



Portrait of a Diamond

Painter Angie Crabtree has built a reputation as one of the most sought-after diamond artists, literally recreating every sparkling facet in incredible detail. Here, she shares her passion for painting gemstones (and the occasional watch movement) with *Gems&Jewellery*...

With the job title 'Diamond Portrait Artist', Angie Crabtree has turned the facets of diamonds and gemstones into a thriving career. Her up-close-and-personal diamond paintings are flying off their easels, while Angie herself is in hot-demand for in-person event appearances and brand collaborations. Here, *Gems&Jewellery* gets to the bottom of her fascinating career in the world of fine jewellery and precious gems...

What is your background and how did you begin painting diamonds?

My background is in art. I have been painting since I was four years old. I went to an arts high school and graduated

from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2009. I also attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam.



I painted my first diamond – at 1.5m tall – in 2013 for a luxury-themed gallery exhibition in San Francisco. Having known very little about diamonds at the time, I began researching and found out that diamonds come in different cuts. This is where my continuous series of diamonds began!

What is it about diamonds that has held your attention for so long?

Painting diamond portraits is meditative. I love learning about each one, and I love the abstract patterns and geometry. It's hypnotising! The symmetry, rainbow accents and reflections are so alluring. Every diamond is unique and presents a new challenge.

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How do people react to your work and how has this led to collaborations and commissions?

When I do live painting at special events, it is a great conversation starter. A handful of companies have commissioned me to paint their special stones, and invited me to paint at their event. Having a stone painted is a great way to show people the details in an up-close and personal way.

Where do you see your paintings progressing — will you be moving into coloured gemstones?

Absolutely yes! I recently started a series of fancy coloured diamonds behind-the-scenes, which I will be releasing sometime in the next year. Eventually, I will work my way to other gemstones and I really can not wait. Recently I started painting close-ups of very detailed and unique timepieces. They are a new challenge, so I am excited to do more.

What can you tell us about the process of painting a diamond? Do you think people presume it is easier than it appears?

There is a lot that goes into the process that people can not see just from looking at my Instagram account. Choosing the diamond, having it photographed, drawing the diamond, building the canvas, prepping the canvas, mixing the paint, base coats, layering, glazing, and weeks of drying time between coats. Even the photography is a big step: capturing the essence of my paintings — the exact colours and details — is no easy task.

The average piece takes over 100 hours — large paintings take hundreds of hours. I imagined I would only get faster at painting diamonds, but they actually take longer than when I first started because the level of detail has gone up tremendously. The more diamonds I see

and paint, the more I learn about how to portray the facets with more brilliance.

Why do you think people are so enamoured with your diamond portraits?

I think people are initially interested in my work because diamonds are luxurious, but when they see them as painted works of art they become mesmerised in a new way. At least that is what drew me into the idea of painting them. Originally, I was interested in exploring ideas of luxury through art, but after researching diamonds and gemmology, the whole series went in a new direction: it became more about getting lost in the abstract patterns, facets, reflections and colours — similar to how I feel when I look into a kaleidoscope.

Are there any particular pieces you are most proud of?

My favourite piece is the painting I did of

my engagement ring diamond. It is of an elongated emerald-cut that I picked out from my friends at Perpetuum Jewels in San Francisco. When I was searching for the perfect diamond, I knew it would eventually become a painting, so that is why I chose this one: I wanted to have a panoramic piece to hang in our home. It is the only piece I will never sell. I recently began selling phone cases printed with the diamond because, why not?! It is the perfect proportions!

What would be your advice to amateur artists who want to give painting diamonds and gemstones a try?

My advice would be to focus on not just the symmetry of the design, but also balancing of the colours and contrast. Mix all your colours from scratch so that they are in their purest form. Quality materials are important too. ■



All images courtesy of Angie Crabtree.