

The Campaign For Illustration



Ironically, during one of the century's greatest economic booms, the illustration industry is in terrible shape. Commissions are fewer; deadlines are shorter; fees are lower. Creativity is valued less; competition is up from stock, royalty free or photographic images. Large media giants continue to be swallowed by even larger ones while illustrators are told its illegal to compare their pricing. Intellectual property, the coin of the new millennium, is becoming so valuable that more and more clients insist on work for hire or all rights contracts.

The ability to think visually is what distinguishes creative professionals from the client's secretary "desktop publisher." But as more clients pick their own stock or clip art, the unfortunate perception of the creative individual as a cut-and-paste "pair of hands" is reinforced. This devaluation of the creative process erodes the status of all creatives and diminishes the unique pleasure of seeing one's ideas executed. The prevailing fear is that little can be done to confront these threats. Many artists are finding more easy and fun ways to support their families. They have not recognized the power of unity, organization and cooperation.

Perhaps it is the solitary nature of the business or an obstinate resistance to structure, but the "industry" has not responded effectively. The fact remains we are all in this together, regardless of specialty, artistic style or client list. No one, even the most gifted, can avoid the consequences of refusing to act in solidarity.

To bring illustrators together to fight back as a unified force, the Guild has created the "Campaign for Illustration," an action plan consisting of three major thrusts designed to reverse these menacing trends: education, action and community.

As a beachhead, the Campaign for Illustration is the first wave of an industry-wide effort to recover lost ground. Through the combined efforts of its participants, the Campaign for Illustration will preserve the economic well being of illustrators and make them closer, stronger and more cohesive. The Campaign will also help more artists keep, control and defend their rights.

I. Education:

Not just artists, but educators, students and clients need to be better informed about issues affecting the industry. For example, the biggest problem with stock is the contracts offered by stock houses. They lock up artists for too long. They control how the art is used. They negotiate the (too low) fees, and keep too much of a commission.

Some believe that even stock sold by artists themselves compete with new commissions. Education is the key to addressing this issue. Here are a number of initiatives the Guild has executed and planned:

Educating Artists

Guild News

- Warned of the threats the stock houses pose; other articles explained how to do self-stock.
- Examined the artist-rep relationship
- Rated the major calls for entry
- Analyzed the children's book market
- Provided important copyright information to help artists keep and control what they own.
- Alerted artists to the dangers of all-rights and work-for-hire contracts.

Contract Monitor

- Analyzed stock house contracts in detail.
- Will offer a "model" stock house agreement.
- Alert artists to the dangers of all-rights and work-for-hire contracts.

Pricing & Ethical Guidelines

For nine editions since 1973, the Guild's Handbook: Pricing & Ethical Guidelines has been the first point of reference for artists and buyers alike. The updated, expanded edition will be released in spring, 2000.

Campaign Against Royalty-Free

Perhaps the most serious threat to artists comes from the rising use of royalty-free images. Artists who sell their work on a royalty-free basis lose control of their rights and effectively cut off all future revenue from those images. To that end, the Guild has:

- Launched an anti-royalty free campaign with ads to appear in Communication Arts, Step-by-Step Graphics and other trades.

Educating Clients

Many clients are ignorant of what illustrators do and the value they provide. The Guild is preparing a booklet on "Working with Illustrators." Designed as a "leave-behind," the booklet will help clients better understand the value of illustration and

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make it easier for art buyers to commission illustration.

Reaching Out to Students and Educators

Students who are aware of issues in the industry before they join the work force will be less likely to sign onerous contracts, undercut industry pricing or give up their rights. For this objective, the Guild will:

- Organize meetings with educators
- Distribute a series of white papers detailing industry problems and opportunities.
- Provide educators with a Teacher's Guide to the Handbook: Pricing & Ethical Guidelines.

II. Action

Facilitate Artist Control

- Will provide templates and instructions for creating a self-stock web site at little cost.

Promote (Good) Stock

- Allied with thespot illustration stock site. Guild members will enjoy a 20% discount on annual fees and a 6% discount on image scanning and storage fees.

Encourage Positive Perceptions

- Dropped all advertising from the Guild News and other national publications/ resources.

Code of Fair Practice

Updated and published a new Code of Fair Practice for the visual communications industry (with the Society of Illustrators (SI), the Advertising Photographers of NY (APNY), and the Society of Photographers and Artists Representatives (SPAR)).

Increase Market Share

In some markets, illustration is chosen only one out of five times. It is imperative to increase illustration's share of the market.

- Will develop a campaign that will emphasize to decision-makers the benefits of original illustration over photography.

Penetrating New Markets

Now a proud local of the UAW, the Guild has

- Launched a campaign to penetrate new markets for professional graphic artists. Unions, political parties and other organizations sympathetic to the labor movement should use union artists as routinely as they use union printers. With the generous contribution of Michael Doret, there now exists a "union artist bug" to promote Guild talent and the value that Guild talent will bring to their communications efforts.

Collective Bargaining

Is investigating the possibility of legislative reform to permit

freelance artists to collectively bargain minimum fees as the Screen Actors Guild does.

Limited © Registration Fees Hikes

Helped limit new © registration fees to \$30 (only a \$10 raise), instead of the \$25 raise to \$45 initially proposed.

Widen Eligibility for Attorney Fees and Damages

Copyright is effectively meaningless unless a work is properly registered prior to an infringement. Unfortunately, most artists do not register their works until it is too late.

- Working with the US Copyright Office, the Guild has crafted language that will enable individual artists to register after an infringement and still be eligible for attorney fees and damages.

Legal Defense

The Guild has committed up to \$30,000 to support two major legal actions.

- Up to \$20,000 to 18 medical illustrators to fight a publisher that has been routinely reselling works purchased on a one-time rights basis to foreign publications for the last 15 years.
- Up to \$10,000 to a photographer fighting an Internet search engine that vacuums images and displays them on the World Wide Web without permission.

Pressure the US Postal Service to End Work for Hire

Under pressure from the Guild, the US Postal Service met with the Guild and reviewed its policies on contracts and compensation.

III. Community

No matter what people say, size matters. A large, unified block of illustrators is much more effective than small, splintered groups.

- Organizing illustrator "house parties" in communities across the country for artists to meet and discuss the state of the profession. Comments and ideas from these meetings will be posted on the Web for review.

The Campaign for Illustration Needs Illustrators!

Only by working together will we be able to turn the tide of battle in our favor. Even if you're not ready to join the Guild, you can still play an important part in the Campaign. Join the educational effort and spread the word to other illustrators and artists.

To find out more about the Campaign and what you can do, please call, mail, or e-mail the Executive Director of the Graphic Artists Guild at 90 John Street, NY, NY 10038, phone 800.500.2672, ext. 106, e-mail execdir@gag.org.

Visit the separate area on the Guild website <www.gag.org/campaign> for announcements and news.