

# Diversity and Equality in Illustration

A Snapshot of the industry  
Summer 2020



***“We need action”***

## Introduction

The AOI ran this survey in June/July 2020. It offers a small snapshot of our industry. It is the voice predominantly of female illustrators, at various stages of their career. There are significant gaps, for example we are not hearing from older people, yet know that ageism is one barrier to the industry. It is not a complete picture, nor is this a glossy report ticking our boxes. It is the start of our path forward, and is offered as a working document that ignites action.

What it tells us is startling, though not surprising. It should make us all feel uncomfortable. In asking about diversity we are asking about more than just race; gender, age, class all feature.

What this survey says most clearly is that illustration is a landscape that enables those with finance, confidence and connections. Barriers are not just at entry they endure through a career.

This is not equality.

This report brings together the findings of the summary. We have worked hard to consider unconscious bias, and be aware of the lenses through which we are reading the responses.

We have kept in many direct quotes to reflect the un-edited voices, because at the heart this is about the individuals who need to make up our industry.

From here we will host a roundtable to discuss the report, and identify tangible routes forward.

*"Tackle head on discussions on the disparities in race in the illustration world."*

*Engage your demographic of minorities.*

*Accept that there is a problem and implement ways to challenge this, challenge top industry people and organisations, and involve and continue to encourage work of all backgrounds"*

## Who Contributed to the Survey?

- The survey was completed by 71 respondents.
- The majority were illustrators (52) with 4 commissioners and 2 agents contributing (some chose not to identify)
- 53% of respondents were AOI members, 47% not members
- 76% respondents live in the UK, with the remaining 24% spread around the world including Europe, Canada, Australia, USA amongst others.
- 16% of respondents consider themselves to have a disability, 81% do not. (3% - chose not to say)
- 63% describe their race or ethnicity as White / White British, 13% as Asian / Asian British, 7% as mixed race and 1% as Black /Black British. 13% identified as 'another race/ethnicity'.
- Respondents were reasonably evenly spread in terms of their time in the industry up to 15 years when it significantly dipped.
- 34% are in their first three years, 31% (have been working 3-7 years, 23% 7-15 years and 6% for 15+ years.
- The majority of respondents (44%) were 25 - 34 years old and a further 27% were 35 - 44 years old. Only 15% were 45+ with no respondents in the 65+ category.
- 75% describe their gender as female, 18% as male, and 6% as non-binary

*"WE NEED TO LOOK AT DIVERSE PEOPLE WHO DRAW IN DIVERSE WAYS! To stop all of our styles becoming the same"*

## What are the barriers for illustrators entering the industry and sustaining a career?

- Overwhelming response was that finance was the primary barrier, followed by race, then gender, and class.
- However, while this gives an indication it does not tell the whole story. It is more nuanced, with a sense of illustration being a club – and that without access to the networks that lead to work, either because of disability, language barriers or where you are geographically, you will struggle.
- Second to that is the reality that characteristics often linked to privilege such as confidence, finance and connections not only enable some illustrators, but further compound the barriers for others. This is especially true in asking for fair pay.
- Those Illustrators who sit in intersectional diversities are most challenged.
- The lack of diversity within commissioners and gatekeepers perpetuates a one-dimensional idea of what 'good' illustration is. There needs to be room for diversity within the artform and this needs to be addressed by diversity within agencies and commissioning companies.

*"Who is deciding what is desirable? How do you recognise a diversity of ages? - not all of us are trained as artists from the digital age and there is a beauty in that."*

*"On gender, it is striking that the overwhelming majority (90% ish) of students I studied BA honours Illustration with were female and yet when I look at those in the highest positions of power throughout the publishing world they seem to be disproportionately male"*

*"In my experience, networking and making a sustainable relationship with other illustrators, art directors, and others in the industry is not easy when you are an immigrant and English is not your first language. You feel like an outsider!"*

*"It seems that people from privileged backgrounds have more opportunities, connections and confidence than us, commoners XD. I love my work, but this is a pretty snobbish environment to work in, which is sad, really."*

## Examples of discrimination that they have witnessed or experienced in the past 12 months.

- The majority of examples given were race based. Some are around gender, either sexual harassment, or a subtle patronising approach which erodes confidence and a feeling of ability.

Examples included:

- Educators, commissioners, leaders being exclusively white as well as book festivals being visibly white.
- Illustrators receiving reduced pay, cancelled contracts from people who were not like them (through language, ethnicity or class).
- Illustrators of colour being asked to illustrate 'their' culture which is not expected of white illustrators.
- The anecdotal belief that fees are lower for female illustrators. Men being promoted in design studios because they are perceived as natural leaders.
- Exclusion from the industry due to language or location. Barriers include requiring travel or a certain way of working.
- Finance - needing expensive software to attend university.
- Lack of reasonable adjustments being made to accommodate disabled artists within educational and professional settings.

