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7

Illustration: A Brief Overview

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*Play creates new situations and
new solutions to old problems.
In terms of a sense of play, art
and humor share common
origins.*

—David Lance Goines

depression on college campuses needed equally potent artwork and design. In this instance, Rebecca Goldschmidt sought to capture the crippling effect of depression through color and agitated strokes in her illustration. Visuals may illustrate an aspect of the story that isn't readily apparent to the reader or offer a perspective that words can't impart. Goldschmidt's artwork really connects to the story's content. Sometimes, too, captions, subheads, decks, or pullouts further flesh out important aspects of a story that can't be communicated by words or art alone.

Experienced art directors and designers look for a specific illustration style to add to the unity of story or theme. This tact may also extend visual continuity for an entire issue. In this case, the style of the illustration should be appropriate to both the story and the publication. Make sure to use other graphic devices in the same way Carrilho did to connect to the illustration's style and voice: color, gesture, and use of space. It is important to match type and design nuances appropriately, too.

The Role of the Illustrator

Successful illustrators and designers understand that visual form and verbal content should be inseparable. Illustration and graphic design



Figure 7-19 Photo illustration and smart design make a statement for *Guide*, the entertainment and magazine section of *The Dallas Morning News*. The strong diagonal, repetitive motif of forks is a suitable solution for the “Favorite Forkfuls” cover on the best new restaurants in Dallas. Kerri Abrams is responsible for this beautiful poster-inspired design. Reprinted with permission of *The Dallas Morning News*. Staff Photographer, Natalie Caudill. Staff Designer, Kerri Abrams.

shouldn't be thought of as simple cosmetic overhauls or introductory tap dances, or as ends in themselves. Try to think of illustration this way: conceptually, you should use artwork to make your layouts seamless with the editorial content, where everything—color, typography, layout, design nuances, and artwork—meshes appropriately with the content and voice of the story.

Perhaps Mark Ulriksen understands that concept as well as any illustrator. His comments



Figure 7-20 The illustration for this magazine feature complements the story's content—depression among university students. Goldschmidt's style, modeling and bold line are reminiscent of Picasso. Her style and use of color suggest the impact of depression; what's more, they connect to the story's title, “Out of the Blue.” Illustrator and designer, Rebecca Goldschmidt; art director, Steve Asbury; design director, Matt Lowrey. Courtesy of *FLUX* magazine.

Figure 7-21

Mark Ulriksen is a man in love with life, music, dogs, design, art, illustration, and his wife—Leslie. His artwork has graced the pages of *The New York Times Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *Sports Illustrated*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and many other magazines and publications. Ulriksen has also been featured in *The Society of Illustrators*, *Communication Arts*, and *American Illustration*. He is also one of the founding members of the Illustrators' Partnership of America. Photo by Leslie Flores.



