

REVIEW OF MARCH MEETING

May 12, 2008

Lisa Gleim

Pet Portraits



A graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and a founding member of the Atlanta Fine Arts League, Lisa Gleim has been doing pet portraits for 8 years now. She painted her first one when her 14 year old Lab, Bonnie, died. Her husband suggested she paint Brownie to help her feel better. A woman who saw the finished piece said, "you have to do my dog". Since then, Lisa has received approximately one thousand commissions for dog, cat and horse portraits, many of which have brought their owners to tears after seeing their pets immortalized on paper.

Now Lisa says she doesn't know why she didn't do it earlier; she is a "huge animal lover, but never thought about other people being as nutty about animals as I am."

THE DEMO

Lisa began her demonstration using a preliminary charcoal drawing which she had brought with her to the meeting. She worked on the smooth side of Canson MiTientes, blocking in color, using Girault, Rembrandts and Sennelier pastels. She squints to find the larger shapes. She does not blend but

prefers the way colors overlap and blend with each other (she notes that in her oil paintings she now utilizes a lot of her pastel technique).

PHOTO SESSIONS

Lisa takes her own photos of the animals. She usually begins her photo session by apologizing to the client for her unprofessional attire; she dresses to get on the ground with the dogs. Lisa says she's learned a method for getting dogs to behave, and finds it difficult to teach clients to do it. And customers don't understand the problems inherent in using a flash. Depending on the behavior of the animal, she usually takes about 200 photos with her digital camera, saves them onto a disk, and lets her client choose an image.

When asked if she ever encountered an animal she didn't like, Lisa answered no, but can't say the same thing for her clients, as in the time a client refused to put her dog on a leash because the dog 'doesn't like the leash'.

When asked by clients, "what's easier to work with, animals or children?" Lisa answers emphatically "animals".

IN THE STUDIO

In her home studio, Lisa usually works from 8x10 photo references for full bodies, or 5x7 for a head. She uses sky blue or felt gray paper—never white, never anything darker than felt gray. 9 times out of 10, Lisa will leave the background unfinished, to keep the focus on the animal. If she does finish the background, it is a lot looser than the animal itself.

Working on several portraits at a time enables Lisa to step back from a piece and see problems with a fresh eye. She usually finishes a head and shoulder piece in 8 hours.



Lisa charges \$600 for a head in pastel, \$400 for charcoal, and has a backlog of commissions.

ADVERTISING

Lisa used to barter for advertising in an Atlanta magazine and business boomed. She now advertises on the internet and in a local publication, Points North.

Lisa regularly donates portraits to the Humane Society of Cobb County, the Atlanta Humane Society, the Atlanta Animal Alliance, Dixie Golden Retriever Rescue and Happy Tails. Her portraits are always a highlight of an event and bring much-needed funds. She sees her donations as a unique way to aid animals in need. This year Lisa became a member of the Artist's Registry of the American Kennel Club's Museum of the Dog.

"One thing about pet portrait clients," Lisa says, "is that they're usually repeat clients. And if they're very happy, they refer their friends."

Two artists whose pet portraitists Lisa admires are Stefanie Lieberman and Louisa Sandvik (click their names to see their work).



Lisa won an Honorable Mention for this pastel, "Say What?" in the SPS International Exhibition, hanging now at the Oglethorpe University Museum of Art.

Lisa's landscapes and portraits can be found in private collections throughout the east coast; in the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Orthopaedic Division; the chambers of the Honorable Vice-Chancellor Jack B. Jacobs in Wilmington, Delaware and Astra-Zeneca Pharmaceutical in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

See more of Lisa's work at www.LisaGleim.com.