

Editorial Illustration

SESSION 03
09.01.26

Three kinds of editorial image, where to find the good ones, and the pen tool.

Workhorse Collective

ART 220 · Fall 2026

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Meets Tue + Thu, 12:30 to 3:20
Today Session 03 · 09.01.2026

Three kinds of editorial illustration, where to find the good ones, and then the pen tool.

01 · What it is

What an image commissioned to run with an article is for, in a magazine, a newspaper, a newsletter, an app.

03 · The process

Brief, sketches, feedback, final. The part of the job that is not drawing.

02 · Three types

Conceptual, data, and portrait. Famous examples of each, plus recent work by illustrators you probably haven't heard of.

04 · Where to look, then the pen tool

Four archives that publish the best of this field every year. Then the pen tool, demonstrated, and Exercise 1, handed in before you leave.

What It Is

AN IMAGE COMMISSIONED TO RUN WITH AN ARTICLE.
THE ARTICLE ALWAYS COMES FIRST.

WORKHORSE

"Works of art that are created to add a visual element to editorial writing."

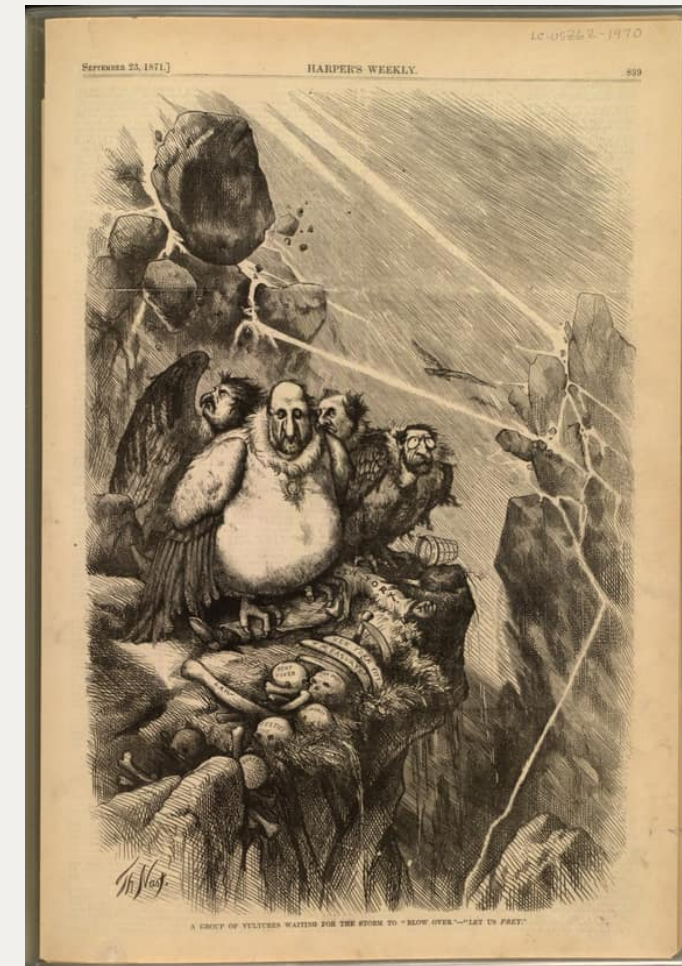
ASSOCIATION OF ILLUSTRATORS, ON EDITORIAL ILLUSTRATION

Newspapers, magazines, and online news. The illustration is commissioned, briefed, and paid for **because an editor decided the writing needed it.**

It has three jobs: **get the reader to stop**, break up long stretches of text, and help people follow a complicated idea.

Pictures have run with the news for 150 years

Harper's Weekly, 1871



Thomas Nast drew New York's corrupt political boss, William Tweed, every week in Harper's Weekly. Tweed is said to have told his men to stop "them damned pictures," because his voters couldn't read the articles but could see the drawings. A money bag for a head says it in one look.

Type 1: Conceptual

You read the article, find the idea in it, and draw that.

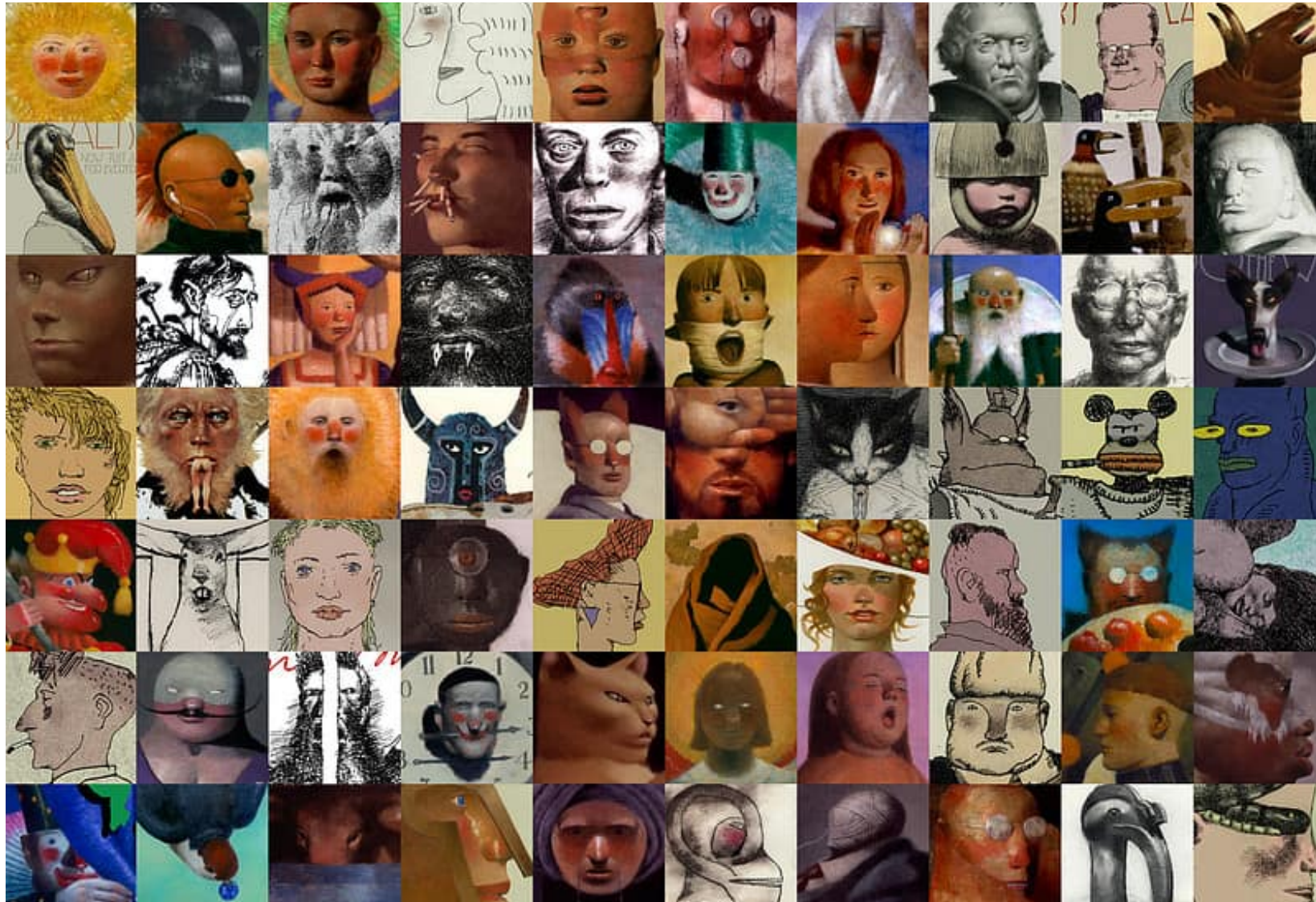
The illustrator looks for **a visual metaphor that makes the article's point quickly**: a melting face, a bird singing inside an ear, a vulture wearing the Twitter bird as a mask.

