



# Purrsonality Profile

## Laura McCullagh

By Noreen Alexander

At just 20 years old Laura McCullagh is already beginning to make her mark in the art world.

Having achieved 95% for Art Higher Grade in Matric at Westerford High School, Laura has always enjoyed art and exploring different mediums.

“Art, whether its drawing, photography, painting or animation is my major interest and passion, particularly animation. But painting has always had a special place in my heart - I’ve been doing it since I was little, and used to clean my paintbrushes on the sofa.”

She enjoys painting ‘big’; one of her largest works is a life size painting of Ann McGregor-Matthews and her Persian Chinchilla Scotia Silver Cloud, a high school practical done in 2006. “Ann and Cloud were great sports and came along to the WHS annual art exhibition, where they displayed themselves alongside the painting. The combination of Ann’s elaborate outfit and Cloud’s calm and collected show cat demeanour, caused quite a stir.”

Laura is happy to take commissions, but for her, painting is a very personal activity. “We were friends with the late Iaine Harper and visited him several times. My mom (photographer Irene McCullagh) fell in love with his American Curl Freya and took a number of photos of her. Both Iaine and I particularly liked one of Freya gazing out of her cage at a show. When Iaine was diagnosed with cancer, I decided to paint that picture of Freya for him. Both the painting and Freya came to live with us after he died -it was in his Last Wishes for Freya.

“I’ve done a few commissioned cat portraits. It can be emotional, because people often request paintings of a pet who has passed away. It’s always challenging trying to capture the likeness of the subject, it helps when I know the cat (or person...) and have a sense of who they are. It’s the old cliché of trying to capture the essence of your subject. Even when using photographic

reference, it’s good to have several pictures or some background information to help get a sense of the cat’s personality. It also helps me determine whether, for example, the expression in one photo is typical of the cat or if it just happens to be making a funny face in that particular photo (this can be a little awkward – most cats have one or two ‘goofy’ expressions so it’s best just to double check before accidentally immortalising one of the more unfortunate ones...)



“Art is highly subjective; the most important things I consider when looking at a piece of art is “how does it make me feel?” and “is it beautiful?”. Personally I like art to be beautiful or at least to have something aesthetically pleasing about it... even if the work is abstract, the subject matter heavy or there’s some conceptual message. I think art can always be beautiful and just prefer it when it is. That said, it should also trigger an emotional response. While I can appreciate the beauty of a decorative work like a naturalistic still-life or landscape, it’s often hard for me to connect with it emotionally.”

“I really enjoy painting long-haired cats, because they’re beautiful and the brush strokes are fun to do. I also love painting cats’ eyes, I don’t think there’s a cat that doesn’t have amazing eyes. Though the face is often the hardest part, because it’s so unique to each individual.

Ironically, as a child, Laura, her mom and brother were allergic to cats; but when she was eleven they were adopted by an ‘orange’ cat, swiftly followed by another (orange!) cat. “Our love for our furry companions seemed to overcome our allergies (or just forced us to ignore them) and we began accumulating felines. We currently have seven.”

Although Laura works in an office as a web designer and paints on the side, she also finds time for animation projects. She is currently working on a music video for a Scottish singer. “A painting is one frame and one image. But you can do a lot more with animation, which changes over time and is made up



Photo by Irene McCullagh



Photo by Irene McCullagh

*Freya stifling her portrait. Freya was the late Iaine Harper's American Curl cat. Both the cat and the painting came to live with the McCullagh's as per Iaine's last wishes.*



Photo by Irene McCullagh

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of many frames. I do digital two dimensional animation, which you don't see very often, because everything is dominated by 3D these days, and I particularly love music videos, as they're the perfect combination of what I love most - art and music.

So where does Laura see herself in five years time? She laughs and admits "I'm really bad at planning, whether it's a picture or my future. I just want to rush through the preliminary phases and get onto the actual process. That's partly why I haven't been to art school - not only was I unsure about what to study, but I was impatient to just get out there and start doing stuff.

"I am also really interested in the Scandinavian countries. I have this obsession with snow, it's so beautiful (even if in reality it's hard and cold and sloshy) and I'd love to see the Northern Lights someday. I've been trying to learn Swedish for a while, so who knows? Maybe in a year's time I'll be able to travel.

"Whatever I'm doing in five years time, it will certainly involve art. It's essential to my life. For me it's about personal expression and escapism. When I go about creating something I always try to make it beautiful. It's all highly subjective but I think generally people share the same universal notion of what 'beautiful' is. In my work I'm not trying to convey any deep, conceptual messages or meanings, I'm just trying to create work that is emotional and full of feeling and that looks as beautiful as possible."

To see more of her work, visit [www.lauramccullagh.com](http://www.lauramccullagh.com)

### PRINT OF LAURA'S ART TO BE GIVEN AWAY

Laura will be given away a print of one of her beautiful paintings to one lucky subscriber. See page ?? for more information.