

Types, Characteristics and Importance of Illustration

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Abstract

We live in an increasingly digital world with our work tools like the computer, tablet, and smart phone, each with some form of image-capture technology. Teaching and research gadgets are also outfitted with carefully chosen, high quality and high-resolution cameras, which are invaluable tools. These devices make taxonomic research much easier, if not more robust. None-the-less, there is still much to be said for a well-crafted illustration. Digital imagery, while an exceptional resource, still does not completely capture the morphological complexity and minutia of insects such as the Chironomidae (specie of insect) quite like a hand-drawn or digitally-inked illustration. Even with expensive and high-quality techniques such as “z-stacking,” it is still difficult, if not impossible, to fully capture minute details that can be easily conveyed with a simple stroke of the pen. The crux or nexus of this study is the characterization of illustration and its importance as it applies to our design process.

Introduction

Several authors and designers have described illustration variously and severally. Illustration, in the view of Osaigbovo and Izogie (2018), Illustration is the art of drawing pictures, diagrams, shapes and figures to decorate or elucidate a literary work. Illustration is the art or method of producing visuals on a surface, usually paper, by means of inscriptions, usually ink, chalk, charcoal, graphite or crayon. Vanden-Bergh and Katz (1999) offers the various categories of illustrations as follows:

- Character illustration
- Spot or object illustration
- Icon illustration
- Pattern illustration
- Logo illustration

Character illustration

Character illustration is more time-consuming and involved than illustrating objects. A character is a person or animal, who perhaps serves as a model for a business or an occasion or even a public officer. Work needs to be put into capturing a personality here especially when it is done in pen and ink and examples of pen and ink character illustration is either realistic or stylized. Character illustration can be in form of satirical drawings like cartoon, it could be realistic or even abstract provided the distinguishing features of such personality are visibly obvious. In plate 1, the major character (the groom) is a very distinct public figure in Nigeria.



Plate 1: Unknown Artist, Character illustration, (2022)

The composition in plate 1 tells a very interesting story of a public figure who has been against the vast majority of workers, especially university lecturers' interest and now, he is interested in becoming the president of Nigeria and of course one will expect the university community to vent their spleen against such ambition. It is instructive to state here that like the journalist, the illustrator is a public analyst and a visual communicator and so brings to the fore, happenings in the society via visual narratives.

Spot or object illustration



A spot illustration is an object that stands on its own, without a background scene. We use this type of illustration to highlight featured areas on home pages, and add personality throughout the site especially in web design. Sometimes an animal or creature can be a spot illustration if it is a simple object (such as a bird in flight or a Zebra) rather than a full mascot with character. Spot illustration, like have been described above is basically outlining and accentuating the shape of an object and in most cases they come in silhouette form.

Plate 2: Spot Illustration, Osaigbovo, 2022

Icon illustration

Icons differ from spot illustrations by being meant for use at diminutive size (though artists always create vector images that can scale to any size without losing quality). Icons have less detailed elements, they are unambiguous when small, and often work better in a single colour. Symbolically, icon is an image, picture or other representation usually as objects of reference. Plate 3 is an icon of a feather which symbolically represents writing because the feather was the first form of writing or drawing instrument before the invention of the pen.



Plate 3 Osaigbovo, F, Icon Illustration, 2022

Pattern illustration

Patterns are flexible and something graphic artists like to include with brand identity design. If artists have a perfectly repeat pattern, they can use it for website background, television montages, business cards and product packaging. There are no limits to ways one can use an illustrated pattern as part of one's brand. Pattern illustrations are also mostly used by textile designers in the production of printed and dyed fabrics.



Plate 4: Osaigbovo, F, Pattern Illustration, 2022

Smith, (2009) captures Illustration as “a visualization or a representation of a subject matter made by the artist such as painting, drawing, photograph sketch, or other kinds of image or objects seen, imagined or remembered using graphical depiction.” The word is derived from the Latin word *illustra'tio* or *illu'stro* meaning enlighten. Apart from the above analysis, this writer will also advance some other genre of illustration as follows:

- Editorial illustration
- Advertising illustration
- Concept art
- Fashion illustration
- Technical (scientific) illustration
- Info graphics
- Packaging illustration

Editorial illustration

This genre is that which is created to better express an idea from the text, usually used in a book, magazine, newspaper, or web resource. This type of illustration cannot fly without the text.

