

Portraits and head-studies

This month we'll be thinking about portraits and head-studies. Did you know, for instance, that there is some debate as to whether one can call a head-study of an animal a portrait?

This is because the word portrait is generally taken to apply to a portrait of a human, a person. The aim of a portrait is to capture not only the likeness, but something of the soul and character of the individual being portrayed.



It is much more common to use the term “head-study” when referring to an animal because historically they were not given the same status as humans, nor were animals thought to possess the same personhood, or sentience, as humans. These debates are likely to run on forever as our cultural relationships with animals are always evolving, but here at The Kennel Club, we like to refer to our head-studies as portraits as we see them all as esteemed individuals.

The example included with these words is an outstanding work of art by the late Bridget Olerenshaw. It's a portrait of a



Valcarlos Itsy Bitsy by Bridget Olerenshaw 1976
©The Estate of Bridget Olerenshaw

Pyrenean Mountain Dog called Cindy (registered name Valcarlos Itsy Bitsy).

Cindy belonged to Yvonne Atherfold who ran the Elbereth Kennel and she is commemorated in this work of art because she was their first show dog. The artist has sensitively portrayed Cindy's cheerful demeanour, her relaxed pose and the gleam in Cindy's eye as well as beautifully capturing the texture of Cindy's fur. As it is a portrait, only the head and neck are included. This focus gives us the opportunity to visually engage with Cindy and to enjoy her relaxed presence from over 45 years ago.



Your activity

Have you ever thought of drawing a portrait of your dog?

Many artists use photographs as source images to work from and this is a great technique to use with dogs, particularly if they don't want to sit still. Think about the shapes and textures of your dog's head, their sparkling eyes and soft fur, as well as the shape of the head, nose and ears. All of these will contribute to capturing the essence of your individual dog.

