

Blind Spots

13th annual Illustration Research Symposium

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Washington University in St Louis

Presentation Abstracts

This page details the panelists' abstracts in full. Panelists and abstracts are organized alphabetically by the speaker's surname.

Emily Bielski

Horrible Pictures, Dark Undercurrents: Gothic Horror and Violence of the Illustrated News, and the Specter of the Second Industrial Revolution

Washington University in St. Louis

During the Second Industrial Revolution, the United States and Great Britain underwent massive technological advancement, with mass production and industrialization radically altering the working and domestic landscapes. However, with these changes came increasing tension over the destabilizing social consequences and moral implications of this technological progress. The threat of the urban industrial future on the physical and moral safety of civilians was recurrently explored in the news of the era, with newspaper production itself radically altered through the mechanization of printing technology and massive expansion of circulation, size, and appearance. Using materials from the [Dowd Illustration Research Archive](#), this research investigates how horror and violence were portrayed in the illustrated news during the Second Industrial Revolution, and how these images borrowed the vocabulary and tropes of gothic horror literature. The visuals and prose used to discuss tragedy largely serve as vessels for cultural anxiety over massive social changes and technological changes occurring during this time. These anxieties include the destruction of the family unit, infanticide, and rise in domestic violence, exploitative industrial working conditions of vulnerable populations, urban destitution, hysteria, and the rising rates of suicide and mental disorder met by public apathy. Additionally, the research examines how reportage on mass casualty events and industrial accidents invokes fears over technology and progress dangerously outpacing our ability to control it. The extremity to which gruesome illustrations used by these newspapers, like Frank Leslie's, openly invites discussion on the politics of imagery, using horror to invoke reform and emotional audience response. This discussion is relevant not only in considering the visual legacy of sensitive or violent subject matter in illustration, historical and contemporary but also in considering the politics of imagery today, as these social issues are still present and reported on in a much different, often more restrained way.

Stephanie Black & Luise Vormittag

Colouring In: Polyvocal Publishing

Kingston University

Our paper is concerned with blindspots within the critical analysis of our discipline and proposes a method for addressing these. We see this as a practical contribution that can help to facilitate the ‘theoretical turn’ written by Jaleen Grove (Journal of Illustration Vol 5 Issue 2), with an eye to making the discussion of illustration more diverse and equitable. Our focus will be on Colouring In, a collaborative research project between Luise Vormittag and Stephanie Black. *Colouring In* examines the impact of illustration on areas of critical importance to global debates. It takes a cross-disciplinary approach by looking specifically at the intersection of illustration and other disciplines in relation to key themes, such as the climate emergency. We examine the impact illustration has in these areas and the possibilities of critical illustration practice to make meaningful interventions. With Colouring In we have devised an innovative methodology for making the research process transparent and open to collaboration as we work towards a book publication. This paper will outline the different methods we have employed to do so, including discursive and polyvocal approaches to generating new knowledge. This also includes different modes, such as image-led workshops that ensure that our findings are rooted in practice. We publish our interim findings to allow us to circulate topical discussions of our themes while they are relevant, integrate our findings within illustration discourse (e.g. through student reading lists and responses within emerging research), and respond to critique arising in developing the resulting book. It is a mechanism for soliciting suggestions from diverse perspectives within and outside illustration. We are also acutely aware of our own positions and have sought to build systems that enable a broader range of voices to be heard and a more global range of practices to be seen.

Sarahjane Blum

Hiding in Plain Sight: The Relationship Between Models and Artists in Classic Pin-Up Illustration

Grapefruit Moon Gallery

That Marilyn Monroe worked as a pin-up and glamour model before turning to acting has become part of history due to the nude photographs shot of her by Tom Kelley. That for two years she regularly acted as an artist’s model for pin-up illustrator Earl Moran remains an obscure bit of trivia, as do most of the stories of the models without whom the pin-up genre would never have existed. By exploring the lives of the models who sat for artists such as Rolf Armstrong, Alberto Vargas, George Petty, and Gil Elvgren, we can situate pin-up art within its period as a genre that was driven and changed by women in ways that are often overlooked. Drawing on primary sources gathered over 15 years of working directly with vintage pin-up art, *Hiding In Plain Sight* questions the primacy of the presumed male viewer and the presumed male artist in creating the beauty standards and styles reflected in the artwork

themselves. How were the models collaborators in the artworks themselves, and the careers of the artists? Where can the lives and preferences of the models be seen in the works? How did the interplay of literal and figurative image-making in the creation of a celebrity culture among artists and models shape beauty standards?

Specifically, in this effort, I examine three sets of relationships: 1) the prevalence of pin-up illustrators as judges in beauty contests, 2) the relationships between artists and their named muses' focusing most substantially on the relationships between Rolf Armstrong and Jewel Flowers, and Henry Clive and Marion Davies, and 3) the relationships between Hollywood depictions of illustrators and models in films such as *The Petty Girl* with the actual working creators. Examining pin-up art through this lens brings to the fore the women who are to this day still considered objects rather than subjects in this genre and exposes unexpected turning points that shaped a style of art that is often dismissed as solely following broader cultural trends.

Steve Compton

Rethinking our Collections

The Society of Illustrators, New York

The Society of Illustrators, with its rich legacy dating back to 1901, has long served as a guardian of the history and evolution of the illustration industry. Its esteemed permanent collection, curated through generous donations from talented illustrators over the years, has provided a fascinating window into the art form's transformation. However, the presentation that will be delivered highlights an urgent need for the Society to adapt and evolve along with the industry itself.

In an industry that is continually reshaped by technological advancements and changing trends, the need to archive digital art has never been more evident. As the presentation emphasizes, digital tools and platforms have revolutionized the way artists create, share, and engage with their work. Illustrators now harness the power of digital artistry, and the boundaries between traditional and digital mediums are blurred. The inclusion of digital art in the Society's permanent collection is a bold step forward, one that challenges traditional museum conventions but is necessary for capturing the industry's current essence.

It is crucially important to continue the documentation of the contemporary history of illustration. The Society of Illustrators must not be left behind, clinging to the past, but should embrace the present and future of the field. By expanding the collection to encompass digital art, the Society ensures that it remains a vibrant reflection of the ever-changing landscape of illustration, making its history more relevant and inclusive for generations to come. Adaption to the digital age only assists in continuing its mission of preserving the art of illustration in all its modern forms.