Most of the work is coming up with the concept. The drawing comes after, and it can be simple if the idea is strong.

This is what op-ed pages, magazine covers, and feature openers usually run.

Brad Holland

1970s onward



Holland started drawing for the New York Times op-ed page in 1970. Before him, editorial images mostly explained the article. His didn't: they were personal, symbolic, sometimes at odds with the writing they ran beside. Most conceptual illustrators working today owe him something.

This is where the idea of a conceptual editorial image starts. Don't just restate the headline. The strongest editorial images add something the writing doesn't already say.



Two flat colors and no face, and you still know exactly who it is and what the article is going to say.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ, MELTDOWN, TIME, AUGUST 22, 2016



Rodriguez drew more than 150 covers in the same visual language for Time, Der Spiegel, Mother Jones and others. The Der Spiegel cover on the left got reported on as news in its own right, which is about as far as an editorial image can travel.

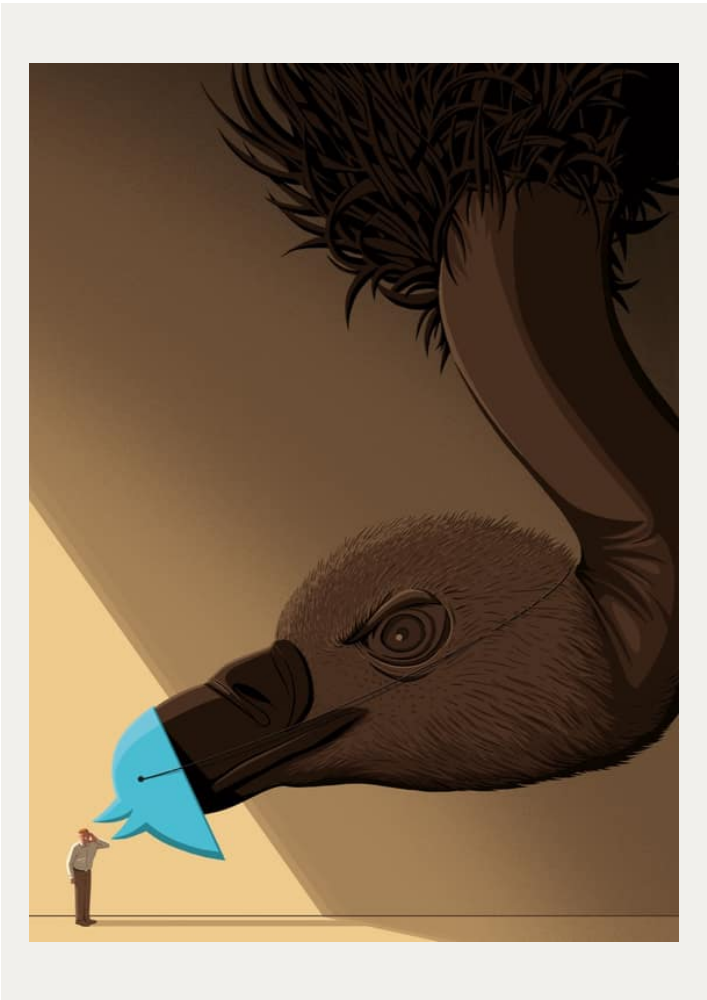
The headline, then the picture

World Illustration Awards, 2024 and 2025



"Tinnitus nearly drove me mad"

NOMA BAR · THE ECONOMIST'S 1843 MAGAZINE



How Twitter shapes your political opinion

STEPHAN SCHMITZ · SCHWEIZER MONAT



Putin's sanctions-busting shadow fleet

OWEN GILDERSLEEVE · POLITICO EUROPE



The Ozempic effect

LISA SHEEHAN · WHICH? MAGAZINE COVER

Most editorial work looks like this: an article, an art director, and one strong image by Friday. Each of these takes one idea from the article and draws only that. Your Project 1 is the same kind of brief.

