

# AOI ANNUAL REPORT



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

## OCTOBER 2022 – SEPTEMBER 2023

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The Association of Illustrators, Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 3LA



# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE AOI



*Image credit: Jonny Hannah*

## **A Legacy of Empowering Illustrators**

In 2023, the AOI proudly marked its 50th anniversary, a milestone that underscores the organisation's enduring commitment to advocating for illustrators' rights, fostering professional growth, and celebrating the value of illustration. Over five decades, the AOI has established itself as an indispensable resource for illustrators worldwide, providing them with the tools necessary to thrive in the creative industries.



*Image credit: Jonny Hannah*

As we reflect on the AOI's rich history, we invite you to explore the features below, showcasing our community's most notable achievements:

- [5 Major Achievements](#)
- [Campaigning History](#)
- [Awards & Events History](#)
- [Membership History](#)

The illustration industry has seen many changes over the past 50 years, and it will undoubtedly continue to evolve. As always, the AOI remains committed to its core values of:

## **SHARING KNOWLEDGE**

Providing illustrators with access to expert advice, a listening ear, and a wealth of learning resources.

## **EMPOWERING ILLUSTRATORS**

Equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate their own careers with confidence.

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY**

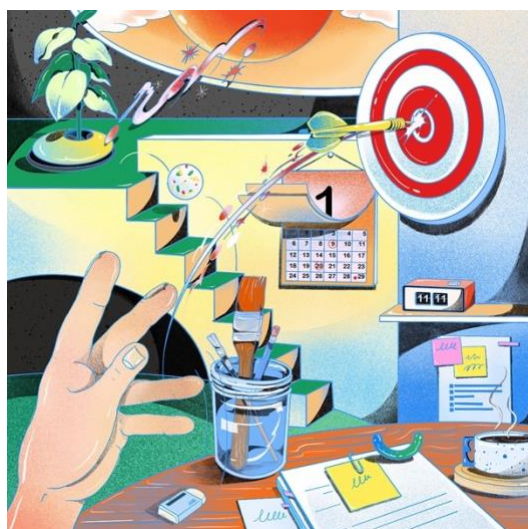
Fostering connections among illustrators on both a local and global scale.

## **CELEBRATING ILLUSTRATION**

Spotlighting the incredible talent within our industry and the immense value that illustration provides.

## **STANDING TOGETHER**

Championing creators' rights and amplifying the voices of illustrators to government.



*Image credit: Beya Panicha*

In this annual report, we highlight the progress we've made towards these goals in 2022 – 2023.

# MEMBERSHIP

Despite the economic challenges posed by the cost-of-living crisis, AOI membership significantly grew this financial year, increasing from **2,653** to **2,993** members.

## **Membership growth by category:**

Illustrator Members: +5

Industry Members: +3

College Members: +8

Student Members: +324

We are particularly encouraged by the surge in student memberships, made possible through partnerships with universities committed to investing in the future of illustration.

# SHARING KNOWLEDGE

We've built our knowledge from supporting illustrators for 50 years. This year thousands of illustrators accessed our wealth of resources and received professional advice from our experienced helpdesk team.

## **Expert Guidance: 1-1 Helpdesk**

The AOI's dedicated helpdesk team provided personalized support to our illustrator members, addressing over 5,000 inquiries across the year. Our advisors offered expertise on a wide range of topics, from licensing and contracts to copyright and self-promotion.

This year, we've seen a notable increase in questions surrounding poor contract terms, the implications of artificial intelligence, and animation.



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

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In September 2023, we welcomed Brittany Freeman to the helpdesk team, who brings a wealth of industry insight to her role, having previously worked as an illustration agent.

### **Enhanced AOI Resources**

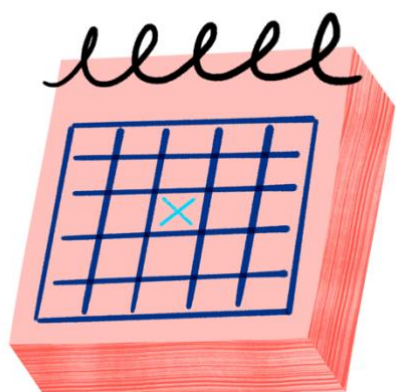
In response to evolving trends and member needs throughout the course of the year, we introduced several new resources designed to support illustrators at various stages in their careers.

**NEW** introductory resources include:

- Strategies for securing new clients.
- Navigating the basics of animation contracts.
- Scam emails and identifying fraudulent enquiries.

**NEW** mid-career resources include:

- How to successfully increase your fees in line with inflation.
- Portfolio refresh guidance from illustration agents.
- An international directory of illustration focussed events.