Heather Campbell Coyle

Building New Narratives: Reimagining American Illustration at the Delaware Art Museum
Delaware Art Museum

Founded with the purchase of work by Howard Pyle, the Delaware Art Museum (DelArt) has a mandate to collect, research, and display American illustration. DelArt is also very much a community museum, committed to being inclusive, equitable, anti-racist, and welcoming. Over the years, we have wrestled to align these aspects of DelArt's identity. The Museum's 2021 reinstallation of our main-floor, permanent collection galleries and our planning for a 2024 exhibition, *Jazz Age Illustration*, provided learnings and strategies to reveal and engage blind spots in our study and display of illustration. Original illustration art comprises about one-third of DelArt's collection, significant gallery space is dedicated to its display, and the Museum regularly hosts exhibitions in the field. The collection is focused on work produced between 1880 and 1950 and is strongest in the work of Howard Pyle and his students. It is dominated by the work of white men and the subjects commissioned for popular publications aimed at white, middle- and upper-class readers. Planning our reinstallation taught us the challenges of collecting as a path forward and the need to contextualize historical illustrations for contemporary audiences. Conversations with community members, illustrators, and scholars pointed the way to new approaches to the galleries. In planning since 2019, *Jazz Age Illustration* will be the first major exhibition to present a broad survey of American illustration between 1919 and 1942. The show was conceived to demonstrate a more equitable representation of the field while attracting a broad audience. The growth of the African-American press is a major story in the exhibition, and the period provides opportunities for addressing gender and sexuality. Through working on these specific projects—with timelines and budgets—DelArt has been able to address some holes in our knowledge, even as we continuously discover new blind spots.

Erika Doss

Honest Illustration: Maynard Dixon and the American West
University of Texas at Dallas

Maynard Dixon (1875-1946) is best known today for his modernist paintings of the American West. His compositions typically feature low masses of stark, geometric landforms, horizontally patterned cumulus clouds, boldly colored vegetation, and occasionally, solitary, expressionless figures. Yet Dixon was also, and always, an illustrator: from publishing his first drawing in *Overland Monthly* in 1893 to designing a mural for the Los Angeles offices of the Santa Fe Railway shortly before he died. Over a span of fifty years, Dixon was a staff artist for several San Francisco newspapers and drew hundreds of illustrations for magazines and books. Living in New York from 1907-1912, Dixon illustrated Western subjects for *Century*, *Collier's*, *McClure's*, *Munsey's*, and *Scribner's*. He also joined the *Salmagundi Club* and showed work at the *National Academy of Design*. For Dixon and other early twentieth-century

American Western painters, the border between fine art and advertising was relatively fluid. Dixon believed that if he avoided the “melodramatic Wild West idea” depicted by illustrators such as Frederic Remington and Charlie Russell and focused instead on still, quiet scenes of an isolated American West, and its Native American inhabitants, he could generate a more “realistic” and hence “honest” depiction of the region. Yet Dixon painted such scenes for corporate interests, including oil companies, tourism industries, and real estate developers, who used his images to camouflage their own manipulation and exploitation of American Western lands and resources. Recognizing these blind spots, this paper aims to evacuate Dixon’s illustration career, focusing in particular on the cover art he produced during the interwar era for magazines including *Touring Topics*, *Standard Oil Bulletin*, and *Sunset*. Second, it aims to contend with pervasive interwar understandings of “realism” among American Western artists, arguing that “authenticating” images of the “real West” served to further perpetuate its damage and destruction.

D.B. Dowd

Pieces of Eight: A Mnemonics of Illustration

Washington University in St. Louis

The historian David Bland described illustration as a “subordinate” art form due to the primacy of text. Anxiety about the centrality of reading to illustration has produced an avoidance response and spawned implicit, over-broad definitions of the field largely formal in character, as if illustration results when words and pictures are placed in proximity on a given surface during most any historical moment. Similar generosity has been extended to narrative pictures which substitute for a text, as with frescoes and mosaics installed in church interiors for illiterate parishioners. In “Defining Illustration,” an introductory section of the book *Reading Pictures: A Cultural History* (WORKING TITLE, under contract to Princeton University Press and Quarto Books) I propose definitional parameters for illustration as a cultural practice and assign the emergence of the field to the era of mass literacy—call it an Age of Reading—in the middle third of the nineteenth century. Normatively speaking, how can we define illustrations as artifacts within that context? Most usefully, how could we know when we are looking at illustration? More broadly, when does the term apply in the sense of a cultural practice? Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* was issued in 1883 and republished by Scribners and Sons in 1911. In the novel’s tenth chapter, young Jim Hawkins visits Long John Silver below in the galley of the *Hispaniola*, before the peg-legged Silver reveals himself as a mutineer. The pirate’s colorful parrot squawks “Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!” throughout the scene. N.C. Wyeth memorably illustrated the moment. I propose a series of tests based on the parrot’s utterance which doubles as a mnemonic of illustration: eight words that begin with P: pictorial, published, printed, plural, periodical, personal, position, and portable. The presentation will explicate the set, argue for its historical utility, and pose questions about the continued use of illustration to describe a field.

Madalyn Drewno

The Kaavad and Kamishibai: Narrative Illustration Beyond the Page

Maryland Institute College of Art

Illustration's ambiguous nature makes it ideal for pioneering new forms of storytelling. Yet rather than looking to homogenous technology trends, visual storytelling practices rooted in long-established cultural traditions and historical events offer unique ways of understanding illustration as a powerful, intermedial community-building tool. Two formats that demonstrate this are the Kaavad, which is a wooden portable shrine that originated in Rajasthan, India 400 years ago, and Kamishibai, which originated in 1930s Tokyo, Japan, and consists of illustrated cards that are presented using a miniature theater. Both the Kaavad and Kamishibai blend illustration, physical space, theatricality, and oral narration in ways that resist easy categorization and challenge conventional methods of illustration. For example, the traditional Kaavad's illustrated folding panels makes it at once a three-dimensional art object and a conceptual space, where the storyteller brings the images to life and patrons imagine themselves becoming one with the sacred. Kamishibai are neither picture books nor pure theatrical performances. The cards are two-dimensional, but they gain a physicality through the stage. The narrator uses facial expressions and different voices to engage the audience, but the images are needed to tell the full story. This interdependence between illustration, oral recitation, and audience creates an immediate shared experience that strengthens the community's collective identity. The Kaavad and Kamishibai are also important pieces of Asian visual culture that reflect religious beliefs, social structures, and vital moments in history. For instance, the Kaavad preserves family genealogies, while the 1940s Kamishibai showcases WWII propaganda. Despite these significances, the Kaavad and Kamishibai have been largely excluded from the art history canon due to Western bias and the trivialization of craft/folk art. Critical examination of the Kaavad and Kamishibai generates a more expansive understanding of illustration and presents inventive ways of combining storytelling, illustration, and theatricality to create transcendent experiences.

