Dear persons of interest,

I recently graduated with a BFA in illustration from BYU, and I am now supporting myself by freelance illustration. I can owe part of my current success to how easy it is to share my work with others online: that's how my current agent found me.

I have no idea how I would make money at all if it weren't for the copyright laws that protect me and my work. I post all kinds of sketches and paintings on social media. I don't necessarily make money off of every single piece I share, but that's not their sole purpose. Their purpose is to garner me more work and to help me build an audience for myself. Without an audience, I cannot sell prints or art books as supplementary income to my freelance work.

I cannot afford to register every sketch or painting I want to share with my friends just to prevent lazy cheapskates from using my work commercially without my say so.

If the Orphan Works Act was passed, I wouldn't feel safe posting anything ever again. It's hard enough making a reasonable living off of what I do, and I'm terrified at the idea of the government stepping in to make laws that make my career any more difficult than it already is.

When the economy tanks, the 1st budgetary cut is usually art/ design. If you pass this law, what's going to make tight-wad corporations feel the obligation to pay us for our work at all? If the government doesn't think our work deserves enough respect to be protected by copyright law, then they won't either. If they can get it for free, why on earth would they contract us for new work?

We love/need the Internet to share our work. And we share our work for specific reasons, NONE OF WHICH INCLUDE ALLOWING OTHERS TO PROFIT FROM OUR WORK WITHOUT OUR CONSENT.

It would be a crushing blow if the Internet could legally strip us of anything we have ever shared and remove our sole right to make a profit from it.

Also, when it comes to people making a "good faith effort" to find the original owner of something: it's difficult to trace the owners of some artwork because when people reblog or repost on social media, they don't credit the original source. This is not the fault of the original creator, it's just a side effect of how social media works.

Any artist who will be caught in the crossfire of this act probably won't be able to afford the time or money to contest in small claims court, which means there will be a further lack of repercussions for those who steal their work.

Please do not pass the Orphan Works act. It will devastate the visual arts community. I cannot see any gain that could possibly be worth ruining all of our futures.

Thanks for your concern

-Melissa Manwill