



Getting Started Taking Art Commissions

Paige Luther

Review

If you're about to start working professionally as an artist, the idea of taking commissions can be daunting. The purpose of this document is to provide information and tips about how to get started taking art commissions. Review the following sections for more information about:

- [Marketing Your Artwork](#)
- [Creating a Website](#)
- [Deciding Prices for Art](#)
- [Creating a Contract](#)



What is an Art Commission?

An art commission is when someone requests a piece of art to be made specifically for them in return for payment.

One of the most common art commission is portraits, but often you will also find people requesting specific characters from books, comics, games, or movies be created into art for them.



Recommended Supplies

The following is a list of recommended supplies for beginning to take commissions.

- Camera
- Computer
- Packing Supplies
- Previously Created Artwork
- Printer
- Scanner



Marketing Your Artwork

Marketing artwork is the promotion of your art. By marketing your artwork, you're allowing potential clients to see what work you have to offer.

One of the best ways to market your art is by using the internet, more specifically by using social media websites.

This section provides information about different social media websites and how they can be used to market your art.





SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

Social media websites give you the opportunity to promote your work and interact with viewers firsthand.

Three of the largest social media websites used by artists are:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Tumblr](#)

The following pages will go over the strengths and weaknesses of each social media website to give you the best idea of what sites might be right for your work, if not all of them.

I recommend using multiple social media sites when promoting your work since not every person uses the same one.

Strengths and Weakness of Social Media Platforms

Consider the following questions when deciding if a social media website is right for you as an artist.

Artist Information

This is the area of a site where the artist can write a short biography about themselves and what kind of art they create.

Contact

Does the site provide contact information for the artist or a messaging system?

Contact History

If there is a messaging system, how easy is it to view the chat history?

Ease of Account Creation

How easy is it to create the social media account? Are multiple steps required for verification?

Ease of Sharing

Can posts be easily shared on the site? Do they link back to the original poster?

Following

Can followers hide the posts from their feeds? Do artists have to pay extra money to be "promoted" in feeds or do their posts automatically show up in the feed if someone follows them?

Image Quality

Is the image quality reduced upon upload? Or is it possible to upload a high-resolution version of the image?

Linking

Can you link to your website and other social media accounts easily?

Ownership of Work

Do you retain full rights to your work when you post it to the social media site? Many social media sites obtain ownership of images that are posted on their site. I recommend artists use [watermarks](#) on any images they post to retain their rights to their work.

Platform for Posting

Can the post be made through both a browser and a mobile device? Are there differences to what can be added to the post depending on what device is used?

Promotion of Post

Can you promote your post to obtain views outside of your direct [followers](#)? This can be done either through a paid promotion or a tagging system that your post can be searched for using.

Searching for Old Work

Is it easy to find old posts on this platform? Or does finding an old post require a lot of work?

Text Posting

Does the social media site allow for a post with just text? Or does a picture have to be attached? Text posts allow for updates on the status of the artist's work or life.

Viewership

How easy is it for people to find the account or page? Do people need to know the exact name of it? Can the account or page be linked to by people who already follow it? Is there a way to find the account or page through other means?



Paige Luther Art
@paigelutherart

Home

Posts

Reviews

Photos

About

Community



Like

Follow

Share

...

Send Message

Facebook

Facebook is used by most people these days. Artists are able to make a page for themselves to display their work through. Any post made through their page will be posted to the timeline of anyone who's liked and followed it.



Facebook

Strengths

- Artist Information
- Contact
- Contact History
- Easy of Sharing
- Linking
- Platform for Posting
- Searching for Old Work
- Text Posting

Weaknesses

- Ease of Account Creation
- Following
- Image Quality
- Ownership of Work
- Promotion of Post
- Viewership



lutherart

Edit Profile



3 posts

0 followers

0 following

Paige Luther PNW Artist focused in watercolor illustrations of animals.

www.paigeluther.com

POSTS

SAVED



Instagram

Instagram is a social media site that consists of image posts primarily, and is best accessed through a smart phone. While it has a browser based version, the functionality is limited in comparison. Instagram posts can also only be made using a smart phone.



Instagram

Strengths

- Contact
- Contact History
- Ease of Account Creation
- Ease of Sharing
- Following
- Image Quality
- Linking
- Viewership

Weaknesses

- Artist Information
- Ownership of Work
- Platform for Posting
- Searching for Old Work
- Text Posting



Paige Luther Art

The art of Paige Luther, a 26 year old Washington resident and hopefully future children's book illustrator! www.paigeluther.com

[POSTS](#) [LIKES](#) [ASK ME ANYTHING](#) [ARCHIVE](#)

Tumblr

Tumblr is a social media platform that allows users to create original posts or [reblog](#) the posts of others. Users can also use a tagging system to add a tag to the bottom of their post that can be searched for.



