



Utrecht Art Supplies

Does art have to be hard to be good?



Henry Fox 1st Baron Holland of Foxley, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds

Ask the Expert: "A friend recently said that she thinks my best paintings are my sketches, compared to the more finished work that I put a lot more hours in. I feel like the best paintings should be the ones that took the longest, with the most hours of work. Is there any consensus among artists?"

A: Maybe there is a casual freedom to your sketches that your friend appreciates. If your friend is also an artist, it could be she is focusing on the hours of work you put into your more involved pieces, a perspective that a non-artist might not share. Also, maybe all the work you invest in your more labor-intensive paintings actually improves your sketches.

Most artists realize at some point that art that looks easy to make and art that is easy to make are often not the same thing. John Singer

Sargent's lush, improvisational brushstrokes seem to have been applied with ease, but that apparent virtuosity and "nailed it the first try" fluidity was only achieved through years of training and cultivated skill. Picasso's prodigious facility was honed by early training in classical drawing.

It's true that some artists have natural ability, just like the physical gifts some athletes enjoy, and these artists sometimes have a suave, easy quality to their work that shows through. Making art isn't completely analogous to athletics, though. Art is also like a language, and everyone can learn to speak a language. Some may become fluent more quickly than others, but good instruction and frequent practice will yield results. And, in the end, who learns fastest isn't really important.

No one values the hours invested in making art more than the artist themselves, and sometimes making a meticulous, labor-intensive piece is a way of communicating to the viewer how much work was invested. Maybe the best statement (often borrowed) about the full investment in a single work of art was made by Sir Joshua Reynolds: When asked by his client Lord Holland how long it took to execute what appeared to be a hastily painted portrait, Reynolds replied, "All my life, my Lord."

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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