



United States Copyright Office

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November 28, 2017

Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC
Attn: Bryce J. Maynard
P.O. Box 1404
Alexandria, VA 22313-1404

Re: Second Request for Reconsideration of Refusal to Register “STORY Logo”; Service Request #: 1-3770086227; Correspondence ID: 1-2AJZEB3

Dear Mr. Maynard:

The Review Board of the United States Copyright Office (“Board”) has considered Amnesia International, LLC’s (“Amnesia”) second request for reconsideration of the Registration Program’s refusal to register a 2-D artwork claim in the work titled “STORY Logo” (“Work”). After reviewing the application, deposit copy, and relevant correspondence, along with the arguments in the second request for reconsideration, the Board affirms the Registration Program’s denial of registration.

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

The Work is a logo composed of the word “STORY.” The logo contains two iterations of the word with the “O” appearing larger than the other letters and stylized to include overlapping swirled segments. On the top half of the logo “STORY” appears in black coloring against a white background. On the bottom half of the logo “STORY” appears in white coloring against a black background.

The Work is depicted as follows:

S T  R Y

 S T  R Y

II. ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

On June 29, 2016, Amnesia filed an application to register a copyright claim in two-dimensional art for the Work. In a November 8, 2016 letter, a Copyright Office registration specialist refused to register the claim, finding that it lacked sufficient creative authorship to support a copyright claim, and noting that “[c]opyright does not protect familiar symbols or designs; basic geometric shapes; words and short phrases such as names titles, and slogans; or mere variations of typographic ornamentation, lettering or coloring.” Letter from R. Holliman, Registration Specialist, to Natalie Ward Blakeney (Nov. 8, 2016) (citing 37 C.F.R. § 202.1).

In a letter dated February 8, 2017, Amnesia requested that the Office reconsider its initial refusal to register the Work. Letter from Bryce J. Maynard, to U.S. Copyright Office (Feb. 8, 2017) (“First Request”). Amnesia stated that “its work contains significantly more than the minimal level of ‘creative spark’ necessary to qualify for copyright protection.” *Id.* at 2. Amnesia further claimed that the design of the “O” within the logo was not a “familiar symbol or design,” and that the logo was stylized to look like “a mirrored or reflective metal surface, which adds another layer of originality to the design.” *Id.* After reviewing the Work in light of the points raised in the First Request, the Office re-evaluated the claims and again concluded that the Work “does not contain a sufficient amount of original and creative artistic or graphic authorship to support a copyright registration.” Letter from Stephanie Mason, Attorney-Advisor, to Bryce J. Maynard (Apr. 27, 2017). The Office stated that “[s]ubstituting a common and familiar shape for a letter with a similar basic shape is a basic, garden-variety logo configuration that does not demonstrate sufficient creativity to support a claim of copyright.” *Id.* at 2-3.

In a letter dated July 27, 2017, Amnesia requested that, pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 202.5(c), the Office reconsider for a second time its refusal to register the Work. Letter from Bryce J. Maynard, to U.S. Copyright Office (July 27, 2017) (“Second Request”). Amnesia reiterated its argument that the Office was “applying far too high a bar for the level of creativity required to register a work.” *Id.* at 1. Amnesia also emphasized that “the highly unusual and creative styling of the double swirl design making up the letter ‘O’ in ‘STORY’ is sufficient to give this work the minimal level of creativity necessary to qualify for copyright protection.” *Id.* at 2.

III. DISCUSSION

A. *The Legal Framework—Originality*

A work may be registered if it qualifies as an “original work[] of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression.” 17 U.S.C. § 102(a). In this context, the term “original” consists of two components: independent creation and sufficient creativity. *See Feist Publ’ns, Inc. v. Rural Tel. Serv. Co.*, 499 U.S. 340, 345 (1991). First, the work must have been independently created by the author, *i.e.*, not copied from another work. *Id.* Second, the work must possess sufficient creativity. *Id.* Only a modicum of creativity is necessary, but the Supreme Court has ruled that some works (such as the alphabetized telephone directory at issue in *Feist*) fail to meet even this low threshold. *Id.* The Court observed that “[a]s a constitutional matter, copyright protects only those constituent elements of a work that possess more than a *de minimis* quantum of creativity.” *Id.* at 363. It further found that there can be no copyright in a

work in which “the creative spark is utterly lacking or so trivial as to be virtually nonexistent.” *Id.* at 359.

