history of art, in fact, has been the history of people doing work for a specific purpose, in other words, commissioned works with specific intentions. After all, Michelangelo did not paint the “Last Judgment” to express himself. He painted it because the pope wanted to scare the bejesus out of the congregation.
> (Glaser, 2000, p.8)

This outlines the pretence that we can differentiate fine art from illustration simply on whether it was purposed for use as a commission or for self fulfilment, as Michelangelo was never deemed as “selling out”, but is rather known as one of the most influential and admirable artists in history despite one of his greatest works being a narrative depiction, something typically considered an illustration.

It is groundless to assign a category to a work based on whether or not it was commissioned, as many illustrators create self initiated works which are still illustrations - regardless of whether they were created with commercial intent or as a means of personal fulfilment.

> I believe that is is possible to expand the boundaries where fine art and illustration meet into an image-making process that redefines our tired old definitions and replaces them with a figurative art that is simply good art or bad art, wherever it appears, whether on a printed page or on a gallery wall.
>
> (Arisman, 2000, p.4)

This viewpoint suggests the idea of abandoning black and white labels amongst art forms and allowing an image or work to be viewed and appreciated solely for what it is, and not having to be coerced into a label conditional of its context or intent.

Chapter Two

The Authorial Instinct

“Creating self initiated works plays a vital role in providing the illustrator with opportunities to take risks and explore subject matter and themes of a more personal nature.” (Zeegan, 2009, p42)

Many contemporary illustrators are disproving the notion of illustration being no more than commercial design through the means of self-initiated work, i.e. work that is not created for a client.

Course leader of the MA in Authorial Illustration at Falmouth University, Steve Braund, defines authorial illustration as illustration which “is concerned with those areas where the
illustrator creates, originates, influences or considers the content of the communication.” (Braund, 2010). In an interview concerning the debate of whether illustration has a place in galleries, he shares his belief that “galleries and museums should show all forms of creative endeavour.” (Braund, 2010)

The House of Illustration is the UK’s only public gallery dedicated solely to illustration and graphic art. Founded in 2014 by Sir Quentin Blake, the gallery is a celebration and dedication to illustration, justifying that illustration is capable of enduring in more contexts than just the printed page. By exhibiting illustration of all descriptions, the HOI is diminishing the idea that an illustration can only be something two dimensional and an accompaniment of an additional matter. The Association of Illustrators praises the HOI for its “eclectic approach, ensuring contemporary and vintage illustration are represented.” (Association of Illustrators, 2015 quoted by Alderson, 2015) The space exhibits all forms of classic illustrations to contemporary which in turn will open new perspectives of illustration for the diverse and complex art form that it is.

Olivia Ahmad, curator for the House of Illustration, believes that “setting contemporary work in the context of its precedents is important. How would you know if something was subverting conventions if you didn't know what the conventions were?” (Ahmad, 2015 quoted by Alderson, 2015)

The House of Illustration invites a new perspective on illustration, demonstrating that there is a place for illustration in galleries, justifying the magnitude of illustration and promoting the blurred boundaries that exist in illustration today.

Fig 1. *Lauren Child’s Doll House*

Fig 2. *The Princess and The Pea*

An accomplished example of subverting conventions is bestselling author and illustrator, Lauren Child and her exhibition of her Doll House, exhibited in the House of Illustration in 2015. The exhibition displayed Child's handcrafted model which took thirty years to complete, with its construction techniques influencing her illustrations today.

Also exhibited were the sets of Child's book *The Princess and the Pea,* which involves illustrations made up from three-dimensional miniature sets with illustrated, cut out paper dolls. The book demonstrates how illustration can be adapted to more than a two dimensional drawing and can be reimagined in infinite forms whilst still retaining the fundamental element of story-telling in an innovative and captivating way. The juxtaposition of three dimensional sets behind the flat paper dolls challenges conventional illustrations - particularly in children's picture books which typically lean towards the traditional side of illustration i.e a drawing or painting - and displays an eccentric and unconventional example of what illustration can be.

Three dimensional outcomes are not something typically associated with illustration, despite the fact that many illustrators choose to work in this way, continuously pushing the boundaries of illustration and demonstrating its flexibility and versatility.

Children's book illustrator, Laura Carlin - famously recognised for her naive illustrations in picture books - also works with ceramics to make figures, tiles, plates and numerous other objects.

