AN EXAMINATION OF THE COPYRIGHT ALLIANCE

OPINION

Christopher Johnson
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The Copyright Alliance\(^1\) has become a familiar name to most Graphic Artists Guild members over the past several years, but details about the organization were of no particular interest to me until recently. I did however become curious after following the controversy surrounding the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), and the Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA), that failed to pass through Congress last winter. The Alliance had been in favor of the proposed legislation, standing against strong opposition that ranged from large internet-based corporations such as Google and Wikipedia, to a host of academics and a very large and vocal segment of the general public. While there was a certain amount of misinformation coming from all sides, the Alliance got my attention when it responded to specific legal and technical criticisms with statements\(^2\) that I considered deliberately vague or evasive. This led to the start of my inquiry; who exactly is the Copyright Alliance? What reasons could there be for their steadfast support of legislation that appeared so badly flawed? After several months of searching for answers to those questions, I have come to the conclusion that the Copyright Alliance is an organization the Graphic Artists Guild should be very wary of, and our status as an executive member of the Alliance should be reevaluated.

THE ALLIANCE

The Copyright Alliance paints itself as a "grassroots" organization, dedicated to protecting the rights and well-being of all creators, usually in terms that sound friendly to the sole-proprietor artist or designer. "The creative individual" is a phrase often repeated in Alliance communications and promotions. Unfortunately, this branding does not hold up after looking at the details; it becomes quite clear that the Copyright Alliance's primary mission is to provide large media and entertainment corporations with additional leverage as they lobby lawmakers in Washington D.C., and it is without any doubt an organization that Sourcewatch.org would define as a front group.\(^3\)

The real substance of the Copyright Alliance can be found by examining the lists of board members and executive members\(^4\) posted on the Alliance website. You'll find nine board
members, all of which are very large corporate entities: ASCAP, BMI, MPAA, NMPA, PPL + VPL, NBC Universal, Time Warner, and Viacom. The executive members list is also made up of corporations or business associations for the most part, with only a small contingent of groups such as the Graphic Artists Guild represented. With this in mind, an examination of the Alliance's website shows that great care was taken to downplay the corporate nature of its board.

The source of its funding is also not mentioned on the website. Since signing up as an individual "Copyright Advocate" is free, it seems to be a fair conclusion that the Alliance’s corporate board members are the primary source of its income, if not the sole source. Nonprofitfacts.com reports that in 2010 the Alliance had revenues totaling $1,304,976 which provided for the busy speaking and travel schedule of executive director Patrick Ross, his salary of $300,000, and for $180,000 of lobbying in Washington D.C., according to Opensecrets.org. This purely corporate funding begs the question; "who's interests does the Alliance serve?"

Examining the law firms on the Alliance's legal advisory board will also provide a few clues regarding priorities. Client lists are stocked with corporations similar in nature to the Alliance’s board members, and the sizes of the law firms themselves are impressive; the Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP website states that the firm has three hundred attorneys in their D.C. office, which is their second-largest and just one of twenty three offices world-wide. Most of these firms are located in the heart of D.C. between Pennsylvania Avenue and K Street. As an exercise in pure speculation, imagine the hurdles your average "grassroots" organization would have to negotiate for such law firms to agree to have their names appear on any list of legal advisors. It becomes less speculative in the Alliance’s case, however, when you look at the founders and current staff members, and note their political connections and previous employment. The biographical details of the people associated with the Alliance are a complete mismatch to the "grassroots" branding of the organization, and its claimed mission of serving the interests of the "creative individual."

