July 22, 2015

RE: Next Great Copyright Act legislation

To Whom It May Concern:

I am self employed as a professional artist. I have been an artist for 15 years, having studied under several professional artists/instructors in order to hone my skills to the level that would allow me to create artwork that is marketable, and to provide an income. I am a signature member of the Florida Watercolor Society and a member of several other community arts organizations. I work as an instructor in watercolor, mixed watermedia, and colored pencil at the Pasco Fine Arts Council in Holiday, Florida, as well as conducting workshops and classes as an independent contractor. I also serve on the Board of Directors of the Pasco Fine Arts Council, Inc. Over the past 15 years I have amassed an inventory of paintings and drawings, finished and unfinished, which form the base of my business.

The Next Great Copyright Act currently under consideration presents a serious threat to the livelihood of visual artists such as myself. The possibility of a law allowing rich and powerful corporations and their legal teams to decide what value a piece of art has, and who may have access to it, is disturbing. Clearly, their interests do not align with small, independent business people like me. Corporations are looking for easy access to art without having to pay for it, so they are attempting to make the theft of our work legal through legislation. This would be incredibly damaging to all artists because it wholly undermines the integrity and value of our work. Corporations claim art is no longer valuable once it has been published, but they are the ones who would actually be devaluing the art by taking away the copyright of the artist, allowing it to be altered, misrepresented, and used for profit by the public.

Every artwork created is the amalgamation of the educational investment, years of practice, distinctive and original ideas and design, and intangible talent possessed by the individual artist. My works of art are my property, both physically and intellectually. I came up with the concept for each one, did the legwork and research required to develop my subject, and then put in the hours of hard work necessary to bring the concept to fruition in the form of a painting. Copyright law is, and has been, the singular protection to insure that all my hard work remains under my jurisdiction. It insures that my inventory is used as I deem fit, and that I receive the financial return that is my due as the originator.

Most professional artists, with few exceptions, make a modest income from their work. Having to register all their inventory with Extended Collective Licensing would prove to be cost prohibitive for most professional artists, and definitely for hobbyists. It would place an unnecessary financial burden on artists. Once again, powerful corporations win at the expense of small business owners.

To take what is mine, without my consent or control, is stealing. For someone to use or distort my work, and reap the financial gain for personal or corporate benefit is criminal. It is my sincere hope that those in Congress will use common sense once again and protect the ability of artists to freely determine how our work is used, and by whom.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Natzke FWS