

PORTRAIT PERSPECTIVE

by Ray Easterling

From rudimentary cave drawings to the Mona Lisa, the painted portrait has long been mankind's tool for capturing a slice of time, preserving one's deeds or depicting a person's likeness through the ages.

"It's a way of capturing that fleeting moment in time," said Michelle Snead, a Raleigh-based painter of portraiture who has been painting professionally for 18 years. "It has that timeless quality that transcends time."

While portraits have traditionally been exclusive to the wealthy social elite, modern times find artwork being commissioned and owned by a broader spectrum of society. "That, to me, has been a major change in portraiture: that you didn't have middle-class people commissioning portraits (historically) and now you have a lot of that," she said.

More than what a painting means as a stand-alone piece is what it can do for the

interior of a house. Original artwork can readily lend a sense of stability, style and timelessness to a home. A good artist can help homeowners choose the right setting, composition, colors and style for a given piece, portrait or otherwise, but often the most difficult decision is choosing the right painter.

"In my opinion, you have to make an almost emotional connection with that artist and feel good about them because the artist is going to spend so much time with you," Snead said. She suggested that prospective buyers consider the following criteria in the selection of an artist: style, price and accuracy. Every artist has a different style, be it photo-realistic or something more painterly. It's important for a client to like the given artist's personal style. On price, there is the obvious need to find someone willing to work within specific price constraints. Lastly, Snead recommended comparing the likeness of a

final product in the potential artist's portfolio to reference photographs in order to ensure that a good-looking portrait actually matches its intended subject.

"If you're getting a well-painted portrait, you really are getting a piece of artwork," Snead said. "For many people that may be the only original piece of artwork they have. They're getting the artwork for more than just the likeness of the subject. But I feel like it's my job as an artist to give them a true painting, knowing what's involved in having a true painting: all those elements of composition and color and how they interact with each other to make a wonderful painting."

Snead said these days you don't have to be a millionaire to commission a portrait of you or your family. "In a way, the art makes you wealthy," she said. "It adds a whole new dimension to your life."

MW

Michelle Snead



PORTRAITS AND OTHER FINE ART

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