Beth Duggleby

Lullabies in Lockdown: Illustration Exhibition to Address Isolation and Document the Experiences of New Parenthood

Leeds Arts University

The COVID-19 pandemic took a wrecking ball to many elements of life as we knew it. For those encountering parenthood for the first time, they were navigating the ushering in of two "new normal." What can illustration stories within the gallery offer to uncover, support, and unite those with shared but unspoken lived experience? "Lullabies in Lockdown" began as a group illustration exhibition that took place in Leeds, U.K., during October 2022. It brought together the work of a group of local, national, and international illustrators who became new parents or were exploring choices surrounding parenthood during the pandemic. This paper will uncover how these illustrators utilised differing approaches and expertise to

document and carefully open up dialogue surrounding new parenthood and the stories of the babies who stayed at home. Through analysis of the work submitted for exhibition, artist statements, and audience feedback, the paper will consider the role of collectivised authorial illustration in shaping our understanding of lived experiences. More specifically, it will discuss how sharing this form of illustrative work within public spaces offers the opportunity to recollect and bring together people who may benefit from reframing their own hardships as being experienced “on their own, but not alone.”

The paper will look to discuss ways in which the illustrator as witness, with the gallery as medium, is in a unique position to develop tonally sensitive aesthetics and appropriate narratives which can invite audiences to congregate and encounter challenging experiences in poignant, accessible, and supportive ways. In its conclusion, the paper will share future ideas for the “Lullabies” exhibition which include taking it on tour and developing a pop-up version for exhibition within a variety of community spaces where the themes of the project can connect its audiences with existing support networks. This final discussion proposes methods for how we might best harness illustration’s powers beyond the page and screen in manners appropriate to the challenges of the 21st century. With ongoing issues of human polarisation alongside the impending threat of AI to not only the illustration industry but our perceptions of truth and reality, the paper ultimately proposes that authorial and other humanising elements within or utilised alongside illustration, will play an ever more important role in its use as a means of purposeful communication.

Selen Sarikaya Eren

Illustrating Dissent: An Exploration of Illustration in the Case of Gezi Protests

Middle East Technical University

Illustration has long been part of protest art, most notably in the form of call-to-action posters. With the increased role of social media and new digital technologies, protests in the last decade have seen protestors directly producing and sharing protest-related visuals ranging from memes to illustrations online. Art plays important roles in social movements due to its capability of affecting emotions; it can be used to communicate, increase sympathy, and resonate with the larger public; internally it has a role in creating and preserving the collective identity and the memory of a movement. These functions of art have recently become an interest to social movement scholars, however, their approach often lacks a visual art perspective; terms like illustration, graphics, or artwork are used interchangeably and often illustrations are supporting data instead of being the central question. In this study, by taking Gezi Protests as a case study, I will analyze and explore illustrations that were created and shared on Twitter during the protests. Escalated as the largest protest wave in the history of modern Turkey, Gezi protests were unexpected not only in the number of people that reached millions but also in the manner of social media was a major part of the protests; as well as the inclusion of performances and artistic repertoire employed by the protestors. An overlooked aspect however has been the illustrations created

by protestors and illustrators (who also likely took to the streets) and shared online during the protests; most notable being the illustration of the iconic lady in red. By incorporating content analysis, iconography, and triangulation methodology this study will contribute to the study of illustration as a topic worthy of scholarly attention while exploring the crucial roles illustrations can play in social movements.

Deanne Fernandes

The Missing Degree in the India Education System

Rhode Island School of Design

I worked with students from diverse backgrounds during my four years as an art educator. Working in a small private academy, made me assess the quality of Visual Art education in India. My thesis in Sociology researched how a Fine Arts degree is the least popular degree in India. As I researched universities for my Masters, I realized that in the few art and design schools in the country, Illustration as a degree was non-existent. If I wanted to become an illustrator, I had no option but to train in foreign universities. I soon realized that was the first part of the struggle. Many of my students with Illustration degrees from foreign universities now faced unemployment as they returned to India post their degree. The illustrators who did get jobs were working in fields not related to their degree. They worked in graphic design jobs that didn't utilize the skillset learned in their degree. Many of the job opportunities available to illustrators in India are freelance jobs rather than full time salaried positions. Majority of the freelance jobs are not based on portfolio or strength in skillset. There is a whole new level of obstacles one has to face to land a freelance job in India. These obstacles include caste, class, gender and geographical location in the country. It is rather rare to land a job as an illustrator purely based on skill. Artists have no respect in India and are considered hobby artists. Freelance jobs are often not paid positions and clients pursue illustrators to take on the job for the sake of exposure and experience. Defining the role of an illustrator is also a massive task. Commissions include religious murals and niche culture specific work with no space for the illustrator to define their personalized style. My paper will look at the role of an illustrator and illustration as a degree in a third world country. My personal experience and journey as an artist will be used as a narrative in the paper.

Charlotte Fleming

Can't See the Forest for the Trees: Packaging Nature Through Weyerhaeuser Advertisements

Washington University in St. Louis

This paper will provide an in-depth visual analysis of the Weyerhaeuser Company advertisements held in the Dowd Illustration Research Archive. Illustrated by Stanley Galli for over a decade, these advertisements were part of a national campaign launched in 1952 by the lumber company Weyerhaeuser. In 1941, Weyerhaeuser created (and coined the term for) the first "tree farm," simultaneously transforming the tree's identity from wilderness to

“crop” and positioning Weyerhaeuser as a company built on sustainable forestry. The period in which these advertisements were created coincided with the post-WWII housing boom, advancements in forest research, and a national interest in reforestation (or at least concern about deforestation). Through Galli’s illustrations and accompanying text, Weyerhaeuser’s advertisements crafted a new narrative around the forest and forestry. There is the idiom: “can’t see the forest for the trees,” that is to say, being too focused on the details to understand the broader context. These advertisements are all about the details. Through an overload of visual and textual information, they create a sense of transparency. How are these illustrations constructed to shape ideas around nature and our relationship to the environment? What does this seeming visual transparency ultimately elucidate or obscure?

