

AOI Annual Report



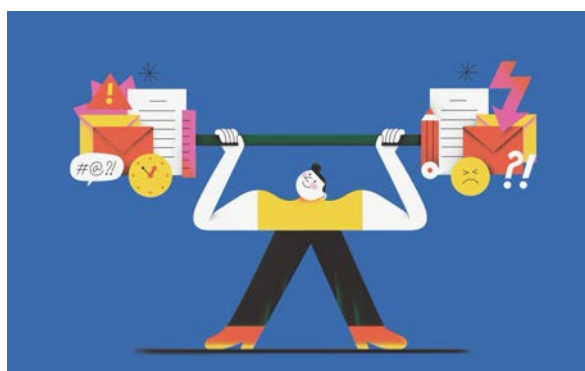
October 2019 – September 2020

Chair's Summary

2020 was an extraordinary year. We addressed refining our offer, developing new initiatives to support our growing membership, structuring our team most efficiently, and then, seemingly in an instant, along came Covid and we had to change nearly every way worked immediately.

That change involved developing new services for our members, maintaining our existing services, and establishing a successful working from home model. The amazing and committed AOI team, rose to the challenge with energy and positivity, despite navigating their own personal Covid-challenges. I would like to thank them all for their determination and resilience.

This report will demonstrate the success with which we delivered existing and new programmes, as well as the silver linings that the pandemic have afforded. The World Illustration Awards, planned for a new venue and festival style programme, was reimagined as an online showcase and promotion package. This was well received, and while we all missed the physical connection with others, has attributes we will take forward.



Strong governance and financial management has meant that AOI entered the pandemic with some resilience. My thanks go to the board for their work in diligently steering the AOI to ensure that we will champion and support illustrators now and for years to come.

David Gilbert
Chair

MEMBERSHIP

Supporting Members

Our membership increased from 2780 to 2830 through this financial year.

Our helpdesk responded to around 7,000 enquiries. These dipped at the start of the lockdown, but remained just under the usual weekly total for the majority of the first lockdown.

Before the pandemic we focussed on developing our offer for **mid-career illustrators**.

Three notable highlights were the establishment of a **new mentor scheme** for under-represented illustrators, creating a **new residency partnership** with Atelier Olschinsky and establishing the AOI's **Fighting Fund** to support illustrators taking their infringement claims to court.

The AOI team worked hard to adapt the service as Covid-19 struck. Rachel Hill led the membership team with commitment and care delivering an excellent service. Key areas of our **pandemic delivery** were:

To keep informed:

- Establishing a Covid-19 resource page with up to date, reliable information
- Presenting our mental health guide for creative freelancers
- Developing webinars, resources and articles which address current needs and trends including the Two Week Plan.

To keep connected:

- Launching the Spotlight on Series featuring an illustrator weekly to address the desire for connection and networking
- Establishing regular agent meetings in partnership with SAA
- Developing and launching our Member Exchange, an online connection tool for members.

To champion:

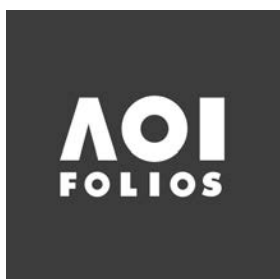
- Undertaking a surveys of members to understand the impact of Covid-19 and determine our advocacy.
- Communicating the challenges and needs of illustrators to the Government.



Showcasing members

In October we delivered a **members' exhibition** in Hoxton Arches 10-12 October 2019, with an accompanying program of talks and events. This cost neutral event was designed to connect and showcase members works.

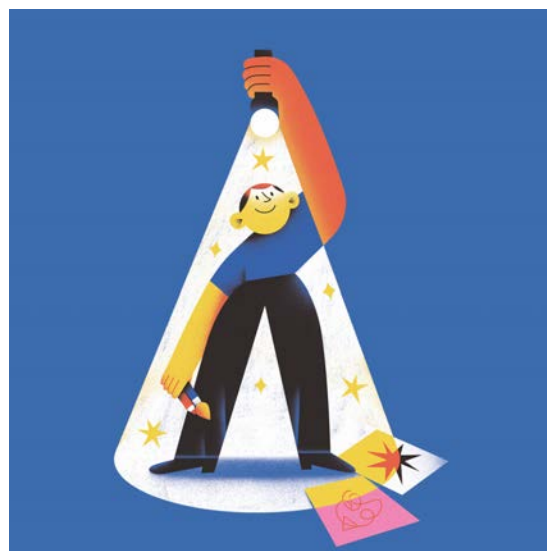
Led by Daisy McMullan the whole team worked incredibly hard and it was a strong success. Submissions were invited around a theme of innovation. There were 560+ visitors over two days, and 10 events including college visits, pop up help desks and talks.