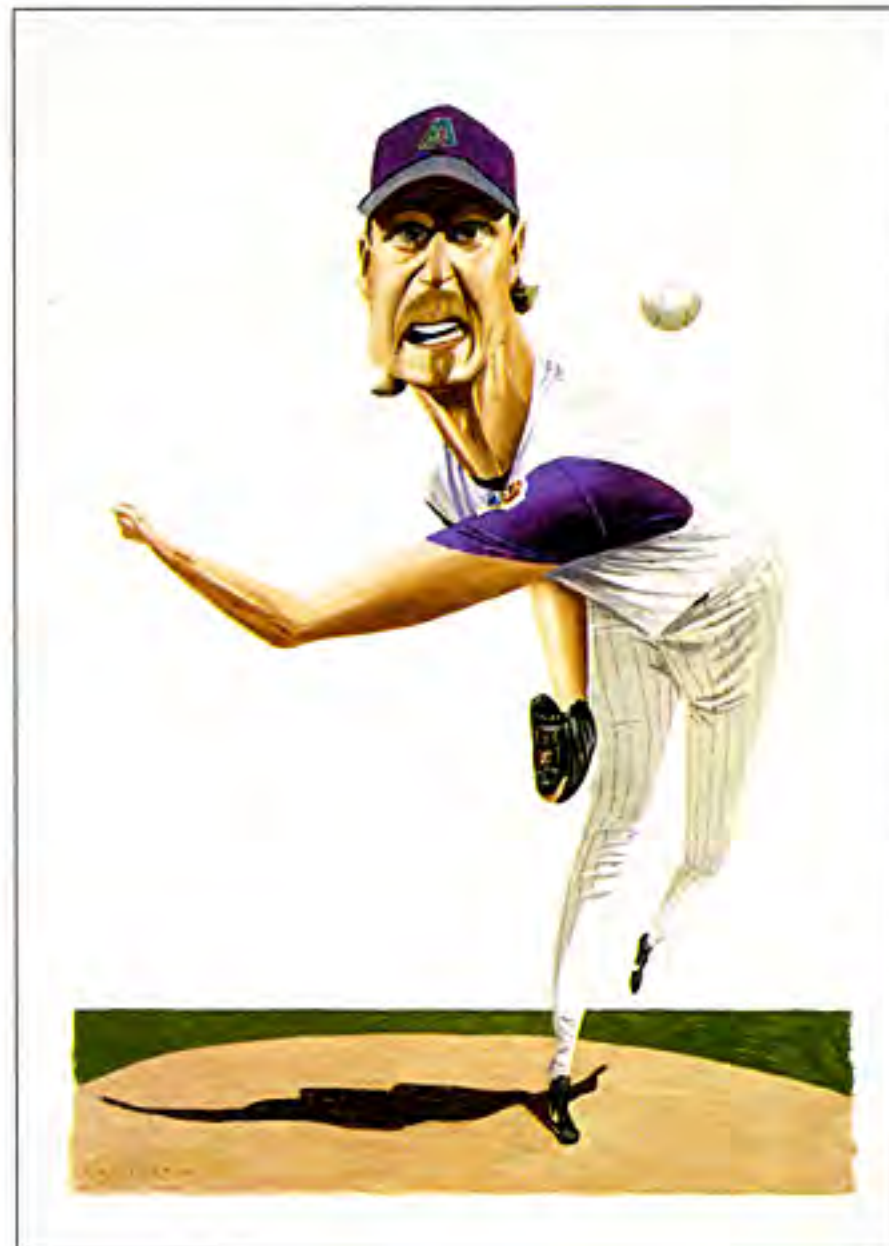
are especially insightful because he worked with illustrators prior to becoming one. Before launching his illustration career, Ulriksen worked as a graphic designer and then as art director for eight years at San Francisco *Focus* magazine. His artwork is widely published and has received many awards.

If I'm going to spend my days largely in solitude—drawing and painting—then I want to draw and paint things that I care about: people, relationships, music, sports, politics, pets, children. I'm not enamored of computers, corporations, or marketing, so I hardly ever get assignments on those subjects.

One thing I've learned is that one needn't always wait for the phone to ring. Once I read

Figure 7-22

Randy Johnson looks like the dominant, overwhelming player he is in this Mark Ulriksen illustration for *The New Yorker*. The artist's strategy was clear: "I wanted to make sure you felt his height (he's 6'11"), and by making his rear foot smaller I was able to convey the feeling of him coming right at the viewer." Notice, too, how Johnson seems to be coming off the page and at you. This was accomplished by adjusting the uniform and background colors in a subtle way. "The hardest thing was to paint his white uniform on a white background. I first painted his clothes light brown, then painted white over that so that my white was darker than the board's white." Illustration, Mark Ulriksen; illustration editor, Owen Phillip. © Ulriksen Illustrations.



that four baseball stadiums were in their final year of operation. So, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool to visit all these stadiums and have a magazine commission me to paint them (and foot the bill for my travel expenses)?' My former agent and I wrote a letter about my plan to travel and interview local fans and stadium employees about the ballparks' last hurrah and submitted the idea to a few publications. The New Yorker, my steadiest client, consented and soon I was off to Detroit, Houston, Seattle and my home town, San Francisco. Dreams can and do come true (see Figure 7-22).

