

Original or Copy? written by Jean Lang

Over the last few years, incidents have occurred in which WRAP artists mistakenly believed that in converting a commercial artwork or published image—be it a magazine photo or copyrighted painting or drawing—into a *different color scheme* or a *new medium* (such as converting a photo to a pen and ink drawing), they were creating a new and original piece.

It's easy to see how this happens. In many introductory art classes, students are encouraged to select an image—often a magazine photo, postcard, or page from a calendar—and use it as their model or even trace it. Sometimes the instructor provides a photocopied image from a similar source for class use. Unfortunately, there is seldom a follow-up discussion pointing out that the student's completed artwork is not truly original in composition and would be a violation of copyright if offered for sale or exhibit. As a result, many new artists—delighted with their new skill in accurately rendering a published photo or painting—never really think about plagiarism as it applies to art. Though you may love your finished piece from class and hang it on the wall, *you should not exhibit it or sell it as an original if it is based on someone else's image.*

We remind you of this for two reasons. First, artists who copy a commercial or published artwork and submit it to a WRAP competition gain an unfair advantage: the skilled professional photographer or commercial artist whose work they have copied has done a lot of the hard work for them— choosing the topic, designing the composition, and selecting form, color and perspective. Second, WRAA and WRAP are put in a potentially awkward legal situation and could be sued for plagiarism if Contour Notes or other WRAA/WRAP publications print an art piece that is a copy of someone else's work, without their permission.

Your work must also be original in *another* sense of that word. That is, giclee prints or other reproductions of the *exhibitor's own work* will not be accepted as substitutes for the original in any WRAP show. We want the real thing.

Of course, it gets confusing because we do accept prints that are serigraphs, etchings, lithographs, monotypes and similar works which are the end result of a very demanding multi-step printing process carried out by the artists themselves. And we do accept digitally processed photos and digitally manipulated photos (since film has vanished and this is the current form that photography takes). In the area of fiber arts, we do not want works that are essentially stitched collages of various commercially manufactured fabrics and accessories. The work must show *significant alteration and creative manipulation of the fiber materials by the artist.*

Our concerns are with art copied without permission from commercial, professional, copyrighted photos and artworks, not with snapshots of your brother's trip to Yosemite. Also, we recognize that everyone occasionally refers to commercial images, such as nature guides, to get the correct shape or color of a particular animal species or flower when the real thing is not easily available. Just remember to use the image as *a starting point only.*

WRAP and the WRAA board take this issue seriously and we trust you will too. If you are uncertain about the originality of your work, discuss it with your WRAP coordinator. Please do not put coordinators in the awkward position of having to reject your artwork on drop-off day.