Bloomberg Businessweek

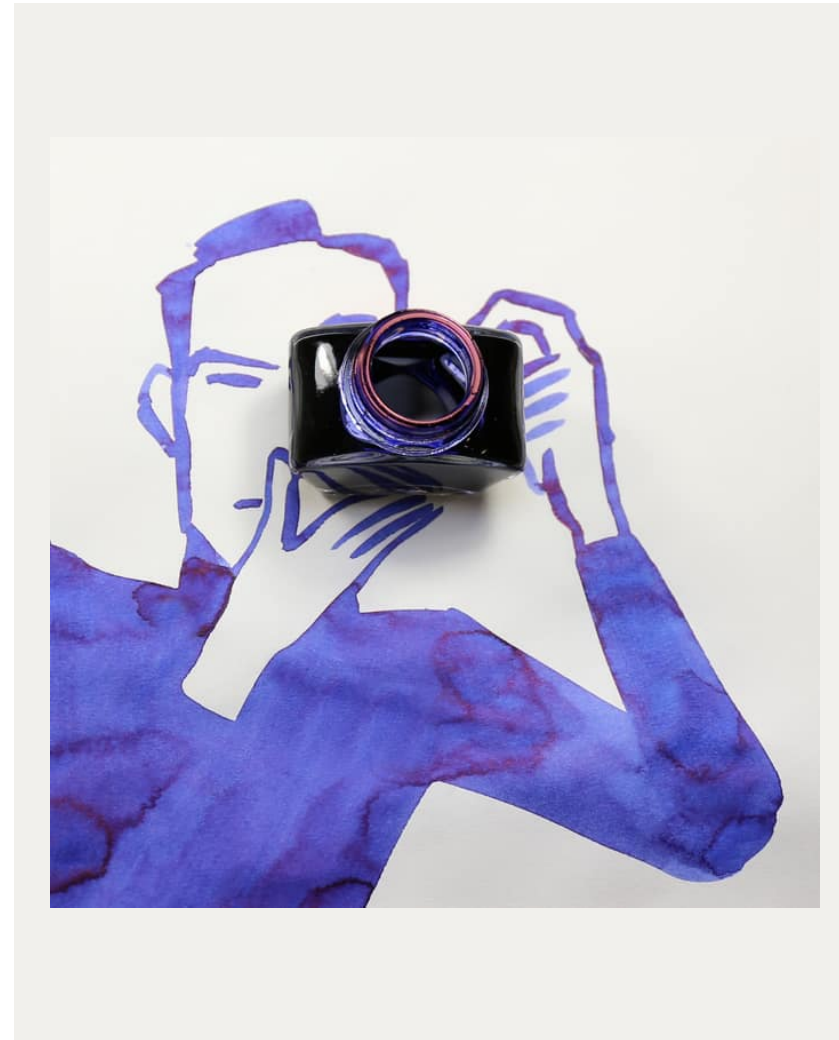
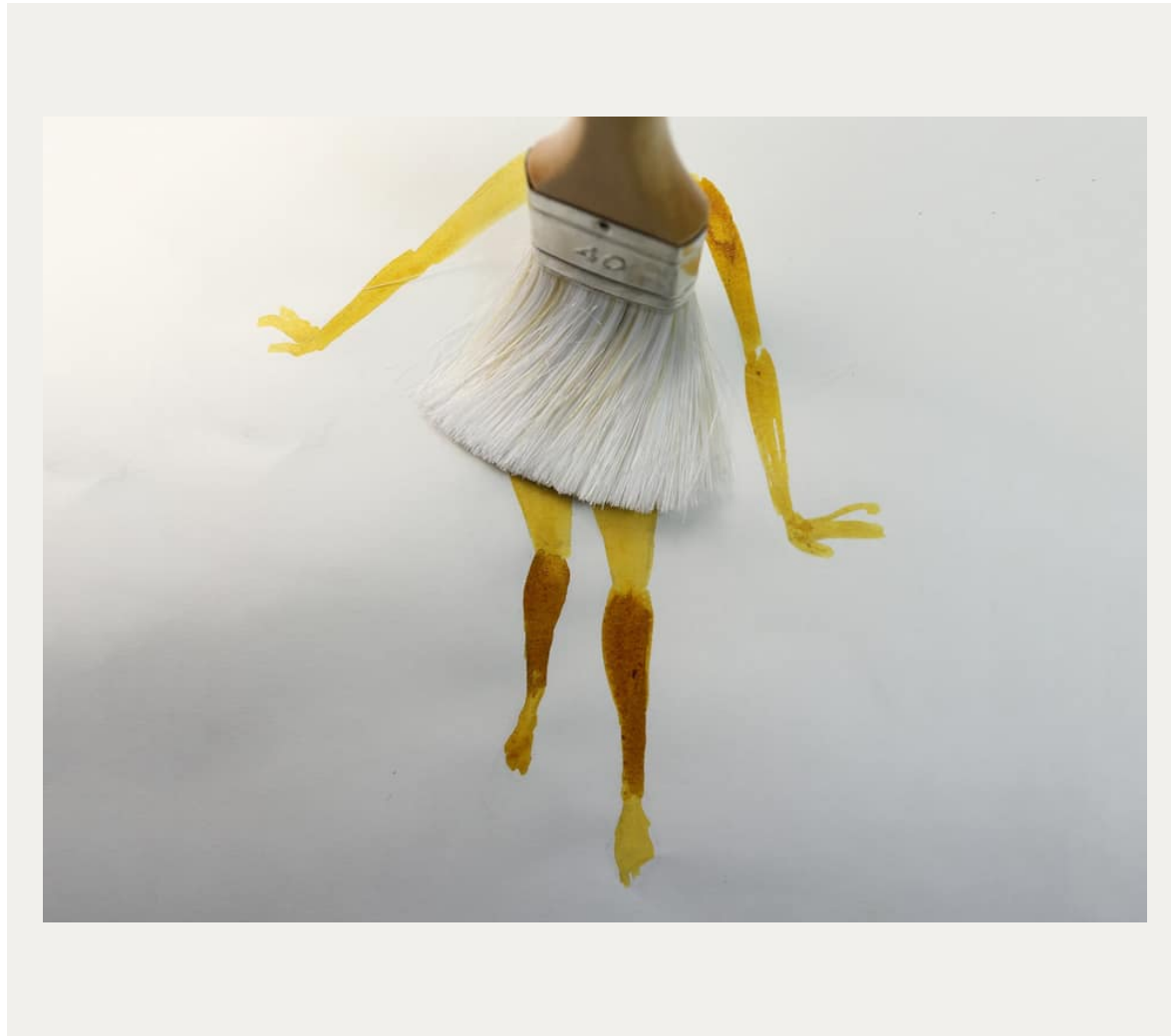
2010 to 2014



Conceptual covers made with photography instead of drawing. Under Richard Turley, Businessweek put a chart coming out of a hedge fund manager's fly, mated two planes for the United and Continental merger, and shouted at its own readers after Hurricane Sandy. Photo-illustration is a big share of the editorial commissions out there, and the concept work is identical to what you just saw drawn.

Christoph Niemann

The Sunday Sketches



Niemann has drawn more than 20 New Yorker covers. In the Sunday Sketches he puts a real object on the table and finishes the picture with a few drawn lines, and the whole piece rides on the idea. It's a weekly exercise he set for himself to practice coming up with ideas, and anybody in this room can steal it.

Type 2: Data

INFOGRAPHICS AND VISUAL DATA.
CURRENTLY THE MOST COMMISSIONED TYPE IN THE FIELD.

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Newsrooms lean on data, and somebody has to draw it so readers can follow it.

The brief is simple to say and hard to do: the reader should get **the shape of the story at a glance**.

The New York Times, Reuters and the South China Morning Post all run **whole graphics desks** staffed with illustrators.

Drawing still matters here. Editors hire illustrators rather than reaching for a chart template because hierarchy and metaphor take judgment.

