

Art Etiquette

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Chapter 1

Free Art

Simply put, character artwork is a privilege, not a right, even in an art-centric group. You do not have the inherent right to have your character drawn by someone, and no artist is under any obligation to draw you for free. Ever. So, the best advice when asking for free artwork is “Don’t”. Good artwork takes talent and time; not just the time taken to draw your picture, but the time taken to draw every picture the artist has ever drawn, which shaped their style and skills for your picture. That’s no small accomplishment, regardless of the artist’s skill level. So, saying “I want free art!” means “I think art is worthless and artists’ skills aren’t worth compensating”, whether you intended it that way or not.

That said, money’s tight for everyone, especially young people, so not everyone has the extra funds to pay an artist a fair fee for a commission. Luckily, there are lots of artists who offer free work! Their reasons vary; usually they’re fairly new and looking for subject matter to build their skills, and/or they haven’t worked up the self esteem necessary to properly value their own talent (a common problem among artists). Whatever the reason, it’s pretty common for artists to offer free work, but never, ever treat it as a common occurrence, or take this for granted. Here are some basics when responding to free art offers.

1. Show gratitude. An artist offering free artwork is like a gourmet chef offering free samples, it’s a true treat that should be savoured. Thank the artist for their work, and for making the offer at all, and show your appreciation by promoting them to your friends. Don’t do it by saying “Hey, this person’s offering free work”, but something along the lines of “This artist was generous enough to draw me for free, and they did a great job!”. Above all, never ever take a free piece of art for granted.

2a. Follow the rules. Almost every artist who offers free artwork puts conditions on that offer, so make sure to carefully and thoroughly read the entire offer and its conditions. For example, there’s almost always a limit to the number of spots, so if the offer is for 5 spots, don’t whine when you’re #6 and get nothing. Sometimes there’ll be a contest, competition, or scavenger hunt involved, ranging from easy to complex. If this is the case, and you don’t play the game, you’re not entitled to a prize. Other times, the artist will be looking for specific genders, species, colour patterns, or scenes, usually to practice something specific. On forums, there will often be a seniority requirement. And, I’ve even seen artists offer free art only for those who have no artwork of their character at all. Whatever the case, make sure you follow the conditions of the offer, and if you’re not able to do so, find another artist offering free art. Don’t beg for free art outside the terms/conditions of what the artist is willing to do.

2b. Related to the above point, if an artist is offering art for members of a particularly forum or website, don’t sign up for that website for the sole purpose of getting free art. It’s not fair to the other members of that community, and it’s not fair to the artist. That said, if you intend to be an active member of the community when you do this, so be it, just make sure you’re signing up for more than just the free art.

3. Don’t nitpick. While every furry artist generally makes every effort to portray your character the way you want, sometimes mistakes or omissions are made. You’re free to politely ask for a correction or revision, preferably

during the “pencil sketch” phase, but when no money has been exchanged, the artist is under no obligation to honour your request. When it comes to free artwork, you get what you get, and if you didn’t pay for it, niceness and charm are the only way to get revisions done. If you’re pushy and demanding, don’t be surprised if the artist says “tough cookies”. On a related note, if you have an exceptionally complex character, or one with very specific details/markings that are crucial to the character’s design, free art might not be the best choice for you.

4. If you can’t give them money now, do it later. There are exceptions to this, but in the vast majority of cases, artists who offer free art are doing so for exposure, to get their work out into the fandom, with the hope of increased future business. Promoting their work is important, as mentioned in #1, but if you like what they drew for you, it’s a very good idea to get a paid commission from them in the future. At the very least, offer a tip of some kind, whether it’s money or something else.

5. Be patient. This goes for any artwork, but it’s especially true for free work. Any art takes time to create, and even the people who can crank out amazing work as fast as an old printer need time to work. When it comes to free art, there’s the additional caveat that the artist is under no obligation to do it at all. You didn’t hire them to draw for you, there was no money exchanged and no business agreement, you’re getting something that’s a gift, a privilege, and a treat. Therefore, expecting it within any sort of timeframe is unreasonable. Even if an artist gave a specific timeframe, delays happen, although you’re welcome to ask if they’re still planning to do it if it’s been a long time. Just make sure you frame the question as “if”, not “when”, and be polite and gracious about it.

Note: Art trades aren’t freebies, they’re a commission paid with barter instead of money, and subject to the same rules of conduct as a paid commission. Any artist who treats trades like freebies isn’t worth trading with.

Chapter 2

Character Design/Use

1. If it's art from within the fandom, and you didn't draw it, and it wasn't drawn for you, don't use it to represent yourself or your characters. Period. No exceptions. This includes everything from pulling artwork straight from a Google search, to editing someone else's artwork to look like your character. Don't do it. Ever. Don't use it as an avatar, don't repost it to other websites (including/especially Facebook), just don't use it at all. I promise you won't be the only furry in the fandom without an avatar representing your fursona.

2a. When designing your character(s), never consciously copy any portion of someone else's character. This includes using someone else's character details in your description, but it also includes using someone else's character as a reference image when getting art drawn of your character. If an artist asks you for a reference image or description, and you point to someone else's character and say "he/she looks like that", that is a major faux pas on a number of levels. Similarly, don't say "he/she looks like that, except with these minor changes". No one else's character should ever show up in any part of your character description. The furry fandom is large, but it's small enough that someone who knows the owner of the character you're plagiarizing will eventually find you, call you out on it, and in some cases, get you banned from major furry websites for being an art thief.

2b. Related to the above point, if you find out later that someone else has a furry character with an appearance close enough to yours to cause confusion, the general rule is that the person who's been using the description the longest is the one with the right to continue using it, the other party must change something about their character. Failing that, the person with seniority gets to tell everyone they've ever known and will ever meet to "watch out for so-and-so, they completely ripped off my design and refused to do anything about it". The exception is in the case of highly-generic characters, which is why it's a good idea to make a genuine effort to set your character apart from the rest without relying on something bland like fur color, species, or hair style.

3. Never edit someone else's work for any reason, especially to make it look like your character. I'm not entirely sure why this needs to be said, since it's a pretty blatantly obvious no-no, but it happens with disturbing frequency. When an artist draws furry art, the artist retains all rights to the image unless explicitly stated otherwise. The owner of the character retains a rudimentary, theoretical, unregistered trademark on the character's design, but since that sort of thing has never been legally tested, it's highly uncertain (the usual "characters (c) their owners" line is meaningless BS that holds no weight and defends nothing). That alone makes editing artwork without permission illegal, but in the furry fandom, things go one step further. As I mentioned above, this is a fandom small enough to be somewhat self-policing, if a bit slow at it, so in addition to the legal issues, there's also the fact that you're stealing from fellow furs; you're stealing from the original artist, from the owner of the character you modified, and from the owners of every other character in the picture. Like I said in #1, if it's not yours, don't use it, even if you edited it first. In fact, ESPECIALLY if you edited it first, because it shows that you put conscious effort and forethought into your art theft.

4. Speaking of art theft, don't claim that you drew something you didn't draw. Thankfully, this doesn't happen often on FT, but it's a pretty hot-button issue among furries. In a fandom where people can go on TV, make the

entire fandom look like a bunch of perverted morons, and be welcomed with hugs and snuggles at the next furry con, there's one thing that can get a person truly shunned from large chunks of the fandom, including banned from furry cons (depending on how many friends in high places the victim has). That one thing is claiming to have drawn something you didn't draw. So please, just don't do it, for any reason.