

Research in context (ADAD5003)

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.

Student Name: Brooke Dick

Student Number: 1902051

Illustration BA

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Gwenllian Beynon & Louise Burston

In this essay I plan to decipher the differences and the direct correlations between fine art and illustration. I will be looking at what the characteristics of each style are and discussing the opinions and reasonings of this topic. I will be talking about the connotations of each statement. I will then critique imagery and determine what category best suits the pieces. Are the two so different? Or do they overlap more than often?

The definition of illustration is 'An illustration is an example or a story which is used to make a point clear.' Collins English Dictionary (2020). 'As a discipline illustration sits somewhere between art and graphic design.' Zeegen (2009 p.6). The definition of Fine art is "creative art, especially visual art whose products are to be appreciated primarily or solely for their imaginative, aesthetic, or intellectual content." Oxford Dictionary (2020). 'Fine art is a form of transformation and it's the ability to transform any type of practice or material into something which reflects further on our universe.' Shepard (2019).

Some similarities between the two are the mediums used, mainly traditional techniques such as painting, printing, line work, pen and ink and glass work. And modern techniques such as digital. Both answer and ask the questions that life challenges us with. I found that I was challenged with finding similarities between the two as there is a large opposition that believes the two areas are vastly different. I found that the art world did not want to associate with the commercialization that comes with the design world. In fact, illustration is rather looked down upon because of the way we support our lifestyles. Regardless of this information I believe that they are still quite similar.

In my research I found there are many beliefs as to what differentiates the two areas. '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. 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. 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). Here Apatoff is stating that fine art is the act of making while illustration is the act of reimagination. He states that fine art is 'art for art's sake' Apatoff (2011). It is often categorized as decorative and is practiced for its aesthetic value. 'Drawings, paintings, and sculptures that are admired for their beauty and

have no practical use.’ Cambridge English Dictionary (2020). It is a beautiful art rather than functional. The word beautiful gives a feeling of nature. I imagine flowers, butterflies, and women, much like a renaissance painting. The word practical gives a feeling of purpose that there is reasoning behind the art. It has a function.

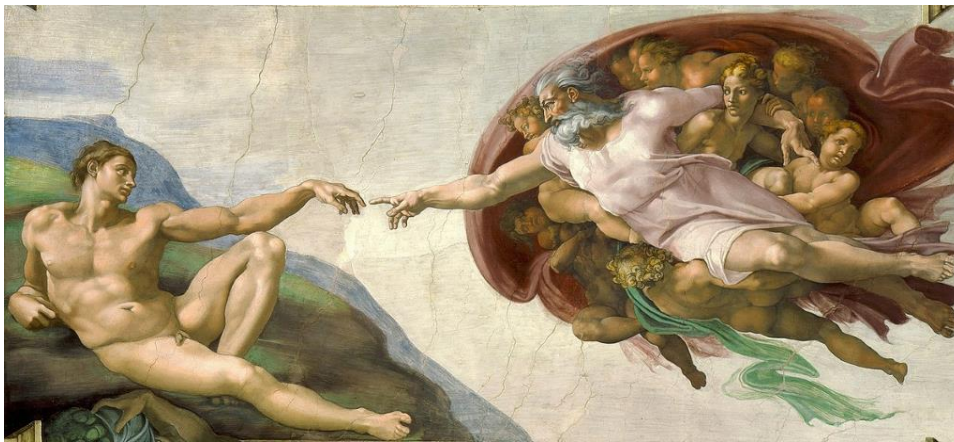
‘Illustration is illustrating a story or idea. In modern illustration the intent is most often the selling of a product. When something noble is put to ignoble ends, there is a deterioration of value.’ Apatoff (2011). The wording noble suggests having rank and having high moral principles, ignoble suggests not honorable in purpose or a humble status. In this context I believe that Apatoff is implying that illustrative art has lost its worth because it is made for profit. The popularity of fine art as a career choice has decreased over time as it is a less stable craft financially speaking. However, in the art world illustration is looked down on because of the commercial side of it. ‘Historically, the fine-art world has wanted to separate itself from what it sees as the taint of commercialism.’ Tedesco (2013). ‘[Commercialism] concern with the making of profit at the expense of artistic or other value.’ Oxford Dictionary (2020). The use of the word commercialism means that illustrators lose their artistic value for money. ‘There’s no denying that some artists see illustration as selling out.’ Tedesco (2013). It is true that illustration is known for its industry work. But the term “selling out” I believe penalizes those who have found a way to market their art as a means of livelihood, Artists no longer need to struggle for their craft. ‘In the simplest terms, what separates illustration from fine art is a paycheck. Illustrators are paid to bring an idea to life, whether it is the science behind the human brain or a child’s fairy tale—all while meeting a deadline. An artist, on the other hand, may spend a lifetime chasing a personal muse and never see a cent for it.’ Tedesco (2013). This confirms the belief that illustrators create with the purpose of receiving payment, whereas a fine artist work without the need for money. I think it does depend on the artists or illustrator and what project they are entailing; illustration is a career in which imagery is exchanged for payment. But there are times when they create without profit such as for charity purposes. And on the other hand, there are fine artists that create with the intention of selling and making a profit.

‘It is possible that illustration and art may one day merge, at some vanishing point in history, but for the moment their aims and purposes are quite different. It seems to be the function of the artist to produce art. The illustrator may use the ideas of the contemporary painter; but it is communication that is his ultimate goal.’ Peng (2008). To illustrate something is to deliver a message to an audience, it gives a viewer visual information and often asks questions. ‘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). I think all art forms can invoke thought and all great arts make a viewer question themselves. ‘Art is a means of both exploration AND veneration. I am both asking and answering questions.’ Bond (2010). The word exploration means surveying unfamiliar areas, in the artworld this would suggest visual analysis. ‘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.' Peng (2008). Advertising means the curation of something with the intention of commercialization. When freelancing or working on commission fine artists are allowed creative independence. Nonetheless, that does not mean that illustrators are not able to have opportunities for artistic flexibility within their client work.