Data on a news headline

WIA 2026 shortlist

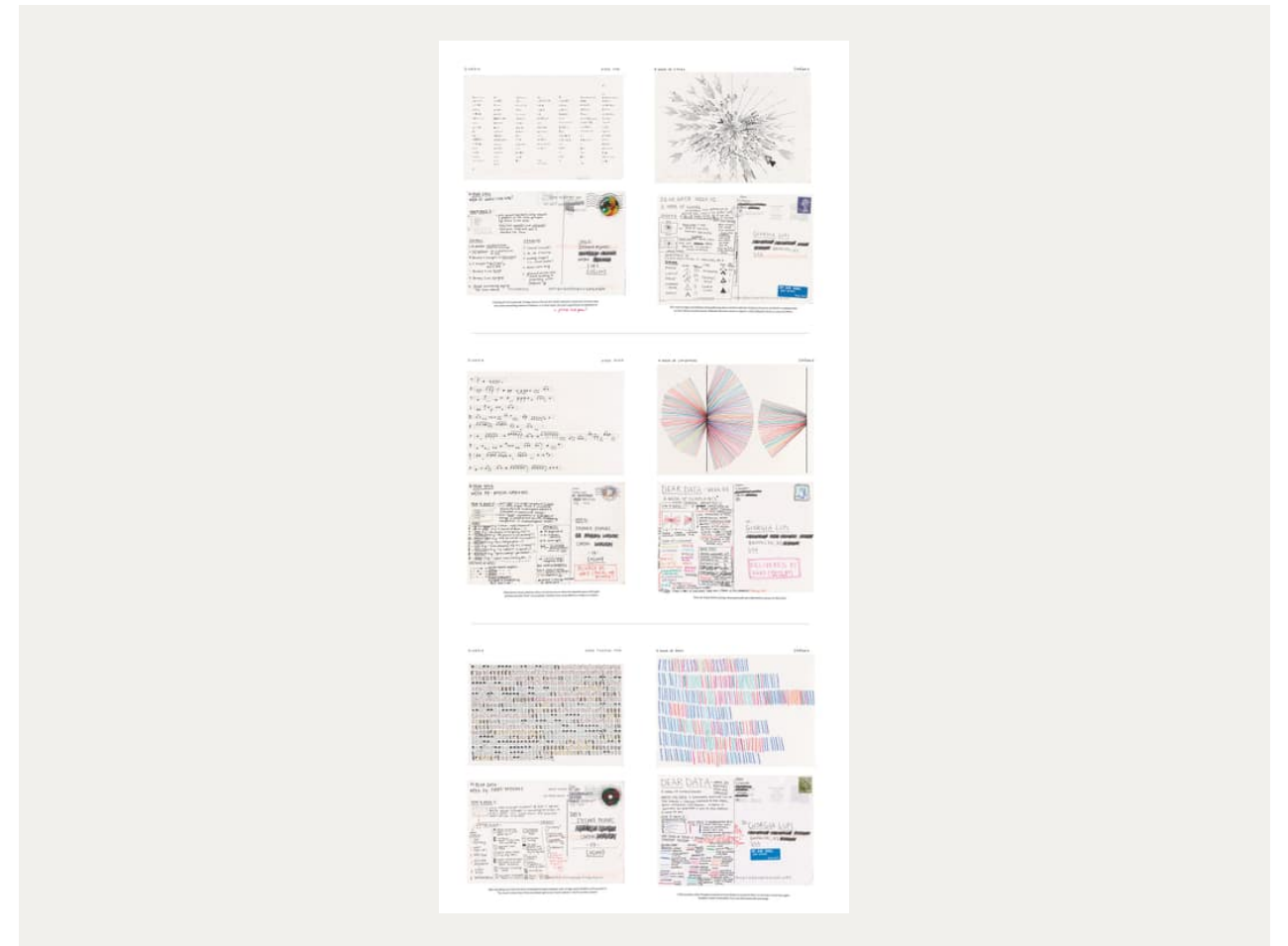


Adolfo Arranz draws for the Reuters graphics desk. Unexploded Bombs of Gaza is a piece of reporting: counts, types and locations of ordnance, drawn instead of photographed. It made the 2026 World Illustration Awards editorial shortlist.

Look up his Hong Kong work for the South China Morning Post as well: full-page drawn explainers of the city. He works halfway between illustrator and reporter; the images are drawn, but the facts behind them are sourced and captioned like any news story.

Dear Data

Lupi and Posavec, 2015



Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec spent a year mailing each other hand-drawn postcards of their own weekly data: clocks checked, complaints made, doors walked through. Every card has a drawing on the front and a hand-written legend on the back. It became a book, and then part of MoMA's collection. Data drawing doesn't have to look like a spreadsheet.

Type 3: Portrait

PORTRAIT AND CHARACTER.
A LIKENESS WITH A POINT OF VIEW.

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A drawn portrait can say something about the person that a photo can't.

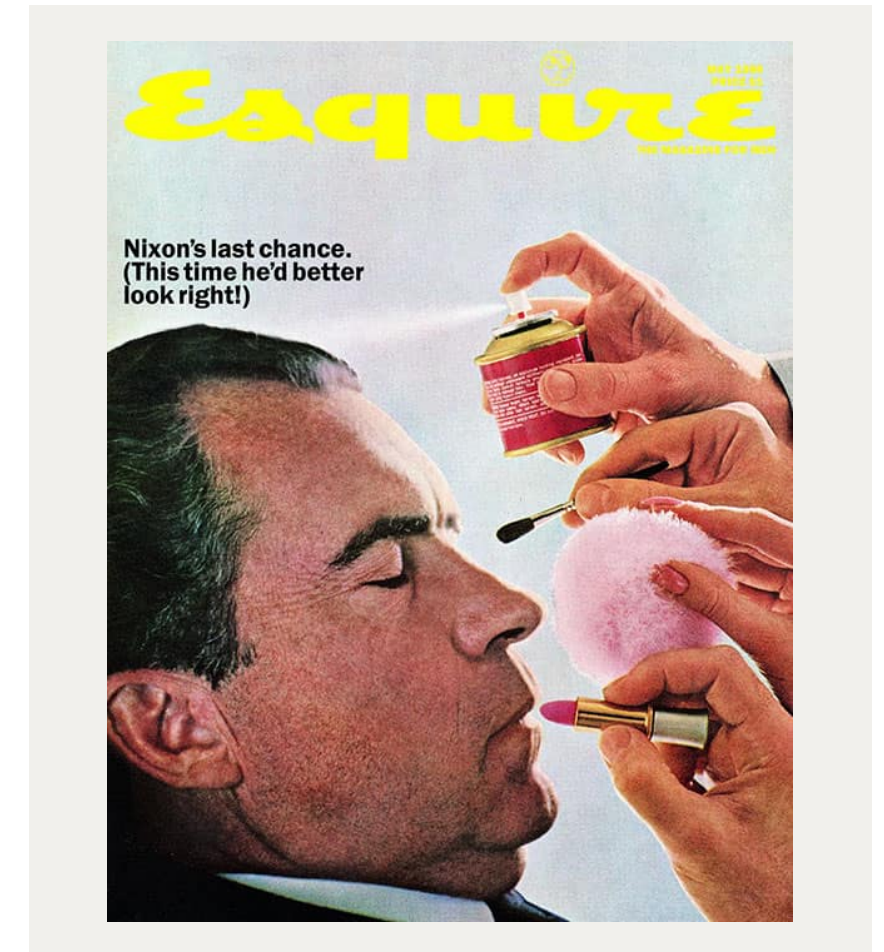
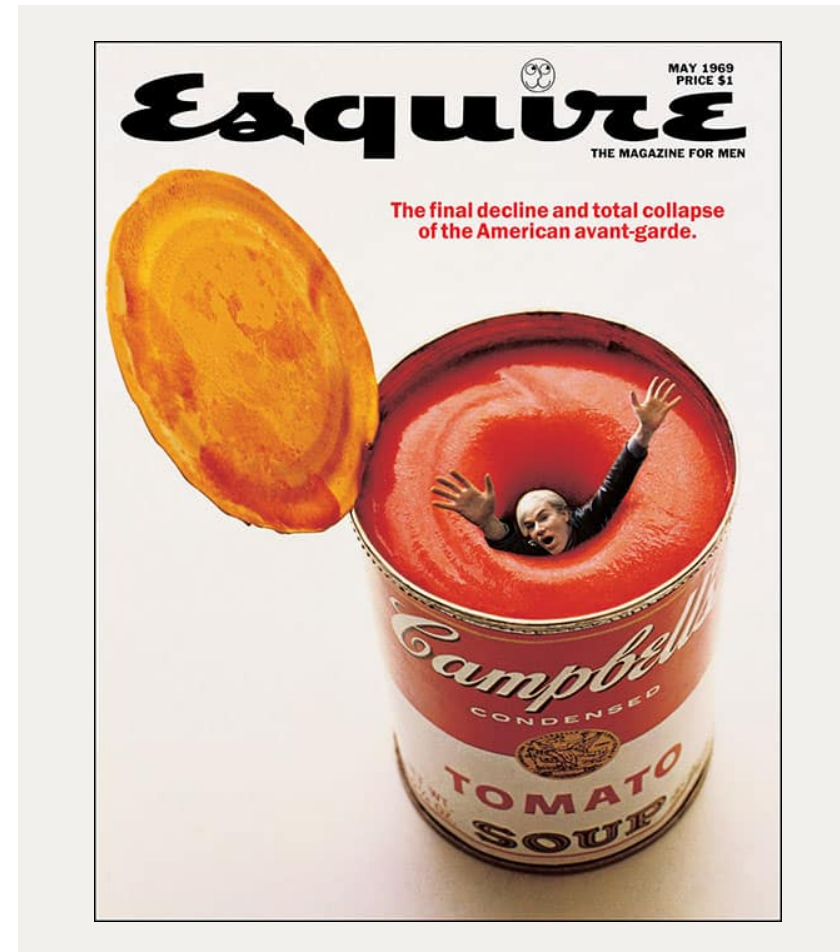
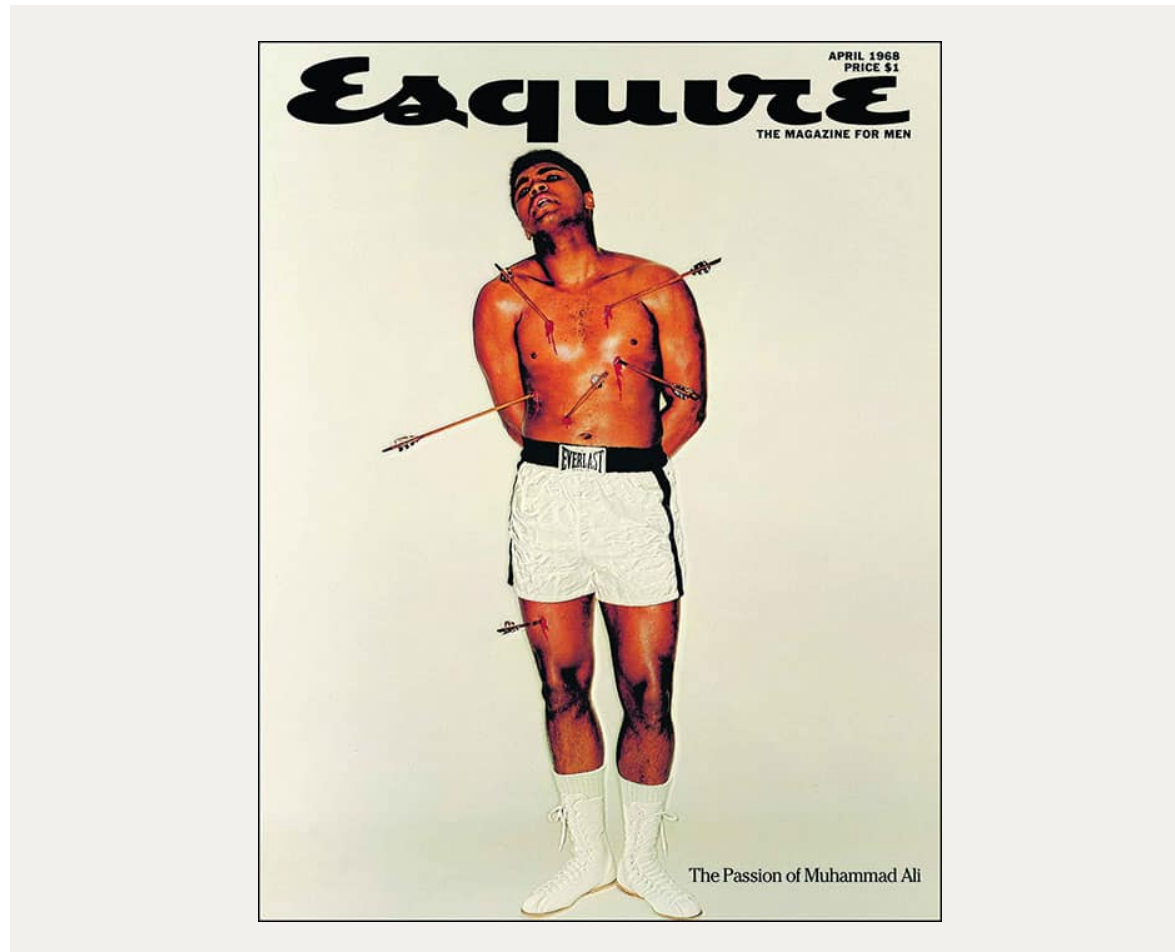
Profiles, reviews, book coverage, obituaries: anywhere the writing is **about a person**, an editor can commission a portrait.

