July 18, 2015

RE: Notice of Inquiry on Visual Works/ Proposal of New U.S. Copyright.

I do not want to take up too much of your time, so I will keep this as brief as I am able. I am an aspiring artist that is currently working towards a Bachelor of Visual Communications Degree. I have been working toward a career as an artist my entire life. Some people dream about being an astronaut, a firefighter, or the President; I have always dreamt of becoming an illustrator. I have been working hard my entire life to this end. I want to support a family one day. This proposal of a new U.S. Copyright act will not only endanger my ability to reach my dream, but far more importantly, it will endanger my ability to provide for myself and for a family with my trade. That being said, I want to answer your five questions to the best of my ability.

1. What are the most significant challenges related to monetizing and/or licensing photographs, graphic artworks, and/or illustrations?

   The most difficult challenge for me and my fellow students is protecting our work from thieves. Even an armature can edit an image digitally. Watermarks, signatures, placards, none of them are concrete anymore. I can spend a year on a painting, upload it to my website, and then lose it forever, in an instant, to some stranger who cropped the image. We want to keep what is ours. We want to own what we create. Our biggest problem is not getting our art out into the market. That is a matter of skill and gumption. Our problem is protecting our art.

2. What are the most significant enforcement challenges for photographers, graphic artists, and/or illustrators?

   The most significant enforcement challenges for visual artists today are, just as I previously stated, protecting our intellectual/visual property from thieves. The Art we create belongs to us. It came from our own minds through our own hands. It only takes a few clicks of a mouse for someone to take our art and then claim it as their own. People have been making prints out of the works of others since it became possible to do so. Our images are our livelihood. When other people sell our images, they steal what profit we could have made.

3. What are the most significant registration challenges for photographers, graphic artists, and/or illustrators?

    We have little to no problem registering our art. Today's copyright laws are convenient and sensible. If it isn't broke don't fix it. Taking a sledgehammer to what is not broken in an attempt to make it better is counterproductive. The problem is not registration, it is protection. We want to maintain ownership of any and all works of art that we create without fear of it being stolen by anyone. We do not want our livelihoods stolen.

4. What are the most significant challenges or frustrations for those who wish to make legal use of photographs, graphic art works, and/or illustrations?

    Finding the actual artist. It is not hard to find an artist if you found his or her work on their website or at their gallery. But it is hard to find someone when you see their work on Google images, and it is linked to several phony websites. Again, the difficulties only lay in theft.

5. What other issues or challenges should the Office be aware of regarding photographs, graphic artwork, and/or illustrations under the Copyright Act?

    The only other challenge is the fight for the right to possession of our intellectual/visual property. Many artists are ignorant of what terrible thing might happen if this new Copyright comes into effect. Most of them are ignorant of the proposal completely. I only heard of it because my instructors are professional illustrators. Young artists are more than likely completely in the dark on this issue: this issue that will affect their future. I would suggest that the next time any act, or proposal, or bill is being considered, that you could please send at least an email with a link to every accredited art school in the country. You would receive an enormous amount of useful genuine feedback.

What we want is the right to own that which we conceived. What we want is the right to keep the things that we dreamt up and brought to life. What we want is to have the right to reap and keep what we have sown. We do not want to be profitless. We want to be free to choose whether or not anything is done with our art. We want the right to be able to create an amazing work of art, and if we so choose, burn it to the ground never to be seen again. We also want the right to share our beautiful art with the entire world, and maintain it for the future generations. But we want it to be our art. It came from us. It is a part of us. We do not want to be exploited. We do not want to be poor. We simply want what is ours.

Sincerely: Travis B Ricks, an aspiring artist.