Tumblr

Strengths

- Ease of Account Creation
- Ease of Sharing
- Following
- Image Quality
- Platform for Posting
- Promotion of Post
- Searching for Old Work
- Text Posting
- Viewership

Weaknesses

- Artist Information
- Contact
- Contact History
- Linking
- Ownership of Work

NAMING AND LINKING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

When creating social media accounts to promote your art, ensure you select a naming convention that can be used across all social media types, if possible. Having one account name to search for will make it easier for viewers to find you on different platforms. If the same name is already being used by someone else, consider what name would be most similar to your other social media account or page names.

Linking to Your Website

Always link to your website on every social media account or page, and to your social media accounts on your website. This allows viewers to easily find a way to contact you or find new ways to follow you if they're switching what social media they primarily use.



Paige Luther Art



Lutherart



Lutherart

POSTS

SAVED



TOP PHOTOS



While the greatest aspect of social media is the promotion of your work, you should be cautious about posting your art publicly as there are risks associated with doing so.

See the next page for information about the risks of posting to social media, and what actions you can take to help protect your work.

Posting Art to Social Media

Protecting Your Art

Social media sites are a great platform to promote your art on, but they come with a certain level of risk. Whenever you post a picture of your art online, there is the risk that someone will steal it and use it as their own. With photo editing software being more freely available, it's become much easier for someone to remove your signature from your work and add their own or use your art for their own purposes without crediting you or asking permission.

One of the best ways to protect your work from being stolen or used without your permission is by adding a [watermark](#) to it. There are many great [guides](#) on how to create a watermark. For art you're especially worried might be stolen, I recommend putting the watermark on top of the art itself as that makes editing it out much harder.





#Tagging on Social Media

Some social media platforms, especially Tumblr and Instagram, use what are called tags or tagging. You can add a tag to a post using the hash sign (#) along with a word or phrase. This tag can later be used to help people find the post you created by searching for that tag, which helps promote your post to potential new followers.

Example:

If you're posting a painting of a corgi on social media you could use tags like:

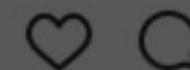
- #corgi
- #corgiart
- #painting
- #corgipainting

If anyone searches for any of those terms, or clicks on them from another post that also uses them, your art will turn up in the results.



lutherart

lutherart Portrait I did for my grandma of her and my late grandfather. #paigelutherart #watercolor #illustration #portrait



18 likes

20 HOURS AGO



Creating a Website



[News](#) [About](#) [Portfolio](#) [More Art](#) [Commissions](#) [Contact](#) [Links](#)

News

April 26, 2016

Well, it's certainly been a long overdue update. Life happens like that sometimes though. Here's a few paintings I've done over the past two years. Hopefully I will be updating this site more often now that I'm in a less tumultuous place than I have been in the past year.



June 13, 2014

Quite a few long overdue paintings to post here... May got a bit insane for me with some major overtime at work and then simply trying to recuperate from it all. I did a few paintings as birthday gifts but also got in two new commissions! Had fun getting to play around with a more cartoonish style for one of these and paint some new dog breeds for the others. Don't get me wrong though, corgis still hold a very special place in my heart. And my bed according to Story.



March 14, 2014

So, the lovely mother of Rhys gave me the amazing opportunity to paint her adorable dog as my first real commission! It was definitely a new learning experience (especially in time frames though I will be the first

Websites allow you to keep all of your information and work in one place. Unlike social media pages or accounts, you own your website completely. This means that you control what you want your viewers to see and your posts won't get lost in someone's feed.

You can also upload the highest quality images of your work, and there is a smaller chance of having your work stolen because it isn't being posted over and over again by others.

Your website also serves as a hub for everything, from your contact information, to your portfolio, to links to your other social media accounts.