Getting the likeness is the baseline. What you're actually hired for is **the angle**: heroic, ridiculous, tragic, monumental.

Character work is the same skill applied to fiction: drawing someone the reader has never seen so they feel like a specific person.

George Lois's Esquire covers

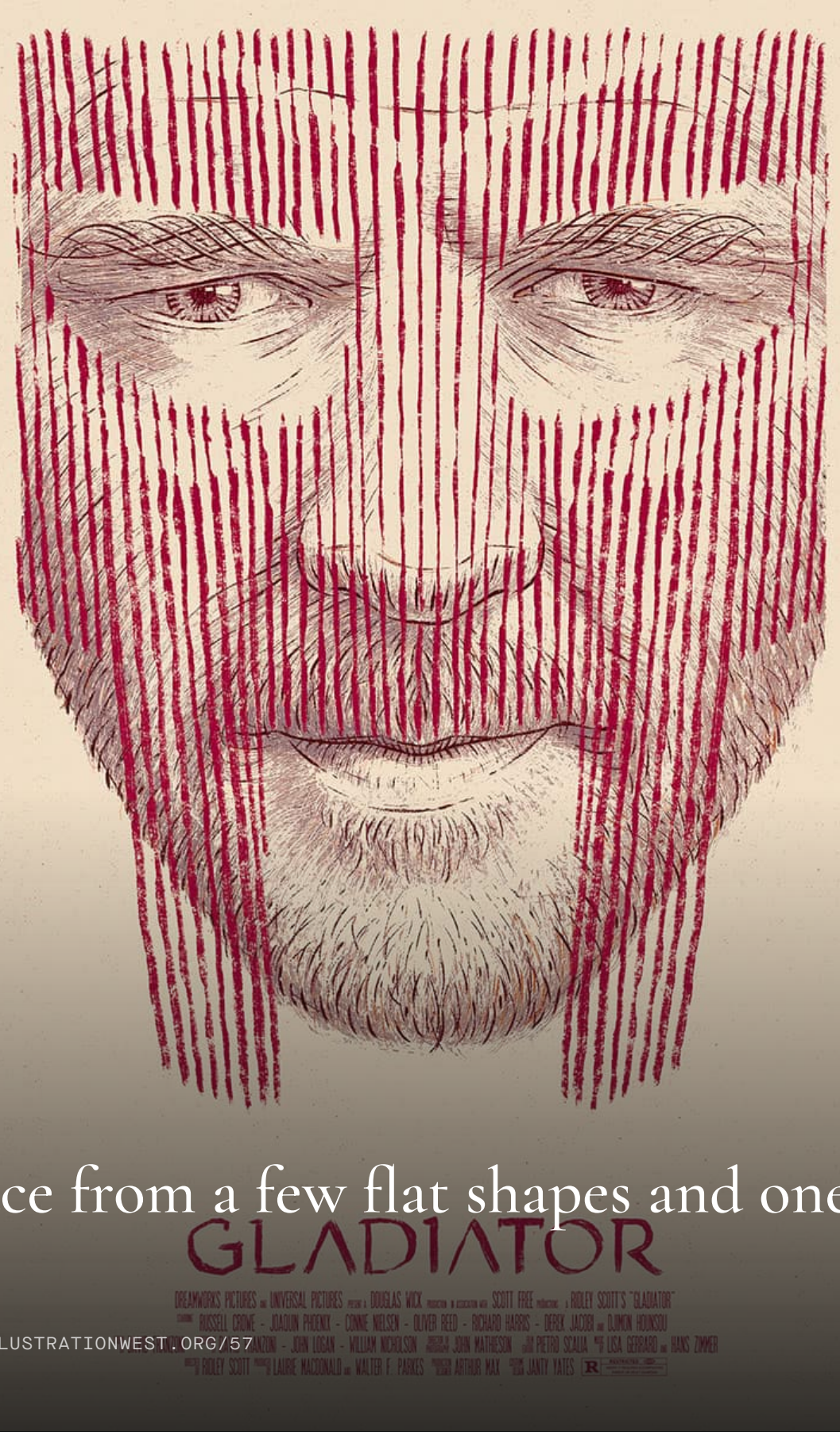
1962 to 1972



The most famous portrait covers in American magazine history are photo-illustrations. Lois staged Ali as the martyr Saint Sebastian while Ali was banned from boxing for refusing the draft, drowned Warhol in his own soup can, and put Nixon in the makeup chair. Shot by Carl Fischer, composited by hand, decades before Photoshop. MoMA holds 32 of the 92.