*Image credit: William Luz*

### **NEW Event Series: AOI Discusses**

In 2023, the AOI launched an innovative series of online talks, AOI Discusses, featuring experts exploring pivotal topics such as income diversification, emerging technologies, and the well-being of creatives. After a successful trial period, we are delighted to announce that AOI Discusses events are now free to members.

This initiative underscores the AOI's dedication to providing enriching and accessible learning opportunities, that explore all aspects of an illustration career.

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## In-Depth Webinars

In addition to AOI Discusses, the AOI delivered a highly successful practical webinar series, designed to bolster illustrators' business acumen. These engaging sessions attracted a diverse audience, with over **90** places booked in each webinar.

The series covered a wide range of topics, including:

- Strategies for selling your work wholesale
- Understanding complex publishing contracts
- Gaining insight into the role of an illustration agent
- Understanding tax obligations as a UK-based illustrator
- How to secure new clients and grow your business

Our ongoing webinar series has received positive feedback for equipping illustrators with the essential knowledge and skills necessary to sustain their careers.



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

## Illustration Business Masterclasses

The AOI developed an updated version of its Illustration Business Masterclasses, delivering this invaluable resource to **51** university courses across the UK. This initiative equipped over **1,650** students with the knowledge and basic tools to launch their careers.

# **EMPOWERING ILLUSTRATORS**

From industry insights to portfolio consultations and client contacts, the AOI provided the tools illustrators needed to build their businesses and forge their own paths.

## **Inside Illustration: A Growing Library**

Following its successful launch in 2022, Inside Illustration has continued to go from strength to strength. This member exclusive section of the AOI website releases two new 'seasons' annually, each a toolkit for mastering a specific are of industry.

### Illustration for Children Season (March 2023)

- A comprehensive guide to entering the children's market.
- Four creative practice courses with renowned illustrators.
- An interview with author-illustrator Alex T. Smith.
- A resource on navigating the children's illustration field.
- Insights from industry professionals on creating images for children.
- A podcast on children's picture book creation, hosted by Rachel Taylor.



*Image credit: Yuki Uebo*

## Site Specific Season (September 2023)

- A guide to building a site-specific illustration career.
- Four creative practice courses with renowned illustrators.
- An interview with Sam Roberts of Better Letters.
- A resource on creating artwork designed for a public space.
- An article on site-specific commissions for shops, pubs, and malls.
- A podcast on developing mural work, hosted by Rachel Taylor.



*Image credit: Alberto Casagrande*

We look forward to expanding this library year on year, sharing the keys to success in a variety of different fields, empowering members to develop and diversify their careers.



*Image credit: Yukai Du*

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## Expanding Consultation Services

This year we introduced a new one-on-one consultation service for AOI members. Nicola Mullen (Brand Warrior) provided exclusive, discounted branding consultations, helping members to professionalise their online presence.

## Updated Client Directories

In November 2022, we worked with freelancer Becky Brown to revise our client directories, ensuring they are current, GDPR-compliant, and feature an extensive list of commissioners from the Editorial, Advertising, and Publishing sectors.



*Image credit: William Luz*

The response to our updated directories has been positive, with **305** sold throughout the year. As always, AOI members received a discounted rate on this valuable tool for growing your client base.

## New Exclusive Discounts

Throughout 2023, the AOI secured new member-exclusive discounts to help illustrators reduce their day-to-day business expenses, establishing two major new partnerships:

- Printworks: Offering AOI members discounted printing services.
- CityLit: Providing members with discounted access to practical courses.



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

## Graduate Support Scheme:

### Empowering Emerging Illustrators

The AOI's Graduate Support Scheme continued to flourish, providing universities with the opportunity to gift memberships to their graduating students. This year, the scheme supported over **600** emerging illustrators as they transitioned from academia into industry.

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# **BUILDING COMMUNITY**

## **Welcoming Members and Building Community**

The AOI introduced bi-monthly 'Welcome Meetings' to introduce members to the benefits of membership, answer questions, and provide an opportunity to meet the AOI team.



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

## **Illo Grad Network**

The AOI hosted the second edition of the Illo Grad Network, a four-part event program spanning the academic year. Each event featured a business skills presentation and networking opportunities.

This initiative connected new graduates nationwide, fostering peer-to-peer support. We also introduced a discounted ticket package, offering graduates reduced-rate access to all four events.