THE FOUNDERS OF THE COPYRIGHT ALLIANCE

Patrick Ross; Co-founder and Executive Director, 2007-2010

Before co-founding the Copyright Alliance in 2007, Patrick was vice president of communications and senior fellow at the Progress & Freedom Foundation, widely recognized as a libertarian front group. If the name has a familiar ring, then perhaps you remember something about Newt Gingrich's ethics troubles back in the early 90's. The
PFF was a 501(c)(3) group run by GOPAC executive director and Gingrich associate Jeffrey Eisenach that helped fund the production and distribution of Newt's so-called history lectures at Kennesaw State College, which precipitated his dust-up with the House Ethics Committee. The PFF website was still online as of July 1, 2012, despite having ceased operations in 2010. There’s a list of supporters posted on the site; a very impressive who’s-who of telecom and entertainment corporations. Sourcewatch.org has additional information on the PFF.

Gayle Osterberg; Co-founder and Director of Communications, 2007-2012

Recently named director of communications for the Library of Congress, Gayle had been listed on the Copyright Alliance's Staff Members page as director of communications up until the first week of March 2012, when her bio was removed from the site. She is however still a point person for the Alliance's media relations, and remains listed as the executive director of the Copyright Alliance Education Foundation, the 501(c)(3) charity arm of the organization. Prior to the founding of the Copyright Alliance, Gayle served as vice president of corporate communications for the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) for two years. Before that, she spent 11 years as a communications officer and spokesperson for Senator Don Nickles, a conservative Republican from Oklahoma who held office from 1980 until 2005. (The senator and his lobbying firm, the Nickles Group, LLC, are critically important pieces of the Copyright Alliance puzzle; you'll be hearing much more about them). Gayle also has her own Washington, D.C. communications consulting firm, 133 Public Affairs, which received $135,000 of business from the Alliance in 2009. On its website you’ll find a bio detailing her long and active career as a player in conservative partisan politics; here are a few items she has listed:

"She coordinated, among other things, media and messaging of the high-profile congressional debate on Patients Bill of Rights legislation on behalf of the entire Senate Republican Conference; . . served as Communications Director for two influential Senate Committees, the Senate Budget Committee under Chairman Nickles and Chairman Judd Gregg, and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Under Chairman Gregg, Gayle developed and implemented communications plans for the entire Senate Republican Conference for major initiatives including the federal budget, Higher Education Reauthorization and the Senate Republican Task Force on the Uninsured."

If your political memory goes back fifteen years, you may already be familiar with Gayle's work in assisting Senator Nickles in his efforts to stymie healthcare, workplace safety, and campaign finance reform legislation during the Clinton Administration. Senators Don Nickles and Trent Lott were instrumental in defeating the Patient Bill of Rights in 1998, according to Public Citizen's Congress Watch Report (PDF). Given that the
cost of our broken healthcare system hits freelancers and small businesses such as design studios particularly hard, Gayle's efforts on behalf of the Republicans opposing reform are not likely to sit well with many Guild members.

As you continue reading about the people behind the Copyright Alliance, you'll note that there are numerous and significant connections to Senator Nickles and the Nickles Group in addition to Gayle's. This raises an important question: how much influence does the Nickles Group exert on the Alliance? The additional information about these connections will strongly suggest that there’s no meaningful separation between them at all.

THE COPYRIGHT ALLIANCE STAFF

Sandra Aistars; Executive Director, 2010 - Present

Sandra has been the most visible spokesperson for the Alliance since joining the staff in 2010. Immediately prior, she was vice president and assistant general counsel for intellectual property at Time Warner, Inc. If that isn't enough of a warning that her priorities might not favor the "creative individual," there's this: while at Time-Warner, she was part of a select group of forty-two corporate representatives that worked behind closed doors on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) that has received heavy criticism for favoring the interests of transnational corporations at the expense of citizen's rights. Before Time Warner, she was an attorney for twelve years at the law firm of Weil, Gotshal & Manges, which Forbes ranks in the top 400 largest private companies in America, with revenues of $1.2 Billion in 2007. Forbes describes Weil as:

"Specializing in business finance and restructuring; corporate law; litigation and regulatory law; taxes; and trusts and estates."