Kosowski builds the whole face from a few flat shapes and one idea about the film.

BARTOSZ KOSOWSKI, GLADIATOR • GOLD, ILLUSTRATION WEST 57 • ILLUSTRATIONWEST.ORG/57



GLADIATOR

DREAMWORKS PICTURES AND UNIVERSAL PICTURES PRESENT A DOUGLAS WICK PRODUCTION A SCOTT FREE PRODUCTION A RIDLEY SCOTT FILM "GLADIATOR"
STARRING RUSSELL CROFT - JOAQUIN PHOENIX - CONNIE NELSEN - OLIVER REED - RICHARD HARRIS - DEREK JACOBSON - CLINTON HOONSO
MUSIC BY JOHN WILLIAMS COSTUME DESIGNER JOHN MATHESON EDITOR JIM PETRO SCULPTOR LISA GERARD PRODUCTION DESIGNER HANS ZIMMER
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS RIDLEY SCOTT LAURIE MACDONALD PRODUCED BY WALTER F. PARKES WRITTEN BY ARTHUR MAX DIRECTED BY JANTY YATES (R) DOLBY DIGITAL

Three portrait registers

Illustration West 57



The Balbusso twins paint an author portrait that could sit on one of her book covers. Carter paints a symbolic figure for a policy piece the way you'd paint an oil portrait. Hsieh draws a reported personal story for NPR in a soft character style. Three completely different approaches to the same type, and all three of them sell.

The Process

THE PART OF THE JOB THAT IS NOT DRAWING.
EVERY PIECE YOU JUST SAW WENT THROUGH THIS.

WORKHORSE

Commission to print

01

The brief

An art director sends the article, or a summary of it, with dimensions, deadline and fee. You read the whole piece and pull out the one idea worth drawing.

You get

The size, the deadline,
and the fee

02

Sketches

Two to four thumbnail concepts, rough enough to change, clear enough to judge. The art director picks one and gives notes. This is the round where the client buys the idea.

You get

Approval on the concept
before the labor starts

03

Final

Finish the approved sketch, deliver at spec, take one round of revisions. Editorial deadlines run days, sometimes hours; op-ed work can be same-day.

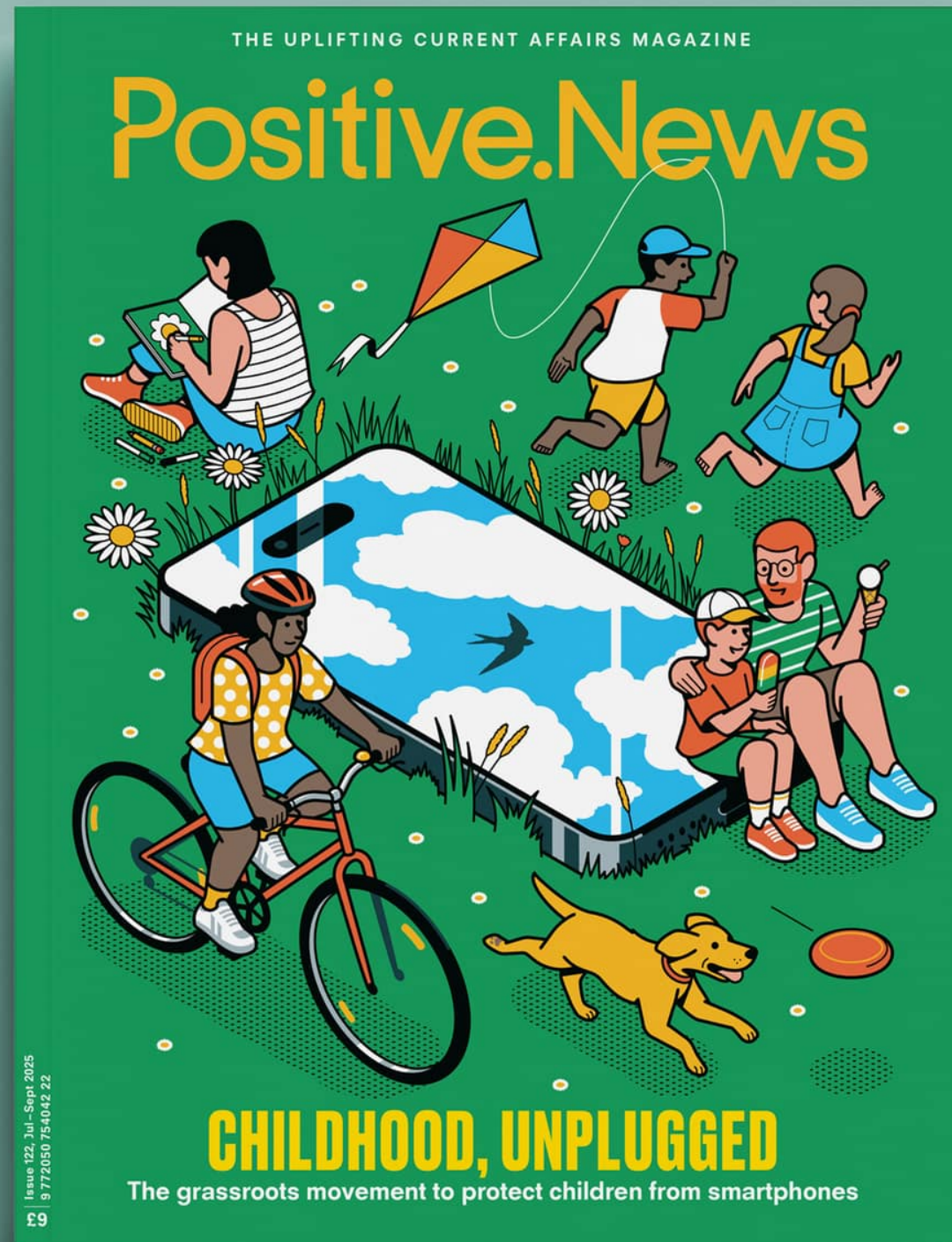
You get

A printed credit
and the next call

Where to Look

FOUR JURIED ARCHIVES, UPDATED EVERY YEAR, ALL FREE.
THIS IS WHERE THE FIELD PUBLISHES ITS OWN BEST WORK.

WORKHORSE



WORKHORSE

WORLD ILLUSTRATION AWARDS

AOI · ANNUAL

WHAT IT IS

The AOI's global annual, filterable by category and year

WHY IT'S HERE

The 2026 editorial shortlist is live now: Sam Peet for Positive News, Aleksandra Bokova for Zeit Magazin, Gabriel Sanz for El Periodico, Andrew Rae for NYT Opinion, Lina's Alzheimer's piece.

[worldillustrationawards.com, editorial shortlist](https://worldillustrationawards.com/editorial-shortlist)

Every project page includes the artist's own description of the brief and process, which makes this the most teachable archive of the four. Images page automatically; arrow up and down to move through them.



