

The Process of a Portrait

what to expect with a commission

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the process

This format is simply a general guide to the commission process. In fact it is very likely that your experience will be different from what I have outlined, and I welcome the organic nature of completing a portrait with you. Every subject is unique and every client will handle the process in a slightly different manner.

Since the process of a portrait commission is really about the relationship I will have with you, it is paramount that we communicate well and often from the very beginning. The result will be a summation of our time, energy, and care—one that you will enjoy for years to come.

meeting one

- Practical details are discussed.
- Subject is sketched in charcoal or paint.
- Photographs are taken of subject.
- Photographs are reviewed on laptop to ensure satisfaction.
- Contract is signed.

pose decision

- Final photograph is chosen.
- Color Study is completed and sent for approval.

meeting two

- Portrait is painted to half completion.
- Progress is evaluated and discussed.
- Frame is chosen.

meeting three

- Final sitting.
- Framing.

delivery

meeting one

Practical details are discussed. To begin the first meeting, I really like to spend time talking with you and getting to know my subject. This time is so valuable to me, as it will inform every decision I make about the entire process. I also like to see where the painting will be hung, talk about the basic formality desired, and get a feel for what type of frame you wish to have.

Subject is sketched in paint or charcoal. I prefer to spend a couple of hours painting the subject. This time of painting helps me understand both the physicality of the subject and his/her personality. The sketch is done on a small canvas in 20 minute sittings until a reasonable likeness is obtained (roughly an hour to two hours). I like to talk with the subject during this time, piecing together all the information I need to create a successful final portrait. If the subject does not wish to spend so much time sitting, I can also sketch in charcoal for one or two sittings.

Photographs are taken of the subject. At this point, I will have been able to spend enough time with the subject to have a good feel for what the final portrait will look like given the personality of the subject and the formality of the setting. I like to take plenty photographs of several different poses. We will take breaks and try to spend enough time to ensure that the subject is not “posing” or “tense” but very natural and comfortable while being photographed.

Photographs are reviewed on my laptop to ensure satisfaction. After photographing, I like to upload the pictures onto the computer and review them with you. This is an exciting time, as both parties begin to get a better feel for what the portrait should and/or will look like. Hopefully there will be many photographs that capture the likeness. If not, more pictures will be taken and reviewed again. I prefer to not decide on a final picture at this time; see more below.

Contract is signed. If a size has been decided (half length, etc.), I will complete the contract stating the details of the business exchange, including a final price and delivery date. If we have not already talked about a delivery date, we will spend some time deciding that here. I try to be as timely as possible in the delivery. Forty percent of the total is due at this time. If the size has yet to be decided, I can send the contract to be signed and returned before beginning the Color Study (see below).

pose decision

Final photograph is chosen. I will send copies of the favorite photographs so you can “live with” them for a little while before making a final decision. This allows you to make sure all aspects of the photograph are satisfactory—from the big things like pose and facial expression to details like background objects, hands, and clothes. This is a good time for you to let me know if and how you want the portrait to be different from the photograph. If it is an issue of simplifying the photograph, such as removing wrinkles from clothes or blurring the background, I can commence painting. If it is a more complicated change, I may need to combine information from several photographs or even take new ones. Either way, it is best for both of us to know at this point rather than at the end.

Color Study is completed and sent to client for approval. When a final photograph is decided upon, I will do a Color Study. This is a scaled-down version of the final painting (usually ~8x12”) to give both you and me a feel for the portrait and to clear up any differences from the photograph. I will send you a picture of this color study. If the study is satisfactory, I will begin the final portrait.

meeting two

Portrait is painted to half completion. At this point the canvas will be completely covered in paint in order to understand how the person feels in the atmosphere of the painting. The portrait will have the likeness of the subject in place and the background will have major comparisons established. Essentially, it will look like a full size version of the color study with slightly more detail in the important areas like the face and hands.

Progress is evaluated and discussed. We will meet to discuss the progress. I want you to see the portrait at this point with the understanding that a lot is left to complete. This gives you an opportunity to feel the impact the portrait has in its full scale and to imagine it sitting in a frame in its final place on the wall. By doing so, you can let me know how much further to take the detailing of certain things and the altering of colors, if necessary. This is when you can say, “Oh, wow. I didn’t realize how bright that red was in the background”, or, “I really like how simply

you've painted the shirt." Again, I want to be as open as possible so that the next step isn't too much of a surprise (I hope it's still exciting, though!).

Frame is chosen. I highly recommend using my framer, Rick Guthrie. Because a frame completes the painting, it is paramount that the frame be perfect. Rick's supply of quality frames and his ability to match them appropriately is what makes him invaluable to my business. He will work with me throughout the entire process to find a frame that matches the painting while fitting the mood desired by my client. Thus, for the second meeting, we will be able to choose from the samples he provides by placing the painting at or near its final spot and cycling through the samples. By doing this now, the frame can be built and ready by the time the painting is finished. Rick's frames come in wide range of styles and prices; he also gives a discount to me, which I pass on to my clients.

After the meeting I will bring the portrait to near completion.

meeting three

Final Sitting. At this point, the portrait is 95% complete. I like to have the subject sit for me a couple times to make any alteration or finalization in the likeness of the face.

delivery

The completed portrait is delivered and hung. The painting is completely dry and has been varnished and framed. The balance is due at this time.