Weil is known for handling numerous high-profile cases and clients, such as:

- The sale of General Electric's plastics division
- Comcast's acquisition of NBC Universal
- Enron bankruptcy
- Lehman Brothers bankruptcy
- General Motors bankruptcy

The Weil, Gotshal & Manges web site showcases a law firm busily representing the interests of large corporations in their battles over mergers, copyright, trademarks, licensing fees, etc. Sandra went to Time Warner Inc. after Weil, so I would expect the resumé she impressed them with showed abundant experience in handling the intellectual property...
affairs of Weil’s premier clients. Two questions come to mind; first, how likely is it that Sandra’s experiences at Weil or Time Warner would help foster an understanding of, or empathy for “creative individuals,” and second, what incentives or motivations would induce a talented and accomplished attorney to leave her high-level and likely well-paid position at Time Warner, to take the job of executive director at a non-profit organization that lists only three other staff members? Perhaps we’ll know more when the Alliance’s 2011 tax return becomes available.

Cindi Merifield Tripodi, Director of Congressional Relations

While listed as a key staff member of the Copyright Alliance, Cindi also happens to be a founding partner and very active lobbyist at the Nickles Group. This makes for an interesting money trail; in 2011 the Copyright Alliance, with Cindi as a staff member, sent $180,000 worth of lobbying business to the Nickles Group, where Cindi the lobbyist works. OpenSecrets.org has a full list of the clients she’s represented, plus accompanying lobbying reports that provide a few basic details, such as amounts billed. In 2011 Cindi’s clients were: AT&T, Baxter Healthcare, Bristol-Myers Squibb, BMI, Comcast, Eli Lilly, Food Marketing Institute, Intellectual Ventures LLC, Medtronic, Merchants' Payment Coalition, MPAA, National Association of Convenience Store Operators, and of course, the Copyright Alliance. The reports disclose the $180,000 paid by the Copyright Alliance to Nickles for Cindi’s services. They also show Comcast paying $252,000 for representation by Cindi and several other lobbyists at Nickles. In 2010 and 2011, Comcast was seeking permission from the FCC to acquire NBC Universal, and was also fighting against proposed FCC rules aimed at ensuring net neutrality; both positions favoring a consolidation of corporate power, while potentially doing harm to "individual creators." Being an outsider, I don’t know how much of a problem it is for Washington lobbyists to simultaneously represent clients with conflicting interests; I can only imagine that meetings with lawmakers or FCC officials on Capitol Hill would have been awkward for Cindi, had the Copyright Alliance’s policy positions opposed those of Comcast or BMI.

Without knowing what her duties at the Copyright Alliance are, I'll venture a guess that being a founding partner and active lobbyist for the Nickles Group is her real day job. But perhaps there’s no need to guess. Being a non-profit 501(c)(4), the Alliance files a Form-990 tax return with the IRS, which is open to public inspection; the latest available return, covering the period July 01 2009 to June 30 2010, does not list Cindi as a key officer or employee; so unless she was a lower-level employee not listed by name, she did not receive income from the Alliance during that period. Clearly, working for Nickles is in fact Cindi’s real job; which makes it unlikely her priorities at the Alliance will be much different from those of the Nickles Group. Other important information about
Cindi; she's a former vice president of congressional affairs for the MPAA, and was a managing director at Public Strategies Inc., a corporate PR and consulting firm with a bit of a reputation. I will discuss Public Strategies in more detail later, since the skill set Cindi may have brought with her from PSI would say something about the purposes for which the Copyright Alliance was created, and its methods of operation.

