

Kaitlyn Johnson

A Voice for Animals Contest

### Older Cats: A Work of Art, Not Broken Goods



If spending time at my local shelter has taught me anything, it's that everyone wants a kitten. People can't seem to resist the adorable magnetism of these tiny bundles of fur; however, while adopting kittens is still a noble action, older cats often get overlooked. According to the ASPCA, every year 860,000 cats in shelters are euthanized, and while shelters can't keep kittens from going out the door, they struggle to find homes for their older furry companions. Why is this? It's become an epidemic for people to consider older cats "used goods." Not only are they often ignored at shelters, but many people abandon their sweet kittens once they reach adulthood. In the wild they are prone to disease, malnutrition, and predators. Many cats face these dangers every day because society does not see the value in an older cat. People simply fail to realize that each cat, however old, is a beautiful gem with a personality and physical appearance unique to them. A cat is no less adorable when it is no longer a tiny ball of fluff. In fact, it is the subtle quirks and nuances each cat has that I feel makes them most adorable.

The concept for my project was to paint the adult cats at the Safe Animal Shelter in Middleburg, Florida. When I first started volunteering there I was overwhelmed by the individuality of each cat – not only in looks but in personality. Spending time with each cat allowed me to understand them on a personal level, and to translate their essence in to my paintings. Through the use of vibrant color palettes and unique backgrounds I am able to embody the cats in my work. I wanted to keep the paintings whimsical by using an impressionistic style in watercolor to capture their free-spirited nature; however, I also mixed several mediums with my watercolors, such as pen and ink and markers, to add more precise line work and accurately represent their physical appearance. I do these paintings for two reasons: to draw attention to the animal shelter and their unique feline inhabitants, and to raise money for the shelter.

When I begin every painting, I start with the idea that every cat is special. While one kitten may look just like the next, adult cats have a very distinctive appearance. This is

something I cherish in my paintings. I don't censor chubby faces or clipped ears, because to me these are what give each cat their character. I highlight not only their physical appearances, but also the embodiment of their personalities. I choose a color palette unique to each cat's personality, and every painting is riddled with symbolism that plays on the cat's character. When viewers look at my paintings they see the cat's as the works of art they are rather than broken goods. I am constantly inspired when individuals look at my paintings and tell me they feel a connection with the cats through them. Art is often an overlooked medium to draw attention to a cause. People forget that art has the power to make us feel something, and in the case of the shelter cats it has the power to help people understand and appreciate them.



I started my project in late January and since then I have painted 10 of the cats at the shelter. Through the sale of prints online, and attendance of art shows I have been able to raise 229 dollars for the animals at the Safe Animal Shelter, and that number is steadily growing. For me this is only the beginning. I have been invited to attend an art walk in late April alongside the Safe Animal Shelter staff so I can continue to raise money and support the animals I have come to love so deeply. This money will be used to spay and neuter, medicate, and foster the lives of so many cats. In addition to selling paintings and prints, I have spent numerous hours of my free time volunteering hands on at the shelter. I have had the privilege to assist in matching prospective owners with their perfect feline companion, feeding and caring for the cats, and helping run the day to day activities of the shelter. I was even able to rescue my own cat, a one year old Siamese named Cortana, from the shelter. Cortana's family likely abandoned her once she was no longer a kitten, but being able to spend time with the cats at the shelter has built my appreciation for older cats and their remarkable personalities.

I hope that my work helps people see the beauty in older cats. All too often society tries to appeal to people's guilt in order to get older cats adopted. My work is attempting to end that, by expressing their beauty instead. Older cats are a fountain of individuality and depth, and deserve the same appreciation as their younger feline friends. I love a kitten just as much as the next animal lover, but unlike many people I am more excited to see what they become.



### Works Cited

“Shelter Intake and Surrender”. The American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. <https://www.aspca.org/animal-homelessness/shelter-intake-and-surrender/pet-statistics>. Web. Accessed 10 April. 2017.