Advertising illustration

Advert illustration is used on promotional material, and its main aim is to catch the viewer's attention. It can be used without any text especially for only the logotype of a company but expresses a strong idea to make it easy to remember. The above e-commerce sale illustration in plate.4 is easy to understand even with very minimal text.

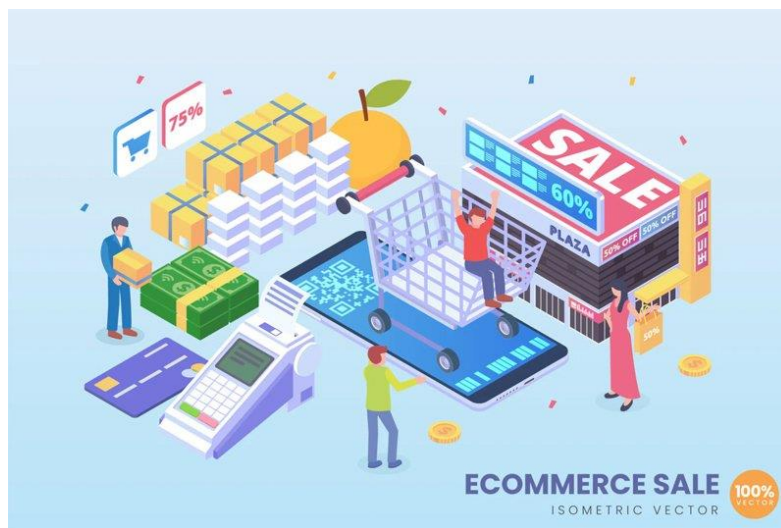


Plate 5: Editorial Illustration e-commerce sale illustration, 2022
Source: www.graphicillustration.com

Concept Art

Concept art are illustrations used in movies, games, and other industries, as working material for finding the best image of the atmosphere of the work. Concept art is usually created in several iterations. The most important thing is not to create a perfectly beautiful image, but to choose the image that is most *appropriate*. The final product uses the final sketch that goes through the art director's criticism. Concept art is usually made for environments, characters, costumes, and items.



Plate 6: Concept Art of cute mascot characters. 2022
Source: www.graphicillustration.com

Fashion illustration can be applied to visualize designs of apparels before it is produced. Fashion designers employ it a lot in their creative processes. The design is to be sketched in roughs, and later modified, before it is sewn in actual clothings. Also, fashion houses use fashion illustrators' work to promote their product and to show it in a special style.



Plate 7: Fashion Illustration 2022
Source: www.graphicillustration.co

Technical Illustration

The purpose of a technical or scientific illustration is to accurately depict an object in order to simplify its understanding. In technical illustration, it is not the image and beauty that is important, but the clarity of the image and the absence of misunderstanding.



Plate 8: Technical planet illustration shows the structure of the earth's core.
Source: www.graphicillustration.com

Info Graphics

These are a selection of images and diagrams with a least of text, allowing one to promptly understand the essence of the topic. Info graphics are related to communication and graphic design, but can also be attributed to illustration. Good info graphics make it easier to understand information and a large amount of data.

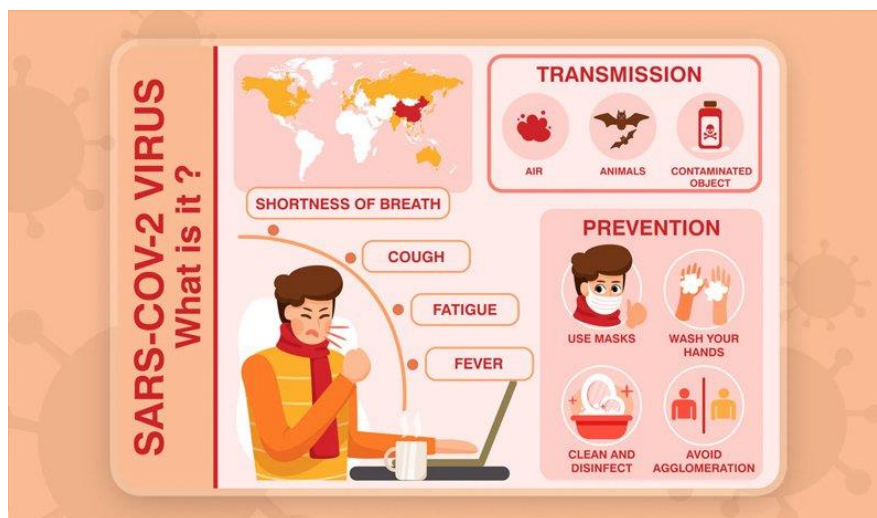


Plate 9: Info graphics can be on different topics, like this example of a Covid-19 virus infographic. Source: www.graphicillustration.com

Packaging Illustration

Like advertising illustration, packaging illustration helps companies to sell their products and services. And it also should be eye-catching and grab the viewer's attention. But also, packaging illustration helps to define the brand, adding a personalized touch and custom feel.



