

# Judith Leman Studios

## COMMISSIONING AN ARTWORK OR PORTRAIT

"The idea of commissioning an art piece or portrait may seem daunting at first"

### **Myths exploded**

At first the idea of commissioning an art piece or portrait may seem daunting and there is a common perception that portraits are stiff, formal affairs for boardrooms or galleries, or only for the "aristocracy"!

There are however, all kinds of portraits and the most important aspect of producing one (whether it be a massive oil or a more intimate head and shoulders), is that the sitter is depicted in an appropriate environment. After all, the main purpose of a portrait is to bring pleasure to the ones who have commissioned the work.

### **Before sittings begin**

Normally artist and subject will meet for about an hour for preliminary discussions before the process of sittings begin. This first meeting is informal and usually held in the subject's home or office environments. It is during this time I try to get a good background on what is required, including the purpose or function of the portrait, the spirit or mood of the work, where it will hang, and its size.

These decisions help choose clothes to be worn for the first sitting and this influences the background colour or setting of the portrait. These elements will determine the price of the work. This is a mutual process, with the sitter having input and approval all the way through.

### **Timeframes and sittings**

I usually require about 5-7 sittings that take 1 ½ hours each sitting. These can take place at my studio, but to be more comfortable and confident may be best in the sitter's residence or work-place. I can and do travel extensively, so working in a variety of countries and locations is not daunting to me.

The sittings are a series of informal conversations with me sketching and observing, trying to get a feeling of personality and character, studying my subject's natural gestures, poses and expression... but they certainly do not mean the sitter not being able to talk or have to remain motionless! Posing for an artist is a unique and sometimes slightly self-conscious experience, and even prominent people who are used to being in control may stiffen at the first sitting. But the more I get to know my sitter, the more comfortable our rapport can become.

### **Progress visuals**

After a first sitting or two, several small studies are produced for approval. Where there is a need for any small changes or adjustments, it is much easier

to do them at this stage, before moving up to the full-size canvas. This also relieves the concern or doubt over the appearance of the final portrait, which everyone needs to be pleased with and proud to hang. When all involved are happy with the general look, I then proceed to work on the larger canvas.

#### **From beginning to end**

Depending on the sitter's availability, portraits can take between six months and even up to a year to complete. Ideally, before work is finished, we can discuss framing which I am most happy to advise on. Unless unusual circumstances, all of the studies and preliminary drawings will be the sitter's to keep.

I trust this information has now exploded the myth and clearly outlines the portrait creation process! What is often perceived as challenging or complicated almost always turns out to be an enjoyable experience for sitter and artist alike. Please be in contact direct should you like to discuss a portrait.

**Judith Leman**

**Artist**

**This information can be read in conjunction with  
Commission Terms of Agreement**

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References: "How to Commission a Portrait" Richard Stone, Essex.