Lauren Freese

Gender, Agricultural Science, and USDA Pomological Illustrations
University of South Dakota

The Division of Pomology, founded in 1886 as an arm of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), utilized botanical illustration to shape the American orchard fruit industry. From 1886 until 1942, nearly two-dozen artists produced 7,584 watercolors of fruits and nuts. The thousands of watercolors by artists within the Division of Pomology are a direct expression of the priorities of the USDA and the federal government. Many of the artists who played a vital role in this political and scientific endeavor were women whose work has been woefully un- or under-studied, neglecting not only their artistic contributions, but the notable ways in which pomological illustration blends scientific and artistic qualities. Botanical imagery has long been feminized and minimized as a scientific discipline and simultaneously relegated to a less creative, secondary class of art within art history. By analyzing the government interventions in the preferred appearance (both in images and at the market), taste, and cultivation of orchard fruits, I seek to examine not only these watercolors, but the artists employed by the USDA. Government support of the arts has been extensively examined in the context of the New Deal, but there has been very little scholarly exploration of the significance of American federal patronage of pomological illustration. My broader interdisciplinary analysis of the USDA Pomological Watercolor program draws upon both art history and food studies to situate these illustrations within the histories of botanical illustration, agricultural technology, USDA policy and regulation, and the American market for orchard fruits. This paper will specifically address gender as it relates to agricultural science and the art of pomological illustration, shedding light on the role of women artists in shaping the history of the American fruit industry.

Carey Gibbons

Uncovering Jessie Marion King and Revealing “The Great Within”
University of North Texas

Jessie Marion King is an underappreciated Scottish woman artist and designer who was associated with the Glasgow School and influenced by Art Nouveau, the Arts and Crafts Movement, Japonisme, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Although King designed ceramics, wallpaper, greeting cards, jewelry, and fabric, the focus of her career was the creation of book and periodical illustrations. Her illustrations have received little scholarly attention, and when discussed, they are typically described as otherworldly, fantastical, and ethereal. A deeper consideration of King reveals more, however; her interest in the latent power of the subconscious emerges, suggesting a sense of purpose and direction not initially apparent in her work. King was familiar with the writings of Christian D. Larson, founder of the New Thought Movement, including quotations about the subconscious mind from Larson's *The Great Within* (1907) in her personal notebook. This paper will examine select examples of King's work within the context of Larson's writings, exploring the influence of Larson's view of the immense latent potential of the human subconscious, as well as his belief in one's ability to manipulate and control that subconscious in order to express the self and bring about positive change. Not simply evoking magical dream worlds, King's illustrations reveal a deep philosophical and spiritual engagement with the hidden power within the individual. The interplay between a vast, mystical subconscious and the need to direct or harness the power of the subconscious in Larson's writings resonates with the tension between fluid, ethereal, dream-like forms and the idea of manipulation and order in King's work. Within King's illustrations one can also uncover an underlying pattern of cause and effect, a sense of purpose, and an assertion of the power of the individual to control one's own destiny through constructive, conscious efforts.

Danielle Gro'ak

Coney Island Postcards: Mementos of the Working Class at the Turn of the Century
Washington University in St. Louis

As Jewish, Irish, and German immigrants flocked to urban American cities at the turn of the century, they were both othered and pressured to assimilate. Advertisements, sweatshop regulations, and reform movements urged immigrants to look differently, to speak differently, and to behave differently. Nestled on the southwestern edge of Long Island, Coney Island's amusements provided immigrant workers an escape from controlling regulations. Spaces of leisure provide greater insight into the working class experience from the 1890s to World War I. In these spaces, working class people gathered, exchanged ideas, and pushed boundaries. This paper addresses an understudied area of American illustration: the significance of postcards in reclaiming spaces and expressing identities. Coney Island postcards were purchased by working class guests and sent all over the world. As Coney Island grew in popularity, postal service requirements on the mailing of picture postcards subsided (John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, p. 40). The purchasing power of consumers influenced the type of visual messages that circulated in intimate spaces. Through visual analysis of a collection of eight Coney Island postcards from the turn of the century, this paper explores the visual messages circulating in working class spaces of leisure. No longer

were working class immigrants producers of quality goods they did not have access to. They were active consumers of their own entertainment.

John Hendrix

“Three True Outcomes: Tool, Trend, Tragedy” – A Perspective on Art-making and Artificial-Intelligence

Washington University in St. Louis

Is artificial-intelligence off-limits to those who practice illustration? The rhetoric around the rise of images made by algorithms is not particularly nuanced. The distance between those who see “AI” as a new tool that makes artistic creation easier and more accessible, and the others who believe it to be a cancer that threatens the very soul of humanity is razor thin. For practitioners, students, and faculty, what are the right kinds of questions we should ask about this new kind of art making? From ethics to ethos, this presentation will consider if image creation using artificial-intelligence is truly a brand-new category of creation or is just the latest chapter in the familiar cycle of skepticism and fear around emergent technology.

Matt Johnston

“Scarce a Dozen Steps Will Take Us Where We Wish to Go”: Sentimental versus Sensational Narrative and Illustration in Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*

Lewis & Clark College

Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) is celebrated as an early example of reform-minded social documentation of urban poverty in New York, in particular making effective use of photographs of the poor taken while he worked as a police reporter for the *New York Tribune* and *New York Evening Sun*. While the photographs themselves are striking images, their reproduction within the book occurred at an early stage in the commercial development of the halftone process, resulting in notably lower quality print images or the decision to use line drawings instead, which were made by the artist Kenyon Cox. At the same time, Riis’s text is notably split between sentimental treatment of the poor as a familiar urban type, an objective laying out of economic and sociological data, and a more sensationalized narrative form that arguably titillates as much as shocks the book’s middleclass audience. This paper considers the novelty of Riis’s book conjointly, in terms of transitions between old and new traditions in both illustration and narrative, and in particular analyzes how established or evolving expectations about illustration reinforce or subvert the specific narrative form of the text with which specific illustrations are paired. Moreover, again, whether line drawing or halftone, the illustrations are visibly different from the photographs, which are usually the focus in scholarly discussions of Riis’s work as a whole. While Cox’s academic training and experience as an illustrator shapes the line quality and consequently the points of emphasis in the line drawings, the early state of halftone reproduction quality substantially alters the tonal range of the photographs. Understanding the groundbreaking status of Riis’s work

requires an appreciation of innovations in muckraking and photojournalism, but also critically innovations in illustration practice.

