

Suffolk Craft Society Guide

How to Commission

Introduction

Whether you are looking to commission an object to be made or if there is a specific maker whose talents you admire and want to commission, it is worth giving some prior thought to the process and to do a little research to prepare yourself. A good commission needs a good commissioner.

Preparation and research

What is it for? Where do you think the piece will sit/hang? What medium are you interested in? What styles do you like – modern, traditional, contemporary? What colours do you like? How much can you afford to spend? What materials would you like to use and can you afford them? Remember, although a commissioned piece is likely to cost more than something that is mass-produced it will be unique, original and high quality.

Look at the SCS makers and their work on the website for ideas, or try to see their work at one of the Society's exhibitions.

Prepare yourself a brief to discuss with the maker, remembering the maker is going to want to bring his or her knowledge and experience to the project. Society members are selected for their individuality and personal style, so while expecting guidance from a commissioner makers will see it as a two-way partnership.

There will also be different things to consider for each medium, and the maker should talk you through these. For example, with furniture photographs of the room and any architectural features can be useful. If it is ceramic, what finish do you want, does it have a practical purpose? If it is jewellery what metal do you want to use? With textiles how do you want it to look, feel and be hung? Contact details for members are available on the Makers' individual pages.

Discuss the Budget and Get a Written Quotation

When you have agreed the remit with the maker agree the costs and get a written quotation. Is there a design fee? Consider the materials and finish, such as with furniture the type of wood or amount of detailing can make a big difference to the cost. Agree the materials, size and finish. Agree payments and expect to make an advance payment or deposit. Larger projects could be broken into three payments - an initial design phase with a fee, and once that is agreed, a deposit (often the price of the materials) and the balance on completion.

Agree the Time Frame

Discuss the procedure and agree a time frame remembering that quality hand work cannot be rushed. Do you get sketches and when? Plan any appointments for viewing the work in progress. Importantly agree up to what stage design changes or adjustments can be made. Also, the maker may have other work to do so you may be on a waiting list.

Communicate Regularly

Good communication is vital for a satisfactory outcome. Remember, because the process is about communication, there is the potential for misunderstandings and differing expectations by the commissioner and maker. Make sure you have thought the process through before proceeding and ensure all aspects are clarified, preferably in writing before you begin, including the quotation, payment schedule and time frame. There needs to be trust on both sides, so if you are worried about something get in touch with the maker. Also, encourage the maker to let you know if there are any delays or changes that have to be made so you know what is happening. The opportunity to commission a piece is an exciting experience and can be rewarding to both the maker and the individual. You or your organisation will become the owner of a unique and special piece of work which will bring hours of pleasure and will be the envy of your friends and associates.