

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.

Name: Chelsea Hall

Student Code: 1702531

BA Illustration

Word count without Bibliography and in-text citation: 2704

Tutor: Louise Burston

Illustration and Fine Art, both methods of creative expression and communication, are often compared to or confused with each other (Male, 2007). The definitions of both have evolved through history as perceptions of art have changed. In 1828 illustration was defined as “The act of rendering bright or glorious” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1828). Modern definitions have defined it as “a picture in a book, magazine, etc. Or the process of illustrating something” (ILLUSTRATION | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020). Contemporary society has defined illustration through its role within society; primarily known by its use in books it can be viewed as a vocational art form supported by Male. “without a context, an image cannot be described as being an illustration” (Male, Page 18, Paragraph 2, 2007). In comparison the definition of Fine art is “The term "fine art" refers to an art form practised mainly for its aesthetic value and its beauty ("art for art's sake") rather than its functional value (Fine Art: Definition, Meaning, History, 2020). The difference between the two terms lies in their use; illustration arguably brings understanding to something whilst a Fine artwork is appreciated more for the way it looks. With the evolution of definitions, our understanding of them and their roles in not just art but across all platforms of society as a whole has changed.

Heller and Chwast (2008), describes illustration as “a clearly defined act of making art...make some subject more pleasing or easier to understand” (Heller & Chwast, 2008, p.7). Comparing this definition to the ones mentioned earlier, it raises the idea that when deciding what something is, or what something is not, it may be dependent upon every individual’s interpretation. This can be further justified historically as illustration and fine art have both developed from a human’s innate need to create; they didn’t just exist, and they have been defined as such to provide understanding of each individual practice. It is arguable that in the 18th century, roles were less defined, art was simply an all-encompassing practice. Fine Art as a profession included painting, music and poetry among other creative outlets. (Britannica, The arts, 2020). From what can be discerned people have specific understandings of fine art and illustration and the definitions they have now seem to have been developed over the years as society’s need for them has grown.

When comparing the definitions of illustration to fine art, examining the use of wording and the overall meaning of them, it can be argued that the subjects are both similar. A keyword in the definition of ‘illustrates’ is ‘adornment’. Adornment is defined as “something decorative, or the act of decorating something or someone” (ADORNMENT | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020). In the context of this definition the act of creating an illustration as an ‘adornment’ means that the illustration doesn’t need to be commissioned nor does it have to

be an explanation for a book or article. In context the illustration itself is primarily for the creator or just to be enjoyed as an aesthetic piece. When comparing this definition to the wording of the definition for Fine art “practised mainly for its aesthetic value and its beauty ("art for art's sake") rather than its functional value (Fine Art: Definition, Meaning, History, 2020), the two definitions correlate. This definition is stating that fine art is only appreciated for its aesthetic content among other things, and the act of adorning something with an illustration is decorative, purely meant for aesthetic purpose. This overlap between the two sources brings up the idea that definitions can be open to individual interpretation and that the two creative practices may not be so different, and therefore artwork that has been defined as one or the other may fit within both definitions.

When looking more specifically into the history of art, we can begin to see how the art practices and their definitions began to develop over time. “Cave paintings at Lascaux illustrated man’s observations of the world around him”. (Heller & Chwast, 2008, p.7) When the cavemen drew pictures on walls, they were visually communicating what they were seeing, as they didn’t have writing. When it was created this art was not defined, however contemporary society now defines them as illustrations. Theoretically however, they could also be fine art pieces. If fine art is the idea (brought to life), then the cavemen paintings are their own personal interpretations of what they’ve seen; they are in effect bringing their ideas to life by painting them on to the wall. However, these paintings had no theory behind them, and they possibly weren’t created as an aesthetic piece either, if keeping to this theory of Fine Art, they do not fit within the definition. The paintings are also described online as ‘Parietal art’; “(also referred to as "cave art") is used to denote any prehistoric art found on cave walls.” (Parietal Art, Prehistoric: Definition, Characteristics, Types, Interpretation, 2020). They are not defined as illustrations or fine art pieces by this website, which raises the idea that the caveman art and therefore all art can be defined by each person differently. The new definition of Parietal art has been created to help the understanding of what these paintings are, although it could be questioned whether it is also affecting objective interpretation.

