

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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The question of the differences between illustration and fine art is one that has inspired a variety of artists, both fine and illustrators, to debate over the factors that determine whether something is Fine art or Illustration for several years. The point made by David Apatoff (which he later goes on to contradict) is that in many ways fine art might be considered more 'conceptual', or less of a straight depiction than illustration, thus seeming to differentiate the two through the content of the piece. Illustrator Robert Weaver seems to differentiate the two more so based on the ideas and influences of the artist, stating:

"Until the illustrator enjoys complete independence from outside pressure and direction, complete responsibility for his own work, and complete freedom to do whatever he deems fit-- all necessities in the making of art-- then illustration cannot be art but only a branch of advertising."

(Weaver, 1959, quoted in Apatoff, 2011)

Bernie Fuchs on the other hand, in an interview with American Artist argues the opposite: "it's all the same, either way I'm "making a picture", he explains" (Fuchs, 2008, quoted in Price, 2008, p.56). When three such different arguments exist, is it possible to come to a conclusion about the true differences between illustration and fine art? And, by extension, what are the connotations of this labelling? Is there a clear-cut line which must be maintained to keep some kind of artistic integrity, or is the line much more blurred, and the significance of this labelling not as important as some would have us think? In this essay I will attempt to answer these questions.

The immediate way some seem to jump differentiating the two is by look, by content. Some might see fine art as something more conceptual, ideas based, and illustration as more functional, practical, and straightforward. Some see them as painting and drawing, respectively. Keith Bond states: "I once heard someone define the difference between a fine artist and an illustrator as: an illustrator answers questions while a fine artist asks questions." (Bond, 2010). But it is fair to say that is always the case? Take for example this piece by Bernard D'Andrea. It is expressive, loose, leaves the viewer with questions and most importantly: does not depict a straightforward, easy to read

image. Yet this is an illustration, painted for Boys' Life Magazine in 1965. The definition of an illustration as being an



(D'Andrea, 1965)

answer to a question reduces what illustration has the potential to be, when in reality it is not that simple. Similarly, take Jane by Raqib Shaw. In many ways it has the qualities of what many would



(Shaw, 2006)

consider an illustration: the depiction of Jane Seymour, a woman, and whilst it is changed to resemble a piranha it is clear and concise and, in many ways, could be used as an illustration, yet instead resided at the Tate. Both of these show that the line between what can be considered illustration and what

can be considered Fine Art is not as clear cut as some would like to think it is. By boxing in what is considered fine art and what is considered illustration, a condition is placed on artist which limits them: you are either an illustrator or an artist, and therefore your work may only fall under what is largely accepted as fine art, and what is largely accepted as illustration. Susan LeVan, the illustration chair at the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University recognises that these boundaries do not and should not account for all practitioners, stating:

“Some illustrators make a living creating personal work that’s exhibited at major museums and sold through dealers [and college illustration programs that offer gallery/fine art as a concentration], Likewise, fine artists have produced commissioned work throughout history.”

(LeVan, 2013, quoted in Tedasco, 2013)

How can you then differentiate the two? Between the two examples shown, the key difference is their purpose. Whilst D’Andrea’s piece is abstract, painterly, and different to what most illustrations typically are, the artists purpose for it to be a splash piece for a magazine meant that the piece was an illustration. Whereas Shaw’s piece, with some illustrative qualities, was intended to be displayed as a fine art piece, and therefore that is what it is. It seems the most dependable way to define work as an illustration or a piece of fine art is what the artist intended it to be, regardless of content or style. Other than within the boundaries of a universities wall, in illustration or fine art courses, it can be argued that the labelling of what your work is means very little. There are illustration competitions and fine art galleries, but whatever style of work you choose to produce, as long as you intended it to be either of the two, they can be submitted. There is no style factor barring one from the other.

There seems to be multiple different ways that different artists and scholars choose to differentiate between fine art and illustration, the most common seeming to be: Context (What was the intended use for the piece), and Content (What the piece contains). The way these two factors are viewed in terms of the difference between the two practices can ultimately be linked to the connotations of the labelling, and what the labels mean for artists and illustrators. Apatoff states: “In my view, there is no inherent difference between art and illustration except the way in which payment to the artist is processed” (Apatoff, 2011), which indicates that the content of a piece does not decide

whether it is classified as fine art or illustration, but rather that the context of how payment is processed is the only differentiating factor. When looking at connotations, a viewpoint such as this would therefore mean the main use for differentiating between the two terms is payment. Whereas a viewpoint such as Weavers, arguing that illustration is not art but advertising and that a fine artist must enjoy complete freedom in their work would make the connotations much less simple, and would also make fine artists an extremely rare commodity. Fine art can be argued to be entirely influenced by outside stimuli, from the way the artist grew up to the situations they have been in, to their political beliefs and so on, all these outside stimuli come together to dictate a fine artists work. Of course, Weaver could instead be suggesting that he sees illustration as something such as a commissioned piece, and for art to be considered fine art, the piece must be entirely the artists thoughts and ideas, not influenced by the commissioner and their ideas. However, this also comes with a myriad of flaws. Would pieces of art created for a specific gallery show in mind not be considered fine art under this umbrella? Not to mention the argument made seems to entirely disregard any art or art history from more than one hundred years ago. When looking at the reasonings behind the creation of art throughout history, commission work has made up a large portion of the most well-known historical fine art pieces. From DaVinci's 'The Last Supper' to Botticelli's 'The Birth of Venus', these commissioned works of art have gone on to become some of the most recognised pieces of art, yet under Weavers definition, they would not be considered art at all. Apatoff, in response to Weavers ideas, stated:

"Only in the 20th century when Weaver was painting did fine art start down the path of "art for art's sake," eschewing any communicative or practical or commercial role. Artists before that time would not recognize the role of fine art described by Weaver. Is this a permanent schism between art and illustration or merely a temporary deviation? In the long history of art, a century hardly counts as a blip on a radar screen. Yet, Weaver-- from his limited perspective-- seems convinced he is talking about timeless truths."