Christy Knopf and Daniel Yezbick

Aluminum and Lace: Milton Caniff's "Bombshells" at the Intersections of World War II Illustration and Insignia

SUNY-Cortland / STLCC-Wildwood

As the U.S. entered World War II, illustrators recruited pulp adventurers and comic book superheroes for the war effort, creating didactically democratic visual cultures for total mobilization. But the full history of wartime illustration runs deeper, and many powerful narratives have yet to be defined or evaluated. Fan correspondence and culture surrounding Milton Caniff's art remains among the under-articulated. Caniff's work epitomized interrelated illustrative traditions of WWII: cartoons, pin-ups, and insignia. Between November 1942 and March 1946, Caniff's *Male Call*, with its seductively sassy heroine, provoked heady, heartbreaking, hetero hijinks in military papers. The *Terry and the Pirates* spin-off strip introduced Miss Lace—a guileless beauty “designed to appeal specially to the forlorn fellow in the foxhole.” Military personnel wrote Caniff requesting both pin-ups of the popular Miss Lace (and her voluptuous predecessors in *Terry*) and customized designs for their insignia, nose art, and other icons to arouse their fighting spirit. Across the war, such images varied from stylized names to cartoon characters, but a great many were inspired by pin-up art (unsurprising, given the number of young, unmarried, men deployed), expressing both militarized masculinity and war-time social relations. Requests to use Caniff's characters for their barracks, planes, and uniforms poured in, demonstrating how Caniff and his heroines provided crucial voice and visibility to emerging military identity, and its connections with sexuality, dis/ability, grief, and recovery. Our presentation engages with correspondence held in The OSU's Billy Ireland Cartoon Library Milton Caniff collection, considering readers' responses to gendered and sexualized identities in combat, domestic, and political affairs—with particular interest in how Caniff's illustrations were used to demarcate troops and war machines, and what this reveals about female erotic power in relation to midcentury social relations—thus revealing a valuable “blind spot” in at the intersection of illustration and military history.

Hilde Kramer

Tactile Picture Books: Illustrations to Be Read Through Our Fingertips

University of Bergen

Many people take for granted that reading and enjoying images requires vision. However, books with pictorial representations for visually impaired and blind people have existed since the early 19th century (Bentzen p. 389 – 390). The category, ‘tactile books’ has developed significantly during the last decades as a result of the development of affordable

technological inventions. The specific qualities of this genre opens the doors to a multisensory reflection-in-reading, through innovative ways of representing the world through designed storytelling, independently of capacity of vision. The shapes, materials and printing techniques are registered through the fingertips and further processed by our minds. New literature arenas such as book art fairs may provide possibilities for both artists and readers regardless of sight. Based on a selection of Norwegian tactile books, this text aims to encourage more illustrators to explore the potential in creating tactile illustration and design solutions for different age and reader groups, providing multimodal art experiences for all. Studying pictorial representations in tactile books it becomes clear that the readership of these books differs from traditional sequential reading: While conventional sequential literature depends on multimodal actors and vectors to drive the narration forwards (Kress and Leeuwen p. 59), the storytelling in tactile books must be graspable and tangible through a design which favours the readership and cognition through haptic learning and bodily experience. If we leave behind an attitude of deficiency or dysfunction, disability can now be seen as the very source of innovation (Valente 2016, Houriez et al, 2013:25, Pullin 2009).

Priyanka Kumar

At Work, At Rest: Women, Labor and Domesticity in Indian Illustration

Maryland Institute College of Art

This paper was written for my Critical Studies concentration at the Maryland Institute College of Art, part of my MFA in Illustration Practice. The roots of this paper started as a pitch for a curatorial project in early 2019—a digital art exhibition called “At Work, At Rest” that chronicled and explored the various approaches to portraying Indian women’s lives inside and outside the domestic sphere, through illustration. Within this lay the central question of how, if at all, notions of Indian femininity and womanhood were constructed and disseminated through illustration and ephemera in post-colonial India. This essay collects the research from “At Work, At Rest” and updates it to current developments in the Indian women’s movement, including the Indian chapter of the #MeToo movement and the role of Indian women in the illustrated documentation of the Anti-CAA protests in the winter of 2019-2020. It also expands upon how ideas of domesticity and labor are coded into contemporary illustrations of Indian women, including the perspectives of Indian diaspora artists. Illustration in the Indian subcontinent is heavily influenced by regional, linguistic, religious, folk and oral storytelling traditions, and incredibly diverse in terms of style, media and content. It would be unfair to treat it as monolithic, but it is usually grouped by the categories mentioned above. Present-day illustration in the country tends to favor trends influenced by popular internet culture and leans more towards a “Western” digital-friendly aesthetic in style and approach, aided and informed by annuals and best-of lists published in the global West. The primary setting for this discussion is the established presence of two parallel streams of illustration in India, driven largely by a question of presumed audience. If we are to consider who views and consumes popular illustration in the country, the first viewer is urban, upper-caste, upper class, English-speaking, and familiar with global trends via

channels of access and privilege that extend across (but are not limited to) education, popular and social media, and spending power. The other audience is non-urban, vernacular-speaking, lower-caste, lower class, viewing and consuming illustration in (it is widely assumed) an educational grassroots advocacy sense. Things are drawn and marketed differently based on who the audience is supposed to be, and this has gradually, over the years since print media became popular in India, created two distinct streams of Indian popular visual culture. They may or may not intersect at certain junctures—this paper will look at specific instances of what happens when they do. With this in mind, class and caste become prominent converging points to be studied along with gender in the illustrations featured in this project.

Christopher Lee

Yellow Peril to Blade Runner: The Persistence of Anti-Asian Tropes in Illustration and Science Fiction

Pratt Institute

Western representations of the East-Asian other have cast this subject as either the “yellow peril” or the “model minority.” One is seemingly problematic, and the other is ostensibly progressive. Both subjectivizations, however, function as the positive form around which whiteness and the idealized West are figured as what Ruth Frankenberg calls the unmarked center. This paper explores figurations of the “Asian” and narrates connections between print-based illustrated representations of Chinese immigrants in the United States in the late 1800s, contemporary anti-Asian rhetoric, and representations of Asianness in science fiction. These show that the “Asian” is not defined geographically or even biologically but rather by proximity or distance to the whiteness that it simultaneously helps to construct. In other words, by reading the various racist tropes produced through illustration critically, this paper presupposes that these images serve to consolidate ideas about “whiteness” and its association with rationality (social and technological progress) and civilization. Contemporary tropes of “Asianness” in sci-fi today, apparent in popular sci-fi films ranging from *Blade Runner* and *Star Wars* to *After Yang*, can be traced to media representations over one hundred years old. Illustrated publications like *Puck* and *The Wasp*, as well as other commercial-print ephemera like “White Labor” labels and ads for washing machines, give material, visual, and historical sense to problematic tropes of “Asianness.” The perpetuation of ideas and attitudes that have generalized a sense of peril for an entire racialized community, and led to senseless homicidal violence, implicates the creative and imaginative power of illustration in something more charged than matters of style and expression. By tracing the resonances of various anti-Asian tropes from the 1800s to now, this case critically examines the pitfalls and blindspots of representation in illustration practice in the absence of substantive historical contextualization.