In 2017, Carlin exhibited her ceramics at the House of Illustration - the exhibition was an "exploration of the narrative possibilities in ceramics… inviting people to engage with and challenge their own views of what constitutes illustration." (House of Illustration, 2017)

Fig 3. *Detail From Forest*

Ceramics and crockery have acted as vessels for story-telling for centuries, for example the famous Willow Pattern, designed in 1780 by Thomas Minton, which tells the story of an eloping couple transforming into doves.

> Illustrators have no one single tool or medium that best describes their relationship with the craft. Instead of mastering one defining medium, illustrators make a journey of discovery searching for the combination of tool or tools and working methods that will best express their style, and that will become their visual signature.
> (Zeegan, 2009, p.58)

These examples demonstrate how illustration comes in a magnitude of forms and the medium in which it is creative is not indicative of how we categorise it.

Another example of narrative through ceramics is the work of illustrator and ceramicist, Rosi Yip. Rosi's work consists of illustrations mostly of the female form, and ceramics based on her illustrated characters - which she creates in the hope of normalising imperfections in the female body.

I reached out to Rosi to ask her what the term 'illustration' meant to her. Her response was:

> The term has definitely changed for me. I always wanted to be an illustrator even when I was little but I was always told that illustrators were people that drew for children's

> books and that was it. I now see the term illustrator as someone who has their own style of drawing and usually has their own line of products.
>
> (Rosi Yip, 2019)

Fig 4: *Ceramics*

Fig 5: *Beautiful, Wonderful, Women*

What I find particularly interesting about this response is that Rosi considers it common for illustrators to sell their own products and create self initiated works, whereas typically it has been considered a practice that only works to briefs assigned by a client, which as discussed in chapter one, once seemed to be the main differentiating factor between illustration and fine art. This shows how illustration has evolved and the term

‘illustrator’ is taking on a new identity, one far more associated with self initiated practice. This demonstrates the importance of authorial illustration as it breaks the stigma of illustrators vocation relying only on commissions and brings a new perception of illustrators who are versatile enough to practice both self-initiated and commissioned pieces. Also she mentioned that she associates the term with someone with their own style, reinforcing that illustrators have their own personal visual language which can often be recognised, perhaps implying that there is not as much anonymity behind illustration as there once was.

I also asked Rosi if she believed there was a clear differentiation between the terms ‘illustrator’ and ‘artist’ and which she considers herself to be. To which she responded:

> Not necessarily but I did fine art at university and it was conceptual and contemporary based. Anyone from that course would definitely have said there was a clear difference because we were taught to use other mediums such as performance. I think that the term ‘artist’ can be an umbrella for lots of mediums including illustration.
>
> I am torn between the two. I would usually say illustrator because it’s a more specific term but I then start adding on ceramicist so I guess I should just say artist.
>
> (Rosi Yip, 2019)

What can be interpreted from this response is that to her, one difference is in the fact that illustration is visual communication. However it is also interesting that she does not believe in a clear difference between the two, and there is an overlap. For example, if you are a creator of many things and your work blurs lines between multiple disciplines then is it necessary to assign yourself to one single category? It could be said that particularly with the growth in recognition of illustrators being able to create and sell work of their own they are becoming less associated with commerciality and more so as a discipline in itself, which perhaps despite common conception, can survive on its own.

Dutch illustrator, Bodil Jane, demonstrates how a personal style can be spread across both self-initiated and commissioned works.

Fig 6: *Tokyo Lovers*

Fig 7. *Eurostar*

Figure 6 is a personal project of Jane inspired by a trip to Tokyo. Figure 7 is an editorial piece for the French *Eurostar* magazine. It is evident that both pieces are by the same illustrator demonstrating that Jane has a clearly established personal style. Although a typically regarded anonymous discipline, many illustrators have created a reputation

through their unique and personal styles. Shaughnessy tells Varoom, “Illustrators are the last group amongst visual communicators to be allowed to have a style.” (Shaugnessy, 2008, p.4)

Style is something typically associated with artists and not with commercial designers, as graphic designers often adapt their way of working to suit the client, whereas an illustrator will be commissioned based on their style entailing that illustration is more closely related to art than commercial design. This reinforces the importance of style amongst illustration, as a commissioning client will have a strong concept of how the finished product will look based on that illustrators visual language, often developed from their own self-initiated work implying the importance of authorial illustration. “The authorial instinct is no longer a choice for illustrators - it is a necessity.” (Shaugnessy, 2011, p.195)