The Office’s regulations implement the longstanding requirement of originality set forth in the Copyright Act and described in the *Feist* decision. *See, e.g.* 37 C.F.R. § 202.1(a) (prohibiting registration of “[w]ords and short phrases such as names, titles, slogans; familiar symbols or designs; [and] mere variations of typographic ornamentation, lettering, or coloring”); *id.* § 202.10(a) (stating “to be acceptable as a pictorial, graphic, or sculptural work, the work must embody some creative authorship in its delineation or form”). Some combinations of common or standard design elements may contain sufficient creativity with respect to how they are juxtaposed or arranged to support a copyright. Nevertheless, not every combination or arrangement will be sufficient to meet this test. *See Feist*, 499 U.S. at 358 (finding the Copyright Act “implies that some ‘ways’ [of selecting, coordinating, or arranging uncopyrightable material] will trigger copyright, but that others will not”). A determination of copyrightability in the combination of standard design elements depends on whether the selection, coordination, or arrangement is done in such a way as to result in copyrightable authorship. *Id.*; *see also Atari Games Corp. v. Oman*, 888 F.2d 878 (D.C. Cir. 1989).

A mere simplistic arrangement of non-protectable elements does not demonstrate the level of creativity necessary to warrant protection. For example, the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York upheld the Copyright Office’s refusal to register simple designs consisting of two linked letter “C” shapes “facing each other in a mirrored relationship” and two unlinked letter “C” shapes “in a mirrored relationship and positioned perpendicular to the linked elements.” *Coach, Inc. v. Peters*, 386 F. Supp. 2d 495, 496 (S.D.N.Y. 2005). Likewise, the Ninth Circuit has held that a glass sculpture of a jellyfish consisting of clear glass, an oblong shroud, bright colors, vertical orientation, and the stereotypical jellyfish form did not merit copyright protection. *See Satava v. Lowry*, 323 F.3d 805, 811 (9th Cir. 2003). The language in *Satava* is particularly instructive:

It is true, of course, that a combination of unprotectable elements may qualify for copyright protection. But it is not true that any combination of unprotectable elements automatically qualifies for copyright protection. Our case law suggests, and we hold today, that a combination of unprotectable elements is eligible for copyright protection only if those elements are numerous enough and their selection and arrangement original enough that their combination constitutes an original work of authorship.

Id. (internal citations omitted).

Similarly, while the Office may register a work that consists of geometric shapes, for such a work to be registrable, the “author’s use of those shapes [must] result[] in a work that, as a whole, is sufficiently creative.” U.S. COPYRIGHT OFFICE, COMPENDIUM OF U.S. COPYRIGHT OFFICE PRACTICES § 906.1 (3d ed. 2017) (“COMPENDIUM (THIRD)”); *see also Atari Games Corp.*, 888 F.2d at 883 (“[S]imple shapes, when selected or combined in a distinctive manner indicating some ingenuity, have been accorded copyright protection both by the Register and in court.”). Thus, the Office would register, for example, a wrapping paper design that consists of circles, triangles, and stars arranged in an unusual pattern with each element portrayed in a different

color, but would not register a picture consisting merely of a purple background and evenly-spaced white circles. COMPENDIUM (THIRD) § 906.1.