The following sections will discuss key components every artist website should have:

- Selecting a Website Host
- Art Portfolio
- Biography
- Contact Information
- Pricing Information
- Updates

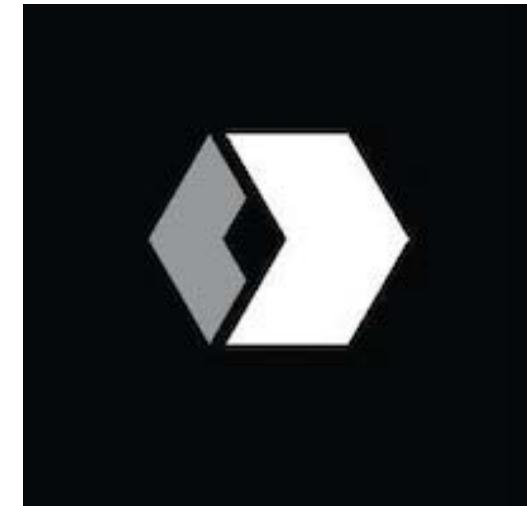
Selecting a Website Host

There are many options for creating a website if you don't know how to code. A few great website creation companies are:

- www.squarespace.com
- www.wix.com
- www.fabrik.io
- www.portfoliobox.net



SQUARESPACE



Art Portfolio

Selecting the right artwork to display on your website can be tricky. There are three main portfolio types to consider:

- [Commission](#)
- [Professional](#)
- [Non-Professional](#)



[News](#) [About](#) [Portfolio](#) [More Art](#) [Commissions](#) [Contact](#) [Links](#)

Portfolio

Watercolors



Commissions

Notice: Please see the Contact section for commission requests. I will try to respond to 48 hours of receiving them.

[Download contract](#)

Base commission rates prior to shipping costs and any additional details:

5"x7" = \$75



8"x10" = \$150



11"x14" = \$225



Portraits (read more below): \$20



Larger pieces can be requested with pricing given upon determination of the project.

Costs for additional animals within a painting is determined on a case by case basis.

Commission Portfolio Art

Art selected for use for the commission portfolio should be work you are using purely as an example of what someone can request. When selecting this work consider the following questions.

- How long did it take to make?
- How difficult was it to create?
- How much did the supplies cost?
- Can you easily select a price for it?
- If shipping, how easily can you do so?
- Do you have several examples for each price?
- Is this in a style you are comfortable working in?



Professional Portfolio

Your professional portfolio consists of art you've created that best showcases your talent as an artist. When selecting work for this portfolio, keep in mind that this should be catered towards what type of work you would ultimately want to do as an artist.

Your professional portfolio will primarily be viewed by potential employers.

Caution:

Refrain from using [master studies](#) or [fan art](#) in your portfolio as there are legal ramifications associated with doing so.

Non-Professional Portfolio Work

Having a portfolio for your non-professional work can also be considered. This could be for work that you cannot consider in your professional portfolio, but would still like for others to be able to view.

Be cautious when considering the use of master copies or fan art on your website as there are legal ramifications. For a more in-depth explanation of the legal issues with fan art, Chris Oatley has a excellent article and linked video on his website [here](#).



Biography

Use the *Biography* section of your website to provide potential clients with information about yourself. You can include things like your education background, your experience as an artist, what mediums you like to work in, or even a written piece about why you do art.

This is also a great area of your website to link to any social media accounts that people can follow you on. It's often easier for people to see your work in a social media feed they already check than to visit your website separately for updates.

About



My name is Paige. I graduated from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco in 2012 with a Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts. While I was there I studied illustration, with a focus in children's book illustration. Post graduation, I moved to Seattle where I have begun to take commissions for pet portraits done in watercolors, please see the Commissions section of my website for my information if you would like to request a portrait.

Contact Information

Contact

Email Form

Name:

Email:

Website:

Message:



Enter the letters and numbers you see on this image into the box below (if you cannot see the image let me know):

4abe9

The *Contact* section of your website should include either an HTML form for people to send in initial requests, or contact information for you. This will allow potential clients to contact you in order to set up a commission.

Caution:

Providing a direct email address for clients to contact you through can also lead to that email address receiving spam mail. Having a contact form with a [Human Check](#) embedded into it will ensure that the majority of messages you receive through it are legitimate.



Pricing and Commission Information

The *Pricing and Commission Information* section of your website should include the price determined in [Deciding Prices for Art](#). For my site, I included:

- Base commission prices
- Background pricing information
- Description of what is being purchased
- Client provided information
- Shipping information
- Timeframe for the project

April 26, 2016

Well, it's certainly been a long overdue update. Life happens like that sometimes though. Here's a few paintings I've done over the past two years. Hopefully I will be updating this site more often now that I'm in a less tumultuous place than I have been in the past year.



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Rhys gave me the amazing opportunity to paint her adorable dog as my first real commission. It's been a new learning experience (especially in time frames though I will be the first to admit I'm not great at that) but one well worth the effort. I really look forward to this arriving at her house.