(Apatoff, 2011)

Leif Peng, in a reply to Apatoff on the subject:

"In my opinion art and illustration were essentially the same thing until the 20th century, when the rift began, and fine art became something rarefied and precious and illustration was relegated to some lower status by the elites because it serves the utilitarian function of communicating with the masses."

(Peng, 2008)

Therefore, is Weaver's definition of an illustrator and a Fine artist not reductionist? To reduce illustration down to advertising and disallow any person influenced by anything to be considered a fine artist. Peng also brings up the question: would the connotation of Weavers definition not just simply serve the purpose of relegating illustration to something not as thought out and complex as fine art, thus simply lowering the supposed value of illustration in comparison? But then, is that not the case with all attempts to strongly differentiate the two? Bringing in the history of illustration and art is important when trying to answer the question. Ashley Tedesco, quoting John Krause, who has worked for some of the best-known book publishers, magazines and newspapers in the country, said: "He says the difference between fine art and illustration is that fine art requires you to please only one person: yourself. With illustration, you must answer to many people" (Krause, 2013, quoted in Tedasco, 2013). But this again misrepresents a large portion of art history. Stating that fine art only pleases one person not only places a high value on work that is seen as 'thought-provoking' and unique, but also relegates illustration below fine art as a way to please the masses, which in turn makes fine art much more elitist and difficult to reach. This can be argued to be a large factor as to why fine art pieces can be valued so high, whereas the average person may see advertising art, design and other more generally illustrative pieces as being 'easier' and worth less. With this in mind, an argument for the title's connotations could be that the only use they provide is to create an even more inaccessible market in fine art, both for normal people interested in art, and for artists trying to break into such an elitist sphere.

Fuchs' statement "I don't differentiate" between illustration and fine art brings up the question of whether it is necessary to do so at all (Fuchs, 2008, p.56). It would be fruitless to sit here and argue that there is no difference whatsoever between a page from 'The Sandman' by Neil Gaiman (1989), and Egon Schiele's 'Death and the Maiden' (1915) when the differences between them are so clear and numerable. However, outside of the two very ends of the spectrum of what might be considered illustration or fine art the line is much more blurred, perhaps even non-existent, or fluctuating. As already explored styles between illustration and fine art mash and mingle, with the only clear-cut difference between the two being how the illustrator themselves defines it. Perhaps in the past, when illustration was new due to as Apatoff put it: "The ability to create and distribute quality copies to large audiences; and the ability to collect small, proportional payments for that art from large audiences" (Apatoff, 2011), there might be an argument that the means of payment was the most important connotation of the labels. However, as time has gone on, not only has illustration manifested into something much more complex than collecting small payments from a large group of

people, but fine art as well with the ease of modern printing techniques also has had the potential to be what illustration once was. And if that is the case if the two are blurring in the ways in which payment is processed, what truly is the reasoning behind having them so clearly differentiated? If it is not of use to the artist to have their work labelled for them rather than choosing a label or no label that fits best, then it stands to reason that the significance of these labels has moved past its usefulness. It can be argued that the terms fine art and illustration still invoke different meanings, regardless of if you use them to label specific art pieces. Commissions for illustrations for magazines, or creating a piece of fine art for a gallery both invoke a different image of what the outcome will be, and so perhaps still holds use for those commissioning or looking for specific art. In an interview with American Artist Fuch's process for art is described as: "Regardless of the category, the process always begins with photos, sometimes file photos provided by the commissioning publication, but more often his own" (Fuchs, 2008, p.56). However, to limit an artist by saying their work is only one of the two, by giving the idea that an artist can only produce one, or that a piece cannot be both illustration and fine art is in my opinion uselessly limiting.

Overall, is there a need for the differentiations between fine art and illustration? Perhaps in some contexts. Companies wanting a splash piece for a magazine are likely to look for illustrators, since typically illustration is used for that. Likewise, fine art galleries would look at someone labelled a fine artist for presentation before an illustrator. However, to state artists must be one or the other, or to label someone's work as one or the other without knowledge of their intent helps no one. As has been shown, many people look for tangible ways in the content of the art, or in the way payment is processed to distinguish whether it is fine art or illustration, but as has been shown with Raqib Shaw and Bernard D'Andrea's work, it is not always possible to do that accurately, or with respect to the artists intent. In today's world of art, illustration and fine art are separated, and so to get rid of that idea entirely is not possible. Looking through history we see that the two have not always been separated, and that only with the popularisation of printing have the two been separated, yet in today's world of art where printing is so mainstream and accessible, we see art coming full circle with both fine art and illustration having access to these methods of creating and producing art to sell. To try to separate artists based on these two categories which overtime have become closer and closer to each other is to limit artists and what they think is 'allowed' in each category, which in my opinion serves no purpose. Typical factors to determine whether art is fine art or illustration are not important when the majority of art falls somewhere in the middle of that spectrum. What is important is how the artist markets or defines their own work, not the style or way in which that art is created, displayed, or sold.

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