Freelance consultant Tess Redburn undertook development work on the **AOI Folios**, refining the content of the site, establishing regular curated galleries and increasing the breadth of engagement with commissioners. This work will continue in house.

Marianna Madriz worked with Chris Unitt, a digital consultant to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which we can use **social media** to support our members, share their work and champion the industry.

Our social media reach rose to 151K+ and we started to work more strategically to leverage social media platforms to best amplify the work of our members. The commencement of the planned Communications Coordinator post was postponed to 2021 to allow robust administration through the first lockdown period.



Empowering Illustrators

Having trialled delivering events as webinars, we ramped up this model of delivery through the lockdown period. Our Spotlight On series was established quickly in response to the desire for illustrators to connect, and proved very popular.

We established the Complete Guide to Business for illustrators, a six part series covering various areas of business practise. Importantly the course is designed to create a 'cohort' who can connect, and, on completion, continue to support each other.



The Black Lives Matter movement galvanized our work around diversity and inclusion and we made a firm positive statement about our intention to challenge racism in our industry.



Working with others we delivered a series of initiatives in this area including:

- Launching a mentorship scheme targeting illustrators underrepresented in the industry. With thanks to Willa Gebbie, Laura Hughes, Dan Woodger and Cat O' Neil for being the inaugural mentees.
- Continuing to be part of the Pathways programme
- Undertaking an industry survey about diversity
- Refining internal processes and policies to make the AOI more accessible.
- Refining recruitment processes to support diversity within the staff and board
- Running a session on public speaking for underrepresented illustrators, supporting work addressing the gap in visibly diverse speakers

PUBLICATIONS

Directories

The Directories are the AOI's listing of commissioners of illustration in three traditional areas of Editorial, Advertising and Publishing. The AOI's USP is that we speak to all listed entrants to ensure that they are willing to be contacted, and to understand their commissioning interests. The Directories are updated annually.

This year we expanded the Directories, investing in research into a broader reach, expanding out into less traditional areas and some non-UK commissioners. The lockdown and furlough scheme made it harder to reach some contacts, but we are pleased to have grown the final Directories. We commissioned work by Caroline Dowsett for the new cover image.



Guide to Law

Guide to Law remains a popular resource and we were able to take portable card payments when physical events still allowed. We will look to review the book in the coming 12-18 months. The closure of the office meant we were unable to send out copies and we closed the online store for sales for the majority of the year.

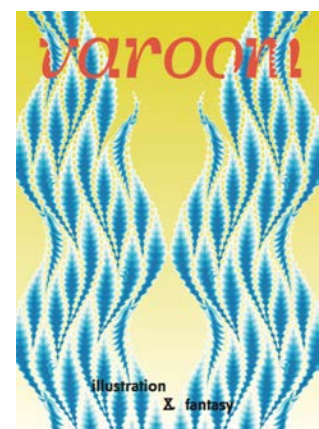
Varoom

Olivia Ahmad continued as Editor of Varoom, working with Derek Brazell on Issue 40 (Fantasy) and Issue 41 (No Narrative).

The Fantasy issue stretched from the uncanny, colour saturated interiors of Ram Han to the hyper real English countryside of *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* game, while No Narrative discovered amazing images from the ocean floor to word-based activist street art via artwork challenging the conventions of medical illustration.

Fraser Muggeridge Studio lead a redesign, seeing the magazine shift to a smaller, thicker style.

As with Guide to Law we were unable to sell from the website or send out Varoom's for most of the year.



CAMPAIGNING

Legislation

The AOI has long engaged in legislative concerns for illustrators. As the Government responded to the pandemic with its financial support programme, we were swift and robust in communicating the concerns of illustrators to relevant committees, including the Treasury and DCMS in particular. Our Covid Surveys provided vital evidence in these submissions, and captured the impact of Covid on our industry.

