



How to Photograph Your Horse for a Commissioned Painting

A simple guide to help you capture images that translate beautifully into a timeless artwork.

1. Decide How You Want to Remember Your Horse

Before taking photos, take a moment to think about why this horse matters to you. What do you want to feel when you look at this painting years from now – pride, gratitude, joy, comfort, or remembrance?

Keeping this in mind while photographing your horse will guide every choice that follows.

Ask yourself:

Do I imagine my horse **wild and free**, mane loose and expressive?

Or **tacked up and polished**, ready for the discipline we love?

Or **captured in motion, performing** the **sport** that defines our partnership?

There is no right or wrong. Muddy, dusty, playful images can be just as powerful as pristine, polished ones – sometimes even more so.



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2. Prepare Your Horse

A good reference photo starts long before the camera comes out.

- **Groom your horse** as you normally would for a special occasion.
- If bathing, **be mindful of grooming products**. Avoid anything that leaves residue, artificial shine, or alters the natural coat colour.
- A small amount of natural sweat can add a healthy sheen, but **avoid photographing a wet horse** – wet coats often appear darker and can distort colour in a painting.

Remember: the goal is not perfection, but authenticity.

3. Prepare the Tack (If Used)

If you choose to include tack:

- Make sure it **fits correctly and sits neatly**.
- Clean leather and metal **without over-polishing**.
- **Keep it simple** – overly busy tack can distract from the horse itself.

4. Angles and Lighting Matter Most

Lighting is the **single most important element in a reference photo**.

- Natural light is best. Early morning or late afternoon creates softer shadows and depth.
- Avoid harsh midday sun directly overhead.
- Light from the side helps define muscle, bone structure, and expression.

Angles:

- Eye-level angles feel intimate and honest.
- Slightly lower angles can add presence and strength.
- Unusual angles can be striking, but may also distort proportions – send a variety so your artist can advise.



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5. Capture Unique Features

Pay attention to the details that make your horse your horse:

- **Facial markings**
- **Scars or whorls**
- **Ear position and expression**
- **Eye shape and softness**

Watch for unflattering moments such as droopy mouths or unfocused eyes unless those features are part of the horse's character you wish to honour.

6. Think About Where the Painting Will Hang

Consider the final artwork early on:

- Will it hang in a living room, office, or farm space?
- Will it be viewed up close or from a distance?

This helps guide:

- Portrait vs landscape orientation
- Close-up vs full-body composition
- Background simplicity or detail

7. Image Quality Is Important

- Higher-quality images allow for greater detail in larger paintings.
- Avoid heavy filters or extreme edits.
- If possible, send both the raw (unedited) image and the edited version.

While artists can adjust colour, lighting, and minor proportions, starting with strong reference material allows the focus to remain on artistry rather than correction.



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8. Communicate With Your Artist

From the moment you begin gathering reference images, a commissioned painting becomes **a collaboration**.

- **Share your vision and expectations early.**
- **Discuss composition and mood before the first draft.**
- **Be open to your artist's guidance** – they understand what will translate well into paint.

If you request major changes and the artist advises against them, respect their professional limits. Artists honour their boundaries to ensure you receive a piece that meets expectations rather than a compromise that falls short.

9. Share Your Horse's Story

Tell your artist about your horse.

Artists form an emotional connection to every piece they create, and understanding your bond – the personality, history, and role your horse played in your life – adds depth and intention to the final artwork.

A Final Thought

This is more than a painting.

It is a legacy piece – one that may be passed down through generations. One day, a child may run past it, stop, and look up at the horse that changed their grandparent's life – asking questions, tracing the frame with their fingers, and forming a connection to a story that began long before them.

Only you know whether that horse should be remembered muddy and playful, or polished with ears pricked and mane flying.

Both are worthy. Both are honest.

For commissions and enquiries please visit: www.fischerart.co.za or send an email to christel@fischerart.co.za.

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