

Today, with the ability to take photos literally in our pockets, one might ask why hire an artist to create a portrait. One of my reasons for creating portraits, is that the value of the hand-made object is so important precisely because our technology makes things so easy. Unlike the expectations of the photo, which are generally understood universally, the hand-made is truly unique. Whether an artist draws or paints, their creations have a history associated with training that dates back thousands of years.

When an artist chooses to work realistically, they consciously align themselves with the knowledge, philosophy and values of what it means to be human. Quite intentionally the artist working realistically has devoted years of their life to the acquisition of knowledge that would help them to visually express the poetry of our existence. One of the reasons realism can be so powerful and awe-inspiring is that on some level of awareness we are instinctively conscious what the commitment to excellence really means. The sacrifice to acquire distinguished, merit based skill is quite literally a sacrifice of one's life. There is something truly amazing about the disposable phones in our pockets. However, at the end of day most of us have one and at a pretty cheap price. That can't be said about a well done portrait.

If realism is the yardstick by which anyone can discern quality, creating portraits from life immediately reveals the true commitment an artist has had to the acquiring skill. Many artists can draw or paint realistically from photos. There are many unethical, lazy tricks to achieve results. Very few artists can work from life with a consistent level of competency. Still fewer can work from life with any age range, gender and any media at any location. The artist that has that level of experience, craftsmanship and honor for the values associated with skill, makes intentional choices in creating an artistic portrait that are quite different from the artificial intelligence of a camera; not to mention the snapshot.

When an artist of the highest integrity accepts a portrait commission they do with the knowledge that the span of their life will only allow them to produce a limited number of portraits. The limits of potential output, combined with length it takes to initially attain the necessary skill, create in the mind of the artist a true sense of honor associated with the request to create a portrait. Something that can not always be said about the photographer.

I can and do work from both life and photos. However, I offer a substantial discount for anyone who is willing to pose from life for their portrait. Apart from my love of that process, I feel strongly about sharing the magic of the experience as a counter to almost everything else in our disposable existence. After all, it is not every day that one gets to have a work of art done of which they are they subject and see it done at the same time. Further, whether it is a painting or drawing, the portrait will outlast the planned obsolescence of probably everything else that we own.

Regarding photos, and modern technology, I am no luddite. Photography offers opportunities to explore possibilities that would be extremely challenging for the sitter. In the end, the creation of a portrait is not an exercise in torture but a combination of committed artistic excellence with the time, potential and budget of the sitter.

The portrait as a work of art is truly a thing to cherish. Today more than ever.