Arguably the origins of illustration as a practicing medium became prevalent due to the invention of the Gutenberg Press which enabled mass publishing. This popularised illustration as now illustrators and the media were able to communicate to more people through the art form; “Starting In the 14th century, artists of the Renaissance presented new music, literature, art, and publications that could be mass-produced and distributed due to the invention of a mechanical printing process by Johannes Gutenberg in 1452” (History - Illustration History, 2020). Before this time art was

only accessible to the rich who would buy work at galleries and exhibitions. Illustration distributed art to everyone “brought images, ideas, and entertainment to a wide audience and provided people outside the upper class the possibility of experiencing art....Illustration became more commonly encountered in daily life.” (History - Illustration History, 2020)

“Illustration has long been disparaged as an applied rather than a Fine art, inspired not by the blessed muse, but commissioned by the dreaded client and hence tainted by commercial impurities” (Heller, & Chwast. (2008), p. 7) In context, this quote is stating that illustration has been seen as lesser than Fine Art, not to be taken as seriously because it is perceived as being commission based and commission based work is seen negatively. The idea that Illustration is seen as a lesser art form than Illustration is backed up by Benaroya “Often falling in the shadow of the fine art world, illustration has many times been cast aside as mere decoration and the work of hired hands, while illustrators have been seen as craftsmen rather than true artists with higher goals in mind” (Benaroya, 2013, p. 6). Currently however, illustration can be viewed as a more viable way of making money due to advertising being featured everywhere. “The accessibility of this kind of imagery to the non-artist is paramount in explaining why illustration has become valued both commercially and critically.” (Benaroya, 2013, p.6). Many companies commission illustrations in order to sell their work, whereas fine artists mainly work as exhibitors with a smaller margin for becoming famous. A fine artist’s work can still be used for advertising, although it arguably then becomes categorised as illustration; they are making something easier to understand, adorning something, which according to the earlier definitions is what illustration does. If the ‘Fine art’ piece is commissioned then it again brings up an argument that it can’t in fact be defined as ‘Fine art’ because Fine art must be inspired by the blessed muse, not commissioned and tainted by commercial impurities (Heller, & Chwast. (2008), p. 7). “Some of the most famous and prominent works of art – “The Statue of David” by Michelangelo, “Mona Lisa” by Leonardo da Vinci, “Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer” by Gustav Klimt – are not technically considered to be *fine art*, as they are all commissioned works by patrons.” (Art History 101: What is Fine Art?, 2020).

Another factor to consider when defining art as fine art or illustration is what a person studies at university and the categorisation that occurs within that environment, hypothetically this can affect the artwork and what the individual creates. It can be argued that a person can go into university with a certain mindset, feeling that they are a Fine artist, for example, but through the categorisation of learning and the constructive box of education, they may find that they are actually an illustrator. At University of Wales Trinity Saint David there is a clear divide between the Fine Art and Illustration courses. “The Fine Art courses are practice-based with a theoretical underpinning that allows the students to practice within medium specificity” (UWTSD, 2020) whereas “Illustration is all about image-making and effective communication” (Illustration | Swansea College of Art - UWTSD, 2020).

In comparison to the earlier definitions of both fine art and illustration, there is a clear difference in how they have been explained. These definitions show a clear difference between the courses and therefore the artwork that will be created by the students. Fine Art is theory based (UWTSD, 2020), whereas illustration is all about “Image-making and effective communication” (UWTSD, 2020). When comparing the way these courses have been described to earlier definitions of the two subjects, there is a clear difference however, backing up again the idea that defining them is up to the individual or context it is placed within.

