July 19, 2015

To: Maria Pallante, Register of Copyrights

I am an artist. While art is not the primary means in which I am to pursue making a living for myself and my family, I have great interest in protecting the creative efforts of those for whom art is their primary source of income.

When I was younger and didn't understand copyright, I would get frustrated by teachers who would tell me that I couldn't use just any images I found on the internet for whatever I wanted. I could have complained about it, and lobbied for a change, but instead I started finding ways to make my own images, or my own music to put in power points or other kinds of presentations. Just because something is valuable to the public, doesn't mean that it should be made readily available to them free of charge. Artists spend a lot of time developing the skill necessary to create the beautiful works of art that they do. Art is so much a part of our culture, and I think often it is overlooked how much we depend on it. Textbook Illustrations, billboards, food labels, Photographs and works of art shared on Pinterest and other social media sites are some examples. Artists spend a lot of time producing the art that pops up on our google searches in mass quantities. That should be worth something. We don't ask farmers to give us food for free simply because it is more valuable to us than it is to them. They can't eat all that food before it spoils, so we should have access to it. It's flawed logic. Everyone contributes something important to society, and if we devalue something we are so dependent on, it is going to cause problems.

It's already hard enough for artists to earn a living as it is. The phrase "starving artist" didn't come from the long hours spent painting, and forgetting to eat because they were so passionate about what they were doing. I have an uncle who is a freelance artist, and over the years I've noticed that sometimes his name wouldn't be included on the artwork he was commissioned to do. Simply because the client didn't put it there or didn't want it there. How do you give credit to an artist, and avoid orphan works if contracted work isn't required to give them credit?

Requiring artists to register all previous works with a private registry would come at great personal financial cost to the artist, who would be spending long, unpaid hours and paying someone else to protect their work, when the copyright should already rest with the creator. If you make it, it's your work. Simple as that. It shouldn't be any different, and we shouldn't pretend that it can be.

Library cataloging of digital images of artwork for educational purposes is one thing, but making available to the public the use of any digitized work of art is stealing. Fair use exceptions are enough. Nothing in life is free. Changing copyright laws for artists would benefit everyone but them.

Please consider who would really be served by the copyright changes being considered. Piracy probably won't go away, but changing the copyright law would most likely make it worse.

Sincerely,

Heidi Allen