Theresa Leininger-Miller

If You Don't Get It, Tain't No Fault of Mine: Illustrated Sheet Music by Albert Alexander Smith in the U.S. and Paris, 1919-1925

University of Cincinnati

“Albert Alexander Smith (1896-1940), the son of immigrants from Bermuda, was a prolific African-American artist who produced over 220 works, including many illustrations for the journals, *Crisis* and *Opportunity*. He is also the only known Black sheet music illustrator of the early 20th century. My paper will be the first to examine Smith’s graphically bold images for mixed audiences. He created designs for at least four firms, one in Paris and three in New York.

My title derives from a song title composed by Black female songwriters, Marion Dickerson and Alex Belledna, published by Perry Bradford, an African-American firm. Like most of Smith’s music cover images—including those for the Black-owned publisher, Pace & Handy, the white enterprise, Skidmore, and a Parisian business—this composition features a romantic, upper-class white couple. White singers like Sophie Tucker and Marion Harris popularized such numbers. Exceptionally, Smith drew Black caricatures for another Skidmore piece to promote a tune sung by African-American comedian, Bert Williams (1874-1922), about a minister imploring his congregation to, “Save a Little Dram for Me.” While Smith relied on fixed gender and racial tropes, he also slyly mocked them with comic elements. I will analyze these details in conjunction with lyrics, contextualizing his music covers in light of Smith’s other work, his white contemporaries, and 19th-century African-American sheet music illustrators. Smith moved to Europe in 1920 after graduating from the National Academy of Design and serving with the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I. After a year’s study in Liège, Belgium, he settled in Paris, worked as a jazz musician and singer, and exhibited internationally, winning Harmon Foundation awards. Smith’s art is in collections of the National Portrait Gallery, Whitney Museum of American Art, Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and elsewhere.

Christopher Lukasik

We Are the Blind Spot: Rethinking the Place of Illustration History

Purdue University

This paper responds to recent calls to “reframe illustration.” C19 gift book illustration will serve as the occasion to reposition illustration studies at the center of media history rather than the margins of literary or art history. While the role of gift book illustration in the development of a mass visual culture in the C19 Atlantic world is well known, its relationship to the commercialization of fine art and literature is often characterized in terms of the democratization of art made possible by technological advances in the mass production of printed images. This paper seeks to complicate that understanding by suggesting that illustration was more than a means to a fine art and literary end. Instead, what this historical

moment shows are two residual forms of genteel culture—literature and fine art—in the process of understanding their relationship to an emergent form of media as they are in the process of being commodified and reproduced at scale. Reprinted literature and fine art sought to legitimate each other within the context of this evolving new media environment and engraved illustrations became the vehicle through which they did. Although illustration would develop alongside and eventually in distinction from both fine art and literature, it did not emulate or supplement it (as mid-century gift books demonstrate) so much as worked with each to legitimate a new sense of “image” whose features would have much more in common with our own notions of new media than our residual understandings of either fine art or literature. The relevance of this moment for illustration studies, I believe, is to ask the field whether it needs to be reframed within art history and literary studies or whether those fields need to be reframed in relationship to illustration and the historical emergence of media as a concept.

Roderick Mills

Expanded Fields: Illustration beyond Definition a Speculative Discourse

University of Brighton

Since the first Illustration Research Symposium in 2010 at Cardiff Metropolitan University UK there has been a proliferation of interest and development of a research culture within illustration academia. At the same time in the UK specifically there has been an exponential growth of those wanting to study illustration at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, indeed according to Discover Uni there are 141 Illustration undergraduate courses from 74 providers in the UK alone. Some courses have cohorts in the region of 90 – 150 students, which amounts to an unprecedented volume of graduates in Illustration (conservatively 5000 per year). Intrinsically there is a visibility about the subject, not only as an act but increasingly for those calling themselves illustrators, with a widening demographic, who I would argue are changing what we mean by illustration. Through social media, especially platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have radically changed the relationship between artist and audience, commissioner and buyer on a global level. This is dynamic and constantly evolving, as is the relationship between practice and research, and the student with the university/institution. Perhaps because illustration isn't confined to a form, a medium, a theoretical framework, it can exist purely as image beyond text, with a greater relevance in today's world? Anyone can be visible now and perhaps anyone can be an illustrator now, in the context of AI technology? In the past 12 years there has been the establishment of an illustration research culture and of the studies in illustration, there are print publications reflecting this now and a growing network of conferences establishing the critical discourse in the subject. Illustration Research, Varoom Lab, CONFIA, ILLUSTR4TIO, and even ICON The Illustration Conference incorporates an educators symposium. Interestingly ICON separates education from the main stage events, in most cases at a different venue. Whilst there is a burgeoning research community within illustration, the white elephant in the room is arguably the lack of impact on the professional world of illustration? This paper seeks to explore the relationship

between the academic/research world and how it interacts/effects with the professional (vocational) world.

Sigrid Peterson

Lithopinion (1965-1975): Craftsmanship, Creatives and the Commonweal Combine in a Midcentury Lithographic Labor Periodical

Washington University in St. Louis

Illustrated reportage returned to the pages of American periodicals in the 1950s and 60s, notably in *Esquire*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*. A mid-twentieth century American labor union in the lithographic trades offered its own periodical packed with illustrated nonfiction called *Lithopinion*: The graphic arts and public affairs journal of Local One of the Amalgamated Lithographers of America. Published as a quarterly between 1965 – 1975 by a union of 9000 New York City lithographers, *Lithopinion* differentiated itself through exceptional production values, the caliber of artists it commissioned, and in its ambitious range of social, cultural, and political coverage. The magazine favored demonstrating technological innovation in lithography—a desire to “show off” the craft, and to connect working class unionists to broader publics. Like *Esquire*, et al., *Lithopinion* published illustrated and photographic essays, as well as in-depth reporting on the trade of lithography, the condition of workers, and on the urban crisis, housing, and political dissent. It commissioned art and illustration from well-known names like Al Parker, Bernie Fuchs, Tomi Ungerer, Austin Briggs, and Noel Sickles. *Lithopinion* provides a fascinating case study in the representation of the labor of image making. Scant attention has been paid to it in the scholarly literature, perhaps because academicians tend to value the “mental” or creative and intellectual components of cultural production, over the “manual”—the skilled laborers responsible for the reproduction and dissemination of illustrated material. Did the Amalgamated Lithographers “imprint” the voice of labor in *Lithopinion*? Did the editorial needs of the magazine focus the uses of reportage compared with the approach visible, say, in *Fortune*? Were the illustrators who worked on *Lithopinion* aligned with the lithographers as they found themselves in a rapidly declining industry (that is, editorial illustration) during its years of publication? These questions will be addressed in the presentation.

