Artist Puts His Foot Down on Amazon

By Chris Gaither
Times Staff Writer

December 28, 2005

An icon of the '60s is taking on an icon of the Internet age.

Robert Crumb, the counterculture illustrator known for characters such as Mr. Natural and Fritz the Cat, has filed a copyright infringement lawsuit against Amazon.com Inc., accusing the Internet retailer of using his images without permission.

Jules Zalon, Crumb's lawyer, said people who searched the Amazon website for a product that it didn't carry were shown Crumb's famous "Keep on Truckin'" image — a big-footed man in full stride, leaning sharply backward — with instructions to keep on looking.

When Crumb's representatives complained to Amazon in 2003, the company promptly removed the image, Zalon said Tuesday.

The lawsuit, filed in Seattle last week, seeks unspecified damages. It came after the two parties were unable to agree on how much Amazon should pay for using the image, which over the years has been memorialized, among other places, on the mud flaps of trucks.

Amazon has not filed a response, and a spokeswoman declined to comment.

The reclusive artist, who usually goes by R. Crumb, owns a house in southern France, where he is working on an illustrated version of the Book of Genesis. His lawyer said Crumb didn't discover the alleged unauthorized use on his own, but was alerted by his representatives.

"I doubt he spends much time on Amazon," Zalon said.