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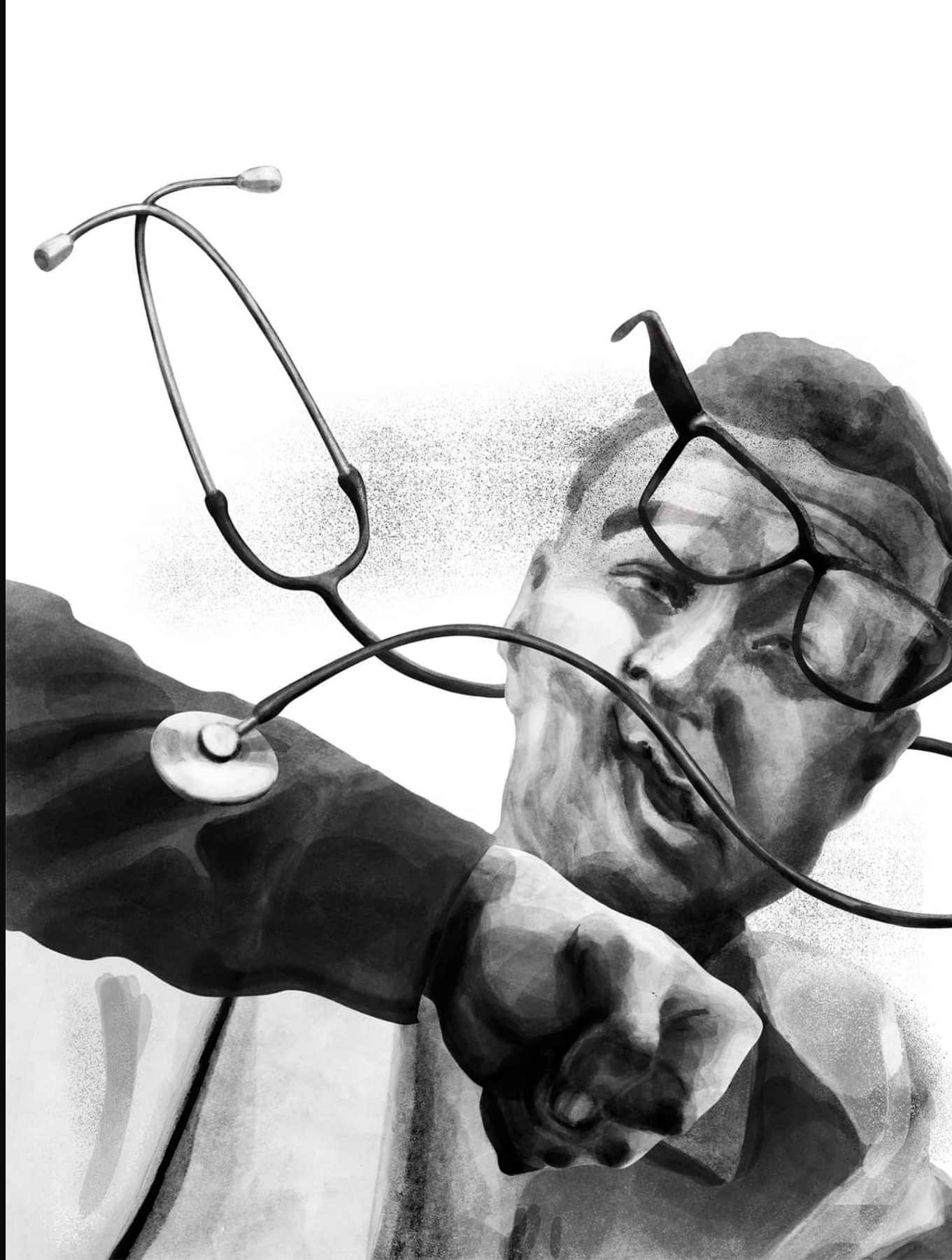
The AOI's global annual, filterable by category and year

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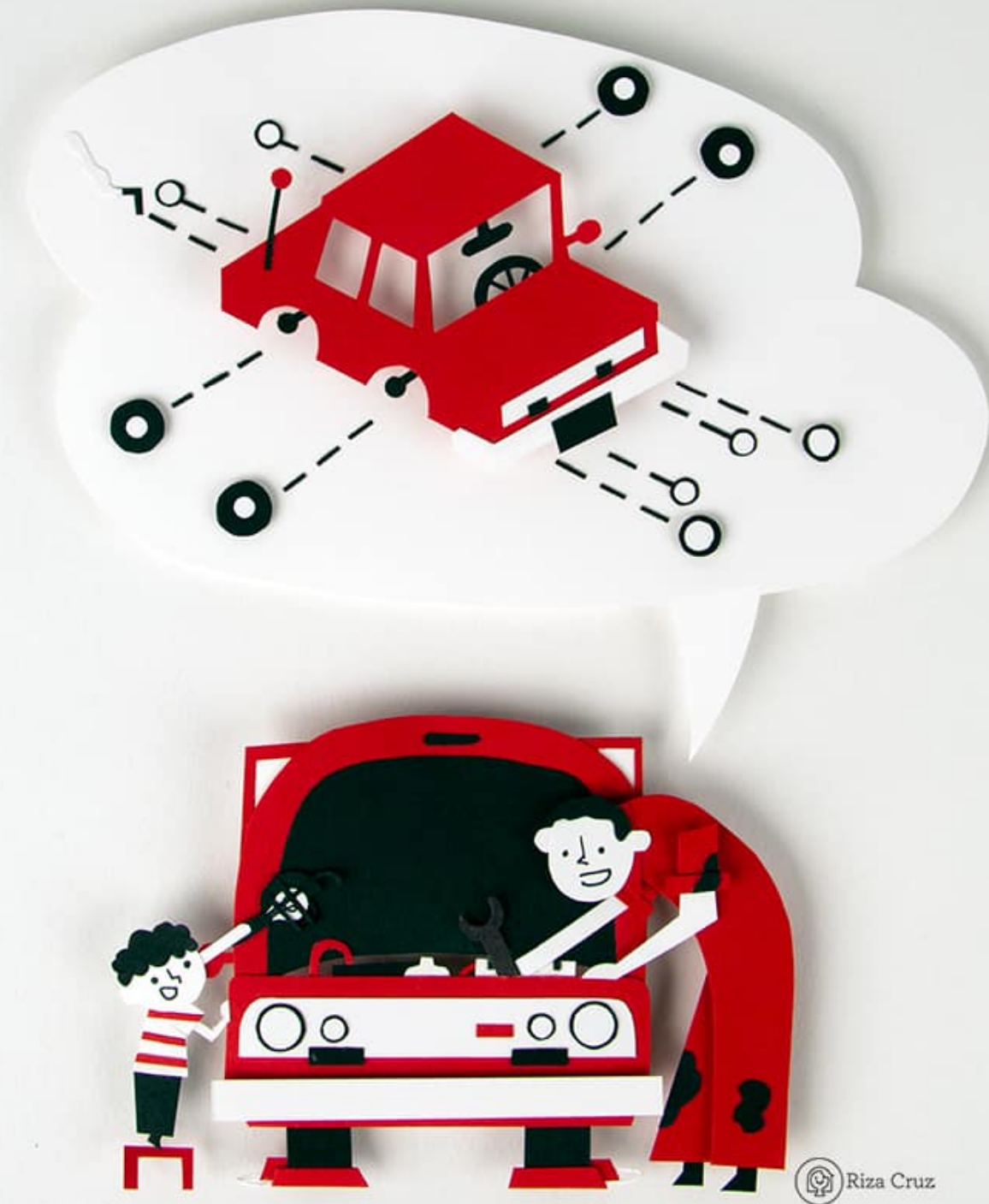
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ILLUSTRATION WEST