I know that my first creative decision whenever I begin a new project is to decide where I am going to find my inspiration. I believe everything should be fair game for illustration content and context. I love it when a couple of pieces of tracing paper I've sketched on overlap each other in some unusual way and I see something totally unexpected. I once inadvertently double-exposed a roll of film I had shot off of the TV of the Iran-Contra hearings and the film Fanny and Alexander. There were stunning juxtapositions and I learned an important lesson. Look for the unexpected.

A case in point: recently my daughter had received a kaleidoscope for her birthday, and I had been looking at things through it, enjoying the patterns and hoping to someday be able to utilize the idea of creating a pattern to tell a story. About the same time I received an assignment to create a theater poster for a play at Arena Stage in Washington, DC. Perfect opportunity. I wanted to create something to capture the gist of the play. Basically, the plot revolved around an all-female cast who were gossiping about a woman whose husband was having an affair, unbeknownst to her. I created a grid to place the women in. The women at the top and at the bottom have closed eyes but open mouths, sort of like a Greek chorus (see Figure 7-23).

*I trust both my intuition and serendipity, and I look for the unexpected. I want the best possible solution, composition, and execution—regardless of their inspiration. Actually, the kaleidoscope motif inspired another piece of art, this time as a cover for *The New Yorker* (see Figure 7-24).*

Advice to Aspiring Illustrators

I'll offer a few pieces of advice:

Paint what inspires you. *Don't look to contemporary illustration for inspiration. Find your own. I still hope someday to do a series of paintings for myself based on Gang of Four song lyrics. Don't worry about your style or lack of it. If you draw and paint enough you'll improve and develop your own style* (see Figure 7-25).

If you're stuck or floundering—switch gears. *Paul Klee once said, 'diligence stands higher than talent.' I believe it. Some days it feels as if you can't even draw a square. Other times, it feels like you're flying. If I can't get a likeness right, I'll try beginning my drawing over at some totally different place. I usually start a likeness by outlining the head shape. Next I start with one eyebrow and work my way down or across the face. If I'm having some sort of hand-eye meltdown, I'll start by drawing just the lips or draw the entire body and then make the face from the neck up—just to break up the routine. In Save the Marriage for the Children, I drew the shouting face for one character, flopped it over and changed its gender so that the two are mirror images of each other* (see Figure 7-26).

Be professional. *Return calls promptly. Be courteous.*

Submit at least two ideas or compositions for each piece so the art directors can do their job. *It allows them some choice and more ownership to choose one idea over the other.*

Realize the value of ambiguity. *The Couple is not meant to portray two real people. I just loved how simple the piece was. I entered it in American Illustration, the bible of contemporary juried exhibitions, and it got published. Soon afterwards, the art director at Texas Monthly called and bought the rights to use it for a story entitled "Are Men Necessary?" Later that year a trade magazine for doctors, the now defunct Hippocrates, licensed the piece for an article about the ordeal of being the spouse of a doctor in residency. My painting was simple and vague enough that two different publications thought it solved their unique problems* (see Figure 7-27).



Figure 7-23

Inspiration may come from a variety of places. Mark Ulriksen explains, "Recently my daughter had received a kaleidoscope for her birthday, and I had been looking at things through it, enjoying the patterns and hoping to someday be able to utilize the idea of creating a pattern to tell a story. The two women directly above the protagonist and directly below her all wear the same face, adjusted slightly. I made their hair color alternate, gray and blonde, blonde and gray. While they eye each other knowingly, the two women to either side of the main character look on with pity." Illustration, Mark Ulriksen; illustration editor, Neil Roan. © Ulriksen Illustrations.



Figure 7-24

Actually, Ulriksen does more than reemploy the faceted pattern in this illustration, "Love the One You're With." There is a kind of multiple repetition in the art for this theme cover. Ulriksen reflects, "I knew the pattern idea could get old fast, so I ration its usage. I had an idea to do a takeoff of a rather famous *New Yorker* valentine cover by Art Spiegelman where an African-American woman kisses a Hassidic Jew. I wanted to create a pattern of kissing couples one doesn't often see together, with the center couple the only typical pair." Illustration, Mark Ulriksen; art editor, Françoise Mouly. ©Ulriksen Illustrations.

