



Defining  
the art of  
illustration

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Tim Dinter, Illustrative.

## Illustrative 08, Zurich

Illustration is one of the most versatile art forms in today's visual culture. Somehow it has always crossed boundaries between fine art and drawing into a "grey" area, and has consistently provoked debate, but how do we comfortably define it?

The "label" illustration/illustrator is ambiguous. The definition of the form is amorphous and indefinite, constantly challenging notions and perceptions of contemporary image making. Like photography and printmaking, illustration has often been questioned by its intent — if it's commercial, is it art? The answer to that is obvious, some of today's greatest artworks have been commissioned, for example, *Angel of the North* by Antony Gormley or Marc Quinn's sculpture of Alison Lapper and Mario Testino's flawless images of Kate Moss.

Illustration has often been partnered with the publishing industry, advertising campaigns, or used politically for satire, but more recently, illustrators are creating bodies of work that excite and experiment with the notions of contemporary visual art and its hybrid forms. As a genre, illustration has been born out of many things, grown broader in its context through new media and technology, and this has signified that illustration now shares a valid

platform with fine art. Today's illustrators go beyond caricature and visual representation to observational statements about current trends and popular culture. Contemporary illustration is a new movement with illustrators drawing influences from graffiti, fashion, computer games and animation. There are fewer boundaries and more friction.

This autumn, Illustrative, Europe's leading forum for contemporary illustration and graphic art, will be hosting Illustrative 08 in Zurich, Switzerland, which will play a critical part in the debate surrounding contemporary visual culture. Zurich provides an ideal location for the Festival with its numerous designers, illustrators and artists.

Festival Director, Pascal Johanssen, has real vision for this year's event. He says, "Our main objective this year is to develop the content more thoroughly. Our request is an exact theoretical description of illustrative art — real explanations, descriptions or art-theoretical analyses for this art movement, which are currently still missing. In order to find a remedy here, we are working on discussion forums, panels of experts and a publication, for which we asked illustrators and academics to formulate their characterisation of contemporary illustrative art. As we have authors from different cultural areas (e.g.





Jan Feindt, Illustrative.

Africa or China) giving their statements we can expect an exciting discussion and maybe a new discovery as well."

Every year at two different creative hot spots in Europe, the Festival displays an inspiring collection of current graphic art with over 400 works from more than 60 artists, as well as film screenings, parties and lectures from leading specialists in the field. Established in Berlin in 2006, Illustrative has been held twice in Berlin (2006/2007) and once in Paris (2007) with the largest event scheduled for 2008. This year also sees the arrival of a new initiative in the form of the

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Young Illustrators Award, an open contest to illustrators worldwide, as well as an expansion into the publishing field, with the first Illustrative publication, *The Artists of Illustrative*.

The Festival is scheduled to take place in mid-October. Over the course of 10 days, Illustrative 2008 will celebrate the illustrative arts, discover new talents, exchange ideas, marvel at progressive technologies, and rediscover forgotten styles. It will display not only the quality and fantasy of the latest graphic arts but also show how the visual effects of graphic design, illustration, book art, comics, concept art, and animation spill into and influence the field of art. Johanssen comments, "With regards to content we want to pay more attention to the different variations of illustrative art, for example in fashion and ceramic art. This year, exclusive fashion drafts of C Neon and XXX will be exhibited. Their collections are inspired from the graphic and illustrative world. Ceramicists like Hans von Bethem or Scott Rench show objects made of porcelain, clay or sandstone presenting a new craft. There is a fine line between art and craft: It is not about classical illustration anymore, but about a visual language, crossing all the disciplines."

"Sensuality is being rediscovered in illustrative art; the mutual enrichment across the disciplines is a characteristic of illustrative art. Graphic and illustration, here, form the graphical basic discipline, which is sending creative impulses in different directions: advertisement, textile art and fashion, ceramics, wall painting (wallpaper) or conceptual art (which once was scenery painting for opera or theatre and now is set design for computer games). This signifies a big difference between illustration and photography: while photography in magazines has taken over a similar function

to illustrations, namely describing and supporting a text, it is not affecting other disciplines that intensely. Illustration sends signals. Our intention is to make these signals more visible at Illustrative 08."

One of the main highlights of this year's event is the Young Illustrators Award. Twenty winners will be selected to exhibit in a designated section at Illustrative 08. During the Festival, three overall winners will then be selected and given the chance to design a Limited Edition watch for Swatch. The Award will provide a valuable platform for up and coming artists, and the exhibition of the winners will display the most intuitive tendencies of the genre as well as acting as an exciting measure for new trends. Another exciting aspect of this year's Festival is the representation of a group of American illustrators from the west coast, including Vincent Hui and Eric Sandberg. The group has been working in and around San Francisco for years, and has made the transition into gallery spaces.

Illustrative 08 is a hub for individuals across the creative industries from editors, publishers, magazines to art buyers, students and academics. This year's Festival takes place from 17 –26 October 2008 in Zurich, Switzerland. For tickets and information please visit [www.illustrative-berlin.de](http://www.illustrative-berlin.de).

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