Plate 10: Bright and colorful fruit illustrations are very typical for packaging design.
Source: www.graphicillustration.com

Graphic design and illustration belong to the same family but the slight difference between them is that usually, graphic designers work with ready-made objects, and their task is to create suitable compositions from them while Illustrators create products themselves even if they are collages. The main task of the designer is to create a successful product that will meet the requirements of the customer and the needs of the intended audience. A good illustrator will also think about the needs of their client and target audience, but also be more focused on the image itself, rather than on marketing goals which the designer has already thought about.

In the same vein, Illustration art is not art in the literal sense of the word. Art is created to express the inner world of the artist, while an illustration is created to explain an idea. The main goal of a work of art is aesthetics. The main purpose of an illustration is to explain. An illustration is created for the needs of a specific customer with specific goals, and a work of art can be made without it. Good illustrators always think about their viewers' and their clients' aims.

It does not matter what technique the illustrator uses; what is important is what the illustration is for. This is not a story about how to create an image, but rather about what the purpose of the image is. A commercial illustration can be traditional in technique: it may be drawn in pencil, ink, and paints. It can be made in digital programs such as Photoshop,

Illustrator, Procreate, and others. Some illustrators use a mixed technique: for example, draw with a pencil, and then interpolate the image on the computer. There are also those who use the collage technique and engraving. An illustrator can use any technique; depending on the purpose of the work and the preferences of the illustrator. Illustration is a very interesting area that simultaneously contains a lot of creativity and close work with the client and designers; but the pleasure when he sees the work printed in a magazine or on a shelf in a store cannot be compared to anything. Good Illustrations should have the following Characteristics.

- Clarity: the information content should be conveyed quickly and accurately.
- The displayed information should be distinguished accurately.
- People should not be overburdened with irrelevant information.
- Consistency: good designs must conform to user's expectation.
- The user's attention should be directed towards information required.
- Information should be easy to understand.
- It should have the ability to elicit curiosity from targeted viewers.

They should be clearly comprehensible, unambiguous, interpretable, and recognizable. Illustration in advertising promotion is often used to make consumers responsive to a product's special price or its benefits. But an even more important purpose of illustration in advertising is to create an image that consumers associate with a product, known as the brand image. The brand image goes far beyond the functional uniqueness of the product. For example, a particular fruit juice may have a particular taste that is one of its benefits but when consumers think of it, they not only think of its taste, but they may also associate it with high energy, calorie, tremendous action, unusual behavior and youthfulness which the Illustration exudes. All of those meanings and insinuations have been included in the product by advertising. Consumers regularly buy the product not only for its practical characteristics but also because they want to be associated with the image related with the brand.

Illustrations and its Characteristics

Illustration, as defined by Fussell (2010) is the action of making marks on any surface with any mark-making material. It is clear, by this definition that anyone can draw. If one can write his name, then he can draw. That being established, we all know that some of us can draw better than others. Becoming skillful at drawing requires several factors coming collectively. Some of these elements include desire, teaching, practice, time, and more practice.

Knowing or drawing a line between good and bad art can be very complicated or even confusing. In fact, some experts like Digolo and Mazrui (2002) think that there is nothing like bad art in the sense that what one person will say is bad may seem appealing to yet another person. It is difficult to comprehend them because different artists have different styles and techniques of rendering even the same subject.

As the old saying goes “Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder”, one’s idea of beauty or the lack of it in a particular art work is always informative, normal and in most cases relative. It is either that one is fascinated by a piece of art work or not. In all these, there still remains some criteria to take into account when judging a piece of art work, that is to say, there are certain parameters an artist takes into consideration when executing an art work that would make the work of art standard or substandard.

What constitutes a good drawing or art work? Dennis (2009) thinks everything we behold in an artwork actually consists of five basic elements. These are Line, Texture, Form, Tone and Colour. Line does not have a physical existence; its initial idea was mathematical, matching the direction of movement, the space between two points or the border of an area. In art, lines are very important in the sense that it is used to unite the various sections that constitutes a masterpiece. It is used to define an object; it is used to indicate the form or shape of an object. Line, in fact is one of the most vital elements in illustration. It is also used characteristically to express movement. It suggests mass or solidity as it comes in various thicknesses. Consequently, any good piece of artwork must conform to the basic principles and elements of art.