Stephanie Haboush Plunkett

Imprinted: Illustrating Race

Norman Rockwell Museum

“Commissioned for public consumption, published illustrations are interwoven into our daily lives as they have been for centuries. From them, we derive perceptions of people and groups of people”—Robyn Phillips-Pendleton

Recognizing the above fact, *Imprinted: Illustrating Race*, an exhibition organized by the Norman Rockwell Museum in 2022, set out to examine widely circulated illustrated imagery, conceived and published over the course more than three centuries, which has reflected and shaped perceptions of race across time. Focusing on artworks commissioned by publishers and advertisers, and created by illustrators, engravers, and printers, *Imprinted* traces harmful and prolific stereotypical representations of race that were historically sanctioned and prominently featured in newspapers, magazines, and books, on trade cards, posters, and advertisements, and on packaging and a wide-range of products. The exhibition also underscores the concerted efforts of twentieth and twenty-first century artists and editors to shift the cultural narrative through the publication—in print and across digital platforms—of inclusive imagery emphasizing full agency and equity for all. As the exhibition is prepared for national travel, we hope that will continue to spark dialogue about the ways that art and systems of publishing have helped to frame public opinion, and how the art of illustration has been and can continue to be a force for change. Our panel will offer reflections on the research involved, curation of, and lessons learned from *Imprinted*—a case study effort to examine the influence of American illustration upon a key aspect of life that has gone unacknowledged until fairly recently—and thus to confront the omissions within the history of illustration that have led us to focus on star illustrators, and a limited array of subjects that did not take account of the perspectives and contributions of Black artists and other people of color.

Julien Posture

How to Do Things with Style

University of Cambridge

While students desperately ask how to find it, educators deem it superficial; at times sign of artistic personality it simultaneously indexes market niches; individual property of the artist it also isn't protected by copyright laws. Style is an incredibly rich concept whose impact on creatives is only mirrored by the lack of research on it. I'm not referring here to studies of different styles but to style as a semiotic device. From its role in the constitution of authorship in the XVIIIth century to The Great Depression aesthetic changes to today's theft of stylistic labour by Artificial Intelligence, this presentation suggests that style, the visual manifestation of the indexical relationship between artists and their work, has long been a tool for creatives to manifest, control and benefit from their work. While it originated as a proof of the intrinsic relationship between an artist and their work, it now no longer can serve this purpose and is seen as mere surface. I argue that these different attitudes toward the concept reveal a myriad of ways illustrators have actively negotiated their fate by shifting the meaning of their work. Style is the fuel of a neoliberal economy; it personalizes commodities and conflates consuming with identifying. At a time during which illustrators are facing unprecedented pressure, developing a critical understanding of style, at the intersection of the history of reproduction technologies, legal frameworks, and economy, will allow us to

think lucidly about the nature of our profession, its connection to broader spheres of society, and our agency on its future.

Danielle Ridolfi

Overlooked Rebellion: Postmodernism and Social Protest in the Picture Books of Seymour Chwast

Washington University in St. Louis

Seymour Chwast's graphic design work is widely celebrated. However, one aspect of his work suffers from relative invisibility: his many picture books for children. This lack of mainstream recognition is perhaps not surprising for a man who devoted his career to a rebellion against the mainstream. In response to traditional midcentury illustration—which he viewed as anodyne and inauthentic—Chwast used his work to craft counter narratives and elevate alternative political and social viewpoints more representative of America's complexities. These priorities help to frame an analysis of Chwast's picture books as well, which, like his graphic design work, celebrate polyphonic perspectives, a decidedly postmodern goal. This paper will analyze five of Chwast's children's books in the context of postmodern picture book trends and discuss how these elements furthered his aims of social rebellion. In particular, his use of non-linear structures, simultaneous narratives, and polysemic concepts in "Tall City, Wide Country" and "Traffic Jam" will be discussed as they relate to Chwast's interest in creating divergent meanings. Additionally, Chwast's use of the picture book as a more overt form of social protest against mainstream views in "Arno and the Mini-Machine" will be discussed. Chwast's picture books have been deemed too high concept for children—a common complaint about postmodern picture books generally. But this critique may reflect the misgivings of adults more than the preferences of children. Educators shy away from postmodern books given their increased interpretive demands, but Chwast's books have much to offer in light of contemporary needs to teach new literacies and facilitate conversations about diverse perspectives. This paper's analysis of Chwast's picture books will more effectively frame his work for parents, educators, and curators and will open an inquiry into this blind spot in the children's book canon.

Phoebe Santalla

Angel in the Centerfold: Finding Queer Community in the Masculine Physique of J.C. Leyendecker's Illustration

Washington University in St. Louis

The enforcement of heteronormative gender roles during the early and mid-20th century did not allow an overt space for queerness to exist in public. Despite this, queerness evoked a fascination, one could argue a fetishization, in the more urban parts of America. However, this does not mean queer representation was not present. Queer sexuality, or its equivalent at the time, the invert, existed in the obvious, but plausible deniability of subtext. Hiding,

coding, and signaling became critical mechanisms of preserving queer culture in the early 20th century as the rise of eugenics and purity politics became mainstream discourse. J. C. Leyendecker was an incredibly influential illustrator in the early 1900's. His work appeared most often on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post, although he is more often recognized for his advertisement pieces for Arrow Collar. Leyendecker became known for illustrating muscular men who had depth and sex appeal. The man who modeled for Leyendecker in these Arrow Collar shirt paintings was Charles A. Beach. Through their work together they fell in love and became life partners. Although they had close friends who knew of their relationship, the "don't ask, don't tell" mentality of the time meant they kept it hidden. By using the imagery within the overtly queer periodical Men's Physique Magazine as a foil against J. C. Leyendecker's art, it is the hope that one can demonstrate queer art was being created by queer artists and consumed by the unknowing heteronormative public. Illustration as a medium requires publishing and public distribution, it is witnessed and interacted with on a deeply personal level. The pictorial piece becomes a one-on-one conversation with each of its viewers. This creates a communal thought space, a private interpretation and experience of art that can reflect the communities to which a person belongs.