We cannot then condemn illustrators for the creation of commercial art when many practice self initiated projects alongside. Educator, illustrator and writer, Lawrence Zeegan, believes that “creating self initiated works plays a vital role in providing the illustrator with opportunities to take risks and explore subject matter and themes of a more personal nature.” (Zeegan, 2009, p.42)

Steven Braund says that his book *The Authorial Illustrator:*

> Seeks to reassert illustration as a developing practice; working against the tendency for the discipline of illustration to be seen as a repetitive commodity where the illustrator is presented with an already clearly defined brief.
>
> (Braund, 2012)

This enforces the relevance authorial illustration has in altering perceptions of the role of an illustrator. Perhaps the indifference towards illustration comes from the perception that commissions are assigned with a clear outline of what is requested, and the illustrator provides little creative input, perhaps often thought of as a lack of imagination. Whereas authorial illustration disproves any notion that illustrators lack creativity as they are entirely personal projects and demonstrate not only practical skill but

artistry for ideas also, proving that illustrators are capable of more than merely putting someone else ideas into an image and can in fact be far more conceptual and inventors in our own right.

Chapter 3

Illustration for Illustration's Sake

"Today's illustrators go beyond caricature and visual representation to observational statements about current trends and popular culture." (Federico, 2008)

Still today illustration seems undervalued by many, and it is arguable that a contributor to that is the personal style that many illustrators work in, particularly those who use a more naive style of working that can be perceived as child-like. It is still believed by many that realistic style is what requires the most skill - when in actuality it is arguably far more of a skill to be able to depict a subject that is entirely imaginary and stylised in a way that reimagines typical perspectives and communicates a personal conception. Illustrator Nina Cosford shares "As soon as I realised that a realistic drawing style didn't define a great one, I felt liberated and excited to share a more unique way of illustrating subjects and develop a style that I could call my own." (Cosford, 2019)

It is necessary for an illustrator to be able to depict every day objects and scenarios into a form that is something other than realistic in order to convey a personal style, as well as proving able to turn the ordinary into something stimulating. "Illustrators think in pictures and bend imagination from reality." (DeWolf, 2009, p.12) Steven Heller talks on how illustration offers the opportunity to create human figures that are not an "exact replica" and that "verisimilitude is not necessary for a successful image". By doing this, illustrators create character and a tone to their work, providing the basis to depict a certain emotion or narrative.

Illustration's advantage is its ability to create something that does not exist in real life, be it a person, place, or scenario; it can be utilised to bring any vision to life.

Fig 8. *Granny Girl*

This image by Nina Cosford illustrates a character that is inspired by the illustrator herself. The illustration is drawn in the form of a diagram which adds a sense of humour and relate-ability to the image, allowing the audience to identify with the character creating an emotional bond between the image and the viewer - contradicting the belief that nothing stands behind an illustration.

Like many other illustrators today, Nina Cosford has her own online store where she sells prints of her artwork, amongst other products such as enamel pins and greeting cards, thus proving that there is a market for decorative illustration and it can be created with the intention of its purpose being one solely for aesthetic appreciation, such as in the form of a physical print.

With the likes of Etsy which provides a platform for individuals to create an online store selling handmade goods, it has become increasingly easier for illustrators to sell their own work, which in turn is helping to evolve the term ‘illustration’ and how it is perceived. It is becoming quite commonplace for illustrators, alongside commissions, to run an e-commerce store to sell their own illustrated products, and the growth in popularity of this

has brought with it associations of own products with illustrators - this reinforces my earlier correspondence with illustrator Rosi Yip, who herself associates an illustrator with someone who sells their own line of products, which is becoming an increasingly common perception, disregarding the pre-discussed notion that an illustration cannot exist alone.

It is also commonly believed that an illustrator must always work alongside a graphic designer to create a finished product - as an illustration alone cannot be the final product itself.