Updates

The *Updates* section of your website is good for making the following types of posts:

- New art you've completed
- Updates on what conventions or galleries you might be displaying art at
- Personal updates on the your life, including:
 - Hiatuses
 - Moves
 - New commission opportunities
 - Exciting personal news

This portion of the website can also act as a great hub page for when someone first accesses your website. It can give them a good idea as to whether or not you're actively doing work within the art community.



Deciding Prices for Art

Setting a price for your art can be difficult. Many new artists tend to underestimate the value of their work and set their prices lower than what is needed to make a profit. There are also artists who may set their prices too high before they have any following and find difficulty obtaining commission requests. It's a delicate balance between your reputation and pride as an artist and setting a fair price so that you make some profit from your work.

The purpose of this section is to provide tips on determining what costs go into creating your art, such as:

- Supplies used in the creation of the art
- Packaging for shipment
- Shipping

Knowing these basic costs can help you decide what prices you want to list your commission rates at.

Cost of Supplies

Supply Name	Supply Amount	Cost of Supply	Cost Per Use
Red Paint	1	\$5	N/A
Blue Paint	1	\$5	N/A
Yellow Paint	1	\$5	N/A
White Paint	1	\$5	N/A
Black Paint	1	\$5	N/A
Paper	24	\$20	\$0.84

The cost of supplies can often be difficult to calculate as you're likely to use the same supplies across several projects.

It can help if you create a spreadsheet of what art supplies you use most often along with the amount and cost of it. As shown in the example on the left, some supplies have an immediate cost per use and can be divided to determine how much each use costs.

My recommendation for supplies that don't have an easily divisible number to calculate with is to use your own experience with that supply. If you know about how many projects that type can get you through, use that number to determine an average.

If you receive a request from a client that you know will require more supplies than originally anticipated, you can speak to the client regarding this.

This is also where the *Examples of Commissions* section is useful. The examples show potential clients exactly what you're offering for each commission price and provide you with context to compare to if you need to adjust the pricing at all.

Hours Spent Working and Reputation

Hours Spent Working

Adjust this portion of your price as needed if you feel that your average work time is much longer or shorter than your peers. If you find that your time spent working is fairly average compared to your peers, then the links below can be helpful.

According to [salary.com](#), the [average hourly wage of an artist in 2017](#) is \$25/hr. Determine an average length of time you spend on each commission and multiply it by \$25 to determine a base price for the hours spent working.

Reputation

Your reputation is the most subjective portion of setting prices for your work, but can be helpful in gaining more profit the better your reputation gets. If the demand for your work is higher than what you're able to put out, you can start charging more.

If you're new to taking commissions and are finding that the interest is still lacking, it might be worthwhile to consider lowering your costs slightly. You should never lower your costs more than what the cost of supplies are. As your work becomes more regular, you can test new prices, just keep an eye on the number of requests you receive after updating the prices and understand that you may need to readjust your prices later if the requests slow down.

I recommend only making small adjustments as making drastic changes too quickly to your pricing can have an adverse effect on your reputation.

Costs of Packaging and Shipping

Packaging

The cost of packaging is determined by how you decide to package your work. I recommend packaging art the same way for each commission to maintain an average cost of supplies.

Below are some resources to consider when deciding how to package your art. These examples focus primarily on flat work, if you're shipping art that is three-dimensional I would recommend going to your local UPS or FedEx store for recommendations on how to package a specific piece. For those pieces, you will need to inform the client that you will not be able to provide a shipping and packaging cost estimate until the work is complete.

- [Saatchi Art](#)
- [Agora Art Gallery](#)
- [FedEx](#)
- [Oil Painters of America](#)
- [WikiHow: How to Pack Paintings](#)

Shipping

Most major shipping companies offer cost calculators for shipping.

- [UPS](#)
- [USPS](#)
- [FedEx](#)

Insurance

Most of these services provide insurance for the work as well which I highly recommend purchasing. If a commission is lost or damaged during shipment, having it insured means that both you and your client are protected.