SOCIETY OF ILLUSTRATORS LA

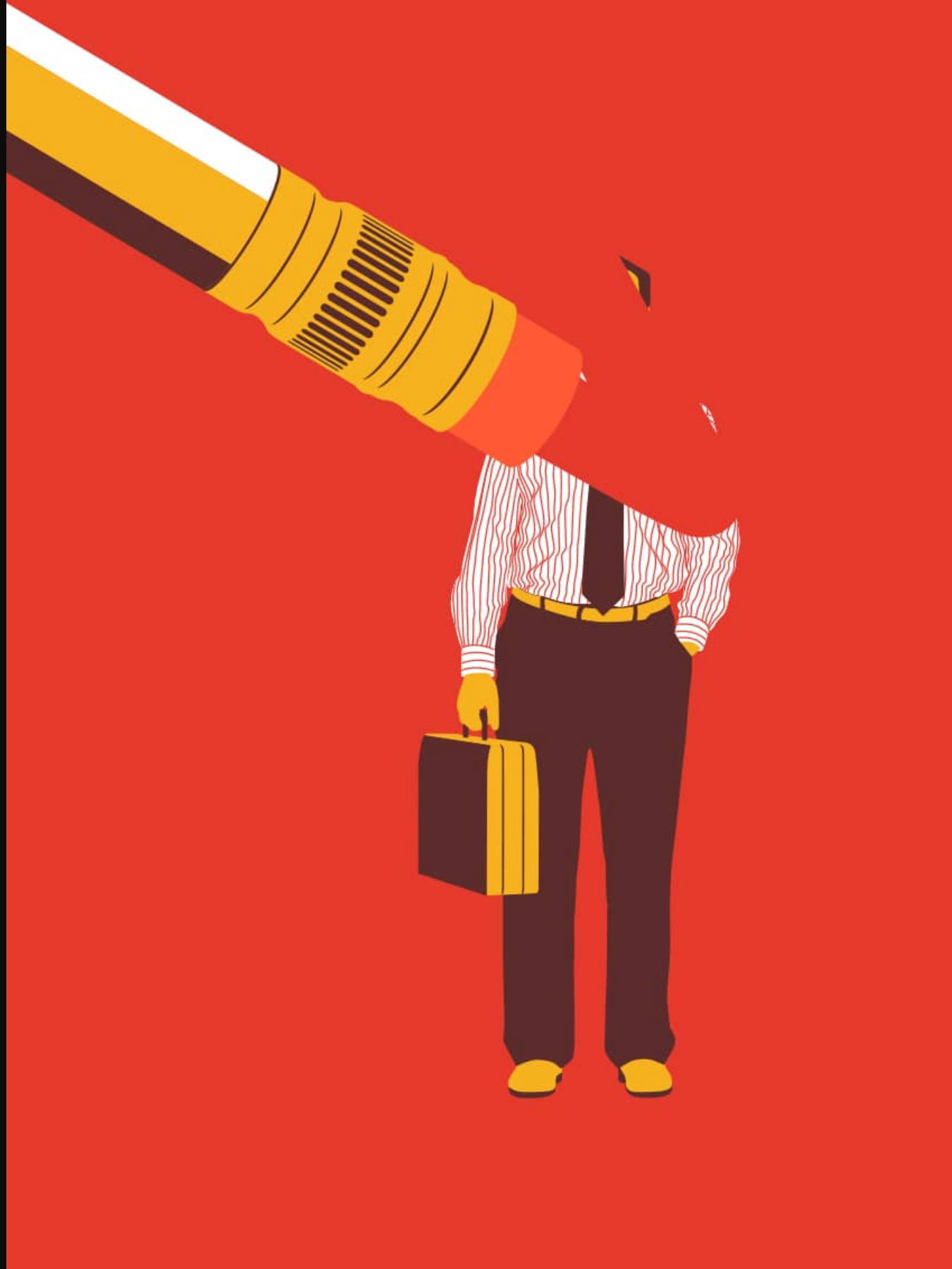
WHAT IT IS

The West Coast juried annual, with a dedicated editorial category

On screen: Riza Cruz for Autoweek, Federico Gastaldi for Entrepreneur, Shreya Gupta for Fast Company. Working commissions, credited to their publications.

illustrationwest.org/57_editorial

Browse by category rather than by artist and you see the market: how many business stories, how many tech stories, how many personal essays get illustrated in a given year.



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Twenty-five years of the American annual, filterable by artist, subject and publication.

The AI-AP archive holds every American Illustration annual back to AI 20. Filter by publication and you can see **what the New York Times has been commissioning, year by year.**

[ai-ap.com/archive/AI](#) · the juried annual most US art directors actually enter

Sibling archives on the same site: Latin American Illustration, American Photography, Motion Arts.

A quarterly competition that students can actually win.

Creative Quarterly juries illustration, design, photography and fine art four times a year, and it runs **a separate student category**. The galleries publish every winner and runner-up.

cqjournal.com/gallery · galleries 60 through 84 are online now

Entering a piece from this course is a legitimate move this semester. Deadlines are quarterly; the current call is on the site.

Keep looking

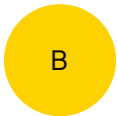


The societies

Society of Illustrators (NY) runs the oldest annual in the field plus a museum;
Communication Arts publishes its Illustration Annual every year. Both post winners online.

Search

societyillustrators.org
commarts.com

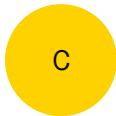


The publications

The New Yorker cover archive, the New York Times Opinion section, and The Guardian's illustrated features are commissioning at the top of the field every single week.

Habit

Note the credit line
then find the artist's site



The illustrators

Follow working illustrators directly, through their sites and newsletters rather than a feed. Every artist named in this deck has a site with their editorial work credited to its publication.

Build

A private reference folder
sorted by the three types

The Pen Tool

ANCHOR POINTS AND HANDLES.
AS FEW POINTS AS THE SHAPE NEEDS.

The pen tool · Three moves

01

Click

Each click puts down an anchor point and draws a straight line from the last one. Click points one after another and you get a shape with sharp corners.

You get

A corner point

02

Click and drag

Drag as you click and two handles pull out of the point. The handles set which way the curve leaves the point and how far it bends before the next one.

You get

A smooth point

03

Break the handle

Hold Option (Alt on Windows) and drag one handle. It moves on its own, so the curve can come into the point one way and leave it another.

You get

A corner on a curve,
like the tip of a leaf

A good curve uses as few points as it can.

Fewer points make a smoother line, and a file that is easier to change later.

Where the points go	At the far ends of each bend: its top, bottom, left or right edge. A point in the middle of a curve is almost always one too many.
How long the handles are	About a third of the way to the next point, pointing the way the curve is travelling. Hold Shift while you drag to keep a handle flat or straight up.
Where the corners go	Only where the shape actually breaks, like the tip of a leaf or where a stem meets a bowl.
When it wobbles	Delete a point before you add one. Then adjust the handles on the points that are left.

Exercise 1 · Trace three shapes with the pen tool.

Place the trace sheet on a locked template layer in a Letter, portrait file. Each shape goes on its own layer.

wave	One open S-curve. 4 anchor points or fewer.
leaf	A closed shape with one corner, at the tip. 6 anchor points or fewer.
letter	A bowl and a stem, like a lowercase b, as one closed path. 8 anchor points or fewer.
Hand in	The .ai file on Blackboard before the end of class, with the layers named wave, leaf and letter and the template layer left in place.

Find one piece in these archives that you wish you had made.

Save the image, the artist, the publication, and the link. Decide **which of the three types it is**, and be ready to say why in one sentence.

We open the next session with a fast round of these. Three minutes each, the image on screen, your sentence out loud.

See you Thursday