

Original or Copy?

Over the last few years, occasional incidents have occurred in which WRAP artists mistakenly believed that in converting a commercial artwork or published image—be it a magazine photo or copyrighted painting or drawing—into a *different color scheme* or a *new medium* (such as converting a photo to a pen and ink drawing), they were creating a new and original piece.

It's easy to see how this happens. In many introductory art classes, students are encouraged to find an image they like—often a magazine photo, a postcard, or a page from a seed catalog, calendar, or art publication—and use it as their model. Sometimes the instructor provides a xeroxed image from a similar source for the class to use. Unfortunately, there is seldom a follow-up discussion pointing out that the student's completed artwork is not truly original in composition and would be a violation of copyright if offered for sale or exhibit. As a result, many new artists—who are delighted with their new-found skill in accurately rendering a published photo or copying a Monet—never really think about or comprehend plagiarism as it applies to art. Though you may love your finished piece and hang it on the wall, *you should not exhibit it or sell it as an original.*

We remind you of this for two reasons. First, artists who copy a commercial or published artwork and submit it to a WRAP competition gain an unfair advantage over other WRAP exhibitors: the skilled professional photographer or commercial artist whose work they have copied has done a lot of the hard work for them— choosing the topic, designing the composition, and selecting form, color and perspective. Second, WRAA and WRAP are put in a potentially awkward legal situation if we inadvertently reprint copies of professional copyrighted works in Contour Notes or other publications without appropriate permission.

This situation has prompted the WRAA Board to reword the description of “original” in our printed materials and WRAP application forms. The new description also will state that giclee prints or other reproductions of the *exhibitor's own work* will not be accepted as substitutes for the original in any WRAP show. Also, we are asking cover art competitors to state from what sources they drew their art. We will include a piece in future *Contour Notes* on the subject of “original” work.

Just as you have always done in the past, you will be asked to sign a statement that your work is original when you submit a WRAP entry form. The revised statement, however, will be more explicit and will read in part as follows:

“If your artwork is a copy of a commercial photograph or of a work that is not your own (such as from a magazine photo or illustration, postcard, calendar or seed catalog), you must have permission from the photographer or original artist. Please include a copy of that permission with your artwork.”

Remember, our concerns are with copies of commercial, professional, copyrighted photos and artwork - not snapshots of your brother's trip to Yosemite, or your daughter's pencil sketch. But WRAP and the WRAA board are taking this issue very seriously and we expect our members to do the same.