*"We had a white older male guest lecturer... He was all jokey...and would then...point to someone of non-white ethnicity and say 'or China or wherever you're from'. None of the tutors addressed it."*

*"I went to a workshop and I was the only person of color in a group of 10 women. We critiqued each other's work....The moderator...did not like my picture book. Instead of giving me constructive feedback she said, "You should do a horror story from your own country." That is what she said. I have lived in California longer than I have lived in my native country. I am an American. But that is what she told me."*

*"I arrived in England 4 years ago by choice. I've been a professional illustrator for 12 years. I've found myself in a position of having to prove that my qualifications and abilities are as good as those from the British artists. Ageism is another huge problem within the industry."*

## Is there a sector of illustration that feels particularly unwelcoming?

- Depressingly most areas felt unwelcoming to people who could describe themselves as diverse. However, there was particular note of gaming / animation and children's book publishing and editorial.
- Unconscious bias was recognised as a driver, and areas where there is generally no diverse leadership may be the least welcoming.

*"Maybe live illustration because the people who draw at an event are very visible. Clients from the fashion industry asked me to remove my piercings.... Can't imagine how they would work with someone who can't just remove their skin colour/gender/tattoos/disability/hairstyle."*

*"At my exhibition on Carnaby Street I was told that I wasn't really mixed race because I wasn't 'brown enough.' I was asked on multiple occasions 'where are you really from?' when I said I'm British... I've heard people joking about my surname and trying to work out my ethnicity whilst I was within earshot."*

*"I think it's probably very tough to be in a real life situation - be it networking, pitching or online meetings - when the "rest of the room" is noticeably not diverse."*

*"As a working class artist I don't know how to approach working with agencies as I feel like it seems like a bit of a club for kids with cash?"*

## What do we need do to – both at the AOI and through the Industry?

We have pulled together 5 key areas to address which have been raised in the survey. We have made steps to address some of these, others remain open for discussion, and some are longer term goals.

### 1. Visible Diversity in Membership

1.1 Ensure visibility of diversity of voices and artistic styles – who is featured, shared on social, who speaks at events etc.

1.2 Encourage commissioners to commission diversely – not stick to knowns.

1.3 Support illustrators to be non -racist and more draw more diverse characters in their work.

*"I feel very confused as to what defines illustration and an illustrator being multi disciplinary - is that acceptable or do I need to define myself-resting in a particular box."*

*"You can also consider to have workshops that talk about this subjects. As a white cis woman I'd love to learn how to bring more diversity into my illustrations without stereotyping. As a travel sketcher I'd love to learn more about how "exotic" images are perceived so that I can be very aware on how I communicate in my illustrations and drawings. I'm sure there is plenty to discuss and learn within these subjects."*

### 2. Diversity in Hiring Positions

2.1 Ensure diversity within AOI staff and Board.

2.2 Support diversity of hiring positions – agents, commissioners, publishers etc.

*"Give more opportunities to people of color. The playing field is not level. People of color start way behind white people."*

### 3. Fair Pay

3.1 Champion fair pay which makes it easier to get into for a more diverse range of people.

3.2 Demonstrate that entry level jobs / unpaid internships (which translates into entry level commission fees and unpaid work) do not support diversity.

3.3 Evidence gender and racial wage gap.

3.4 Recognise lack of awareness of fair fees, and lower living costs, can mean work is outsourced to developing countries.

*“The gender and racial wage gap is just not acceptable. Same work, same money. End of. Trying to make that a reality would be a very positive change I think”*

*“Do more to highlight openly/to non-members, how much an illustrator should be demanding. If you're from a poor background, you have no idea what a 'decent rate' is, and my idea of a good rate was for a long time at least twice as low as a richer/middle class persons idea of a good rate. I had no idea how much money clients could afford to pay me.”*

#### **4. Affirmative Action**

4.1 Support a no tolerance approach to discrimination in the industry and schools. Hold people accountable.

4.2 Proactive schemes such as mentorship for under-represented illustrators and projects for minority groups e.g. getting commissioners and BAME illos together

4.3 Financial support for underrepresented illustrators. Recognise that a lack of financial privilege, whilst experienced across the board, can most directly affect diverse illustrators.

4.4 Recognise the need to communicate differently, and accommodate individual's needs.

*“Language, because I'm from Indonesia. A lot of people in Indonesia are good artists but the lack of resources in Bahasa Indonesia makes it hard for someone who doesn't know English to succeed in illustration unless they network hard.”*

#### **5 The Next Generation**

5.1 Engage next generation while at schools

5.2 Support diversity awareness and education in Higher education

5.3 Show and educate our audience things like history of racism, supremacy, ingrained racism

*“Support universities with illustration courses to embed and address diversity in illustration as part of their course curriculum.”*



## Find out More

If you'd like to find out more about this work please contact Georgia at the AOI [georgia@theaoi.com](mailto:georgia@theaoi.com)

To find out more about the AOI visit [theaoi.com](http://theaoi.com) or follow us @theaoi