**Diana Walters, Special Assistant**

Diana's bio on the Copyright Alliance site states upfront that she is currently the operations manager of the Nickles Group. I suppose that since there's really no chance of hiding the many connections between the Copyright Alliance and Nickles, then the next best thing is to provide some small matter-of-fact disclosure. So there it is. Same as with Cindi’s “dual” employment, Diana's position as operations manager at Nickles, a firm that lists 9 lobbyists, 39 clients, and did almost eight million dollars of lobbying business in 2011, suggests that she too spends most of her time in the Nickles Group office. But in her case, the Alliance’s Form-990 tax return lists her by name as Treasurer, and definitely states that she did not receive any income from the Alliance. But just as interesting is the mention in her bio that Diana was a senior level executive assistant at Public Strategies Inc., where she served several of its managing directors. Since Cindi Tripodi was a managing director there, I would expect that a close connection exists. With the two of them on staff at the Alliance, the type of work done by Public Strategies definitely becomes an issue, and might say something about the nature of the Copyright Alliance; so I'll cover Public Strategies Inc. in more detail momentarily.

**Lucinda Dugger, Director of Outreach and Field Initiatives**

Lucinda is the only named Alliance staff member that has some connection to “individual creators” listed in her bio, in contrast to the other staff members with long unbroken careers in politics or the corporate world. It therefore makes sense for the Alliance to employ her as a liaison to artists, posting news and announcements on social media sites, sending e-mails to the Alliance's “Copyright Advocates,” and interacting in-person with individuals and arts groups. While outreach is a normal activity for any organization, there’s a very obvious quality to both Lucinda’s statements, and those made by other Alliance staff members. Most are promotions to rally support for pending legislation or other political cause; they lack fundamental details, portray opposition in the starkest terms, and repeat the same talking points about the Alliance’s concern for the rights of the “creative individual.” This is the stuff political campaigns are made of; the purpose is not to educate or enlighten, but simply to whip up public support to assist with the real business of lobbying around Washington D.C. A very troubling case in point; Lucinda has called for support of the Trans-Pacific Partnership on the Copyright Alliance blog.
despite the fact that the details of this latest free-trade pact are still being kept a closely guarded secret by the government trade officials and corporate representatives currently negotiating behind closed doors. A few documents have managed to leak out, however, and they suggest that TPP is another potentially dangerous free-trade agreement that serves the interests of multinational corporations, while doing harm to the general public by undermining the authority of domestic courts.

Lucinda also appears to be managing the website Artistsagainstdigitaltheft.com, based on archived news posts that name her as the author. The site was created by the Alliance last year when their big push for passage of PIPA and SOPA began, and while its launch was made public at the time, both the Artistsagainstdigitaltheft site and the Alliance’s own site currently lack any direct acknowledgment of a connection. While this may seem odd, it perhaps makes a certain amount of sense; a casual observer might get the impression that there’s more of an outcry against digital piracy coming from the public than is actually the case, unaware that much of the noise originates from the same central core of corporate entities. This of course nicely sums up the primary mission of a front group.

**Stephanie Badger, One More Connection to Nickles**

Stephanie is listed as the director of legislative affairs at the Nickles Group, and there's no mention of her on the Alliance website; however, her bio on the Nickles Group site states:

". . Stephanie was instrumental in the creation of the Copyright Alliance, . ." 

So draw another line on the diagram of connections between the Copyright Alliance and the Nickles Group.

**PUBLIC STRATEGIES INC.**

Public Strategies Inc. is an Austin, Texas-based corporate PR firm that deserves its own section. If you find it hard to reach the conclusion that the Copyright Alliance is "artfully manipulative" in its messaging, then an examination of PSI will be helpful. Here's how Public Strategies describes itself:

“Public Strategies is a business advisory firm that helps leading companies transform their corporate reputation into competitive advantage by building trust with key audiences through campaign, transaction, crisis management and corporate partnerships. We pioneered the application of the political campaign to corporate issues and developed our Fifth Seat® philosophy to provide CEOs with a framework that allows them to monitor potential public impact on their business strategy.”
Given this description, PSI’s reputation for creating and managing front groups should not come as a great shock. Their website rather oddly omits a client list, and in fact no clients at all are identified anywhere on the site. However, a little digging turned up a few names that make PSI’s reluctance to mention clients perfectly understandable. Public Strategies was hired to do PR and damage control for: Massey Energy, after a mine explosion killed 29 miners in W. Virginia; Goldman Sachs, after continual bad press stemming from their dubious conduct in the derivatives market; Firestone Tires in the 1990's, when they were facing public outrage over the high number of catastrophic tire failures on SUVs, and also when news came out about Firestone's exploitation of workers in Africa.

