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An open Letter to the Obama For America Campaign
130 E. Randolph Street
Chicago, IL 60601

On October 6, 2011, the Obama For America re-election campaign announced a design contest titled "Art Works; A poster contest to support American jobs." The alleged purpose of this poster is to motivate people to support the President's *American Jobs Act*. <http://www.barackobama.com/artworks/creative-brief>

The contest website reads:

"Obama For America is seeking poster submissions from artists across the country illustrating why we support President Obama's plan to create jobs now, and why we'll re-elect him to continue fighting for jobs for the next four years."

What this really means is:

Obama For America is asking artists across the country to work for free to show they support President Obama's plan to create jobs for people other than artists, and why we'll re-elect him to continue fighting for jobs for people who are not artists for the next four years.

The contest website reads:

"Three winners will receive a framed edition of their poster signed by Barack Obama and a limited edition of the poster distributed by Sponsor (approximate retail value \$195)."

Yes, the prize for the winning artists' work is a print of his/her own work signed by the President; not payment for the job he/she did. In actuality, this "prize" has no value to the artist unless he/she sells it, at which point the artist no longer owns the "prize" awarded to him/her by the "Sponsor." The *Graphic Artists Guild Handbook of Pricing & Ethical Guidelines* cites the current rate for the design of a poster for this type of distribution to be approximately \$4,000 and upwards.

How obvious is this irony: A crowdsourced contest soliciting free work (spec work) from American artists for the purpose of promoting legislation to create jobs.

To add insult to injury, the contest rules state that all artists who submit work to the contest grant the Obama For America campaign an unrestricted unpaid irrevocable license to use ALL of the submissions, not just the winning entry (term #17). And, although the Obama For America campaign requires permission to use the artist's name and likeness, there's no promise to even give the artist credit when her/his work is used (term #1).

It gets worse. Of course, entering the contest means that you agree to the contest rules, and indemnifying the committee is part of the rules, so you agree to defend the campaign committee and yourself against an infringement claim at your expense.

There is a great historical precedence of our government –a Democratic President- hiring artists to promote job programs:

“During the Great Depression of the 1930’s, the U.S. government had sponsored a work program that valued artists enough to employ hundreds of them to make posters.” “During the 1930’s, the United States was in crisis and nearly one-third of the country’s workforce was unemployed. In an effort to rebuild the nation, boost the economy, and enhance community life, newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched a series of programs in 1933 called the New Deal. The largest agency of this reform program, the Works Progress Administration (later named the Works Projects Administration), existed from 1935-1943 and employed millions of jobless workers in an ambitious campaign to strengthen the nation’s infrastructure through a network of highways, bridges, and large-scale civic projects such as dams, parks, and utilities.

“Many of the WPA’s undertakings still form the framework of the United States. In addition, depression-era Americans were able to connect with a broad range of fine and performing arts aimed at enhancing the quality of life. Through the administration of Federal Project Number One, the WPA presented cultural events including concerts, art exhibitions, and plays, all contained under the umbrella of the Federal Art Project (FAP).

“Under the FAP, the WPA Poster Division was charged with producing posters to raise awareness and promote a wide range of programs, activities, and behaviors that the Roosevelt administration believed would improve people’s lives...”

[Carter, Ennis, Christopher DeNoon, and Alexander M. Peltz. Introduction. *Posters for the People: Art of the WPA*. Philadelphia, PA: Quirk, 2008. Print.]

Approximately 500 artists were hired by the FAP; more than 35,000 posters were designed and 2 million printed. Many of these posters are now part of the Library of Congress collection. All of these artists were paid and given credit on their work.

The Obama For America re-election campaign contest, “Art Works: A poster contest to support American jobs,” is shameful. American artists should be outraged that our President does not recognize that we are entitled to be paid for our work, as are all Americans.

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The Graphic Artists Guild is a national artists union that embraces creators at all levels of skill and expertise, who create art intended for presentation as originals or reproductions. The mission of the Guild is to promote and protect the economic interests of its members, to improve conditions for all creators and to raise standards for the entire industry. Its core purpose is to be a strong community that empowers and enriches its members through collective action.