## **Industry Events and Partnerships**

The AOI membership team attended and delivered talks at several industry events, fostering connections between illustrators and other creative professionals. Highlights included:

- **London Book Fair:** We hosted a successful 'Illustrators' Afternoon', featuring a Business Masterclass, Panels and Networking Drinks.
- **Bologna Children's Book Fair:** We delivered a talk on 'How to Find New Clients', conducted portfolio consultations with Big Picture Press, and supported the European Illustration Forum's drop-in helpdesk.
- **New Designers:** We delivered a Business Masterclass to graduates and judged the new AOI Industry Award.
- **London Illustration Fair:** We coordinated a popular day of portfolio consultations with 8 illustration agents.

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## Meet Ups: Fostering Local Illustrator Communities

Our volunteer led 'Meet Ups' continued to unite local illustrator communities across the UK. Over **1,400** illustrators attended Meet Ups events throughout the year. Under the leadership of Freelance Meet-Ups coordinator Dave Bain, we successfully expanded our networks by launching new Meet Ups in Birmingham and Preston.

In April 2023, we hosted an in-person workshop with Meet Up Hosts from across the UK to discuss strategies for reaching more local illustrators and best supporting their communities. We thank all our dedicated Meetup Hosts for their excellent work in engaging and celebrating their local communities.



Image credit: Various AOI Meet Up Events

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## Mentorship Scheme

The AOI successfully ran the fourth edition of its Mentorship Scheme, expanding the cohort from **16** to **21** mentees. New mentors joined the program, offering 6 months of tailored guidance to underrepresented artists.



*Image credit: Dan Woodger*

This year we also opened our applications to non-members, to increase the accessibility of the scheme. We received a record-breaking **270** applications.

Our sincere gratitude goes to the AOI mentors, many of whom generously volunteer their time and expertise year after year.

## Neurodiversity in Illustration

Membership survey results showed that 27% of members identify as neurodivergent. The AOI is dedicated to serving these members and fostering an industry that celebrates neurodiverse talent. In June 2023, The Mixer (the AOI's disability meet-up group) hosted a successful event on navigating an illustration career with ADHD, featuring Ana Jaks.



*Image credit: Alexandra Ramirez*

We look forward to creating further events and resources to support neurodivergent artists within our community.

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# CELEBRATING ILLUSTRATION



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

## **Showcasing Member's Talent**

Throughout the year, we showcased hundreds of members across our social media channels and AOI Folios. Our social media community grew to over **184,000** followers across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, further amplifying the work of AOI members.

## **Drawing Diversity**

AOI Director Montana Forbes spearheaded the Drawing Diversity event series, celebrating illustrators who explore Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in their work. Topics included:

- Women in animation, featuring all-female creative production studio Batch.
- Queer narratives, with illustrator and storyboard artist Ricardo Bessa.
- Representation in Children's books, with illustrator Ruthine Burton.



*Image credit: Jeez Vanilla*

## High-Profile Illustration Events

The AOI organized three in-person events featuring renowned illustrators, celebrating the importance of illustration. These events, attended by hundreds of illustrators, included:

- Oliver Jeffers, in partnership with UAL and Harper Collins.
- Lauren Child, in partnership with UAL and Harper Collins.
- Jon Klassen, in partnership with CityLit and Walker Books.

## WORLD ILLUSTRATION AWARDS 2023



## Celebrating Global Creative Excellence

The World Illustration Awards 2023 showcased the remarkable talent and diversity of illustrators worldwide. We received an impressive **4,948** entries from **3,185** entrants spanning **84** countries (representing every continent), reaffirming the awards' reputation and global reach.

## Awards Enhancements

To continually elevate the entrant experience, we introduced:

- A new Animation category
- A new cross category award for innovation
- Fresh branding designed by Ali Vermillo
- An early bird discount for entries submitted before January.

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## New Alumni Event

In September 2023, we hosted our first WIA Alumni networking event, open to all past category and overall winners.

## International Tour

Our ongoing relationship with the Shenzhen Illustration Association saw the 2023 winning projects exhibited in several major cities across China, including Fuzhou, Nanchang, and Shenzhen.

The tour was also shown in several venues across the UK including:

- London Book Fair, Kensington Olympia
- The Levinsky Gallery, Plymouth University
- The Art + Design Gallery, Hertford University



*Image credit: WIA Touring Exhibition*

The World Illustration Awards 2023 was a resounding success, celebrating the power of illustration and connecting the global creative community.

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# STANDING TOGETHER



*Image credit: Tania Yakunova*

## **Championing Illustrators' Rights**

The AOI remained at the forefront of advocating for illustrators' rights and interests amidst the evolving creative landscape. Our campaigning efforts focussed on shaping policy, raising awareness, and empowering members to navigate changes in technology and legislation.