Many illustrators create work in their own personal time for themselves, “an art form practised mainly for its aesthetic value and its beauty ("art for art's sake") rather than its functional value” (Fine Art: Definition, Meaning, History, 2020). This authorial work within the context of the essay question defines that these illustrations are in fact fine art works as they have not been created as a commissioned piece of art, “tainted by commercial impurities” (Heller, & Chwast. (2008), p.7) However, if Fine art is all practical work defined by theory then this would mean that these works do not fit within the confines of the fine art definition, and therefore do not fit within the confines of the Fine art or Illustration definition. It can be argued that dependent upon which definition society chooses to adhere to, an art category can change and overlap, with some art having no category or definition. The grey area surrounding definitions becomes more apparent here as fine art and illustration begin to overlap. It is questionable whether a fine artist or illustrator would care for defining their own work, as arguably they are “making art for art’s sake” (Fine Art: Definition, Meaning, History, 2020). This brings up the idea that to go around defining every piece of artwork is unnecessary and illogical; although it can help understanding, it questions why these definitions matter in the first place.

Damien Hirst defines himself as a Contemporary artist. Defined in the dictionary, “Contemporary art is the art of the present, produced by living artists in the twenty-first century” (What is art?, 2020). This definition can arguably encompass the fine artist however the fact that Hirst uses contemporary artists instead is suggestive that he does not believe he fits in within the confines of the fine art definition. Arguably a fluid art form, fine art uses many mediums and is presented in multiple ways, making it difficult to predict and therefore define. Hirst’s work alone has covered many genres from a real skull covered in diamonds, to animals dissected in tanks preserved by formaldehyde, to paintings with varying themes.

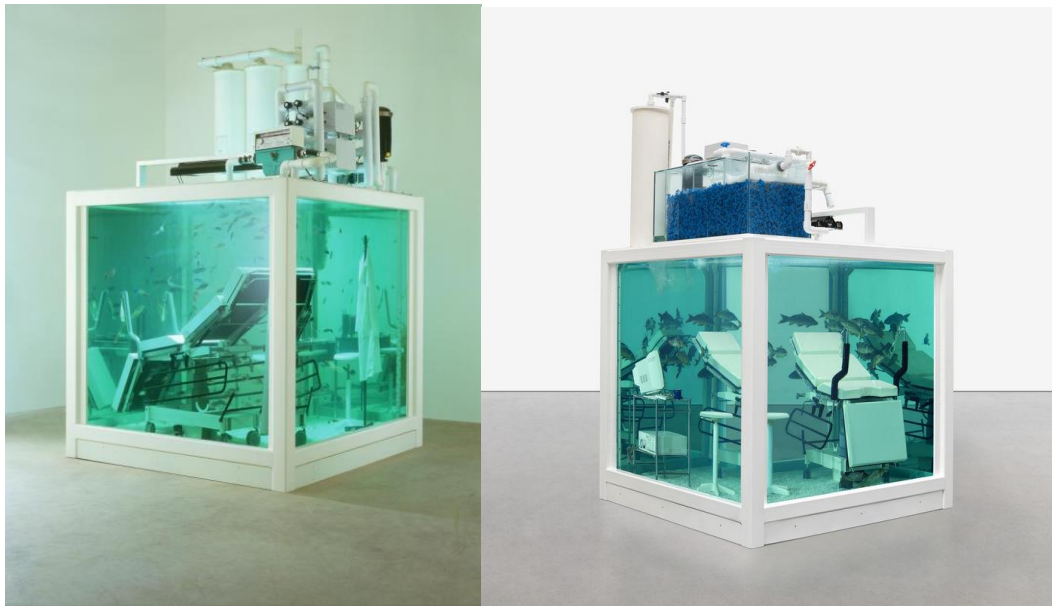


Fig 1: Lost Love and Love Lost, 2000.