The insurance claim money can cover the cost of:

- Replacing the commissioned work
- Refunding the client in full without losing the money you earned

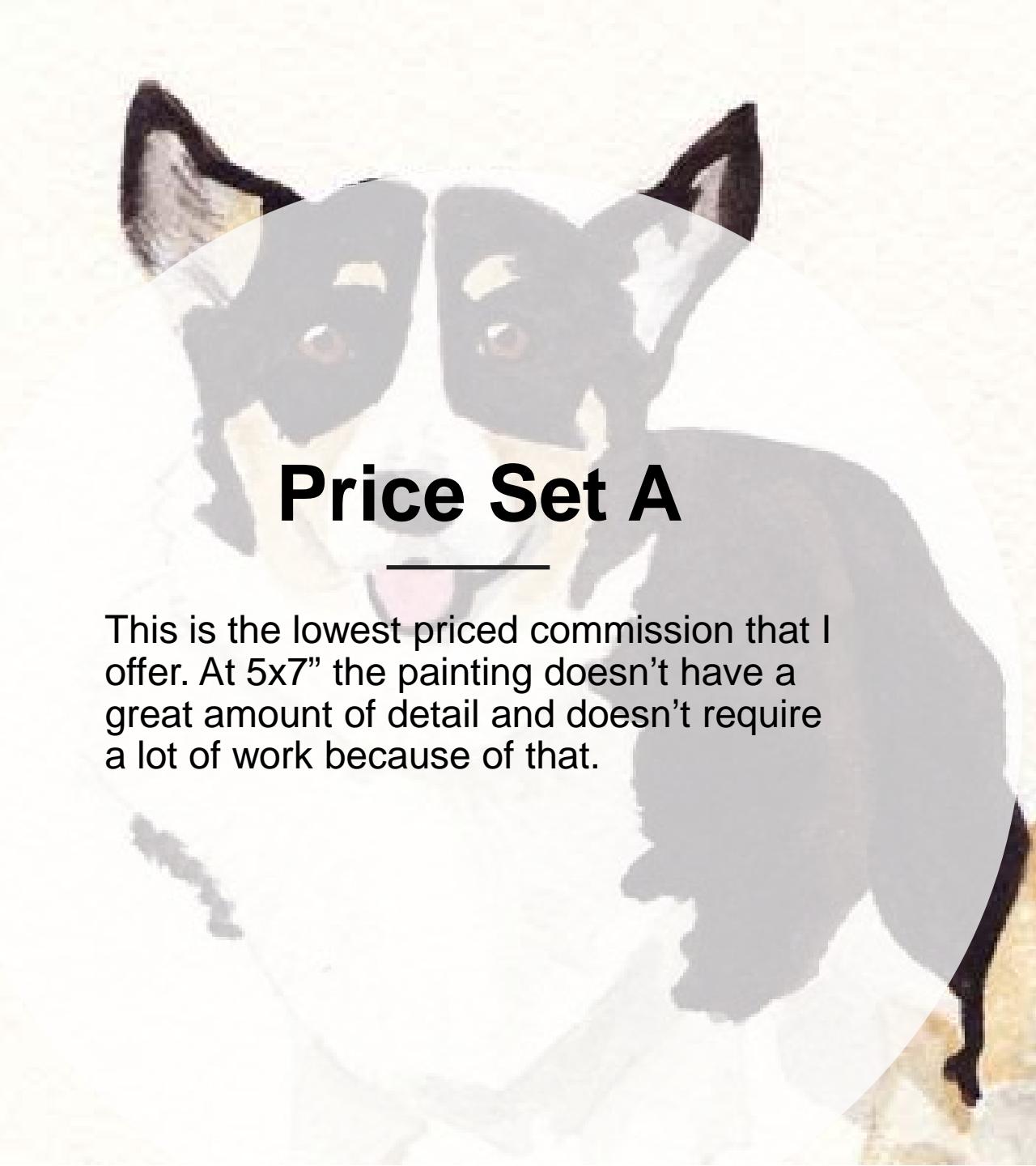


Commission Pricing

It's important to show your clients examples of exactly what you're offering when it comes to commissions. This helps to maintain the expectations of what level of work they'll be receiving for the price they're paying.

The following are examples of the three-tiers of price sets I made when I first began taking commissions, along with an explanation for why I set that price.