I have chosen to create my analyses on world renowned items. All easily recognized but I want to decipher whether they can be categorized as art or design.

Fig one



Firstly, we have 'The creation of Adam' (1512) By Michelangelo it is a renaissance painting. This piece is one of the most recognized images and one that has been adapted many times, throughout its history.

In the image we see Adam lying on the earth unclothed before God. God is seen floating towards man through the heavens. Sat upon an array of angles. He is reaching his mighty arm out to Adam, who is new to life and seen as struggling to hold his arm up, they are about to make contact. God is going to give him strength through celestial touch.

Pope Julius II commissioned Michaelangelo to fresco paint the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. The piece illustrates the biblical creation from the Book of Genesis. From this information it could be argued that 'The creation of Adam' is an illustrated artwork. It was a commissioned piece which also tells a story and that is what most defines as illustration. However, it is also a decorative piece. Pope Julius II's intention was to decorate the Sistine chapel its gallery like with all the artwork presented. This fits under the glossary of fine art. It is hard to decipher what this image could be concluded as like many art pieces of art it can come under many different titles; it does not fit just one category. But I think with the biblical context I will label it in my own opinion as an Illustration.

Fig two



Secondly, I have chosen 'Les Hasards Heureux de L'Escarpolette' ("The Swing") (J-H Fragonard, 1767). This painting is hard to decipher, as it tells a story in its imagery like an illustration but could also just hold aesthetic value.

The story I see in this image is an overly romanticized love affair. A young maiden centerfold swings from a tree. She is looking towards a young man, while he is crimson faced peering up her skirt. Above him a Cupid statue, very symbolic of love or romance. An elder man is seen pulling the ropes of the swing, perhaps a father figure. I am sure there is a lot this image could portray it is up to the eye of the beholder. Whether to read into the imagery or take it as it is a painting, a piece of art. Because I see a story, I could define it as an illustration, but it is also a gallery piece and very aesthetically pleasing so it could also be defined as fine art, or I could make it inconclusive as it stands alone from a category. I do not think there is a need to put this painting into a class, it is a timeless classic that should not have to be restricted by a label.

Fig three



Next, I have chosen something closer to modern day 'Nighthawks' 1967 By Edward Hooper. This painting is very vague, there is no known narrative. It is open to interpretation. The title gives away a clue of time and a sense of character. The lighting also suggests it is late, the vacant street could suggest early hours. The two men look like detectives which would explain the 'hawks. But still there is a slim to nonvisual context. It is hard to say that this piece could be considered an illustration because of the lack of information. I would personally consider it as an item of fine art because of the more apparent artistic purpose. So, I have chosen this piece to be finer art than illustrative as it is more decorative than informative.

Fig Four



Lastly, I have chosen 'David' 1504 another piece By Michaelangelo. It is a 14 ft marble statue depicting the biblical hero David from the book of Samuel. It is one of the most famous pieces

of visual art still to this day. Michaelangelo depicted David before the battle of Goliath, this was a first as he had traditionally been shown after his victory, triumphant. He stands cleverly next to a cluster of branches with his slingshot hidden from plain sight, showing his wit. There are two cast moldings of the statue which have been placed in several locations over the years. The second cast was gifted to Queen Victoria. When she saw the nudity of David The Queen commissioned a fig leaf to cover his genitalia for royal visits. I understand 'David' as to be a piece of fine art. Michaelangelo was commissioned to create a decorative piece originally for the Cathedral of Florence '14-foot-tall David was unveiled only to them: they all agreed that it was far too perfect to be placed up high in the Cathedral, thus it was decided to discuss another location in town.' Accademia.org (2020). Because of its beauty and visual aesthetic, it was placed in the Piazza della Signoria, for all to witness. Even though it was originally based on a piece of text, I believe its purpose was to be decorative. He is an exceptionally large commemorative piece. So, I would label 'David' as a piece of Fine art by the definition that fine art is beautiful art.

After my analysis I have made the conclusion that there is no definite distinction between fine art and illustration, the separation is such a thin line that more than often it becomes blurred. They are interchangeable and most creations defy categorization. Both subjects are much less constrictive than one would think. A piece of art or an artist's style can fit many categories and should not be constricted to a label. Creators should be free to make, educate and improve the lives of others with their crafts, however they see fit.

From my research I believe the main distinction between the two is the fact that illustrators tell a story or create a meaning behind their work, we make crafts that have a clearer purpose. 'Illustration remains to be one of the most direct forms of visual communication.' Zeegen (2009). While fine artists create for the sake of creation, they make art that reflects the world and its current state. I also believe that with the ever-changing circumstances of modern life make it harder to define what art and illustration is, new artists with interchangeable disciplines' allow for more perspective and create more connections between the two. 'Both illustrators and fine artists communicate a message. Art is a language.' Bond (2010). Art is a language and no matter what area an artist or a designer may belong to we all speak it. Whatever part of the world or derelict you speak, we can all connect through the communication of imagery. I believe I have found relevant sources to make this argument. Labelling of pieces is not a necessity but rather making connections through creation is.

Figures

Fig. One: Michaelangelo. (1512) *The Creation of Adam*. The Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

Fig. Two: J-H. Fragonard. (1767) *The Swing*. The Wallace Collection, London, England.

Fig. Three: E. Hopper. (1942) *Nighthawks*. Art institution of Chicago Building, Chicago, Illinois.

Fig. Four: Michaelangelo. (1504) *David*. Accademia Gallery, Florence, Italy.

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