With respect to the methods they use for serving their clients’ PR needs, PSI is known for the creation of one astroturf group in particular; namely, “Hands off the Internet” which despite its name was actually fighting against the FCC’s attempts to keep the internet neutral. Public Strategies' founders, management, and alumni are no strangers to engineering “astroturf” political campaigns; they include people such as Mark McKinnon, chief media advisor to George W. Bush; Matthew Dowd, chief campaign strategist for Bush-Cheney and an associate of Karl Rove; Jack Martin, founder of PSI, and now the CEO of Hill & Knowlton Strategies, which is currently helping America’s Natural Gas Alliance (ANGA) create some positive PR for hydrofracturing (fracking) in shale formations. Dan Bartlett is the current CEO of Public Strategies; he was the White House communications director for George W. Bush, and is another of Karl Rove’s associates. Other key people at Public Strategies are known for working mostly on behalf of Democrats, such as Jeff Eller, but at PSI their mission is the same; present the best PR for the corporate client, as Eller did for TXU Energy in Texas.

The expertise that Cindi Tripodi and Diana Walters might have brought with them from PSI’s astroturf toolmaking operation, combined with the political and corporate backgrounds of the others at the Copyright Alliance, strongly suggests that the Alliance is by design a tool for managing public perception for the benefit of its corporate sponsors. For a little more information about PSI, visit sourcewatch.org's Public Strategies Inc. page.

SENIOR DON NICKLES

The details of Senator Nickles’ career in Washington damage the Alliance’s credibility still further; certainly for anyone who takes a dim view of the influence that corporate money has on our government and society. Senator Nickles was a member of what was known as “the Family,” a group of christian fundamentalist lawmakers that made head-
The details of Senator Nickles' career in Washington damage the Alliance's credibility still further; certainly for anyone who takes a dim view of the influence that corporate money has on our government and society. Senator Nickles was a member of what was known as "the Family," a group of Christian fundamentalist lawmakers that made headlines with their house on C Street. He is an alumnus of ALEC, a group denounced by many for its secretive influence on state legislatures and its radically conservative, pro-corporate agenda. Guild members should be particularly interested to know that ALEC has been working hard to undermine unions, as witnessed in the state of Wisconsin this past year. Nickles' own anti-union credentials are demonstrated directly by his leadership role in getting "Right to Work" legislation passed in his home state of Oklahoma in 2001. He's a long-time advocate for deregulation of the oil and gas industries, and served for seven years as a board member of Chesapeake Energy until just this past June, when his political ties to the troubled CEO Aubrey McClendon led him to resign. He received an "F" from Common Cause in their Reform Report Card- Money & Politics Voting Records of 106th Congress. The support he received from HMOs and drug companies while senator (now major clients of his lobbying firm) goes hand-in-hand with his consistent opposition to healthcare reform efforts. It was Senator Nickles who introduced the Defense of Marriage Act into the Senate in 1996. A current client of the Nickles Group is the Financial Service Centers of America, a consortium of payday lenders fighting to weaken or kill the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).

Here's one last piece of trivia; the Copyright Alliance's Washington D.C. office is 5 blocks (one half-mile) up 13th Street NW from the Nickles Group. If you're curious about where Copyright Alliance staff members might prefer to spend their time, you'll find Google Maps' street views of both locations interesting. The Nickles Group LLC's address is 601 13th Street NW, Suite 250 North, Washington, D.C. 20005. The Copyright Alliance is located at 1224 M Street NW, Suite 101, Washington, D.C. 20005.