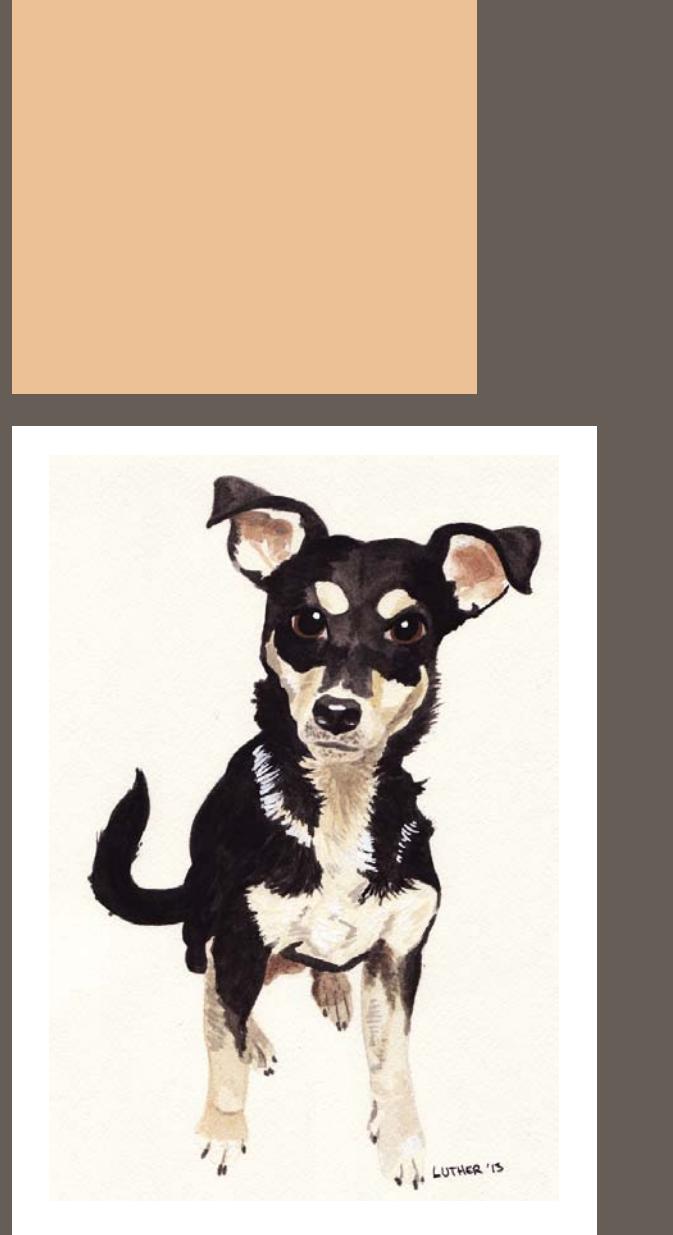
Price Set A

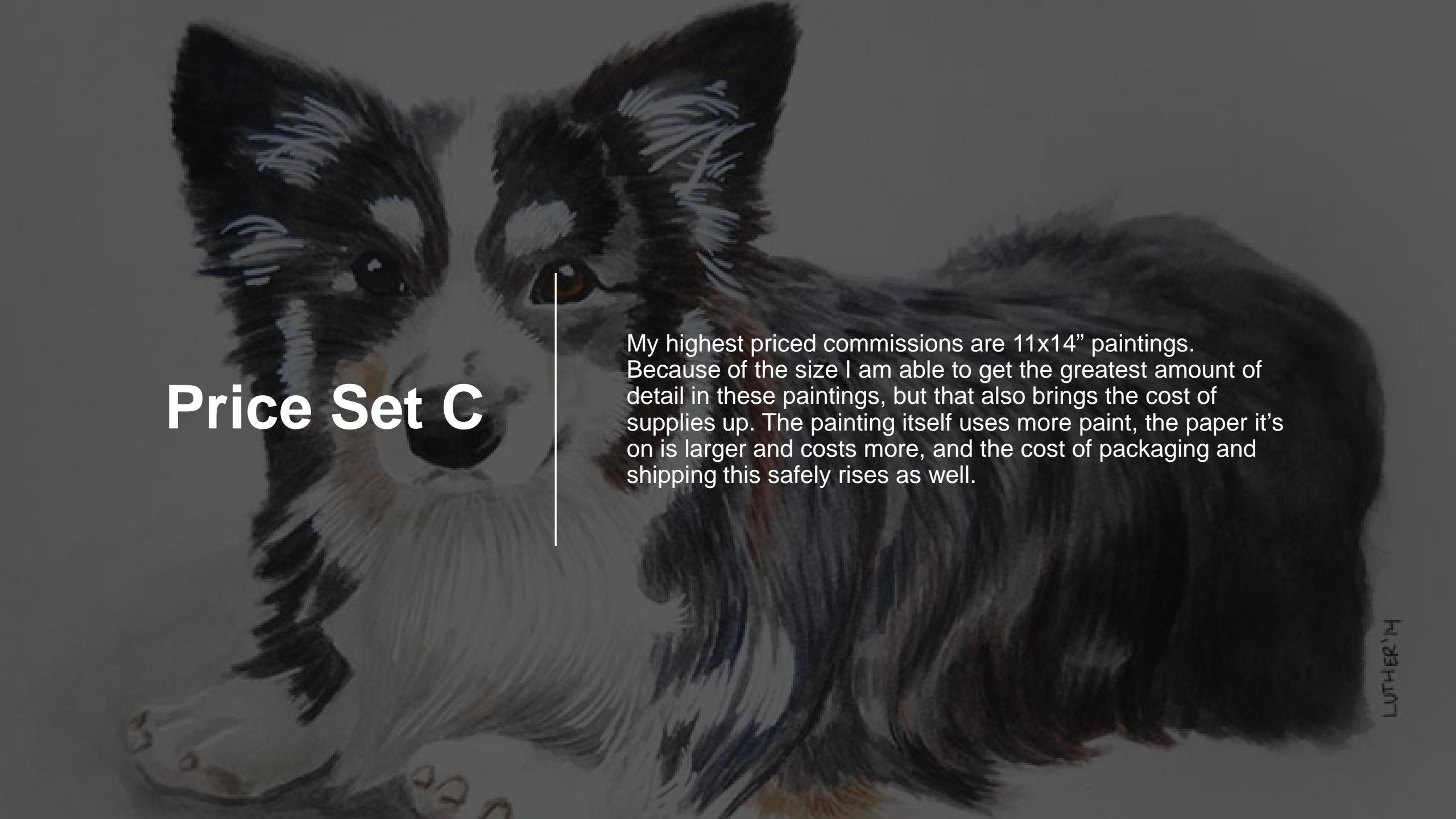
This is the lowest priced commission that I offer. At 5x7" the painting doesn't have a great amount of detail and doesn't require a lot of work because of that.



