

Experts on Illustration

Those who live and breathe illustration would be the right people to gain some insight on the popular design form. From the evolution of illustrations to its place in the world today, renowned designers and illustrators get together on the next few pages to express why and how illustration is taking the design world by storm!



Abhishek Singh is a graduate in Animation Film Design from India's National Institute of Design. After studying, he set out to travel throughout his own country to experience and absorb the deep, rich stories that reticulate India. Since then, he's designed various graphics published by leading names like Image and Virgin Comics.



Based in Bangalore, **Alicia Souza** is a happiness-illustrator who also designs picture books. Her works have featured for various clients like Google, Yahoo, Times of India, Tanishq etc. A few months ago, she started her online store which keeps her busier than ever.



Mukesh Singh is a freelance Illustrator and Concept Artist. He studied his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the reputed Sir J. J. School of Arts, Mumbai in 1997. He's previously worked with great names like Prana Studios and Liquid Comics.



Raj Khatri is currently the Creative Art Head at Marching Ants and a part time independent Illustrator. He is also a movie poster designer. A self trained artist with over 13 yrs of experience, he has more than 150 officially released movie posters under his hat.



Saurabh Chandekar completed Fine Arts from Abhinav Kala Vidhyalaya in Pune, and credits his alma mater for teaching him the basics of the craft. Originally from Pune, Saurabh currently works in advertising and lives in Mumbai.

CG: Where do you think illustration stands in the designing world today? How has its perception evolved?

Abhishek Singh: Illustration today has evolved to become an integral aspect of all trans-media projects. Because of evolving technology, it's being used in so many eclectic ways. It's a very exciting time for illustrators. Many illustrators are now able to find exclusive markets for their work because of the Internet. This has allowed creators to cater straight to people who love their work, and only take the right kind of commercial assignments. The scope is tremendous, which is both great and overwhelming.

Alicia Souza: I think illustration has grown as part of many people's design process and has been accepted and appreciated as a great solution to many design problems.

Mukesh Singh: The art of Illustration has made a comeback in the last decade or so. At its core though it hasn't changed. The audience remains the same as they have always been - looking for answers, for meaning. And like any creative field, illustration exists to provide them those answers and meaning. Free from commercial considerations of selling products, just like the art world itself moved away to explore broader ideas when newer mediums supplanted its core markets, illustration too has moved way from its origin and has become a medium of expression. I tend to think of the current illustration field as a born again art for the masses; as art should always be. I don't think of it as separate from the fine arts really. It's almost the same thing, minus the deadlines.

Raj Khatri: Post digital revolution, the illustration medium has become a 'special' requirement for any particular campaign to get that 'look'. It surely holds a special place in the entire designing equation. In times when everything is so synthesised with excessive Photoshop and digital photography, illustrations provide a breath of fresh air.

Saurabh Chandekar: Earlier only handmade work was the core of any design. No other technique was available. Advertisements were made with the continuous efforts of long hours and were valued. The illustrative artworks were quite often used in 90's. But as technology evolved, the world became digitalised. The artworks are now easily available on internet with one click. Now, with the slow saturation of digital world, an age of illustrations has arisen wherein everyone loves to have handmade articles. The crafted things have once again gained value. Not only in terms of money but also with respect to popularity around the world ←

CG: Is illustration today just about using hands as tools? How has technology influenced the ability to illustrate?

Abhishek Singh: Technology has made the creative process highly efficient where turnaround time has been optimised; illustrators are producing more than ever. For me, the argument is not about traditional vs. digital or quality over quantity, but how wisely and thoughtfully you use either. Use the best of technology and use the best of your mind.

Alicia Souza: Absolutely not. There is no one way to illustrate. Everyone uses tools, be it paint or Photoshop. Technology has definitely added another dimension to make it easier to do certain illustrations that are manually harder to do, like adding textures with the ability to remove them once done. It has also made it more convenient to replicate and reproduce for mediums ranging from the traditional print magazine to the modern day social media.

Mukesh Singh: A traditional brush or paint is a type of technology too. A more apt question would be - does newer technology make a difference? It might enable newer techniques but technique isn't the point of art. It is about the idea, the message.

Raj Khatri: Hand illustrations will always have that extra 'human' factor which makes it organic and unique. But with digital tools, the ability to edit, like recolouring, reshaping etc. has become so much more flexible and handy which completes the job in time, a very vital factor in commercial industry. Hence with applications like (painting side of) Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Corel draw, Corel paint, zbrush, 3d and many more, the illustration stream has evolved tremendously.

