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Fun & Fast Family Portraits

By Deborah Shelton

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Making self-portraits and pictures of family, friends, and even pets, is a great way to connect with children (and it's a lot of fun!). There are so many imaginative ways to create a person's image. Try these techniques, then invent some of your own.

* Traditional. Drawing the way most of us are used to: with pencils, crayons, markers, paint and paper. Just because this uses traditional supplies doesn't mean that your picture has to be traditional. Try out Picasso's abstract style or even a minimalist portrait (think stick people with a little more detail).

* Crafty. This is where all of those scrap pieces of fabric and miscellaneous office supplies come in handy. Buttons, flat marbles, googly eyes, and coiled paperclips work well for eyes. Shredded paper strips, yarn, and shoelaces can be used as hair. Small rubber bands are cute for curly hair.

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* Food. Ah, the wonders of elbow macaroni...it's delicious and artistic! Create a dry pasta portrait, or an edible picture with slices of cucumbers or olives for eyes, small carrots for noses, a slice of bell pepper for a mouth, whipped cream hair—anything goes!

* Hands-On. In other words, finger painting! The secret to having fun with this hands-on technique is to use only your hands and fingers—no brushes. Double fingerprints, one inside the other, work great for eyes. Apply dark lipstick on your lips and kiss the paper to add a mouth!

* Artistic. Object painting can become very addictive once you get started, so go through your garage sale box to find plenty of "canvases." Paint portraits on clear dinner plates, keepsake boxes, T-shirts, tote bags, and any other object that lacks pizzazz.

Deborah Shelton is a mother, a freelance writer, and author of the brand new book, "The Five Minute Parent: Fun & Fast Activities for You and Your Little Ones." Visit Deborah's website for more fun ideas and book ordering information: <http://www.fiveminuteparent.com>

Tips For Pet Portraits

By Grace Palce

Whenever there's a special occasion that requires the giving of gifts, only a few people usually feel the need to spend more than a few moments on thinking about a gift that would really mean a lot to the recipient. When giving gifts, we should always remember that it's truly the thought that counts so no matter the price tag attached to the gift, if it strikes the recipient as impersonal, the gift would then be not as special as you want it to be.

Whatever the occasion, as long as the recipient is a pet lover, you might try considering giving him or her a portrait of his favorite pet as a gift. A pet lover often sees their pets not as possessions but as companions in life.

A lot of pets that display almost human intelligence like dogs can serve a lot of purposes in a person's life and provide not only aid in their daily routines but also friendship and protection. Pets, unfortunately, have a short life span, compared to that of humans, so people can enjoy only a brief relationship with their pets.

Pet lovers would then no doubt appreciate if you bestow upon them a portrait done of their favorite pets. With a portrait of their pets, they'll be able to remember them and never forget what they look like. When they feel that they miss their favorite pets, they only have to look at the portrait and feel as if

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their pets are always nearby.

There are artists who specialize in pet portraits. If you're considering giving pet portraits as a gift, it's best to spend time researching for artists who truly have expertise in doing pet portraits. Doing pet portraits, after all, is not as ordinary as sketching apples because you need to master a few skills, for instance, when trying to perfect the look and color of an animal's fur.

Doing a portrait of any animal or pet would also require an infinite amount of patience and expert guidance that not all artists possess. As they're animals, it's impossible to expect them to follow your every order.

If you don't want to base the pet portraits on photos, you may have to offer your pet several incentives to let him obey your wishes. Offer them treats in exchange for staying still for a certain period of time. If it's okay with you, a sleeping pet is no doubt a better subject than one that's awake.

However hard it may be, everything would be worth it when you see the smile on your friend's face as you give them their much-awaited gift!

Grace Palce is writing articles for direct portrait, a very fast and easy to use painting from photo service

– Specializing in pet portraits



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