Price Set B

My middle price commissions are 8x10" paintings. These paintings have more detail because of the larger workspace, but no background. This is the most common commission size I have received requests for, both due to the mid-level pricing but also the amount of detail that can be done in a larger painting.





Price Set C

My highest priced commissions are 11x14" paintings. Because of the size I am able to get the greatest amount of detail in these paintings, but that also brings the cost of supplies up. The painting itself uses more paint, the paper it's on is larger and costs more, and the cost of packaging and shipping this safely rises as well.

Creating a Contract

Having a contract for clients to sign is a vital part of the commission process. Contracts help go over guidelines for the project you're working on as well as set rules to protect you as an artist.

Generally, to be legally binding a contract must contain two key elements:

- An agreed upon offer by both the client and seller
- One thing of value being exchanged for another thing of value

A commission contract should consider including the items below.

- Client Information
- Painting Information
- Number of Edits
 - Pricing costs for additional changes
 - Number of changes that can be made
 - Explanation of how big of changes can be made
- Rights of Art
- Payment
 - Will all of the payment be given at the end?
 - Will there be a base price for shipping or will it be done on a case-by-case basis?
 - Is shipping included in the commission pricing?
- Shipping and handling agreement
- Signatures of both the artist and client in agreement to contract terms
- Cancellation policy

Client Information

The client information section supplies the contact and shipping information for the client. Having separate shipping information gives the client the opportunity to either:

- Ship to another address
- Buy a commission as a gift

Customer Information

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

Shipping Information

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

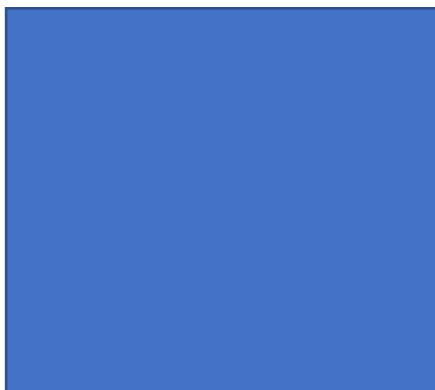
Painting Information

Painting Information

Size of Painting: _____

Background: _____

Mat or Framing: _____



I recommend having a basic description of the commission for reference if you ever need to look up previous work.

While this example doesn't have it, you may find it helpful to include a photo or a written description of what the commission is with the contract.

Number of Edits

Changes to Painting

Per contract statement the artist, [Artist's Name], has agreed to:

- One set of major changes in the initial sketch stage of the painting
- One set of minor changes to be done after completion of painting

This is to protect the artist from doing more work than agreed upon initially. Should any further changes to the painting be requested, a new contract will be drawn up to cover those changes.