## **Artificial Intelligence: A Priority Issue**

The rapid advancement of AI image-generating software brought increased attention to the potential impacts on the illustration industry. The AOI actively worked with industry organisations to campaign against the unremunerated use of copyrighted works in AI datasets and to amplify the voice of creatives in government conversations as AI regulations are formed.

Our AI campaigning work included:

- Conducting a member survey on text and data mining, with results submitted as evidence to the government to inform policy decisions.
- Hosting an AI roundtable for agent members, featuring representatives from Sheridan's and the British Copyright Council (BCC), to discuss industry-wide concerns, challenges, and opportunities presented by AI.
- Releasing a public [AI statement](#) on the AOI website, clarifying our position and commitment to members.
- Launching a dedicated AI Updates page, providing a centralized resource for the latest information and developments.
- Participating in the AI/ML Media Advocacy Summit, to help shape the conversation around AI and its impacts on the industry.

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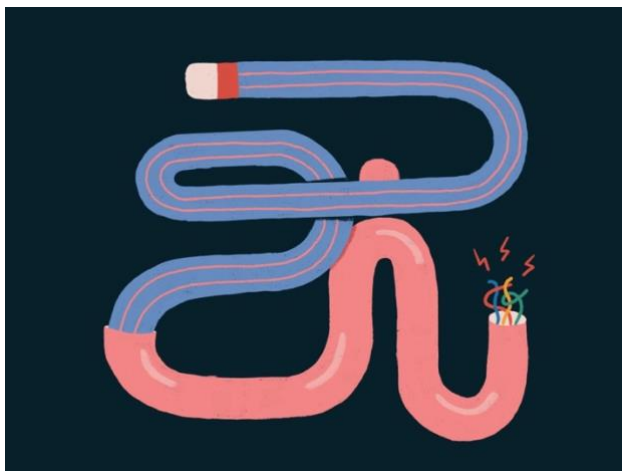
- Working closely with the Creators Rights Alliance (CRA) and BCC to feed into government consultations, ensuring the illustration community's interests are represented.

### **Government Submissions**

The AOI submitted detailed responses to the UK government's AI white paper and the House of Lords' Large Language Model Inquiry, advocating for the rights and interests of illustrators.

Our key arguments included:

- No exceptions for text and data mining should be granted for works 'scraped' from the internet to train AI datasets.
- The development and deployment of large language models should be regulated at the government level to prevent misuse and ensure transparency.
- Creators whose work is used to train AI systems should receive appropriate remuneration for their contributions.
- Artists must be protected from AI-generated works that replicate their unique style, preventing unfair competition.
- AI developers should be required to disclose all sources of information used to train their systems, promoting accountability.
- Creators, trade associations, and unions must have a seat at the table in shaping policy and industry-wide decisions.
- Creators need access to affordable and accessible legal mechanisms to enforce their rights and protect their work.



*Image credit: Falko Grentrup*

### **AI Events**

In July 2023, we hosted a well-attended webinar for AOI members, delivered by Sheridan's Law Firm, exploring the legal implications of AI for individuals and its wider impact on the illustration industry.

In September 2023, the AOI also chaired an online panel discussion event in partnership with the European Illustration Forum, featuring five international speakers sharing diverse perspectives, national legislation, and campaigning initiatives from their respective countries.

## **COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE**

### **National Lottery Heritage Fund**

The AOI participated in a Heritage Fund working group discussing 'Ethics, Creatives and Cultural Commissioning'. We advocated for illustrators' interests and challenged the requirement for Creative Commons licenses on all digital content funded by the Heritage Fund.

### **The European Illustration Forum**

The AOI remains steadfast in its commitment to challenging itself and the industry at large to foster an equitable and diverse community that all members can take pride in.

As president of the European Illustration Forum (EIF), the AOI led the launch of a European-wide diversity survey, translated into 8 languages and garnering nearly 1000 responses. The EIF will use the results to champion underrepresented groups through various initiatives in the coming year.



*Image credit: Tania Yakunova*

### **Agents for Change**

We continued to support Agents for Change (AFC) in their initiatives to actively diversify the illustration industry, including portfolio consultations and industry round tables. Our partnership with this group helps ensure that issues of representation and inclusion remain at the forefront of our organisation and the industry's evolution.

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## **CRA and BCC Activity**

The AOI remains an active board member of the CRA, collaborating with other creative organizations to advocate for the rights of all creators. Throughout the year we also contributed to the BCC's Copyright Education and Awareness Working Group, ensuring illustrators' voices are heard in shaping copyright policy and education initiatives.

Through proactive campaigning, collaboration, and education, the AOI remains dedicated to championing illustrators' rights. As we look ahead, we will continue to prioritize the issues most impacting our members.