> Illustration generally requires the graphic designer to package it for the end user. Rarely will the illustrator deal with production, reprographics, and print, yet these aspects are part and parcel of the designers responsibility. Illustration relies on graphic design to a certain extent.
>
> (Zeegan, 2009, p.38)

This notion is challenged by the illustrators that make a living from self initiated projects and prove successful without the need of a third party to refine their work - "The authorial approach… nurtures truly creative illustration by illustrators able to work on their own terms, often generating their own employment" (Braund, 2012, p.7)

Also available in Cosford's online store is her self-published book *The Trans Siberian Railway.* The book is a visual diary of her travels from Moscow to Beijing. Whilst the book includes information on world famous attractions and observations by the illustrator, the appeal and selling point is the attraction of the illustrations themselves. Inordinately breaking the conventions of illustration, Cosford has published a book that is not illustrated to accompany a story or pre-written text, but is a book published solely as a means to display a collection of illustrations, thus proving that illustration can in fact stand alone.

Fig 9. *Celebrate Yourself*

As well as *Granny Girl,* above is an image of another print that Cosford stocks in her online store. The image is clearly a celebration of the female body with the intention of motivating others to embrace their imperfections and adopt the mentality of female empowerment that is depicted in the image.

“Today’s illustrators go beyond caricature and visual representation to observational statements about current trends and popular culture.” (Federico, 2008) No longer do illustrations need only accompany a text or source of information, but are now often statements in themselves, often reflecting trends and societal tendencies proving relatable and appealing to audiences.

For example, the above image by Nina Cosford is very much in line with current trends of female empowerment and feminism, a common theme amongst work of contemporary illustrators. By focusing subject matter on societal trends, illustrators are appealing to the masses so despite being self-initiated the work is still often relatable , arguably a key difference between authorial illustration and self fulfilled fine art.

Fundamentally, illustration, even when self initiated, is created with the audience in mind; perhaps that is considered selling out, but ultimately it is selling out with noble intentions.

Conclusion

“Our culture loves the image; we want the image; we perhaps even need the image. And the illustrator is an image-maker.” (De Freitas quoted by Braund, 2012, p.21)

Whilst it may still be misunderstood, it is apparent that illustration has a place in todays society more so than ever before. “Illustration is not dead - in fact, it may just be giving birth to itself.” (Arisman, 2000)

The common perception amongst illustrations is that they do not possess the means to stand alone, such as being displayed on a wall or in a gallery space. However, it is proven that many illustrators create and make a living from self initiated projects that require no accompanying text or other source of information - and have the full capability to function in a manner that a piece of fine art would, something that is primarily aesthetic; proving that context is not a conclusive influence on how we define a piece of work and illustration can exist in many forms.

Arguably, a lot of the negative preconceptions towards illustration come from a lack of understanding as to what illustration entails as a discipline - and that is up to us as illustrators to make it known who we are and what we do.

There is a stark difference between fine art and authorial illustration, despite both being forms of self fulfilment. Fine art ultimately is a means of self expression, it has no real purpose other than to act as a channel for inner emotions to be expressed, and more often than not it is not reproduced but only the original remains. Authorial illustration, on the other hand, may express an emotion or feeling but whether it is a decoration or a narrative, it is ultimately created with an intent other than to depict personal emotion. Authorial illustration is also customarily reproduced meaning that it is available to the masses, further enforcing that illustration is the people’s art.

Furthermore, my investigation has proved indisputably that illustration does not need to rely on other practices but stands paramount as a practice in itself - and while commissions may depend on third parties, we as illustrators are equally reckoned on to provide a service so it is misguided to disregard illustration as a valuable vocation.

“The glory days of illustration may be long gone, but we have a new industry on the rise that involves many new technologies and talent all over the globe” (DeWolf, 2009, p. 16) Many illustrators are obtaining recognition for their personal style and audiences are wanting to acquire works of illustrators who’s style they admire, meaning that illustrators can sell their own illustrated products without the need for commission.

Illustration is, and always has been, the art of the people - and that is something that should be celebrated and not demeaned. It provides the opportunity for ordinary objects to be beautifully decorated, it provides a creative and visual explanation to a text or story, it allows art to exist everywhere we look and not exclusively in galleries - it is available to the masses and is the art of the every day. “We create images that sell ideas, push boundaries of the imagination, sell products, decorate and compliment text like nothing else. We are in a unique creative zone.” (DeWolf, 2009, p.1)

So to answer the fundamental question, what is illustration? There is no one answer to what illustration is, its beauty lies in its diversity and its power to adapt. Illustration is an explanation, an instruction, a story, a decoration, a product in its own right. It can be a work of art or a product of commercialism, it can be both at the same time. It is the essential amalgamation of art and design that meets the needs of whomever requires it, be it the client or the creator - that is the true essence of illustration.

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