Carolyn Shapiro

The Blind Spot of the Blind Spot: Re-thinking the Lustre of the Illustrator Today

Falmouth University

Illustration's fundamental function of shining light upon something converges uncomfortably with the operation of conspiracy theory. In these days of Q-Anon and other decrypting illuminators of invisible power structures, a myth-system is readily deployed as the apparatus which reveals hidden truths, disseminating the "truth" through constellations of visual signifiers that "prove" what otherwise is not seen, that is, what otherwise does not see the light of day. In both illustration and conspiracy theory, the metaphor of light persists, converging from opposite directions: informative illustration on one end, and conspiracy theory on the other, both claiming to enlighten. "Truth" emanates as rays of shared knowledge. This strangely happy meeting place from either side of the spectrum of enlightened messaging suggests that our own critically informed acknowledgement of "the blind spot" itself carries, and even masks, its own blind spot. Might the claim of enlightening illustration carry inherently problematic claims about the darkness of an implied crypt? Looking at the worst case scenario that the figure of the revealed blind spot potentially invites, that is, conspiracy theory and its insidious operations, my presentation will begin to deconstruct the positive assertions that illustration's value is that it shines light upon a subject. My approach will be to closely read illustrations which employ the emanation of light from an all-seeing Eye as their primary performative trope. I trace the provenance of the "blind spot" as the same one as that of the "seeing spot", looking at 18th century Enlightenment-inspired illustration which includes imagery adopted by Freemasonry. I then trace the pathway of the Seeing Spot to that of conspiracy illustration, a pathway taking the

form of a horseshoe, where the Left and the Right of our cultural political spectrum nearly meet in their merging of light, vision and the revelation of Truth.

Melissa Geisler Trafton

A Part for the Whole: Anatomical Transformation and Juxtaposition on Trade Cards of the 1880s
College of the Holy Cross

American trade cards of the late 1870s and 1880s displayed experimental illustrations that often paired a detailed representation of the product with strange bodies of humans and non-human animals. This is part of the general shift in the way in which animals on printed ephemera in the nineteenth century were anthropomorphised and exaggerated. Although some advertising cards contained didactic elements of natural history typical of the period, or sentimental images of pets and livestock, others radically abandoned visual conventions such as adherence to scale, setting, anatomical accuracy, and natural animal characteristics and behaviors. Those cards that advertised mass-produced, manufactured, and packaged low-cost goods, such as soap, baking leaveners like yeast, medicines, and spooled thread, were among the most innovative. In this paper, I will investigate illustrations that demonstrate the jarring juxtaposition of an accurately labeled and trademarked commercial good with a fantastical reconfiguring of bodies. The images are not illustrations of a text, but instead through this humorous and striking contrast, draw attention to the quality for which the product was being marketed. Packaged with consumer household products, the cards were distributed and circulated outside the traditional networks of visual culture. They were collected and traded by women and children, and pasted into the family trade card albums. Although they were mass-produced, their reception was within private domestic spaces according to an organizational structure designed by the collector. Generally found in archival institutions in large loose collections or in scrapbooks, they are rarely cataloged as individual objects, nor often reproduced in online catalogs. This paper analyzes these little-studied ephemeral advertising materials, and the way in which the images shattered conventions in order to illustrate an abstract concept by employing humor that is dependent upon absurdity.

Cora Trout

Marianne in Le Petit Journal: Visualizing French Identity in the Illustrated Press
Washington University in St. Louis

By the late nineteenth century, the Supplement Illustré du Petit Journal gloried in symbolism of the French Republic. The journal's bold cover illustrations depict Haussmannian apartments adorned with French flags and tricolored bunting; portraits of French presidents, generals, and politicians set within decorative borders; and patriotic images of the French army victorious over its colonial possessions. But one figure plays a recurring role in the supplement's weekly illustrations: Marianne, the national female allegory for the French

Republic. She appears frequently on the front and back covers of the *Supplement Illustré*, often wearing a red Phrygian cap and draped in the French tricolor. She assumes many guises: fully human and iconic. She is malleable and manipulable. My paper, analyzing Marianne within the context of coexisting republican imagery, investigates ways in which the *Supplement Illustré du Petit Journal* used her image to fashion a particular national French identity during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Most studies concerning the European illustrated press conclude around 1870. The following thirty years, like the *Supplement Illustré* itself, remain relatively understudied. Scholarship on the journal has focused not on its contribution to manufacturing a national French identity through its choreography of imagery and text, but rather its sensational coverage of horrific events and courtroom trials. Notably, however, the *Supplement Illustré* reached the zenith of its distribution and popularity between 1890 and 1900, a decade in which the French Republic was embroiled in political turmoil and upheavals that would long shape French national identity. My project asks how considering the illustrations of the *Supplement Illustré* as politicizing agents rather than simply “fait divers” can help us understand and make sense of their politicized visual world as well as our own. Are images as powerful as we think they are?

Evie Yuqing Zhu

Immersive Study in Illustration Narrative of Vernacular Culture: A Practice-Based Research in North Italy

University of Bologna

The visual-based study uses illustration narrative and co-creation as tools to immersively explore vernacular culture of the Emilia-Romagna region of North Italy. The research also includes qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews and psychological analysis. Advanced technology and urbanization are weakening the sense of community, as globalization causes cultural homogenization—universal visual language often suffers from being superficial and labeled as stereotypes. The diversity of local visual culture has become subjects of concern at the forefront of illustration research. However, Current studies of local culture are mainly based on text-based academic materials instead of perceptual visual forms that could deeply embed hidden and complex cultural information. An immersive place-based sketching and illustrating experience of vernacular culture is unique because of the unknowability it brings when the local community is constantly in flux, enjoying every unpredictable and real moment. The research aims to investigate the interactive process of illustrators, local Italian residents, and audience in terms of visual coding and decoding. By delving into the real-life emotional experience of different sectors, the author explores the culture of gastronomy and leisure life in Bologna and other counties through local conversations, life-drawings, visual narratives, and recordings. The combined form documents the mutual emotional interactions among creators, storytellers, and audiences. It analyzes the concealment (the hidden messages) and complexity in visual narratives from a user-experience perspective by using mental model diagrams to explore new cultural insights uncovered by formal academic research.

