

MAKING ART ON COMMISSION: TIPS FOR ARTISTS

Q: Many artists have had what looks to be a golden opportunity - a commission - turn into a nightmare. What are the pitfalls an artist can expect when commissioned to do an artwork and what are the solutions?

A: Working on commission, creating a work of art on spec from scratch for someone other than yourself, is totally different than selling a finished piece at a show, at a gallery, or out of your studio. Selling a completed work of art is an event; producing a work of art on commission for another party is a relationship. Never confuse the two.

From your end, the key to making a commission work is your ability to be flexible and work with people. A commission relationship only succeeds when you respond effectively to the other party's concerns, requests, and needs (which hopefully aren't too numerous). Put another way, if you don't work well with people, don't take commissions.

The number one commission pitfall, by far, is taking one on without knowing who you're dealing with. No matter how badly you need the money, how well your initial contact goes, how much you each like spumoni, how much they say they love your art, or what your psychic says, if you haven't worked together before, do due diligence. Many commission nightmares can be avoided before they start.

Meet with the other party to discuss the project, preferably at your studio or where you make art. Make sure they see a representative selection of your work while there. Some people say they want to commission a work of art when what they really