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## **COMMISSIONING ART NEED NOT BE DIFFICULT (Published in the October issue of Columbia Home) - 10/1/2005**

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### COMMISSIONING ART NEED NOT BE DIFFICULT

COLUMBIA, Mo. – It starts with a vision. You want a particular painting or sculpture to light up your wall or grace your entryway. The problem is, you have no artistic talent and cannot create the artwork yourself. How do you find and commission an artist to create the work you need?

Jennifer Perlow wanted a painting of her children for her husband for father's day. Luckily for Perlow, co-owner of Poppy in downtown Columbia, she knew how to attack the problem, so it was relatively easy. She says it can be the same for others, with a little help from someone at a gallery who knows the ropes.

"The first step is deciding what you want -- you see an artist and you love their work, but you have a specific space, or you have specific wants," Perlow said.

The next step, she said, is to go to a reputable gallery or studio and establish communication with them. Tell them you are looking to acquire a custom piece, give them details about what you want, and the gallery will help you find an artist to create the artwork.

While some artists work on commission, others do not. "I do think there's a fine line with commissioning art," Perlow said. "It's art; what makes art art is that an artist does it. If you put too many parameters in -- if you say, 'I want a pear, in this shade of green, with background in blue, and I want it 24 by 20' -- it no longer is that artist's work; it's yours. Knowing what you're looking for, but being able to give the artist freedom to do it in their own hand, I think is the trick."

Joel Sager, a Columbia painter who works in mixed media, says he enjoys doing both commissioned art and fine art for galleries, but not all artists like doing both. "When someone is commissioning something, usually they have a very specific image, idea or concept about the painting that they want you to meet," he said. "Ideally most artists would like complete freedom on what they would want."

Depending on whether the artist likes to deal directly with the client, the gallery may

choose to get the customer in touch with the artist directly. Sager has an agreement to sell his Columbia portraits solely through Poppy as his liaison with the client. "Normally, when I do portraits, I like to meet the person, and then after that I work from photography for the portrait, just because, especially with children, sitting can be so difficult," Sager said.

A good way for an artist and a customer commissioning an artwork is to work from a sketch, sometimes with multiple choices for the customer to choose, Perlow said. The customer approves the sketch, and then the artist works on the artwork according to that sketch. A customer should plan on the work taking at least two months, but it could take longer depending on what work the artist is already working on at that time.

Payment for the work usually starts with a deposit at the approval of the sketch, with the rest due when the artwork is finished, Perlow said. An 18-inch by 20-inch painting often will cost between \$1,500 and \$2,000. A tabletop sculpture often costs at least \$4,000. Cost depends on the size of the work, the medium used, and the artist. An artist with a big reputation may cost more, and sometimes custom pieces cost more because of the extra time involved in drawing sketches and negotiations between the parties.

"The advantage is that you have a piece of art that is really your own," Perlow said. "A lot of times people will commission pieces that involve old houses that they lived in, or people that they know, or dogs, or objects that mean something to them, so it actually makes the artwork even more personal than if you just bought a piece that the artist had done for a gallery or for his or her studio."

However, if you are looking at art as an investment, it may be wiser to purchase something from a gallery. Commissioned art isn't planned for sale, so it may not be as collectable, unless the artist becomes famous. "The disadvantage is sometimes you take a little bit of that artist out of the piece because it is so personal. It's not something that the artist chose to do a painting of on their own, so you're influencing that artist's work a little bit."

Perlow said artists can be commissioned to do almost anything, even ceramics, wood bowls and jewelry. She helped one customer link up with an artist in Lawrence, Kansas, who created artwork for the daughter of a couple who were celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The piece incorporated photos from the couple's wedding, fabric from the bride's wedding dress and their original wedding bands. As a birthday present for her husband who had grown up in Texas, another client commissioned an artist from San Francisco to arrange Texas license plates in the shape of the state.

Having seen the commissioning process as both a customer and an intermediary, Perlow highly recommends it. "It can be affordable; it doesn't have to be expensive," she said.