Lost Love and Love Lost were created as a pair for the exhibition, 'Theories, Models, Methods, Approaches, Assumptions, Results and Findings', at Gagosian Gallery, New York, 2000. (Hirst, 2020). These works are surrealist in design, featuring Gynecology equipment in a water tank with fish swimming around in the environment. With Gynecology being the medical practice focusing on the female reproductive system, the fish in contrast to the Gynecology equipment could represent several things, semen, children or sex, just to name a few. Hirst describes this piece as having a "hugely sexual element" (Hirst & Burn, 2001) and being "pretty direct" (Hirst & Burn, 2001) which can be viewed within the title itself. Although gynecology can have positive implications the title *Love Lost* is suggestive of possible abortion or miscarriage in contrast to his suggestion that the piece is hugely sexual. Hirst's work is open to interpretation and perception often causing massive upset due to the controversial nature of the pieces he produces. Despite calling himself a contemporary artist it can be argued that he also fits within the confines of the fine art category due to the nature of the art he produces. He challenges preconceived notions of what art should look like and his pieces, often hard to understand, can be appreciated for their "imaginative content".

In contrast to Damien Hirst is Quentin Blake a renowned Illustrator, whose career has spanned over 50 years. Quentin Blake although most known for his illustrative work has expressed that "my practice as an artist has largely been illustration" (Blake, 2019). This arguably shows that Quentin Blake considers himself an artist who has mostly created illustrative work, not just an illustrator. Many sources have described him as 'Quentin Blake...one of our best-known contemporary illustrators.' (Vital, 2004) and 'Renowned illustrator, cartoonist and author Quentin

Blake' (Q, Blake, 2014). Being portrayed as an illustrator by other people, shows how society may interpret a person's work and their practice without knowing or acknowledging how they define themselves.



Fig 2: BFG illustration by Quentin Blake.

Being most renowned for his work with Roald Dahl, it's understandable why Quentin Blake is known primarily as an illustrator, as his most well-known work is illustrative. 'It is his collaboration with writer Road Dahl, however, that he will be forever remembered for' (Vital 2004). As shown in figure 2 this illustration from the BFG, could not be considered as anything but an illustration as it communicates text and information from the book. As illustrations are always commission based, then Quentin Blake being commissioned to create them, backs up further that these works are illustrations.

When comparing the two artists above, it is clearly shown that although they may define themselves as one type of artist, individuals and society may define them as something else entirely. These examples back up the idea that although definitions at times can help with understanding, they could also hinder artists, as their work may be expected to remain within a certain category to succeed. Quentin Blake primarily, is only really known as an Illustrator, yet he considers himself an artist who has mostly created Illustrations in his lifetime (Q, Blake, 2019), This shows how unknown his other work must be for society to only describe him as an Illustrator, not an artist.

As previously discussed it can be argued that when putting something into a category, it can help with the understanding, but on the flip side it can be argued that it can cause dubiety for an

individual who feels that the confines of such a classification doesn't fit them fully. A creative practice isn't set in stone; artists explore, experiment and develop as they grow older and grow more into their creative practices, therefore choosing one pathway to follow isn't a black and white decision. This grey area of deciding on a profession gives a creative person flexibility within their personal practice, but also makes them question, how does a person decide within which category their work rests. It can be argued that an artist must decide before they create their work what it is to be defined as, or it instead can be decided as it is evolving, a part of the creative process confirmed during production. The definitions demonstrate the lines between the two practices as blurred and in theory any artwork created can often fluctuate between the two. If in theory this is true then these definitions can both constrict and engage; whilst an artist can arguably move between each subject the definitions ensure that their work is confined to one realm or the other, regardless of what the artist themselves believes. The definitions in this sense can then be argued as impractical as arguably the art forms are one and the same. These definitions in this context are limiting, as an individual will be stuck within the parameters of how they identify themselves as an artist and what they decide their work to be based on. In theory, if an artist decides to detach themselves from the specifications of artistic definitions then that individual's work can span across all genres, reaching a wider range of people. In this sense, the definitions are non-sensical, constricting rather than helping with understanding.