THE ALLIANCE IN ACTION

While the backgrounds of the people at the Alliance strongly imply that the organization is a front group, it is of course their words and actions that most directly demonstrate the Alliance's true mission and reason for existence. A prime example showing what the Alliance is all about is the testimony of Executive Director Sandra Aistars to a hearing of the House Subcommittee on Intellectual Property, Competitiveness and the Internet, on June 01, 2011. Three panelists testified before the committee: Sandra, from the Copyright Alliance; Maria Pallante, the Register of the U.S. Copyright Office; and Michael O'Leary, Vice President of Congressional Affairs at the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

In her written testimony, Sandra describes the Alliance in much the same way as she does at many of her other public appearances, and in keeping with the Alliance's branding:
"The Copyright Alliance is a public interest and educational organization supported by more than 40 entities comprised of individual artists and creators, as well as the associations, guilds, and corporations that support and invest in them. Besides these institutional members, we have more than 7,000 individual, one-voice artist advocates who give their personal time and creativity to support our work."  

Note her emphasis on individuals, and the very obvious minimization of the Alliance's corporate membership. Later in her testimony, she adds:

"The Copyright Alliance represents the copyright holder next door. Our members are living and working in all 50 States and include, among others, the independent filmmakers who self-finance films that tell as-yet-untold stories, the talented crafts people who are behind every television show and motion picture you enjoy, the tens of thousands of professional photographers and videographers across the country who run their own studios, employ a handful of workers, and contract with a dozen more, and there are people working in unexpected places on extraordinary projects, like a music producer living in Wrightsville, North Carolina, who is working from his home studio with musicians as far away as Glasgow and as recognized as Neil Young."

To anyone unfamiliar with the details of the Alliance, Sandra and the other witnesses appear to represent a broad spectrum of interests before the committee. Maria, a government official; Sandra, allegedly speaking for the plucky "individual creators" of the general public; and Michael O'Leary, representing an association of prominent corporations. However, since the MPAA is a Copyright Alliance board member, and even better, the MPAA officer who's named as a director of the Alliance is in fact none other than Michael O'Leary himself, the appearance of a broad spectrum of interests being represented is an illusion. One more item pointing to the MPAA's heavy presence can be seen in the video of the hearing, where the spectator sitting immediately behind Sandra appears to be Cindi Tripodi: Copyright Alliance staffer, Nickles lobbyist representing the MPAA, and former vice president of congressional affairs for the MPAA, which to remind you is the job O'Leary currently holds.

Sandra's claims of representing the "copyright holder next door", and speaking for the "7,000 one-voice artist advocates" would carry more weight if these supporters actually had some real representation within the Alliance. Unfortunately this is not the case. The Alliance's 2009 tax return indicates that its governing body consists of 10 voting board members, which I expect are the 10 named directors: Patrick Ross, the Alliance's executive director (prior to Sandra's arrival); the MPAA's Michael O'Leary; and then representatives from BMI, ASCAP, NBC Universal, PPA, VIACOM, Time Warner, Vindi Bona...
Productions, and PPL-VPL. So unless there’s a democratic process hidden from view, it appears that the 7,000 one-voice advocates don't have any voice at all, except to the extent that they agree with the Alliance’s board members.

Finally, the educational activities of the Copyright Alliance and its 501(c)(3) charity, the Copyright Alliance Education Foundation, seem to be minimal at best. The classroom materials available on the foundation's site date back to 2009, were all created by corporate board members such as the MPAA, and at the time they were initially distributed received a fair amount of criticism for advocating extremely restrictive views on fair use. My own searches on the web for signs of recent educational activities of the Alliance or its education foundation have only turned up references to the original launch of the foundation, and virtually nothing else save for a few infrequent seminars held in Washington D.C. As for the educational content of blog posts, Sandra's numerous interviews, presentations, testimony, and other public statements from the Alliance, it's a matter of judging for oneself whether they are informative and educational, or merely one-sided propaganda.