Saurabh Chandekar: Illustration is all about hands and mind. With a bunch of ideas in mind, one can do wonders with the hand. For accurate illustrations, the hands have to be accurately positioned too. Thus, hands and mind are the two crucial tools for illustrations. In today's world, technology also acts as another tool for illustrating. But the central element is hand work completed on paper. Artwork is enhanced with use of technology and makes the work a bit easier for the illustrator ←

CG: What would you say are some great designs (advertising, gaming, movies etc.) where illustrations have worked for the brand and for the audience both?

Abhishek Singh: The brilliant Gerald Scruff animated sequence in the film "The Wall" based on the band Pink Floyd remains one of my favourites till date. Similarly, the collaboration between Dali and Disney and Destino is also incredible.

Alicia Souza: One of my favourite graphic designer and illustrator is Alan Fletcher and his works include many a times hand-drawn iconic illustrations. All his artworks are amazing, but the one that comes to mind is a lovely set that he did for the London Underground, so simple, yet witty and brilliant.

Mukesh Singh: I guess the ones that stick in the memory have always been the ones that have a certain feel to them. Ralph McQuarrie (Star Wars), Alan Lee (LOTR), H.R Giger (Aliens Universe), Frank Miller (Sin City) and Geof Darrow (Matrix series) have had a major telling in the feel and identity for the respective movie series. Blizzard has a unique signature style that has become the calling card for its games. Of the golden era of American illustrators, Leyendecker's Arrow Man comes to mind. Closer home, Amul is still going strong with its bill board illustrations but it is one of the last bastions of what used to be a successful marketing strategy.

Raj Khatri: Since I'm from the poster back ground, I can tell you my favourites in movie poster and gaming industry. The works of great Drew Struzan, Bob Peak, Saul Bass and in recent times, contemporary digital artist like Sam Spratt and Martin Asin, Alice X. Zhang, Grzegorz.Domaradzki, Ryan Meandering are doing great works for movie visuals. In gaming, the recent campaign for Tomb Raider, Assassin's Creed, God of War and GTA are creating nifty artworks for their promotional campaigns.

Saurabh Chandekar: My illustrative ad campaign "Once upon a Vespa" is striking for the audience. It expresses the entire story; the history of Vespa in the captivating strokes of illustrations. The lines articulate a rich legacy for the brand and helped gain attention of the masses ←

CG: India's got a plethora of talented illustrators. What according to you differs between Indian and international illustrators?

Abhishek Singh: One of the main differences is the level of awareness. Lack of awareness about IPR's licensing, e commerce etc. are big factors as so is lack of initiative to form collectives so they can operate in a more substantial way.

Alicia Souza: I guess every illustrator brings with them a past of visuals and a present of environment. Not all of course, but you tend to notice a lot of stories with Indian illustrator and brighter colours and denser patterns too. It's beautiful.

Mukesh Singh: There are more professionals now than ever before. We are all learning as we go along. The industry will take time to mature. The international ones have a very rich history. Comparatively, our idols have been very few and far in-between. It isn't quite a movement yet. It hasn't exploded into mass consciousness.

Raj Khatri: India has a plethora of talent but I believe the attitude needs to become more refined and honest with themselves. An opening up of the head space is still required when it comes to commercial work. We need more fresh perspectives.

Saurabh Chandekar: India is enriched with varied culture, religion and tradition. The multi-hued country has number of artists, painters but fail to get an appropriate platform to express themselves. On the other hand, in foreign countries the artists have a higher professional value ←

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CG: List some traits that a good illustration should carry. Tell us how one can differ with their designs in this competitive times?

Abhishek Singh: Strive to be better always. Create something for oneself; uniqueness comes from a pure personal place.

Alicia Souza: Well, I guess it depends on what the illustration is used for. If it's used for an editorial, it has to support the text. If the illustration is for a children's book, without words, it has to be the text and visually communicate a story. If it's for textiles, it has to be visually flowing with the piece it's working alongside. And my two cents to illustrators just starting out is keep drawing. Drawing with things you wouldn't usually and also drawing the things you did again.

Mukesh Singh: Look at the eponymous word itself - illustrate. Ask yourself - why are you doing this? What are you really hoping to accomplish? Illustrate an idea, a message. The idea is the illustrator's message. Technique is the texture, it's the flavour. Use the same words. But say them in your way. That will be your style.

Raj Khatri: Illustrators have a unique and powerful gift to see a 'world' before anybody else. They essentially create worlds and characters out of thin air, which are later developed into other streams. Developing your own style which is unique and original is a lifelong process in illustration. Be honest and take what the world wants from you and make it our own.

Saurabh Chandekar: A good imagination is the core trait of a good illustrator. Ideas make every artist unique. An irrelevant thinking and craziness produces a piece of magnificence. Thus it carries a meaning and becomes captivating for the masses. To be different in competitive world, one needs to be weird ←

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