

Portrait Commissions By Katherine Taylor

How it works:

I generally don't have subjects actually sit for me while I paint for several reasons; my studio props are limited and I can't be sure of lighting in other homes when I set up my easel. Also, people who are not used to sitting for a portrait for two or three hours at a time find it difficult to do, especially when it comes to children. Photographs can usually do the job instead. However, with that said, it does help to have some live modeling sessions if the subject is willing to pose for an hour or so; I usually use this time to make color notes and do some gesture sketching.



I can paint from an existing photograph, but I prefer to paint from photographs I have taken myself. There are two reasons for this: for one, I can control the lighting choices and make sure the face and/or body of the subject is illuminated properly. Second, I get to meet the subject and talk to them in person, which in turn helps me capture more of their personality on canvas. With this said, however, I have painted successful portraits from someone else's photo if it's a good one - and this is especially true of pet commissions.

I generally consult with the client first about the size and orientation (horizontal or vertical) of the image and give advice on wall space, matching decor, and framing. It's best to visit the space where the image will eventually hang to do this consultation. The client and I decide on a setting and a pose for the image. Then I take anywhere from 100 to 300 digital images, usually in another session. The client and I review the images and choose the best one based on lighting, expression, aspect ratio and so on. I often create a different background than the one in the actual image, again based on what the client prefers.

I can create a compositional concept using Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop for the client to review and approve before I proceed to paint. A commission can take anywhere from 2 to 5 months to complete based on my schedule, the complexity of the design and the payment agreement; in addition, for most skin tones I use a glazing technique, which requires time to dry in between stages. I usually get the painting done in advance of the agreed delivery date since I want to piece dry enough to frame.

Clients may ask for one revision on a painting as part of our agreement but of the many commissions I've done in the last decade, that's only happened once. I have very satisfied customers when it comes to commission work.

Katherine