List of illustrations:

Figure 1: Hirst, D. (2000) *Lost Love*. [Photo]. Available at: <http://www.damienhirst.com/lost-love>. (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Figure 2: Blake, Q. (2020) *The BFG And Sophie*. [Website] Quentin Blake. Available at: <https://www.quentinblake.com/gallery/bfg-and-sophie> (Accessed: June 2020).

Bibliography

Benaroya, A. (2013). *Illustration Next: Contemporary Creative Collaboration*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Blake, Q. (2019). Doing it by the book. *Country Life*. p. 74-76,78. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/docview/2330034602?accountid=130472&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3AAprimo (Accessed: 7 June 2020)

Blake, Q. (2014). Quentin Blake. *Blueprint*, (335), p. 25. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/docview/1547844659?accountid=130472&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3AAprimo (Accessed: 7 June 2020)

Quentin Blake: 50 years of illustration. (2004). *Vital*, 1(2), pp. 12. Available at: https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/docview/229541633?accountid=130472&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3AAprimo (Accessed: 7 June 2020)

Damien, H. 2020. *Lost Love - Damien Hirst*. [Website] Damienhirst.com. Available at: <http://www.damienhirst.com/lost-love> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Damien, H. 2020. Love Lost – Damien Hirst. [Website] Damienhirst.com. Available at <http://www.damienhirst.com/lost-love> (Accessed: 8 June 2020)

Dictionary.cambridge.org. (2020). *ADORNMENT* | Meaning in The Cambridge English Dictionary. [Website] Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/adornment> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Dictionary.cambridge.org. (2020). *ILLUSTRATION* | Meaning in The Cambridge English Dictionary. [Website] Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/illustration> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Encyclopedia Britannica. (2020). *The Arts*. [online] Available at:
<<https://www.britannica.com/topic/the-arts>> (Accessed: 7 June 2020).

Heller, S., & Chwast, S. (2008). *Illustration: A Visual History*. New York: Abrams.

Illustrationhistory.org. (2020). *History - Illustration History*. [Website] Available at:
<<https://www.illustrationhistory.org/history>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Male, A. (2007) *Illustration: A Theoretical and Contextual Perspective*. Lausanne; Worthing: AVA Academia.

SaatchiArt. (2020). *Art History 101: What Is Fine Art?* [Website] Available at:
<<https://canvas.saatchiart.com/art/art-history-101/what-is-fine-art>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

UWTSD, W. (2020). *Fine Art: Studio Site and Context (BA) | Swansea College of Art - UWTSD*. [Website] Uwtsd.ac.uk. Available at: <<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/ba-fine-art-site-context/>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Uwtsd.ac.uk. (2020). *Illustration | Swansea College of Art - UWTSD*. [Website] Available at:
<<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/art-design/illustration/>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Virtosuart.com. (2020) *What Is Art?* [Website] Available at:
<<https://www.virtosuart.com/blog/what-is-art>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Visual-arts-cork.com. (2020). *Fine Art: Definition, Meaning, History*. [Website] Available at:
<<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/definitions/fine-art.htm>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Visual-arts-cork.com. (2020). *Parietal Art, Prehistoric: Definition, Characteristics, Types, Interpretation*. [Website] Available at: <<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/prehistoric/parietal-art.htm#:~:text=In%20archeology%2C%20the%20term%20%22Parietal,on%20walls%2C%20floor%20or%20ceilings.>>> (Accessed: 8 June 2020).

Websters Dictionary 1828. (2020) *Webster's Dictionary 1828 - Illustration*. [Website] Available at:
<<http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/illustration>> (Accessed: 7 June 2020).

