

A guide to the perfect reference photo for fine art animal portraits (with examples)

Art by Evelyn Gibbs

This guide is intended to support clients with taking or selecting appropriate photos to be used for a fine art pencil portrait of their animal(s).

All photos featured within this guide are of the artist's own horse for illustrative purposes and are © Evelyn Gibbs. Please note that although the examples are of a horse, the principles are the same and can be applied to any animal.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to send a direct message to *Art by Evelyn Gibbs* through Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/FineArtByEvie>).

Please read the following advice carefully:

Things to consider:

1. **Summer or winter coat?** Not only does an animal's fur length change throughout the year but so do their base colours. A summer coat is more likely to look brighter, sleek and shiny - whereas a winter coat is more likely to be darker and longer.
2. **Blemishes?** With the wonders of Photoshop, scars, lumps and bumps can be removed if you wish. Some clients opt for this in order to portray a younger version of their animal, although this is solely down to the owner's preference. Please make your choice known where applicable.
3. **Trimming?** Was your animal recently trimmed or clipped before the photo? Is it an accurate representation/how you would prefer them to be portrayed?
4. **Clean?** Most small flecks of mud and dirt can be removed easily during the portrait process, although you should ensure that your animal is mostly clean before selecting reference photos.
5. **Personality?** Does your photo accurately show the personality of your animal? You will know your animal best, but treats are advised to get an animal looking both happy and at the camera!
6. **Quality?** To create the most realistic portrait possible, please supply HD photos which show details such as the animal's fur direction, whiskers etc. If no such photo can be taken (ie, the animal has sadly passed), I am happy to work with whatever you have and "fill in the gaps" where I can.

Camera distortion: Although they often make for "cute" pictures, angles such as within the following examples do not translate well to pencil portraits and should be avoided. Try to show your animal as they would look "in real life", without being influenced by camera angle, background or their surroundings which will not be included within the portrait.



Lighting and contrast: Natural daylight is always best, although please be aware of over exposure on sunny days which can make your animal's colours appear bleached or otherwise distorted as within the following example. This can cause a photo to lose detail due to excessive shadows in contrast to the bright areas.



Top tip:

Try to avoid photo filters as these distort the true colours of your animal.

This includes any "portrait" effects which blur backgrounds. This often removes fine details such as fly-away hairs and whiskers and can blur parts of your animal accidentally.

Angle: The most flattering photos will show your animal at either 3/4, side on or face on to the camera. This helps to really show the 3D quality of the portrait. Poor angles can make your animal look disproportioned and will not give a true reflection of the animal being portrayed.



Grooming and presentation:

As shown within the following examples, the grooming and preparation an animal receives prior to its photo being taken can change the effect of the portrait dramatically. Consider which you would prefer!



Thank you for completing this guide! Please contact me for any further questions.