CONCLUSION

It’s impossible for me to take seriously any notion that the interests of Graphic Artists Guild members could be a top priority for Senator Nickles, his lobbying firm, or the people who have been long-time associates of his. The Alliance’s root-level connection to the Nickles Group, in addition to its functioning as merely a front for a collection of powerful corporations, should be more than enough justification for the Guild to terminate its executive membership in the Alliance.

However, despite all the details showing the Copyright Alliance to be a front group serving a corporate constituency, it’s possible there could still be a few people who don’t have a problem with this; that is of course, if they’re capable of believing that Time Warner, Disney, and members of the Graphic Artists Guild are all on the same side of most trade and copyright issues, and somehow aren't too offended by the Alliance's deliberate misbranding. So let me take a moment to suggest some important differences in our interests. To be sure, there are a few general principles we share with the major content libraries and media empires; meaningful ownership of creative property that allows us to profit from our work is something we have in common. But in the complicated world of Washington politics and a global economy, it's simply ludicrous to evaluate proposed legislation based only on positive-sounding titles and mission statements, and the simple arithmetic the Alliance trumpets in arguing its case.
Using SOPA as an example, stopping online piracy was the legislation’s stated purpose; but many critics from both legal and technical points of view warned that it was likely to be ineffective at accomplishing this, but would perhaps be very good at altering the marketplace to favor the largest players. Even if legislation does truly enhance protections for intellectual property owners, individual creators might still lose if net neutrality is compromised and industry leaders are able to control the web’s infrastructure to suit their own ends. We lose if an industry is ruled by a few large players that can dictate contract terms and the rates of compensation for creators. Everyone loses if the power of the courts to reign in abusive practices is undermined by corporation-friendly trade agreements. If you're against "work for hire," then you probably don't want a consolidation of corporate power in publishing, movies, broadcast TV, or some other industry in which you're trying to make a living. In so many ways, the giant media companies and intellectual property libraries on the Copyright Alliance board, such as BMI, Time Warner, and Viacom, are not going to be your friends; their interests will be served by being able to acquire your work as cheaply as they can, and to squeeze the most value out of it as they can. The practice of "Hollywood accounting" should be fairly convincing evidence that top-shelf corporations will not always make the interests of the “creative individual” a high priority. To heed the calls of their proxies at the Copyright Alliance and to support SOPA, ACTA, or especially now, the still-secret, still-being-negotiated Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, without a careful look at the details first, would be completely foolish.

In instances where we find ourselves legitimately on the same side of an issue as the Copyright Alliance, i.e., the corporate entities it represents, we always have the option of signing petitions, writing letters of support, or rendering other assistance. However, since the Alliance board members are worth literally billions, have access to Washington lawmakers through uncounted consulting and lobbying firms, and have no shortage of media outlets though which to make their opinions heard, the Graphic Artists Guild has no business giving the Copyright Alliance any more money; the $5000 we gave them last year was not well-spent. In fact, if anyone still harbors lingering doubts about the Alliance, let me direct your attention to the Guild’s 2011 financial report (LM-2) filed with the U.S. Department of Labor. Schedule 16 records the money being sent to the Copyright Alliance, 601 13th Street NW, Washington D.C.; you may or may not be shocked at this point when I remind you that that’s the address for the Nickles Group LLC.

Finally, there’s the issue of the Graphic Artists Guild being used as a prop by the Alliance in its false claims of representing the interests of creative individuals, unions and small businesses. I see no plausible argument for maintaining our status as an executive member of the Alliance, which grants them license to do this.
NOTES

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About the Author

Christopher Johnson is a freelance illustrator currently serving on the board of directors of the New York chapter of the Graphic Artists Guild, and is also one of the chapter’s representatives to the international board of directors. He is the chair of the IAG, an interest group for illustrators at the New York chapter.

Contact Information:
e-mail: chris@cjohnsonart.com
www.creativeshake.com/cjart