We worked with Society of Authors, Creative Rights Alliance and ACLS in particular to amplify our voice and ensure concerns were heard. We joined a wider group led by ACLS calling for the establishment of a UK Creators Council.



Industry Engagement

We work directly with organisations around to address inequitable practise. Of note was considerable work around competitions, and advocacy for the need for kill fees to be included in contracts. This latter point was of particular importance as the pandemic started.

The launch of the Fighting Fund also underlined the AOI's commitment to ensuring Illustrators rights are upheld. The Fund is designed to share the up front cost of going to the IPEC Small Claims Court.

Partnerships

As president of the European Illustrators Forum we continued to lead this group of professional bodies in sharing resources, collecting data and understanding a pan-European view of the impact of Covid 19. On an illustrator level we were able to share the Ninja Guide, developed in Spain.

The AOI remains an active Board member of the Creative Rights Alliance, supporting the recruitment of a paid staff member to lead the work of the Alliance.

We joined the BCC's Copyright Education and Awareness Working Group, allowing us to not only enhance and contribute to the great work this group does, but to ensure illustrators voices and needs are heard.

AWARDS

The World Illustration Awards 2020 received the highest number of entries to date with 4371 entries (19% more than 2019) from 2820 entrants in 79 countries (59% Europe, 25% America, 17% rest of world).

We introduced a longlist for the first time, presenting 500 illustrators which was well received and an important way to offer additional value to entrants.



The pandemic meant that we could not offer a physical event, instead shaping a digital showcase, featuring the 200 shortlist, an awards ceremony and celebration programme. Sabine Reimer, working with Daisy McMullan achieved a hugely successful and well received outcome in the most challenging of circumstances. The programme was shaped around two themes;

Promotion: share curated lists of entries on social media and websites, promote to art directors using our networks and bikini lists, invest in paid for advertising and enhance the showcase page on our website.

Celebration: present an online programme of masterclasses, meet ups and panels in October in line with the physical event dates.

This digital focus was well received and offered tangible benefit to illustrators as well as allowing a more equitable engagement from entrants globally. The website had 82,000 page sessions through the Awards cycle, with 9,000 visits to the showcase. The newly established Instagram was popular, with 5,000 followers within months of launching the account.

We continued with the Highly Commended awards, as well as the 4 cross category awards, and Professional and New Talent awards for the ten categories.

We renewed the partnership with Directory of Illustration to run from 2021 to 2023. This will enable us to continue to grow the awards, adding benefit and value to illustrators who enter around the world.

Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 3LA info@theaoi.com www.theaoi.com
social media: @theaoi



ADMINISTRATION

In the summer of 2020 AOI was the victim of a data breach. This was despite rigorous cyber security, and in keeping with a rise of attacks during lockdown. We took swift and robust action to close and secure our site, report the attack and establish long term enhanced cyber security.

We brought forward the updating of our office software and took further security enhancing measures. We revised our organisational risk assessment, and implemented actions to address some further areas.

Staff during the financial year 2019/20

Ren Renwick, CEO
Rachel Hill, Membership Director
Rasheed Musa, Finance Director
Derek Brazell, Projects Manager
Sabine Reimer, Awards Manager
Daisy McMullan, Awards Coordinator
Georgia Luckman, Membership Adviser
Marianna Madriz, Senior Membership Assistant

We work with a number of freelancers, in particular:

Simon Davies, Finance
HC Gordon, Directories
Natasha Knight, Membership
Alexa Lamont, Contracts
Fig Taylor, Portfolios
Charli Vince, College Talks



And with thanks to our Volunteers leading meet ups through the UK:

Dave Bain, Sue Gent, Shirin Karbor, Natasha Knight, Lana Lee, Anita Jean Stewart, Jennifer Reynette, Charli Vince

AOI Directors

David Gilbert (Chair)
Sam Arthur (Deputy Chair) Resigned April 2020
Roderick Mills (Retired July 2020)
Vicki Willden-Lebrecht (Retired July 2020)
Darryl Clifton
Silvia Baumgart
Montana Forbes
Deirdre McDermott
Ren Renwick
Dan Woodger

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