Signatures

Client Signature

Artist Signature

Having a section for the number of edits a commission has, along with written guidelines of when and how big of edits they are, protects you as an artist.

Limiting the number of changes a client can request will save you from doing hours of extra unpaid work fulfilling unplanned edits the client has.

My experience has been that most clients have a good idea of what they're getting from the examples shown for what your commissions are. But it's always good to have a backup plan implemented into your contract.

Depending on the type of art you are planning on commissioning it may be worthwhile to define and show examples of what you consider edits to be.

Rights of Art

You should have a predetermined agreement set in writing for the ownership rights to your work. There are three common ownership scenarios for art:

- ❖ The client purchases full rights to your work, including the reproduction of it for their own personal use, including marketing campaigns or prints. This generally costs a large additional fee because you're losing the opportunity to use the work yourself.
- ❖ The client purchases the rights to your art, but not for reproduction purposes. This generally happens if a client has commissioned a personal piece they don't want others to buy printed copies of it. You can usually retain portfolio and self-promotion rights with this.
- ❖ The client only purchases the original piece of art, if it's not a digital piece. In this case, you may reproduce and sell the art as much as you want.

Rights of Painting

I understand and agree to allow [Artist's Name] the rights to use my painting for promoting themselves for further business, through their own website without watermark and through social media sites with a watermark on the painting.

I also understand and agree to allow [Artist's Name] to reproduce the painting as a print unless ownership rights to the painting are purchased.

Payment

Along with the payment information, you should consider including a timeline for when you receive payment.

Write out the payment timeline clearly, including whether you should receive full payment before or after shipment.

Payment Method

Payment Method: _____

Base Price of Painting: _____

Extra Costs: _____

Shipping and Handling: _____

I understand and agree that 50% of the *Base Price of Painting* and *Extra Costs* must be paid before the artist starts the painting, and the remaining 50% of the payment plus *Shipping and Handling* costs is due upon completion. Completed art will not be shipped until payment is received in full. Exceptions are if the art being shipped is larger and requires special calculations to determine the shipping cost.

Shipping and Handling

Include the list of precautions being taken to ensure the shipping company is liable for any damage during transportation.

In the case of my contract, I included photographs of the packaging as proof that from my end it was packed properly, the insurance clause, and an agreement to send the client tracking information for their package.

I highly recommend purchasing [Insurance](#) for every commission you ship.

Packing Information

The following is completed for every piece of artwork being shipped:

- Photographs of packaging to document proper protection of the work
This is to protect the artist from any liability if the work is damaged during shipment
- Insurance purchased to cover the cost of the work
- Tracking number is sent to client when available

Lost or Damaged Artwork

If purchased, the insurance claim will cover the cost of a new painting that the artist agrees to start on as soon as reasonably possible. The artist will select a shipment method based on availability of insurance. Should the client choose to select a cheaper shipment method they waive liability for any lost or damaged work.

Signatures

Client Signature



Cancellation Policy



Projects can be cancelled at any time, and it's important for you to protect yourself from doing unpaid work.

Set strict guidelines for your cancellation policy. When deciding the cancellation guidelines you will want to take into account your payment timeline as well.

Cancellation Policy

If the client selects to cancel their purchase, refunds will be completed as follows:

- 100% refund if the painting has not been transferred to the watercolor paper
- 50% refund if the painting has been transferred, but not started
- 0% refund if the painting has begun being painted

Reference

Fan Art

Fan art is art created either in the style of another artist, or using their intellectual property as the subject matter of your piece.

Reblogging

Reblogging is when someone shares your post on their blog. When reblogging a post there is generally a link back to the original poster to help credit the work to them.

Tagging

Many social media platforms take advantage of “tagging”. You tag a post by using the hashtag (#) symbol followed by the word or phrase you want to have attached to your post. This allows people to click the tag to find other posts with the same tag or they can search for posts that have been tagged with that word or phrase.

Followers

Followers are people whom have liked or followed you on a social media account. These are people who enjoyed your work enough that they wanted to continue to see updates whenever you make a new post.

Watermarks

Watermarks are words or a logo placed semi-transparently on top of an image of your art in order to protect your work from being stolen.

Human Check

A human check is a commonly used feature on any website where you can contact the owner directly. They generally consist of a bunch of random letters and numbers the user has to enter in, or an image that has features that must be clicked in order to prove the person signing up for the account or sending off an inquiry is not a robot set up for spamming.

Master Studies

Master studies are artwork that's created using a photograph of another artist's work. This is common practice for most art students.