

By IAN JEROME LEONG

EARLIER in the year, the Association of Accredited Advertising Agents of Malaysia revoked two prestigious Kancil Awards presented to a notable advertising agency as the winning entries bore similarities to works produced by a foreign designer.

In June, another prominent advertising agency was accused of plagiarism by an independent filmmaker after the final web-film shared a similar storyline and setting previously pitched by the filmmaker who was rejected during the selection process.

High-profile incidents like these may be few and far between but they bring to light issues pertaining to originality and ethics within the creative industry, particularly in the fields related to arts and design.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but every creative professional deserves to be recognised and given credit where credit is due.

### Creative tightrope

One of the biggest challenges for all artists, designers and other creative professionals is to create a product that is truly original, which can highlight their unique style and skills.

While it is not wrong to be

# Honour in the craft

influenced or find inspiration from different artists or recognisable masterpieces, the large amount of resources readily available online and through various publications make it easy for individuals to copy, adapt and modify the works of other designers instead of coming up with fresh ideas.

Artists and designers who continuously choose this route will then be on a dangerous path that will not only stifle their creativity but decrease their career prospects, or worse, lead them to the more serious act of plagiarism.

Augustine Wong, department head of art and design at Sunway University's Faculty of Arts, says, "The differentiation between inspiration and plagiarism is that one seeks to motivate the creativity of the designer while the other seeks to kill off any creative endeavour."

Speaking about his experience in the field, Augustine says, "I have encountered a lot of junior designers who have turned to what is easy and safe, however, the outcome is that they would not be able to produce strong portfolios to secure bigger accounts.

"Bigger clients with good brand

name will require designers who have original ideas while pitching for a project," he says.

### Fulfilling expectations

Like many other industries, the level of competition within the creative fields can become cutthroat as agencies, artists and designers strive to outdo one another to attract high-spending investors.

Therefore, this fuels the possibility that agencies and individuals knowingly risk outputting plagiarised work as they hope to cash in on what they believe is a good idea.

Despite the risks involved, the possibility of lucrative earnings and illustrious recognitions may be too hard to ignore, outweighing the ramifications that may follow.

The willingness to plagiarise may be rooted to the expectation and influence of the clients and organisation that set unreasonable and inflexible job briefs that may include short turnaround time, low budgets and irrational requests.

### Breaking out

So how will this situation

translate to art and design graduates and aspiring creative professionals who are struggling to leave their mark in an established industry? Wouldn't an impressive portfolio only allow seasoned industry professionals to view and possibly steal ideas for their respective projects?

Augustine and Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology's School of Media, Arts and Design academic director Assoc Prof Wong Bee Suan agree that the best assets for talented individuals are intellectual property and their ideas.

Augustine advises, "The key to success for the designer is to find inspiration and to be inspired. Graduates must not be afraid to show their talents and skills to the industry.

"They must grab the opportunity to obtain industry recognition, display confidence in their work and be willing to share their ideas to obtain feedback and comments."

Assoc Prof Wong says, "One can never be able to stop people from deliberately taking one's work and claiming it as theirs.

"Copyright in a way does offer some assurance, and at least the

designer is protected under the law. A copycat may be able to steal the work, but not the ideas and the creativity."

Dean of the School of Information and Communication Technology at Asia e University Assoc Prof Dr Roshayu Mohamad says, "The possibility of people stealing one's idea should not be the hindering factor that stops people from being creative. Producing new ideas is one's process of learning.

"During the learning process, people become inspired by different concepts or techniques.

"The distinction between inspiration and plagiarism is when creative professionals produce something unique and better than the original inspiration in such a way that the new elements amounts to originality," she says.

But all things said, creative graduates need to be aware that ownership of copyright can sometimes be difficult to establish as there has to be sufficient proof of effort applied to the work and reduced to material form before it is eligible for copyright.

> SEE NEXT PAGE

## True to one's self

> FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Furthermore, similarities between creative designs may be unintentional as the same source of inspiration can greatly influence the outcome of the final product.

### Reshaping the mould

According to Assoc Prof Wong, universities play a crucial role in shaping creative students with high ethical conscience.

"Creating awareness, stating the importance of being original and enforcing ethical issues from the very first day of study will help in creating students that value originality. A university should also implement the code of ethics and make sure students follow it."

He adds, "It is important that the university takes action against students who breach the code of ethics to further emphasise the severity of such behaviour. This way, students will learn to respect the works of others and continue to practise the same ideologies as they enter the workforce."

Augustine shares the same thought, saying, "Programme heads are responsible for briefing students on the negative consequences of plagiarism and this must be reinforced through inclusion of punitive actions with regards to plagiarism in all assessment rubrics and briefs."

In addition to instilling ethical mindfulness, Augustine believes universities can go further to help students express originality in their work by offering creative or critical thinking modules that will

encourage students to think out of the box.

"In the design process, students are required to start generating ideas via research, peer discussion, sharing of ideas and criticising ideas before they start designing.

"Through this process, students will then understand how to generate their own ideas and harness their problem-solving skills," he says.

### Master of the art

Augustine continues, "The world has changed and it has seen a new group of clients who are willing to pay more for originality as they understand the value of professionalism.

"Big corporate brands will also require their designers to have original ideas in project pitches and avoid creative conflicts."

Irrespective of the challenges and demands of the industry, creative professionals must stay true to their craft and, more importantly, to themselves.

It is only then will the industry as a whole eradicate the practice of plagiarism and blatant disregard for originality and creativity.

While there may be individuals in the industry who resort to taking the easy way out, graduates of the arts and design must take it upon themselves to constantly strive to push the boundaries of their craft as it is the only pathway to success.

As the first president of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe said, "Originality is the essence of true scholarship. Creativity is the soul of the true scholar."