Finally, Copyright Office registration specialists (and the Board) do not make aesthetic judgments in evaluating the copyrightability of particular works. They are not influenced by the attractiveness of a design, the espoused intentions of the author, the design's uniqueness, its visual effect or appearance, its symbolism, the time and effort it took to create, or its commercial success in the marketplace. *See* 17 U.S.C. § 102(b); *Bleistein v. Donaldson*, 188 U.S. 239 (1903). The fact that a work consists of a unique or distinctive shape or style for purposes of aesthetic appeal does not necessarily mean that the work, as a whole, constitutes a copyrightable work of art.

B. Analysis of the Work

After careful examination, the Board finds that the Work fails to satisfy the requirement of creative authorship and thus is not copyrightable.

Here, Amnesia admits that the word “Story” itself “would obviously not be copyrightable, nor would a Story Logo consisting solely of the Word STORY in the basic typeface used for the letters S, T, R, and Y.” Second Request at 2. Instead, Amnesia focuses on “the highly unusual” stylizing of the letter “O” and the “mirrored” effect of the lettering as sufficiently creative to entitle the Work to copyright protection. *See, e.g.*, Second Request at 2. While Amnesia is correct that copyright law mandates review of the Work as a whole, and that the combination of unprotectable elements, if sufficiently creative, can render a work copyrightable, *see Satava*, 323 F.3d at 811, the Work at issue here simply does not rise to the level of creativity required by the Copyright Act.

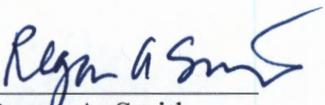
The Work's text consists of the same word repeated twice using different coloring and a different typeface for the letter “O”. *See Coach*, 386 F. Supp. 2d at 496 (holding that a design consisting of an arrangement of the company's initial was not copyrightable). “Words and short phrases . . . [and] mere variations of typographic ornamentation, lettering or coloring” are all ineligible for copyright protection. 37 C.F.R. § 202.1(a), (e); *see CMM Cable Rep, Inc. v. Ocean Coast Properties, Inc.*, 97 F.3d 1504, 1519 (1st Cir. 1996) (citing the Office's regulation and noting, “[i]t is axiomatic that copyright law denies protection to ‘fragmentary words and phrases’”). The stylized “O” itself, like the other letters in the word STORY, is a trivial variation on a basic building block of expression that cannot be copyrighted “regardless of how novel and creative the shape and form of the typeface characters may be.” COMPENDIUM (THIRD) § 906.4; *see Eltra Corp. v. Ringer*, 579 F.2d 294, 298 (4th Cir. 1978) (finding the Copyright Office properly refused to register a typeface design and noting, “typeface has never been considered entitled to copyright”). Moreover, the Board finds that the different typeface used for the letter “O” does not materially add to the Work's creativity, as several standard typefaces include a similar stylized “O”:



The only additional element of the Work is the “mirrored or reflective” effect of the logo. Practically, however, this effect merely reproduces the word “STORY” below the original, using opposite coloring for the typeface (white instead of black) and background (black instead of white). This additional coloring does not “possess more than a *de minimis* quantum of creativity.” *Feist*, 499 U.S. at 345. In a prior case involving adding visual effects such as “relief, shadowing, and shading, labeling, and callouts” to an existing work, the Fourth Circuit agreed with the Copyright Office that such additions did not give rise to a copyrightable work and that such elements “fall within the narrow category of works that lack even a minimum level of creativity.” *Darden v. Peters*, 488 F.3d 277, 282, 287 (4th Cir. 2007). Overall, reviewing the Work in its entirety, including the text, coloration, and stylized “O”, the Board finds that it does not meet the threshold for copyright protection.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated herein, the Review Board of the United States Copyright Office affirms the refusal to register the copyright claim in the Work. Pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 202.5(g), this decision constitutes final agency action in this matter.

BY: 
Regan A. Smith
Copyright Office Review Board

¹ The above letter “O”s are reproduced from these respective typefaces found online: “Commercial Script BT”; “Heaven Matters”; and “Shit Happens”. 1001FONTS.COM, <http://www.1001fonts.com/> (last visited Nov. 13, 2017).