# **ADMINISTRATION**

## **Strengthening Our Foundation: AOI Internal Activities**

As our organisations continued to grow and evolve, the AOI team remained committed to refining our internal processes, governance, and infrastructure to best serve our members.

## **Sustainable Membership Fees**

The AOI chose to absorb inflation costs between 2018 and 2023, throughout the pandemic and rising cost of living, to help support the illustration community. In August 2023, we introduced a modest membership fee increase, necessitated by the economic climate and the increased costs associated with carrying out our services. We were grateful for the understanding and ongoing support of AOI members.

## **Strengthening Our Governance**

In summer 2023, our nominations committee welcomed Rachel Gannon, Associate Professor and Acting Head of School of Design at Kingston University, to the board (pending member approval).

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Rachel brought invaluable experience in academia, enriching our board discussions. We also welcomed Gabriella Playford, solicitor at Sheridan's, as a legal advisor, bolstering the board's expertise.

### **Investing in Our Digital Infrastructure**

Our website is the key access point to AOI benefits. This year we invested in a comprehensive redesign, launching in summer 2024, to enhance the user experience and better serve our members. We collaborated with UX consultancy Deckchair to conduct member user testing and assess the website's functionality needs.



*Image credit: Harriet Noble*

Our priorities included:

- Simplifying the design to better showcase member's work and voices.
- Improving navigation for easy access to member areas and benefits.
- Seamless integration with our CRM and payment portals.
- A cleaner, visually appealing design with curated content.
- Enhanced functionality and visibility of AOI folios.

We are currently working with web developers TLC to complete the redesign, ensuring the member experience remains the key focus. We will be launching the updated website alongside other exciting projects in the coming months.

## **STAFF DURING THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2022/23**

Rachel Hill, CEO

Tsveta Todorova, Finance Manager

Sarah Morris, Membership Manager

Derek Brazell, Projects Manager

Sabine Reimer, Awards Manager

Daisy McMullan, Awards Coordinator (to March 2023)

Helen Ridley, Awards Coordinator (from March 2023)

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Saskia Cameron, Membership Adviser (to September 2023)  
Brittany Freeman, Membership Adviser (from September 2023)  
Natasha Knight, Membership Executive  
Marianna Madriz, Communications Coordinator  
Tania Duarte, Membership Administrator

**We work with several freelancers, in particular:**

Simon Davies, Finance  
Dave Bain, Events  
Becky Brown, Directories  
Fig Taylor, Portfolios  
Alice Desmond, Portfolios  
Charli Vince, College Talks

**And with thanks to our Volunteers leading meetups through the UK:**

Alexandra Ramirez, Abbie Reilly, Jen Leem-Bruggen, Katherine Tromans, Lauren Jefferis, Liv Collins, Tom Woolley, Tim Alexander, Jess Knights, Chris Evans, Mathilde Heu, Birgitta Sif, David Barrow, AJ Higgins, Freya Moses, Tita Berredo, Ekaterina Sheath, Vicky Hughes, Lana Le, Nicola Mullen, Josie Peters, Rachelle Panagarry, Carl Wilson, Kirsti Beautyman, Julia Triay, Emily Foster, Ollie Dean, Becki Harper, and Marc Godfrey-Murphy.

## **AOI BOARD**

### **Directors**

David Gilbert, Chair  
Silvia Baumgart, Deputy Chair (to May 2023)  
Ciara Phelan, Deputy Chair  
Ren Renwick (to July 2023)  
Montana Forbes  
Deirdre McDermott  
Dan Woodger  
Daniel Moorey  
Jhinuk Sarkar  
Rachel Gannon (from September 2023)

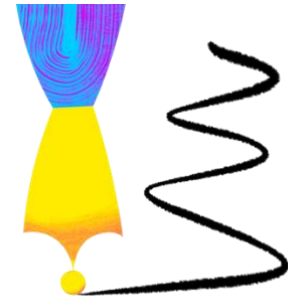
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# Chair's Summary

This has been another successful year at the AOI. Notwithstanding challenges, we have had a stable year with overall membership, with student membership rising strongly.



*Image credit: William Luz*

We have seen record numbers of illustrators attending recent events and engaging with our campaigning work. Developments in Artificial Intelligence have sparked important conversations about the value of creativity. The AOI will continue to champion the rights of creators and support you in navigating this landscape.

Looking forward, we are excited to introduce some significant new projects in the year ahead, to ensure we are best serving our community.

I want to thank our outstanding Executive Team and Board of Directors. As well as the members, for supporting the AOI, and driving the illustration industry forwards.

## David Gilbert

AOI Chair



*Image credit: Tania Yakunova*

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