Remember that the basic job of an illustrator is to create an image that solves a client's problem, and the illustrator then licenses that work to the client, charging very specific dollar amounts for very specific rights to use that image. Sometimes, however, for whatever the reason the artwork gets 'killed.' For example, Newsweek never used my piece, Putin's Long Russian Winter. At news weeklies, such as Time and Newsweek, stories come and go all the time

as the news evolves. I've done many pieces for Newsweek that never ran. You still get paid the same, but no one sees your work. Of course, that's one of the main reasons you illustrate. Among the ways to get a piece such as 'Putin' published is to enter it in competitions, use it as a promo, or have it appear in a college text book such as this one! (See Figure 7-28).

Ask questions. I'll ask art directors why they called me to see how others picture me: 'The

Figure 7-25

Splash Landing meshes Ulriksen's love of dogs with plastic (well, acrylic) surgery. "This was an old canvas, halfway done with a portrait of my Lab jumping over sand dunes. The day I brought my paintings to the galley I was distressed to find that my show was too small, I needed more canvases to fill the wall spaces. I had two days to do something. So I came home, found this canvas, and in a few hours changed the scene to water and the dog to a Portuguese water dog." © Ulriksen Illustrations.



Figure 7-26

Inspiration may come from anywhere. Sometimes it's a kaleidoscope, pet, comic book, incident on the subway, or even classic art; in this case, the scenario or composition was inspired by the film, *American Beauty*. Mark Ulriksen explains, "Kids tune out the arguments that punctuate some marriages. Here, the meal has barely begun and already the husband and wife are making threatening gestures with butter knives and meatballs. Only the dog, with its tail between its legs, seems shaken. The movie *American Beauty* was currently showing, and I borrowed the formalism I found in some of its dinner scenes." © Ulriksen Illustrations.



story's about a sense of something wicked just below the surface and I thought of you,' or 'There's a dog that steals the Thanksgiving turkey as the guests arrive and I thought of you.' I'll end the conversation with my usual question, 'By the way, do you have a contract?'

Sometimes clients will want to use the illustration for everything in the known universe. If I sign a contract, they'll have the right, in perpetuity, without additional payment, to reproduce the image for any purpose they like. That's where I get out my pen, circle all these contract clauses and say, 'No, not without additional payment—to be negotiated,' and return the contract. Either no one in the art department says a thing and my revision is accepted, or we haggle. Or, their

lawyer and I haggle over terms. If these additional rights mean so much to them, they should provide compensation. Otherwise, I thank them and move on. With illustration rights, everything is open to negotiation.

If you're interested in these aspects of working as an illustrator, there's plenty of good information about the business end of illustration in the *Graphic Artists Guild Handbook: Pricing and Ethical Guidelines*, tenth edition.

My friends remain envious of my working arrangement and environment. No boss, no dress code, get up when you want, work when you want, listen to what you want—as loud as you want. If you're like I am, it's a great way to be an artist, make a statement—and earn a living.



Figure 7-27

The Couple is an example of inspiration coming from outside. In this case the illustrator went to an art museum for inspiration and found it in the miniscule brush strokes of Grant Wood. Look closely at the image. The likenesses were spurred by an odd couple: Elizabeth Taylor and Franz Kafka. Mark Ulriksen clarifies: "I utilized reference photos of celebrated people to create my own characters. This wasn't intended to be a portrait of Elizabeth Taylor and Franz Kafka, they just happen to have interesting faces." © Ulriksen Illustrations.



Figure 7-28

The upper left area of the art was deliberately left black here to accommodate where the art director and designer at *Newsweek* had plotted the header and deck typography. This is a wonderful example of collaborative design. Ulriksen handles color and space here to underscore cold, solitude, and isolation. *Putin's Long Russian Winter* was never run by *Newsweek*. Sometimes even brilliant work is not used due to the fickle nature of news and the fleeting value of a story. © Ulriksen Illustrations.