Texture, according to Bellinger and Harb (2013) is the tactile value of a surface. Any good drawing must have various tactile value which gives solidity to an object so drawn. Form is made up of lines that connect themselves in order to define a particular form. The artist refers to contour especially when it describes a surface area. Tone is the word that describes the lightness or darkness and by extension the solidity of art works. Dramatic and aesthetic effect can be achieved by the effective manipulation of different tonal values in a drawing process therefore good draftsmanship implies good tonal gradation. Colour is the last in the series in this category. Colours can be analogous, opposite, complimentary or monochromatic. On the whole, there must be a particular harmony that should be adopted by the artist. Apart from the above, Buchanan (2010) avers that there are also other criteria to be taken into consideration in judging a good draftsmanship work. These include:

Technical proficiency: This is the quality of the pencil work or other materials used in drawing like pen, charcoal, pastel or chalk, taken into consideration the strength, weakness, boldness or decisiveness of the rendering with such materials and the confidence the artist exudes over the work.

Design Layout: This refers to the use of space in proportion to the work or objects to be drawn and in relation to the size of the paper or material. Arrangement of subjects to be drawn is also considered in terms of balance.

The artist’s personality or self-expression is also a factor to be considered. Here, the feeling the artwork evokes is taken into consideration as to whether the artists have captured the essence of the objects by whatever technique he uses. Every work of pen and ink has some specific quality of the artist’s style therefore the researcher decided to use various styles to convey his individuality in rendering in pen and ink for this project.

Balance is also taken into consideration. Balance can either be symmetrical or asymmetrical. A well-balanced arrangement of drawing is a compulsion in achieving a good work of art.

Originality is also to be taken into consideration while executing a good work of art. Above all, suitability of the whole essence of the work in relation to the intent is also very crucial. Others are relative proportion, size, shape and colour, solidity, perspectives and depth, resemblance to the objects drawn, appeal, foreshortening, light and shade and finally, gesture in case of facial expressions and movements of animate objects.

On the whole, the aim of illustration is to explain or enhance an account, a poem, a story, or piece of literal information by making use of visual representation of something described in the text. Illustrations can also represent technical images of plants, medicine or different processes, biological or chemical processes or technical illustrations to give information on how certain things are used.

All these criteria could still be broken down into three distinct areas thus: Imitational and literal qualities which focuses on realistic representation, Formalism and formal qualities which deals with composition and arrangement based on the principles of art and finally, Emotional and expressive qualities which has to do with the arousal of feelings, emotions, moods and morals of the art work (osaigbovo, 2014).

Conclusion

Gilka (2008), is of the opinion that “drawings are perhaps the most critical component of taxonomic metaphors, and are especially crucial for insects and other organic objects.” While some insect taxonomists have been allured by the simple “click of a button” technology, particularly as compared to the often many painstaking hours with the pen (traditional or digital), there are so many details that are simply lost or not completely captured. For example, when comparing illustrations and images the writer argues that with digital images, while high-quality illustrations still do not quite capture all of the details of the corresponding inked illustration, when it comes down to it, these minute intricacies may mean the difference between one species or two, or species ‘A’ or ‘B’, especially in groups that are difficult to differentiate. These situations certainly are not difficult to come by when dealing with the insect family. Images can be of great help during illustration process, and in many cases can add great value to a manuscript. But unless the manuscript is littered with images taken at slightly different depths or angles, the traditional illustrative techniques cannot and should not be replaced. Another important advantage of illustration, as pointed out by Holzenthal (2008), is that the illustrator becomes intricately familiar with the sample in question. What better way to become so familiar with the male chironomid terminalia than by sitting at the microscope, pencil in hand under the drawing tube, while making careful focusing adjustments with the other? As wary taxonomists, we should use all techniques available to us; just as molecular and morphological species delineation techniques complement each other, so to do digital image, capture and hand-crafted illustrations. Often, they will lead to the same conclusions, but in some cases, one method will allow the observer to see features in a new light or allow someone, or other researchers, to ask further probing questions. Illustrations have come to stay as far as graphics and arts generally are concerned and so should be embraced by graphic artists and designers for optimum productivity.

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