July 19, 2015

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Danielle Keller, and I am a fulltime graphic designer for a well-known cigar company and an amateur illustrator/animator in my limited free time. As exhausting as it is to work a 9 to 5 job and make a commute that runs between an hour to an hour and a half each way every day, I have found time to make a weekly trip into the city to further my education and I devote at least an hour every night to working on personal projects that only go so far as my circle of friends online.

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

There is a significant dearth of information available to students today regarding their rights to their work and the processes involved in protecting themselves and their work. Luckily, the idea of teaching students how best to use the law to protect themselves is catching at some major art schools, but it's not happening quickly enough. When artists face theft onlines, they are often faced with an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness in the face of legal jargon and faceless corporations who have exploited their hard work.

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

It is a widely known fact that the legal system has not kept up with the progress of the internet. When faced with copyright violation, many lawmakers simply do not know how to proceed to best protect artists' rights. There are very few avenues for even seasoned creators when they require legal assistance, and even less so when international companies are involved.

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

As I said before, the process of legally protecting your work is not something students are commonly taught at school. Because of this, the only thing we have to rely on to protect our work is the bare bones automatic right to it the moment we make it.

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?

Many, many young artists would be happy to pay to legally obtain stock art for projects, but most of the time, prices are far too high for someone just starting out. While it is easy to make use of art from the Commons, uncomfortable situations can crop up when art is submitted to stock art websites without the creator's knowledge or consent.

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

Art students are not wealthy by anyone's definition. We create everything with our own two hands, and often, it is the only thing we have to make a living. Companies that make apparel and accessories and prints for a living prey on artists FAR too frequently. I have known at least a dozen popular, well-respected artists whose livelyhood was stolen from under their noses and reproduced at a level of quality that appalled them. Most of them had no recourse but to ask for the advice of their peers. The most heartbreaking thing I saw again and again is that, after exhausting themselves trying to protect their work, they all admitted that the theft wouldn't have stung so badly if they'd had control over the way their work was represented in the end product and if they had received even a fraction of the sales.

I'm begging you today to consider this before you make it easier for so many people's livelihoods to be threatened.

Thank you for your consideration,

Danielle Keller