Dear Copyright Office,

I hear copyright laws are being discussed once again to loosen them up and make images easier to be claimed as orphan works. I would like to log my official objection to this proposed legislation.

I have been a children's book illustrator (and author/teacher) for nearly fifteen years now and I have been fighting a constant battle against people stealing my work. To get jobs, I have to advertise myself with an online portfolio. I put watermarks on my work, but people remove them and repost my work online as their own constantly, or repost them without attribution at all. I also share coloring pages on my site to help promote my books, and the theft of them is ridiculously rampant around the globe. In fact, a few years ago a woman downloaded almost my entire collection, colored them and sold them through stock image sites around the world as her own. She made several thousand dollars off my work and I had to waste a tremendous amount of creative time going after her. In another example, one of my pieces was used by a major shoe company to give out at their mall stores for Halloween. A fan alerted me to the usage and I went after them. It turned out even they had removed my copyright information from my image and put their own advertising on it to hand out.

My point is that theft happens across all grounds – individuals, companies, etc. Obviously, I have little to no control over theft by people with moderate photoshop skills and no conscience. So my works could often fall into "orphan" status even though I diligently try to make sure my work can be traced back to me. What I need is tighter controls to protect my copyright, not looser.

I'm sure you're familiar with the term "starving artist." The stereotype exists for a reason. Despite working enormous hours as a freelancer, monetary gain in the arts is minimal. I am usually not in a position to pursue legal action against offenders (if I can even track them down). I see these new laws as only marginalizing me even further. Artists need to be acknowledged and compensated for the contribution we make to society. After all, it would be a sad world in which we could no longer afford to create or share.

Please keep my comments in mind as you go into debates on the topic.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth O Dulemba
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