

Kathryn Dana Halpern

Fiat Lux Artibus

~Classical Portraiture and Still Life in Oils~

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“The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.”---Aristotle
“My soul can find no staircase to Heaven unless it be through Earth’s loveliness.”---Michelangelo

Artist’s Statement, and Fiat Lux Artibus: The inspiration for Fiat Lux Artibus---“Let there be the Light of the Arts”---came from my inner experience as an artist. The creative and artistic endeavor is profoundly linked to the spiritual. In the Renaissance view, art served as a window of vision to the higher world, the perfection of the divine order of the universe. The still life, for example, when working well, can do this: it uses the ordinary to present the extraordinary; the imperfect to present the perfect; the visible to present the invisible. I often experience and create the still life as it is known traditionally: a spiritual, philosophical and metaphorical genre---but also, as a richly beautiful creative and expressive form. I work experientially, intuitively and aesthetically to create a piece, however, rather than conceptually. In working intuitively, the creation comes from a deeper place within, the contemplative experience of silence, pure feeling and pure experience. The essential nature of the higher world is perfect beauty, and this is revealed to us through our enlightened apprehension of the things of this world, through the artistic process. This is the delightful truth of my experience and work in both classical portraiture and still life painting.

What is Classical Oil Painting?: While there are many techniques and approaches to classical oil painting, the classical oil painting techniques I generally use have their basis in the practices and traditions of the Italian Renaissance masters. Even among the Italian Renaissance masters, there is a wide diversity of specific techniques and materials used to create the magnificent paintings we have from this era. That being said, briefly described, I begin with a primed and toned surface; I prefer to use high quality Belgian portrait linen, stretched on wooden bars, primed with gesso or an oil paint primer. This is followed by creating a monochromatic underpainting (later called a *grisaille* or *brunaille*), generally done in a number of layers of paint, followed by the application of color, also in many layers, both of impasto paint (thick application of paint), as well as thinner layers of paint, used in the techniques of scumbling and glazing, for example. The use of many layers of paint, and techniques such as scumbling and glazing, allow the picture to build gradually. This, together with the manner in which light travels and reverberates through these layers, interacting with the particles in the materials of the paint, creates a beautiful sense of depth and life, a soft variation and resonance, and an overall subtlety in the colors and values, and in all aspects of the work. The beauty and richness of this effect cannot be properly reproduced through any type of ink reproduction.

The Commission Process for Classical Oil Paintings: Timing: For the most part, the layers of paint need to dry in between work sessions. This, combined with the care and mastery required of classical realist presentation means that this type of classical oil painting is not a speedy process. I maintain the integrity of this process in order to offer you the highest quality of classical work and the most beautiful paintings which I can produce. Therefore, when commissioning a piece, whether portraiture or still life, I advise my clients to allow about six to eight months for the completion of their work. This is once the initial creative and design work and photography are done, and upon commencement of the actual painting process. Ideally, once the painting is completed, it should then also be allowed to dry for another six months to one year before the final varnishing, framing, shipping and delivery. However, in most cases this is not possible. So, after completion, I will allow the painting to dry for at least one month before applying an intermediate finish varnish, framing and shipping. If I can visit you one year after that, or if you can bring the painting to me, I will apply the final varnish coat. If this is not possible, the painting will be well preserved and cared for simply with the intermediate finish which I use.

Initial Creative Work and Design; “Sitting” and Photography: Traditionally, classical painting and drawing is done “from life”; that is, using a live sitter for portraiture, and a still life set up for still life paintings. I have come to use photography as a professional tool to make this process somewhat more convenient for the pace of the modern world. I do not paint from photographs, nor do I copy the photographs, nor am I a “photorealist” painter. I have learned with my eye how to adjust what is available in the photograph to be as though working “from life”. I generally use many photographs as references to create any one painting. Traditionally and historically, this was done using many sketches, as well as many “live” sittings for a portrait. For example, John Singer Sargent sometimes used as many as 80 or more sittings (each sitting lasting several hours) to finish a portrait. This process is made more convenient for you by my use of reference photographs. After some initial discussion with you regarding the overall size of the piece, the general design and conception of the portrait, and completion of the commission agreement form with price quote, I will schedule a photography session or sessions for the subject, either at my studio or in a setting at your home, or other setting. Prior to the photography session(s), I will need to work with the subject’s wardrobe, etc., as well as with the setting, to design the portrait. Please note that I will have certain specific lighting and pose requirements, etc., for both human and animal classical portraiture. If you desire certain settings or still life objects to be included in the portrait, I can consider these; however the final discretion regarding overall design, composition, attire, objects, pose, background, setting and lighting must rest with the artist alone, and with my aesthetic judgment.

