



Utrecht Art Supplies

Commissioned Portraits: Managing the Process



Image: "Margareta Maria de Roodere and Her Parents" (1652). Gerrit van Honthorst

Ask the Expert: "I accepted a commission to paint a portrait of a prominent local businessman. The client has been very critical and demanding, asking for revisions during the course of painting the picture. At first I was happy to accommodate requests to adjust the hair, clothes, etc, but he's getting really nit-picky. I haven't gotten paid yet, and this painting has taken twice as long as it should have. I really need to wrap this up- how do other artists handle it?"

A: Clients who have never commissioned a portrait before don't always understand the process, and can sometimes interject more often than is helpful. Successful portrait painters prepare first-time clients by outlining the process from start to finish, including the payment schedule and whether revisions will be considered.

It's important for the artist to get compensated for any time spent drawing and painting. Some charge a small, non-refundable studio fee that covers materials used to produce preliminary sketches. If you do charge a setup fee, be clear about what it covers so everybody understands

that it's just for materials- any sketches or photographs taken at this stage remain the artist's property.

Agree on how you will handle requests for revisions, should the project go forward. Some painters don't consider any input from the client once the initial sketches have been approved, while others allow one round of requests toward the end of the project. Established artists whose work is in demand may be more comfortable rejecting client input, compared to emerging artists who need to yield a bit in order to secure commissions.

Once the commission has been accepted, consider charging a deposit to commence work, with the balance due on delivery of the finished piece. The deposit secures the client's stake in the project and makes cancelling the commission less likely.

When a client's excessive feedback interferes with the artist's ability to work comfortably, there are a couple of ways to correct course without hurting anyone's feelings. Try transitioning to a discussion of the date you'll deliver the painting, and give the client one "last call" to give feedback before completion. Alternately, if you really need to avoid any further unproductive critique, try explaining that you're entering the final stage of the process, and at this phase you typically work in-studio without any more live sittings. Make sure to thank the client for all their input so far, and let them know how excited you'll be to unveil the finished portrait!

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#).

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