Regarding copyright, briefly: As a global, international legal standard, copyright and all related rights, including reproduction rights, for any creative work remain with the artist.

Website: My website and blog(s) are available at www.kathryndanahalpern.com

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Standard Sizes:

Classical Portraiture: Single Human Subject, Oil on Linen:

Head and Shoulders, 11 x 14", 12 x 12"
Head, Shoulders, partial Torso, 16 x 20"
Head, Shoulders, partial Torso, 20 x 20" or 20 x 24"
Partial Figure, Seated, 24 x 30" or 26 x 30"
Partial Figure, Seated, 30 x 36"
Full Length, Standing, uncropped figure, 30 x 36"
Partial Seated or Full, 36" x 48", 40" x 50"

Single Animal Subject, Oil on Linen:

Head and Neck, 10 x 10"
Head and Neck, 11 x 14" or 12 x 12"
Head, Neck, Shoulders and partial Torso, 16 x 20"
Full Body, seated or standing pose, 20 x 24"
For larger dogs and horses only:
Full Body, seated or standing pose, 24 x 30" or 26 x 30"
Full Body, seated or standing pose, 30 x 36"

Standard Sizes, Classical Still Lifes, Oil on Linen:

8 x 10"
11 x 14" or 12 x 12"
12 x 18"
16 x 20" or 20 x 20"
18 x 24" or 20 x 24"
22 x 28"
24 x 30"

Pricing Information provided upon request. The price for any specific project will vary, depending upon complexity of the composition as well as the size of the work. Other sizes (in addition to those listed above) are also available, if suitable for the project. My standard pricing allows for a simple background and includes initial basic creative, design and photography work, but does not include frame and framing, nor travel expenses and shipping (as required). Prices for larger works, more complex compositions, complex backgrounds or attire, multiple subjects, and/or portraiture compositions including still lifes, etc., will vary and will be quoted for the specific project. The price for each project will be quoted individually, prior to the acceptance of the commission and our agreement to begin the initial creative work for the project. Payment schedule: After initial consultation and commission agreement form completed and signed, 50% to begin creative work, design, photography, and painting; an additional 25% due at half way completion of the painting, and the final 25% due at three-quarters completion of the painting. Frame, framing and shipping costs (and any necessary travel expenses), as required, will be quoted separately and in addition.

Artist's Biography: Kathryn Dana Halpern lives in Chatham, Massachusetts, and is an artist, educator, and architectural designer. She has worked extensively in classical Italian Renaissance drawing and painting techniques, as well as in classical 19th century color based painting techniques in private study, and has received additional training in drawing and painting at the Museum of Fine Arts School in Boston, MA, and at the New York Academy of Art in New York City. Currently, her work in painting emphasizes classical portraiture, both human and animal, and still life, at times in its metaphorical and metaphysical tradition, and as a richly beautiful creative and expressive form. Dr. Halpern is an experienced teacher and educator, and holds a Master of Arts degree as well as an honorary Doctoral degree.

Courses and Seminars offered: Private instruction in classical drawing and painting, as well as seminars on Art as a Spiritual Practice, and the still life in its traditional role as "The Philosophical Genre"; and additional courses such as: Classical Drawing from Still Life I, II, and III; Drawing from Sculpture and Casts; Drawing the Classical Figure I and II; Still Life Composition: Photography for Painting; Classical Painting I and II: Monochromatic Underpainting, and Color.